

October 2020

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# Stories of shielding

Life in the pandemic for those with health and care needs

# Stories of shielding

## Introduction

National Voices is the leading coalition of health and care charities, with a particular focus on raising the voices of those using health and care services.

When lockdown began, we created a digital platform - Our COVID Voices - for people with health and care needs to share their experiences. Not all the people who contributed were on the official shielding list but many were, and all of the people describe how the pandemic impacted their health and care. This gave us the unfiltered views and stories from people at great risk of all the effects of the pandemic, including anxiety, uncertainty and changes to their care. But it goes much deeper, into their relationships, their jobs and dealing with the everyday aspects of life in the pandemic.

We have compiled their contributions here to help inform any decisions taken in the future regarding the way their needs are addressed.

## Stories of shielding

National Voices has over 160 member organisations who we have been working with to understand how people with long-term conditions are experiencing COVID-19. As well as hearing from our member charities during our COVID-19 webinar series on topics such as inequalities, mental health and lifting lockdown, National Voices has received over 70 accounts of experiences of people with long-term health conditions during COVID-19. We have collated quotes from these stories and hope they will give you an overview of the real-life experiences of individuals shielding.

While around two million people were told to shield, there is of course enormous diversity within this group, which is borne out in the contributions to the Our COVID-19 Voices digital platform. Some of the people contributing their experiences describe themselves as 'extremely clinically vulnerable', others merely as 'vulnerable' – and yet others reject that terminology. Some people were formally shielding, following government guidance and receiving some support, others describe simply staying at home, on their own, without support. We have no way of ascertaining whether people were told to shield or not – unless they told us in their contribution. Here we collated experiences about self isolation, and feeling or being vulnerable to the virus.

## Experience of shielding

The way people spoke about their experiences of shielding was hugely varied. Some expressed fear and anxiety about the future and how long they would have to shield, and others expressed the ways in which they had adjusted to this 'new normal' with new routines and hobbies.

Several people felt fortunate that they had access to private outdoor space, support around them and financial security and we also heard from people struggling without these. They expressed concern for those who live alone, who do not have access to outdoor space, or the internet and support around them. We heard from people about missing 'normal' life and social interaction but also from those for whom the world has become more accessible through everything moving online and who hope that this remains after lockdown.

*"Life is easier now than it was back then. Everyone has learnt to video chat, theatre has moved online, I take art and exercise classes over Zoom, home-working has finally been fully embraced now everyone has been forced to do it. When lockdown lifts, I hope those who are 'healthy' remember how important these things were for their own sanity and sense of community so that everyone, disabled or not, can continue to live a fuller life if they are stuck at home."*

*"I have no garden so I have only felt the sun on my face for those fleeting escapes. I can get some breeze from opening my windows, but it's not the same. I heard this week that it looks like it will have been the sunniest spring since records began - feels like a cruel irony as I have missed it all."*

## Communication

This was a frequent theme and one framed by a lot of frustration. People reported being confused by official information, advice and guidance, and sometimes finding it to be in conflict.

The message to "stay at home" during lockdown was felt to be clear and easy to understand, but a number of people noted the information to have been one-way, with no mechanism for asking questions or requesting support. There was a theme around how much easier people's lockdown experiences would have been if someone with understanding of their circumstances and needs had contacted them with tailored information and advice.

Some people felt overwhelmed by the amount of information available, the frequency with which it changes and the challenge of identifying what is evidence-based and credible. Some people reported stress and anxiety caused by information gaps and the speculation that filled them, for example whether chemotherapy services would be halted during lockdown.

A number of people reported contacting charity helplines for up-to-date advice and guidance, and charities were generally seen to be a source of useful and credible information. Local networks, including community Facebook groups, were reported to be helpful sources of local information.

“Trust” was mentioned a number of times in the context of information. People reported finding it difficult to know who to trust, and struggling with the enormity of trusting politicians, scientific advisors and others to make decisions that to individuals are the difference between life and death. As lockdown has begun to lift several people have reported confusion and stress because of government messaging.

