



SPECIAL FEATURE:
REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19

**RELATIONSHIPS AND
RESILIENCE IN THE TIME OF
THE CORONAVIRUS**

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Relationships and resilience in the time of the Coronavirus

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Abstract

Coming together as a community is an important function for members of The Why Not? Trust, a charity which supports long term connections and relationships between young people with care experience and the people who matter to them. These networks allow young people to access experiences and events which give opportunities they may not be able to access on their own. Their approach is based on a belief in being defined by relationships. The COVID-19 lockdown presented a challenge to relational engagements which are contingent upon being able to interact. Despite their fears they have managed to cope. The online world provided a way of maintaining contact and providing support with young care experienced adults. The experiences of the past few months helped the Trust better understand the causes of isolation and exclusion, but also to appreciate more than ever the value of human relationships.

Keywords

COVID-19, relationships, resilience, networking, digital exclusion, The Why Not? Trust

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When the Coronavirus arrived, we were all keen to see the back of it. Most of us were struggling with the controls needed to stop the spread of the virus to protect one another; ourselves, loved ones, strangers. We all have experience of being carers now, staying at home and keeping a distance is how we've done it. We have been deprived of the connections in our lives and control over how we live it. The things we take for granted and the foundations for living well, purpose and belonging. When we sought to compensate for these losses we would tune into social media and were sometimes confronted with jarring content. Judgements being made about how people should and should not behave or clichéd memes that felt falsely optimistic. What we needed was something that said we are all a little frightened and here is something that might help. We are all anxious and grieving for the loss of something or someone, worried for ourselves, each other and what we may yet lose.

Life as we had known it seems like a distant memory, coming together as a community was an important function for members of The Why Not? Trust. Regular catch-ups, breaking bread together were always met with magical moments. Our approach is based on an unerring belief that we are defined by relationships, with ourselves, with others, and it is through these that we make sense of the world and our place in it. That need and aspiration are universal human characteristics that emerge and are met and achieved in our relationships with one another. Enabling these is the best way to support wellbeing. With our young adults we create spaces and experiences through which these relationships can thrive, community develops and through our interactions we act to support one another. The lockdown has presented a challenge to relational engagement which is contingent upon being able to interact. Despite our fears we have managed to cope, and in some ways grow.

The Why Not? Trust for Care Experienced Young People is a charity set up in 2018, to support long term connections and relationships between young people with care experience and the people who matter to them. As well as individual connections, the Why Not? Trust is supporting young people, including young parents with care experience to develop their own community networks. These networks allow young people to access experiences and events which give opportunities they may not be able to access on their own.

Stories of hope have developed across communities and ours is no exception. The young adults involved with Why Not? have created new ways of connecting through online group chats. This is helping them not only to pass the time but to create safe space for some to express anxiety and have it soothed. If, sometimes, only through a ludicrously funny post that eases fears, at least for a little while. Connectors were leaving groceries at the doors of their beloved young adults; this concern is being reciprocated by the young adults who are also checking in on their connectors to make sure they are okay. Conflicts from the past have been resolved, or set aside, as the gravity of the pandemic shifts perspectives and compels us to focus on what is genuinely important; to paraphrase Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a moment of reconciliation can be worth more than a lifetime of friendship.

We have some members of our care experienced community who are key workers in care and health services. They have proudly gone out to work every day, contributing to the national effort to ensure those most vulnerable to the virus are safe and cared for – our very own heroes. We have witnessed our young parents get creative with their bairns, letting them paint on walls, with washable paint obviously. Baking skills are on point and they have developed an acrobatic flair on their trampolines.

Moving online

On discovering video conferencing, along with the rest of the world, we began to plan which would suit our community best. We organised a quiz night through Zoom only to discover some members wanted to participate but did not have the devices needed; some who did join in had to leave because of limited access to data. Autumn Roesch Marsh (2020) identified through recent research with young people that being able to connect with friends, partners and family virtually was essential to wellbeing. Digital exclusion wasn't something we'd considered before but quickly became relevant when we struggled to make contact and maintain connections with some of our young adults living alone. We needed to address this. We secured some grant funding through [Foundation Scotland](#) and the [Corra Foundation](#) resilience funds that allowed us to contribute to phone top-ups and devices for our care experienced community members.

The more connected we are, the more connected we become; the opposite is also true, and disconnection often leads to isolation and exclusion. When we were working to distribute resources to support digital connectivity and access ICT infrastructure, we discovered the least connected of young adults often didn't have access to basic services such as bank accounts or were so overdrawn they would never receive any funds paid to them. We were peeling back the layers of disadvantage, ever decreasing opportunities as the access to basic services necessary for the management of our day to day affairs were not open to them.

Access to the digital world must be viewed the same as other necessities of modern life, electricity, water, as a basic utility. We found other ways of supporting them to buy data for their phones but these circumstances highlighted again the need to ensure when entering the 'adult world' young people should be equipped with the capacity and resources, the societal infrastructure that is necessary to day to day life. It was deeply concerning that some young people didn't have functioning bank accounts and this something we are will be working to address with some urgency.

We are working to adapt the way we develop, support, and maintain the relationships that are at the heart of the Why Not? Community, using technology. The virtual world is not the real world, there's no substitute for human contact and we know there are some people in our midst struggling, 'needing hugs' as one young adult put it. Technology enables us to communicate to some extent and it can act as life support for relationships. But for these to develop and grow we need to meet, to be in proximity where presence lights up the spaces between us and we cross the border of self and into the worlds of one another, where interdependencies form and community is created.

Through the experiences of the last few months we appreciate the value of these relationships more than ever. What we previously thought of as normal is not going to be good enough and we are determined to build back better-progressing the principles of our [#RightToRelationships](#) Charter.

References

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About the authors

Danny has worked with Care Visions since April 2002, and in a residential environment with children and young people since 1994, in various roles. He is interested how relationships in residential care can be a pre-cursor for healing and growth and how we might better enable these.

Nicki is the Manager of Why Not? Connections and Community which sits within The Why Not? Trust for Care Experienced Young People. Nicki also has continued relationships (Connector) with young people she cared for during her time as a Residential Child Care Worker. Please note at time of writing Nicki was the Manager of Why Not? Connections and Community and is now a Residential Child Care Manager.