

9th Episode

Navigating our emotional and mental health, through the pandemic

Welcome to Doorstep Revolution, a project emerging out of the heart of South Riverside in Cardiff and run by gentle/radical, an arts organisation based in the neighbourhood, and interested in connecting up culture, community, politics, spirituality, and healing justice.

Supported by a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, this sound archive was born out of the pandemic of 2020 and 2021.

We spent time knocking on doors, hearing people's stories and finding out how our thinking about the future might have changed under COVID.

From homeschooling to weddings under lockdown, from acute isolation, to finding new forms of togetherness, these conversations with neighbours reveal questions and profound reflections on recent times and how we might wish them to be different.

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The pandemic presented challenges not only to our physical but also our mental health. Many residents spoke to us about anxiety, fear, loneliness, and depression, and how they processed their feelings during this time. People also spoke to us about the things that helped maintain their mental and emotional health - family, nature, connecting into the body, connecting to other people. In this episode, we hear from Helen Marie, Abby, Peter, Becca, Phil and Rob. We also hear from Jordan, Bree Anne, Sandra, Gillian and Andrea, James, and Jackie.

Helen Marie

Things that've comforted me and got me through this period are nature and going for these morning walks, nature's been a massive one. Just watching, just standing like at six o'clock in the morning, going for a walk and then suddenly standing and watching a tiny wren, just on a branch and then fly away. You know, I've always loved nature. But for years, I don't think I've connected to it, the way that I've reconnected to it again now, and I'd forgotten how important it is to stay connected with it for mental health, for your kind of spirit really, from an energy level perspective, it's almost like going for the walk in the park was making my battery levels full almost, you know?

Abbey

I'm just trying to think, what happened in lockdown? I did crafts, went for lots of walks, met the kids out the front. And a cat came into our house. Just this black cat followed me from all the way around on my walks from somewhere in Riverside, got to the front door, opened the front door, and it just came in and then was our friend. I went right, OK. Then you didn't know what to do because, you know, it was wandering around the house and that, and I didn't know if I could pick it up or, you know, are you supposed to touch animals during the pandemic, I'm not sure, and he just came in and we managed to get it back outside again. And then ever since then every now and again, he is sometimes in the back garden. I don't know how he gets to the back garden. Because, you know, it's just that there's a walled off area. And sometimes he comes through the front and then ends up in the back and then he's off. She/he I don't know. But that's been really nice having a cat in the house. I mean, I love pets, but my housemate would never get a cat. I don't think so. That was really nice. But yeah, we've got a new cat friend here. I hear them fighting out in the street sometimes, but that's just one thing I want to add in there. I made a cat friend.

Peter

I'm still anxious, I wouldn't deny you that. I mean, the anxiety levels are nowhere near as intense as just prior to the first lockdown and you know, during the first lockdown. I mean have to admit that. You know, I grew up as a child of the 70s, I remember that - I'm trying to remember the title of it now - it was a sort of science fiction... It was called "Survivors" and they remade it not so long ago, but the original, you know, I remember as a kid watching the programme thinking, "Can this disease really spread across the globe and finish, the majority of the population, world population off?" So there's sort of during that very early lockdown, my 2020 self collided with my 1970s younger self, where I thought "Sh*t we're here! We are in that science fiction. What was once fiction, now reality?" And I thought to myself "Sh*t, are we going to die off?" You know is this, at best, going to decimate the world population? Now, that's the level of my worries and sort of anxieties and concerns at the time of the first lockdown. Now? Yeah, I can see that. I mean, the sense of relief when the news broke that the first vaccine had been, you know, discovered, developed, and, and so on, you know, I nearly burst into tears... well I did burst into tears that day, when I heard the news, and I wasn't in front of anyone, I was up before everyone else and heard the news and thought, "Blimey, a glimmer of hope!"

Becca

There was a moment, the period of a couple of weeks, and I can't remember what stage it was, but I suddenly had this overwhelming feeling of being trapped. It was really strange, because it was very claustrophobic and it was almost like, I don't know, there's this feeling just built up in me and I felt trapped. And I think I went out into the garden and had a walk around or something and... the wave came over me a couple of times during those couple of weeks. And then it wasn't until I shifted my thinking into that I wasn't trapped, but I was safe, that I sort of shifted something in my head and I didn't get it again. It was a period of two weeks and I don't know why that particular two weeks, you know, maybe it was that I like to go out and about a lot and we were only really allowed to go out in a very limited

way. I love walking, walking is my exercise, I have a back problem, a disc problem that is managed most of the time absolutely fine, what helps me to manage it is walking. So if I couldn't have, wasn't able to do the same amount of walking as I normally do, then that could potentially cause an issue, obviously working from home and sitting like this as well. So I think that the feeling of being trapped was overwhelming for a tiny amount of time.

Phil M

I think I'm one of the lucky ones, I'm quite self contained. My partner had a few difficulties throughout the lockdown. And because she lives in Roath, and I live in Riverside, socially isolating made it quite difficult to see each other. So a lot of the time though, I've kind of quite surprised myself and I didn't really feel any feelings of loneliness initially. In the last three months it has been getting worse, mind. It was between Christmas, well, January and now it's become more difficult in terms of that, in terms of... again, because of the uncertainty about work. So I'm usually quite a sociable person, not seeing many people around has been quite tricky and initially, I'd be in the front garden and be chatting to everybody. But gradually, everyone loses the time they have for their neighbours, I think, because they're back into a situation where they're going back to their normal life as well.