*“Not knowing is disempowering, disorientating and it’s an uncomfortable place to sit. This is made worse by confusing and inconsistent messages from the Government. We no longer feel like we have control or understanding of his risk or immediate future and feel excluded from decision-making. The Government, academics, clinicians and social media all take various angles and often claim the monopoly on The Science. Yet these same people invariably reach opposing conclusions, adding to confusion and fuelling anger and frustration.”*

*“Admitting the unknowns of this pandemic and being transparent with how decisions are being made will do far more to build trust than pretending otherwise. The Government needs to recognise its failures in communication with the most vulnerable groups. It needs to listen to the concerns and worries of people who are isolated and for whom the future feels so bleak and uncertain.”*

## **Shopping**

Access to food and essentials was a pronounced problem for many people at the beginning of lockdown, which has continued to be an issue for some. Accessing online delivery slots was problematic, even for people who received their official letter advising them to shield. One person reported having everything set up with their usual supermarket – who had proactively identified them as extremely clinically vulnerable – only to be told the supermarket’s list had been scrapped and replaced with the Government’s list, which they did not (yet) appear on. When having problems there was also difficulty finding contact details to seek help.

*“I didn’t get my Government shielding letter until 20 April and not being on the shielding database meant getting food and medication has caused real anxiety and worry. It took me two weeks after the official lockdown to get a slot with a supermarket. It took several 4am attempts for success.”*

## Mental Health

This was also a mixed theme. Some people reported coping well with the pandemic and lockdown, including a few who were surprised by and/or proud of their personal resilience. Some people reported successfully drawing upon pre-pandemic talking therapies and coping strategies to manage their mental health in lockdown [see Self-management and coping strategies, below].

However, a larger number of people reported the pandemic, particularly lockdown, had an adverse impact on their mental health. For a number of people, the sudden loss of normal routine had proven especially difficult and some expressed concerns the pandemic would have a long-term impact on their mental health.

*“My anxiety is heightened, it feels as if someone is trying to choke the very life out of me, as the walls close in.”*

*“Things had been deteriorating before lockdown, but I feel the isolation has definitely not helped. All contact with services is now by phone and I can’t see friends. The mundane routines of meetings and appointments that meant I had to keep functioning on some level are no longer there and it feels even harder to see life as worth living.”*

## Receiving healthcare during COVID-19 – delays, cancellations and shifts to remote models of care

Responses were mixed. Some people reported the shift from face-to-face to online/telephone contact to have made accessing health and care services easier. Some people wondered why services had previously reported things like video assessments to be too difficult or insufficient for decision-making.

There was an emerging theme that people missed the routine of face-to-face contact in mental health services, and some people reported struggling with the shift from regular appointments to “contact me if you need to” support – some people felt isolated or burdened by the onus being shifted onto them to ask for help. Some people reported being excluded by the rapid shift to online consultations.

*“Why has it always been a nightmare until now? Why has doing assessments via the phone being impossible before? Why has any process to get support been so “challenging” (to use an oft-worn phrase). Why have I been told up to now that video assessment, phone calls, or just reading my notes isn’t sufficient?”*

People report having had a range of appointments, treatments, services and surgeries delayed or cancelled. People were understanding about the pressures facing health and care

services but were anxious - sometimes to the point of reported distress - about the future and the impact of waiting on their long-term health.

People did not have information about when health and care services would resume, and reported having no information or advice about what they should do in the interim, including if their needs increased or they reached a point of crisis. This also impacted upon carers.

