

Impact on Charity

Mountain Movers Education, as many small grassroots charities have been significantly impacted
COVID

19. Our primary concerns as a charity are as follows:

- 1) Community Centres - the continued shutdown of all community centres and the lack of information regarding how or when these might re-open or what changes would need to take place to enable use of these spaces by community groups again. How would any potential changes be manageable by community users?
- 2) Project Impact - All our current projects have been impacted by the shutdown and have all had to be modified as they will not be able to achieve their intended goals.
- 3) Funding - Funding is always extremely hard for small organisations to access however our charity faces an additional barrier in that many funders hold the same widely held misconception that elective home education should be a statutory funding provision and that we should be funded by a local authority. This repeatedly excludes us from funding support including those specifically to help small charities face the challenges of COVID 19. With all our activities having to be suspended, our income is currently reduced to nil and yet the demand for our services is greater than ever. We are supporting more families than ever with advice, support and access to resources including many families of state schooled children as they try to support their children with complex difficulties learning at home.

We conducted an online survey for elective home educating families including children/young persons to look at the impact of COVID 19 on the EHE community. The survey ran from May

Health and Wellbeing

Parents reported concerns over the suspension of therapy services and health assessments for whom many have struggled for years to achieve access for their children to these services in the first place. There is a shared concern over the lack of information about if children will ever have access to these services again, what does it mean for those who were part-way through therapy sessions and have seen all their progress lost? As therapy sessions are limited in number, does this mean their child will not see the benefit as their sessions have been broken and delayed by COVID 19?

"CAHMS appointments stopped. ASD assessment delayed"

"im not sure if its being withdrawn but may be pushed back. which would impact us receiving help on his wellbeing for his anxiety/adhd"

"Telephone conversation with therapist/specialist does not meet the needs of the children at all. Its very hard to explain effectively what a difficulty is, or to understand the programme of therapy prescribed in written or spoken format compared to seeing it taking place with the therapist."

There are also families and children who are experiencing real wellbeing difficulties because of COVID 19 and are denied access to support services because of their elective home education status. We feel this is morally wrong to be denied a health service due to education placement. This is an all too familiar situation that electively home educating families have faced for decades. Progress had been made in recent years, but it seems that all the lessons of including pathways for those families outside of the state education system have been forgotten during this crisis. We would urge these counselling and support services to look at opening up to the elective home education community as a matter of urgency, of course this has funding implications for services which need to be addressed.

"access to mental wellbeing and the resources school goers have been given to get through this lockdown. I lost my job due to covid and am now on UC.I spent 5 yrs building my career for it to fall"

"They need online or face to face counselling, ALN kids need to be thought about, mine isnt but has friends that are ALN, I see them take the guidelines to the extreme, which isnt helping them."

Digital Access & Inclusion

Electively home educators are currently enjoying the sudden influx of access to resources that has either been previously denied access to the home education community or priced for schools which excludes a home educators family budget capabilities. The community has shared its experience and knowledge of home learning freely with the UK to support all families and children at this time of crisis. However the lockdown has impacted electively home educating children in many of the same ways it has impacted traditionally schooled children. Over 20% of the families surveyed experiencing a barrier to digital access and inclusion.

21% report concerns over internet reliability and loss of service.

"I think broadband, as it is being heavily used, is struggling. So we have had connection issues and"

outages.”

“Going down periodically”

“Poor signal”

Due to activities moving online, this has placed a burden on families in terms of digital access and inclusion. Many families of children with complex disabilities do not have access to the specialist equipment that would enable their children to utilise IT software and equipment to participate in online activities. Families with multiple children are rationing who can access what, when with having to share limited devices between their children. Over 70% of the children/young persons surveyed were concerned over having to share IT devices whereas this was not an issue previously. The majority of families are unable to financially support the purchasing of more IT devices at a time of crisis when many are seeing their incomes dramatically cut due to furlough, redundancy etc.

There are reported difficulties around newer software and outdated devices and 68% of parents in the survey indicated they lack confidence in their IT skills/knowledge.

“And only have one laptop for whole household. Normally that's fine as our learning out of lockdown is not based on digital methods”

“Lack of devices, lack of space in the house and strain on the network, so it doesn't always work”

“Big family, small house so no privacy for social use, lack of devices to go around.”

Exams

Of those families who indicated that their home education journey has been impacted by the decisions regarding GCSE examinations, 90% of those young persons are not able to achieve support for a predicted grade.

Barriers reported such as “Need a tutor or teacher to sign off grade evidence can't come from parent even if you have third party evidence”

These decisions will have an impact on delaying their education journey and future prospects. Families reporting

“Additional one year of gcse work and lack of motivation”

“We might have to re do the year, preventing college and uni education”

“Teen is feeling disheartened and disadvantaged because of educational choice to home educate.”

Media

There was widespread sharing of pride in the community which acted fast to pull together and support all families in the UK. Sharing our knowledge, experiences and resources to all.

“I actually feel the home ed community pulled together so fast to make sure there were online resources and how to find them for everyone a few weeks before so we were pretty organised, this meant everything was ready and researched for lockdown”

However there is also an overwhelming fear with regard to the media and professionals reporting of families and their experiences of this “lockdown schooling”.

