

# **"Connection really is magic"**

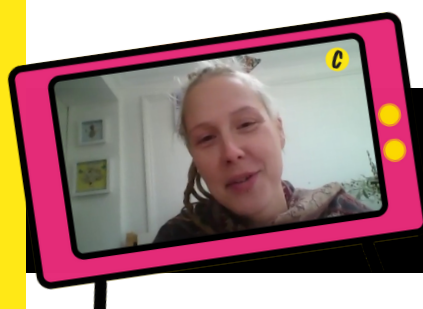
## **Isolation and connection during the pandemic**

As you might expect with stories from the pandemic, the themes of isolation and connection come up time and again. This insight briefing explores people's stories, experiences and emotions on how they have – or haven't – connected with folk over the last year.

**"Just to be able to say what I wanted and be accepted"**

*The importance of being alongside folk*

Between shielding, restrictions on household mixing and travel, and plain old 'social distancing' (we prefer the term physical distancing!), making connections with people since COVID-19 appeared in our lives has been increasingly difficult. Carole points out that "we're just tired at that lack of personal contact. Not talking to people face-to-face, it's energy-sapping and soul-destroying in many respects. That personal connection is just missing." Candice, meanwhile talks about the beginning of the first lockdown as she watched the young people she worked with become more and more isolated as the support systems they relied on disappeared. She also talks about her own experience of reduced contact with her mum who was shielding: "Seeing her through the window was so hard." Paula tells how the isolation caused by shielding has dredged up negative memories of being locked in a flat all day alone by a former partner. Augusta, who is on her own in the UK while the rest of her family is in Canada and Africa, describes not knowing who to turn to and feeling stressed and anxious: "I just kept everything to myself and that didn't work well mentally with me." We've also heard Lynn tell us, "When we went into Tier 2 about a month ago, my mental health took an absolute and total nose dive." The feelings of "I can't do this again" were overwhelming. These stories show how difficult isolation has been during the various stages of restrictions we've faced since March 2020, and the effect it's had on folk's mental health. It's also raised the question of how people have kept going and kept connecting with others.



***Click on the TV to listen to some of this topic's stories***

Carole has been running painting classes on Zoom and actually thinks that she's getting more attendees than she would for in-person classes. I think it's probably opened people's minds a little bit as well. So, plusses and minuses, I guess. More minuses. ... My hope is, coming out of this, that people will feel more drawn to other people, to people's company, and will seek it out." Selva has taken the opportunity to get to know her community better by joining her local Mutual Aid Group as a co-ordinator. "I've got to know my community very well through that actually ... and it's led me to meet some very lovely people. During that time, I've discovered that the isolation and loneliness really is a huge problem and I'm very worried about that, so we're looking at ways to try and help. This Sunday, actually, unfortunately it's on Zoom, but we're holding a 'Winter Conversation'. So, we're calling it Sunday Lunch and we want to ask the community what are their worries, what are their wants and go away and see what we can try to do about it." This kind of proactive approach to forging connections has really helped folk connect with their communities in ways they may not have done pre-pandemic and it's perhaps one of the ways in which we don't want life to return to 'normal' in the future.

Other's talk about the #SpoonRooms put on by Camerados and the benefit they've had. Tony says, "It's been really good for talking, and getting support, and be with other people and talk about the challenges, but also the successes." Paula says that the #SpoonRooms have really, really helped her in addition to friends offline. Candice, meanwhile, talks about the bonds she has made with the people she's met in #SpoonRooms after deciding to resign her role so she could focus on her own wellbeing for a while, and explore "the things that make me, me. The people I want to connect with, real friendships with people that I've never met before who, now, I'm so close to. Just incredible connections. ... Connection really is magic, and #SpoonRoom was brilliant for me. Just that safe space. Not work, not supervision, not having to guard my thoughts. Just to be able to say what I wanted and be accepted." These stories highlight the need we, as humans, have to simply be with others, and that being with others helps us through difficult times. It's easier when we're not alone.



*Click on the TV to listen to all of the stories from the movement gathered so far*

**"Connection really is magic and #SpoonRoom was brilliant for me...  
Just to be able to say what I wanted and be accepted."**

*What we've learned from the stories*

The stories on isolation and connection gathered by the Association of Camerados and Community Reporter movements have taught us a few things:

- Although not the same for everyone, isolation has had a negative effect on the mental health of many.
- We should try to build relationships before people need you and you need them.
- While online spaces aren't a replacement for face-to-face, for most they are better than the alternative of being alone and so technology needs to be accessible.
- The rise in online events has actually improved accessibility for some folk and this shouldn't be lost post-pandemic.
- We should do our best to keep these relationships going post-pandemic.

## **A #BitOfAction**

Here's what we can do to create more connections with folk:

1. Get sending some letters – become a pen pal or simply post little notes from your neighbours' doors to spark a conversation.
2. Create spaces where folk feel able to just be themselves – that could be a Spoon Room, Public Living Room, street sing-a-longs or taking over the park for a good old dance!
3. Look at where technology can help create connections – it could be street WhatsApp groups or websites like nextdoor.com.

***You can watch A #BitOfCompany Chat episodes  
that explore these topics more on YouTube***

**Click on the TVs below to view the shows!**



**EPISODE 3**



**EPISODE 4**

## About The Project

Camerados is a growing global movement of people who get through tough times by looking out for each other. The movement's Public Living Rooms are a space for people to chat and be alongside one another and, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, they've created virtual Public Living Room spaces known as the #SpoonRoom that keep these connections and conversations going.

People's Voice Media meanwhile, is committed to supporting folk to bring about positive social change through the Community Reporter movement. Community Reporting is a form of digital storytelling that focuses on the gathering and sharing of lived experiences, and using these stories to start conversations of change between different people, groups and organisations.

Thanks to the Emerging Futures Fund from the National Lottery Community Fund, the Association of Camerados and People's Voice Media have come together to look at people's experiences of the pandemic, and create spaces in which different voices could be heard. Over 65 stories have been gathered and we've produced five insight briefings summarising what we've learned from listening to folk. We also created an online chat show – #BitOfCompanyChat – where we've talked about some of the themes in the stories a bit more and thought of bits of action we can take to overcome them together.

Find out more at <https://www.camerados.org> and <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

The logo for Camerados, featuring the word "CAMERADOS" in a bold, black, hand-drawn style font on a yellow background.