*“I have had important medical appointments put off because of the virus and two serious appointments failed to happen because, it seems, COVID-19 issues were considered more important than my own life-threatening condition. A friend of mine has had a triple by-pass operation postponed.”*

For many people who are shielding, attending medical appointments was reported to be the only time they left their homes. People reported feeling apprehensive and fearful about accessing non COVID-19 care. One person reported having been placed on a ward with patients suspected to have COVID-19. People reported how “strange” services were, with A&Es quiet, staff wearing PPE and loved ones no longer allowed to accompany people or visit them. A number of people noted how kind and reassuring staff had been. Some people reported they were now unable to access services because of the way they had been hastily reconfigured.

*“I wonder how many have actually managed to, firstly get passed an over-zealous doctors’ receptionist, to then be met with an indifferent GP.”*

## **Employment**

Employment is a relatively common theme within the personal accounts. Contributors generally report supportive employers who have enabled them to work from home and have understood the needs of people who are shielding. However, some people report high levels of anxiety about what the future holds as lockdown eases, and a number report having friends who have not been supported by their employers. Experiences of working from home are mixed, with some people enjoying it and some eager to return to their pre-pandemic ways of working.

*“I live with and care for an elderly disabled parent; how I can return to work & put them at risk? The guilt I feel for this is almost unbearable, I am acutely aware many are faced with similar dilemmas, shielded or not.”*

## The end of shielding

Many have experienced the same problems with communication coming out of lockdown as they did earlier on, with feelings of confusion and frustration. Some reported fear at their future as a shielding person and the consequences of relaxing lockdown. There was also a sense of being left without support as the shielded are encouraged to go back to work.

*"I am also worried that when the government 'lightens' the lockdown its messaging could leave people like me in the cold. I understand that the government is going for a blunt 'one size fits all' message but that risks leaving people like me exposed. We are all in this together. And that includes me."*

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## PEOPLE'S VOICES

### Communication

"We find that the total lack of any advice or guidance at the end of this period of self-isolation is absolutely appalling."

"I want to know why do I keep getting different rules and regulations all the time its all very confusing."

"I feel really frightened about how it is being handled, frustrated at not getting replies to my questions; all that has made me ill physically so I have to stop sometimes and take time out."

"We need clear and concise advice that should be discussed with the NHS or healthcare professionals before being issued."

"It's not right that government/public organisations just broadcast out information without an option to ask questions or express concerns, particularly about trying to get basic food supplies. It is not effective to have schemes running that people don't know about or which don't co-ordinate with each other."

"In 2020, with the range of communications we have available, this is not helpful and has caused me additional stress and worry. Consultation, coordination and two-way conversations are needed now and in the foreseeable future."

"Over the weeks, I have read loads of political articles, I have written emails to MPs, begging letters with no replies. Not even getting an automated reply has been what angered me most, I felt unheard, stuck and helpless. The NHS, GP and Council have been amazing, all

have rung at intervals to check that all was OK and reinforce their presence should we need it.”

“I look at the UK Government strategy for the next few months and it’s vague at best.”

“Not knowing is disempowering, disorientating and it’s an uncomfortable place to sit. This is made worse by confusing and inconsistent messages from the Government. We no longer feel like we have control or understanding of his risk or immediate future and feel excluded from decision-making. The Government, academics, clinicians and social media all take various angles and often claim the monopoly on The Science. Yet these same people invariably reach opposing conclusions, adding to confusion and fuelling anger and frustration.”

### **Advice from charities**

“On 6 March my director asked me to contact my friends at Asthma UK for advice. The nurse on the helpline suggested working from home sooner rather than later.”

“The information that evolves day-by-day, expertly curated by Kidney Care UK and the various other kidney research and renal care organisations, is the positive bit.”

“Once again, the local voluntary services and charities have been incredible in supporting us both with food and offering wellbeing support and it's really comforting to know that there are people out there who can help and again are only a phone call away.”

### **Trust**

“It has been a real test in trust; trusting politicians (Ha!), trusting the scientific advisers to be frank and logical, to tell the truth in a way which cuts through political machinations. Trusting their professionalism, trusting the data and their models. Ultimately, trusting the decision-making of strangers who are more informed than me, to make the right call.”