Rob

Obviously, the constant kind of fear of the unknown, like, not knowing what's going to happen next. And obviously the fear of COVID. And, you know, mental health wise, I've struggled with anxiety and depression, on and off here and there, and... something like uncertainty will exaggerate that. Yeah, I think it's definitely been like a roller coaster. So you have days where it's like, you can't even handle it and then there's days where everything's okay... But it's like, after a while it gets to you, it really exaggerates those feelings.

Adeola

What have you been missing the most?

Jordan

Ah! It's gotta be, it's gotta be like having a team in the office. I just love a laugh. And then I think from a social perspective, especially in this area in particular, it's just for example, like, my mate who had a breakdown, I don't think he would have had a breakdown if you could get him to a pub - not to drink - just to sit in a social area with other people and just talk. I think that's what probably I missed the most, it's just interaction with people.

Bree Anne

Bute Park is, I mean, it's invaluable. Being so close to the park has been such a blessing and again a privilege to live near such a lovely green space in a walkable distance, like what a beautiful park that is - just gorgeous. Like I revel in it every time I'm over there. Like, I just love it. I don't know who does the gardening over there. But shout out to you! Whoever you are, because it's amazing. It's so beautiful. And I appreciated it before this pandemic, but man, has it not just been such a... I'm getting emotional... It's been great. It's been so lovely.

Sorry. I don't know why I'm getting upset. I've really come to appreciate that space so much, and just use it, utilise it, you know, just sit there and exist in that space. Yeah, like, I love it. I love how well kept it is and people really seem to, around here, respect that space. Like, you know, there's always some crazy stuff going on here and there. But for the most part, people are really respectful of that park and the open areas for people to share.

I've actually taken a liking to walking around some of the cemeteries that are around here as well, there's some really lovely, well-kept cemeteries around here. And I feel like if you're respectful and you stay on the paths and you know, just walk around and admire some of these spaces that I think normally you really wouldn't think about. But when the park was so full in the summertime, last summer, it was a little daunting and scary sometimes, because you weren't sure, can I get it from being around these people? So I found myself also gravitating to these little green spaces that are kind of unconventional, almost, like cemeteries and just these little offshoots on the road. Like, you know, where you are just overlooking these really beautiful spaces. But yeah, something I've definitely come to appreciate much more.

Sandra

I think when you went for a walk though everybody was so lovely.

Gillian

I used to talk to a lot of the homeless.

Sandra

And I did, I thought they were lovely. Like we've met the police women on their horses. And talking to you, and even going through the castle. Like, you know, an old man, shouldn't say that, he might have been younger than me, and he was sat there, and we spoke to him. What was it over? Oh, the robin. And we took bird seed and we were feeding it, and he said "That will come up by your hands if you go by it." And then all of a sudden he turned around and he said "Thanks for talking to me." And I thought, that's sad... guy sitting there and wants someone to talk to him. So we did and we sat with him and we were talking to him...

Andrea

...and he said "thank you so much."

Sandra

Yeah. How many people are out there like that, you know?

Jordan

Appreciate your loved ones when you've got them. I've got a grandfather who's 88 and he's got all his marbles but he just got this... I think it's called Ménière's Disease or something like that. So he has vertigo 24/7 effectively so they just come on like that. So pre-lockdown, this is a guy who's been a photographer for like 60 odd years, he climbed the mountains, the valleys, takes photographs, he was uber confident, you knock on his door and he's not there.

He's out at the park, or he's up the mountain somewhere. I didn't appreciate how healthy he was at the time because now, since lockdown, you can't go into his house. He now doesn't want to leave because of the vertigo attacks he has because he doesn't want to be dizzy, fall over, that sort of thing. His confidence has dropped quite a bit. So I think if anything, it's probably that... you've got to appreciate your loved ones once you've got them. So my mother-in-law's partner died at Christmas time. Not of COVID, just of cancer. So we couldn't say goodbye to him because we couldn't go to the funeral because we... didn't want to spread it and it was in England so we couldn't travel anyway. So I think just that thought of family and loved ones and appreciate them whilst you can because when they're not there, that's when you realise how important they are, I think.

James

So the isolation... my wife said something the other week, she said how she misses the embrace of another woman. And I realised that I actually missed the embrace, like a male embrace as well, quite a lot. You know, I miss my friends, it's nice when you see somebody, and you know, we're gonna have a nice time now, because we're together and you give them a hug and I really miss that. And I don't know when, with everything going on and kind of people's anxieties and of course that involves two people's interaction, two people's consent to that. I don't know when that is going to happen again comfortably.

Jackie

It has been awful. But I'll get there in the end. Me and my sister help each other. Yeah, with the mental health team as well.

Stephen

Yeah. As you say, it's really good to say I need help with mental health and getting that help as well, which not everyone does. Lots of people don't.

Jackie

It's a shame. People might be too scared to go down that road. But I definitely benefited from it. And I just hope that people will, if they're having problems, look towards that road. Because it does help, it does help. At the end of the day, that's what they're there for, you know, just to get people back into their way of living as they used to, you know.

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We hope you enjoyed hearing from some of the voices in our community. Doorstep Revolution is an ongoing project. So if you're a Riverside resident and want to get involved, do get in touch with us at gentleradical.org. In the coming months and years, we'll be continuing to build a resource of stories, perspectives, and dialogues, exploring the realities as well as the dreams of people living on our doorstep.