Mountain Movers shares this fear and have evidenced not only by a significant number of school parents answering our survey despite clearly being addressed and aimed solely to the Elective Home Education Community, but also by the substantial raise in calls and emails from parents looking to us to support them and their children whilst their children are at home from school. Many of whom report that what school is providing or suggesting is not appropriate for home learning, they are experiencing deterioration in family bonds and relationships and a disengagement from all learning.

“The narrative that this is what home education is concerns me and the pressure on parents to replicate schools at home is also concerning.”

Mountain Movers share this concern that there has been a decided lack of understanding or acknowledgment of the fundamental difference in dynamic between being a parent and child engaging in a learning compared to a teacher pupil which requires an entirely different educational approach and methodically than what is experienced via the school system. This lack of acknowledgement and awareness, compounded with hostile media reporting, is compounding the hostility between home educators and authorities.

“Parents are being viewed very negatively during lockdown with narratives that children being at home and not in school somehow puts children at a huge increase in risk of harm. This in turn highlights precisely how negatively both the public and the authorities actually view home ed parents...as non “overseen” children at increased risk of harm.”

“Due to the reporting, people think this crisis schooling during a pandemic is what home education is normally like. There has been no clarity or reflection on the fact that there is a very different dynamic between parents and their children compared to a child and their teacher and that trying to replica school at home tends to cause massive friction in families. This is not home education in any way shape or form. We are struggling too and so are our children who are use to going out and being part of the wider community everyday. In this respect COVID19 has had a greater impact on home educated children. I am also deeply concerned by the fear of “bad parents” and encouraging of reporting on people. There has been no evidence or statistics given to support these opinions. Even low income families would not starve their children, free school meals might be a welcomed support but it doesn't equal then that they wouldn't feed their children without them. Its a huge scandal that parents are being portrayed in this manner, especially low income and parents of disabled children. Studies have repeated shown that actually children are safer at home with their parents and its a tiny percentage that there is a risk of and these children are well known by services. Children are in school for approx 30 hours a week - that's 138 hours at home per week, add on school holidays - one has to question, if its safe for them to be at home then without all this drama on the media, why is there this huge panic by some professionals now? Support social services but don't shame and demonise parents and dont try and make out that school and teachers are heaven and angels when the evidence shows that for significantly more children than those at “risk” at being home with their parents, schools is a place of danger, torment and abuse!”

“Lockdown educating at home does not accurately reflect home educating. Isolated learning with work from school that the parent does not know how to help with and sometimes all adults in the household working from home doesn't provide a supportive learning environment.”

“HE is being attacked. People are viewing isolation education as HE, and it isn't.”

Socialisation

The part of our survey that causes all electively home educators to groan with exasperation *“really are we still tackling the myth that home ed kids are kept indoors all day everyday?”*

COVID 19 has impacted electively home educated families greatly in disrupting normal life in a similar yet more profound manner to what children who traditionally attend school. EHE children and their families are used to being in the community the majority of the time as part of groups, clubs, volunteering, workshops and life learning. This loss of freedom and engagement with the wider world is hard for many electively home educated children to understand particularly those with learning difficulties such as autism. However there is a shared upbeat comradery with the whole of the world in having to stay at home and learning to adapt.

88.5% reported children and young people's social lives and friendships have been impacted by COVID 19 lockdown - with 46.2% reporting a severe impact in this area however additional survey comments by children and and young people surprisingly report they are enjoying life in lockdown and not being so busy!

“I like not being so busy going from activity to activity.”

“I have time to learn my stuff at home.”

“I miss my friends but it's good being at home.”

Whilst there is concern over the future of services that home educators use to support their home education journey, families are impressed with services being provided by organisations such as Scouts and specific interest groups, via online methods. There are concerns over the continued lockdown though for children with disabilities who may not be coping with digital access and need that face to face group situation to continue to develop appropriate social and life skills. Therefore home education groups need support from community centres with guidance from Welsh Assembly as to a pathway to reinstating these services again.

“Our cub group are online and still setting tasks for badges etc. So they are great really.”

In conclusion Mountain Movers share the same feelings as reported to us by many elective home educators, there is a lack of awareness, understanding and fundamentally respect towards home educating families. They are forgotten except as an avenue for some professionals to continue to seek justification to regulate family life further. We need to change the harmful and damaging style of approach to families during this crisis from the hostile one currently being used to one of enabling, empowerment, inclusion and most of all respect, despite differences in approaches and beliefs.

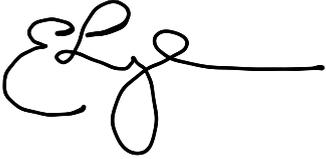
“More supportive attitudes to home ed by government and LEAs - it's hard enough battling our way through this present situation without difficulties from prejudicial attitudes and actions by these bodies”

“Knowledge that we're being included in the thought process. For example is any thought being given to when Home Educated children can start with learning groups again? I have a tutor group of 5 children who all work together on Maths and English, when is that going to be able to restart?”

We'd like to offer our thanks to the members of the committee for investigating the impact of COVID 19 on children and young people and for all your hard work during these strange times.

If we can be of any further assistance to the committee, please feel free to contact us.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erika Lye', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mrs Erika Lye
Chairperson and Trustee
On Behalf of Mountain Movers Education
Registered Charity 1176708