“People I trust recommend extreme caution, others I respect are advocating a much quicker release of lockdown. What seems much harder to say is 'we don't know'. Admitting the unknowns of this pandemic and being transparent with how decisions are being made will do far more to build trust than pretending otherwise. The Government needs to recognise its failures in communication with the most vulnerable groups. It needs to listen to the concerns and worries of people who are isolated and for whom the future feels so bleak and uncertain.”

### **Coming out of lockdown**

“Their message during lockdown was clear, but now with the easing on the lockdown their messaging has been farcical and I don't even bother listening to them anymore, I just speak to my medical consultant for advice on what to do.”

“A game of cat and mouse now ensues for all of those on the “National Shielding list”. We have been catapulted into a maze of confusion and uncertainty. The cruel claws of guidance, evolving faster than we can keep up, tightening the noose around our necks.”

“So my letter arrived yesterday. Shielding is being paused. My stress levels have gone through the roof. The letter says as I am still extremely clinically vulnerable, I must still observe strict social distancing and avoid coming into contact with multiple people as much as possible. However, the letter says I can return to work. Yesterday the PM said people can only have one family from one other household into their house because the transmission rate is higher indoors. But working in a school, as I do, it seems that although I have been shielding and have a serious condition and lung disease it’s okay for me to be in a room with 15- 30 children (because that’s what it will be in September) from 15-30 households. I can’t understand it.”

“It seems incredible that we can receive a letter from the NHS at the beginning of this crisis telling us to self-isolate for 12 weeks and then at the end of this period there is just a deathly silence.”

## **Experiences of shielding**

### *April*

“I’m just worried - will I be able to cope with people when all this is over, will I be able to go on stage and talk and do the things I usually do? I’m finding my speech is getting difficult because I’m not speaking much to other people. And I am missing my family very much, especially my grandchildren who I see quite regular.”

### *May*

“I now have no feeling of the sun on my face. No breeze fanning through my lockdown hair. The starkness of this isolation is highlighted most in the pretence of getting ready for work. I shower and shave just like I would for a normal workday, except business is conducted in the realm once restricted for slumber and love.”

“I’m afraid. I’m only in my fifties and I feel like I’ve so many years to lose if I get this virus and die, so it feels like so much is at stake. My own father died young so I know what the impact would be on my adult children. I am frightened of how long I might need to be isolated, maybe a year until there is vaccine maybe a bit longer. I am fortunate to have a small garden but when your whole world is a small house and garden it’s so hard but I won’t break isolation no matter how hard I have to stay isolated.”

“Life is easier now than it was back then. Everyone has learnt to video chat, theatre has moved online, I take art and exercise classes over Zoom, home-working has finally been fully embraced now everyone has been forced to do it. When lockdown lifts, I hope those who are ‘healthy’ remember how important these things were for their own sanity and sense of

community so that everyone, disabled or not, can continue to live a fuller life if they are stuck at home.”

“Some people say that we are used to a life of isolation. That chronic illness has prepared us to handle this situation ...We are resilient and resourceful but that doesn't mean that I am mentally prepared for months of shielding.”

“I do miss being able to come and go when I want and do my own shopping, and go out with family for meals or drinks or both, and I miss meeting people randomly out and about and having a chat about what they are doing now in life.”

“Feeling more and more frustrated by the discrepancy between some lives and others, as lockdown begins to lift. My mum is shielding, completely alone, for 12 + weeks, and it is of course having a huge effect on her wellbeing.”

“We are lucky. We have very good pensions. A lovely flat with a balcony; good food deliveries; supportive friends and relatives; great wifi and enough to do (but not too much). I reckon that puts us in the luckiest 5% of those having to stay in.”

“I have no garden so I have only felt the sun on my face for those fleeting escapes. I can get some breeze from opening my windows, but it's not the same. I heard this week that it looks like it will have been the sunniest spring since records began - feels like a cruel irony as I have missed it all.”

#### *June*

“I have missed seeing my family. I have a six-month-old Granddaughter who barely knows me. I have wept and shouted and made myself so tired with stress.”

“We are very lucky; within our household bubble we coped well, we have each other and a garden. Living alone through this or without access to outdoor space must be awful.”

“Throughout lockdown we have been supported by family, friends and neighbours: we had a publicly acknowledged reason to stay behind our front door and not go out for anything.”

#### *July*

“Those days at the peak of the first wave (as we almost surely will see another) was intense. From utter thankfulness to be getting treatment during this period to waves of anxiety, and forced OCD preparations of finding a space for the nurse to do their job, and buying heavy duty masks, then followed after the visit by surgical-level cleaning and buying hospital-level air purifiers. It left us a wreck emotionally but not enough to knock us off course. Just enough to understand that this is the new normal.”

“During the outbreak, I count my blessings that technology is helping me to keep connected with family and friends, and keep abreast of the news. I am convinced that digital inclusion

of all age groups is a necessity in the modern world, particularly during this difficult time of social distancing, and especially for the visually impaired.”

## **Shopping**

“Prior to this, I had online shopping slots and was contacted by Sainsbury’s advising I had been identified as extremely vulnerable and was able to do online shopping. As soon as my letter arrived, I found myself shut out of all online shopping slots! I followed the instructions on my letter and registered as extremely vulnerable on the GovUK website, selecting the option that I was unable to get shopping. I then received a text from GovUK saying I had to get a letter from my Hospital Clinician or GP. I already had one from the Hospital so I contacted my GP who also sent me one. This failed to address anything as neither party could assist with the shopping issues! I discovered that all supermarkets had wiped their lists and were only adding vulnerable elderly when and if the GovUK advised them to!”

“The process to inform the supermarket for priority deliveries simply isn't working well enough. I have had three copies of the letter but still Tesco don't have me on their list.”

“I duly registered on the national website and thought that at least I should now be able to get a priority online delivery from the supermarkets but when I tried two supermarkets they both said I wasn’t on the government list. This is when I looked back at the texts I’d received and the letter but there was no number I could call or an email address I could contact to find out what the problem was ... The lack of any numbers to talk to anyone about being on the government list, or not, and no free text available in the user-unfriendly questionnaire required to register made me wonder how other people manage and there must be people falling through the gaps?”

“While the government has put in place measures to provide food and medicine for those who are extremely vulnerable, for example people with certain cancers or severe asthma, what about vulnerable people who do not meet these medical criteria? I know that I am not the only person impacted by this.”

“I didn’t get my Government shielding letter until 20 April and not being on the shielding database meant getting food and medication has caused real anxiety and worry. It took me two weeks after the official lockdown to get a slot with a supermarket. It took several 4am attempts for success.”

## **Mental Health**

“I feel drained, tearful, angry and so let down.”

“My anxiety is heightened, it feels as if someone is trying to choke the very life out of me, as the walls close in.”

“I had the letter to shield. I have two children at home, a husband who worked as a healthcare worker - he moved out to protect me; my depression worsened, I was not able to seek help from anywhere; my healthcare was non-existent; the world became more dark for me, mentally and physically.”

“There it is again - the survivor guilt I’ve been fighting for a month. I can sometimes batter it away; I’ve been a survivor for years. I’m adaptable. I’m resilient. I’m ill, but I’m resourceful. This is why we are doing all right - not great, not brilliant, but ok.”

“Since the government lockdown was announced, this is really testing my mental health.”

“Things had been deteriorating before lockdown, but I feel the isolation has definitely not helped. All contact with services is now by phone and I can’t see friends. The mundane routines of meetings and appointments that meant I had to keep functioning on some level are no longer there and it feels even harder to see life as worth living.”

“I’m still anxious. I worry about them easing the restrictions too early and the impact this will have.”

### **Receiving healthcare during COVID-19**

“I wonder how many have actually managed to, firstly get passed an over-zealous doctors’ receptionist, to then be met with an indifferent GP.”

“My life is completely changed. I worry about going to the doctors for my three-monthly blood test, it feels so risky.”

“Going to a hospital is a particular concern - I may be risking infection by going there and my body may not be able to fight the infection due to my weakened immune system. This has also impacted my ability to attend my scheduled appointments and take blood tests.”

“The switch from in-patient care to at-home care was supposed to be all about patient experience and cost savings but in reality you’re almost certain to spend hours panicking that in an industry that obsesses about time but seldom is on time will it all actually go to plan this week or will I need to call the oncologist to rush through the right prescription again.”

“Mostly though the experience was about anxiety. Imagine being told by everyone that social contact is potentially deadly but if you don't get your treatment it's as life-threatening. Then being told the hospitals you went to before are now closed so instead we'll be sending a person to your home. The very thing you've been told is devastating. You then think - this person's job is to go and see other people each day so the contact chance is exponential.”

“I have had important medical appointments put off because of the virus and two serious appointments failed to happen because, it seems, COVID-19 issues were considered more important than my own life-threatening condition. A friend of mine has had a triple by-pass operation postponed.”

“Daily life has become impossible and lockdown may not have been so hard if I was able to do more. However, I can only sit or lie down as it is so painful to stand or walk. I am so scared what the outcome of all of my health issues will be and worry about how long I can continue as I am.” [Someone waiting for treatment of their cirrhosis.]

“All hospital appointments have been cancelled, meaning I have had just two telephone consultations with my psychiatrist and no contacts for my diabetes or liver disease. The stress and worry around this has been harrowing and crippling for much of the time. I feel so alone, with little support, and don't think hospital appointments will return to normal anytime soon. I am left with massive anxiety and am unsure that I will cope for much longer without treatment. Life is pretty unbearable!”

“My pharmacy have been really helpful in delivering prescriptions and both local people and delivery drivers have been brilliant.”

“Why has it always been a nightmare until now? Why has doing assessments via the phone being impossible before? Why has any process to get support been so “challenging” (to use an oft-worn phrase). Why have I been told up to now that video assessment, phone calls, or just reading my notes isn't sufficient?”

## **Employment**

“I live with and care for an elderly disabled parent; how I can return to work and put them at risk? The guilt I feel for this is almost unbearable; I am acutely aware many are faced with similar dilemmas, shielded or not.”

“Emailed my employer with my concerns and explained I am unable to return until infections in the local community are lower. It makes me feel guilty, letting the team down yet again, I know they are all concerned, they too have families and loved ones.”

“My partner and I both lost our jobs, as neither can be carried out in a COVID-19 safe way.”

“Now I can't see how I can go back to work in August as I work in a charity shop and I don't believe it will be safe just yet.”

“I was hoping to start on a new career, but this has obviously been put on hold due to the uncertainty over how and when I can enter the job market again.”

“I have been working from home, which is much harder than you think. There are lots of distractions at home. I like meeting and networking with people usually, which I must do

without now. I have been using Zoom and Microsoft Teams to keep in contact with my work colleagues.” [A person with mild learning disabilities.]

“The change from working a five-day week, the fabled normal business hours, the 9 to 5, means I don’t have a perilous car journey, a hour and half travel each way each day.”

“The government delay put many of my friends at risk as, unlike me, they weren’t allowed to work from home without the government first announcing they should.”

“We may wish to work from home, and we would like that to be a right where possible. We may need retraining if our previous work role can’t be performed virtually. We would love it if working from home was not implied to be shirking. We would love everyone to remember how difficult ‘splendid isolation’ is to live in.”

“I have been able to work remotely and I’ve taken advantage of all the things that have gone online and able to stay connected through technology.”

“I am working from home and loving every minute of it, It been liberating and stress free. I want to always work from home now.”

“I worry how long I’ll be off work, how long I’ll be shielding for.”

### **The end of shielding**

“The clinically extremely vulnerable instead of being ‘shielded’ are being encouraged to go out into society by our local councillors. They have resisted a government intervention, no shielding, in one of the highest-risk areas of the entire country. Shielding has become a postcode lottery, dependant on local budgets. Mine is of course not an isolated case and this blatant disregard for the clinically extremely vulnerable, will no doubt set a precedent for what is acceptable for the rest of the country.”

“The town I work in is under Local Lockdown with a government intervention, shielding reinstated for residents. Government advice is sketchy, I should not go into a locality where shielding is in place, but I don’t have a letter to back me up.”

“I really feel the shielded community are being left to just get out there and hope for the best. How on earth can we? ... The future for the shielded is frightening and for those that work in buildings or rooms with many multiples of people it’s even more scary. It’s not about the risk of getting the illness - we are no more at risk than anyone else - it’s about the consequences, and I know for me the consequences of getting this illness would be fatal.”

“But I am confused by the new rules. Could they continue my furlough for a while? Will I have to resign? Will I be seen as a trouble-maker? What if I get sick? How will I cope with the way other people are not respecting any rules? It has been so frustrating the way the

government has talked about anything but us shielders. 2m rule, football, schools are all more important at times.”

“It was clear what people in the group need for the next phase - clear advice from specialists or people with knowledge of their particular health condition, and help with judging their own risks.”

“Changes to the shielding guidance, everyone was concerned about the way in which the guidance changed, announced via press headlines with no warning and no input from specialist clinicians, patient groups or charities. There was also concern that vulnerable people were being encouraged to go out at a time when lockdown measures were being lifted for the wider population, meaning that more people would be outside, meaning greater risk.”

“We had to contact the NHS Haematology Consultant for advice as to any release of lockdown restrictions that may or may not apply to us. He had received no information about this from the Government, so could give us no official advice, but suggested that he was reasonably happy for us to do a daily walk and also play tennis, following all the distancing and hand-sanitising guidelines. However, when our family ask us ‘so when are you going to be allowed out?’ we have to say we still have no idea as there is a total lack of advice for us.”

“It seems incredible that we can receive a letter from the NHS at the beginning of this crisis telling us to self-isolate for 12 weeks and then at the end of this period there is just a deathly silence. “

“I am also worried that when the government ‘lightens’ the lockdown its messaging could leave people like me in the cold. I understand that the government is going for a blunt ‘one size fits all’ message but that risks leaving people like me exposed. We are all in this together. And that includes me.”

“The easing of lockdown scared me and made me feel very down, then the announcement for those shielding just made me cross.”

“We have lives to lead even if they are restricted by COVID-19. So, we hope that you remember us and continue to offer to get our shopping. We hope that friends will still call us. That theatres and bands will still offer us virtual viewings. For those in education, whether at school or university, we hope that these institutions continue to support online learning for students who fear returning to the large crowded classrooms and lecture theatres.”

“Our families don't want us to take any risks. Now that shielding will be lifted we won't have financial help or public support.”



“I cannot help but think an opportunity was missed - the shielded could have had purpose, wouldn't have been seen as a burden on society or left feeling redundant. Who better to work on the National Shielding Helpline? After all, the technology is there, the calls scripted and we would hve identified and fed back many issues before they came to pass, instead of hiding away in social media groups 'feeding our fears'.”

“Many of the shielded feel abandoned, exposed, and laid bare, others simply no longer care. Defeated, they go back to work, into situations that are far from COVID-19 secure. Many denied a risk assessment and no notice taken for requests for reasonable adjustments. They do so putting on a brave face, because we all know it was never about us as individuals. Of course, we are all grateful for the assistance we were offered and there has to be other priorities. The initial bravado of 'returning to work and embracing the new normal' now replaced by fears, recognition of what being let out into society really means, now the tide has turned and infections are on the rise.”

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# **National Voices**

**October 2020**

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