



The Stuart Low Trust

The impact of COVID-19 on mental health and social connectedness



Stuart Low Trust

October 2020

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About the Stuart Low Trust

The Stuart low Trust is an Islington-based organisation with a pan-London reach. We provide safe spaces and community activities focusing on arts, nature and wellbeing, most of these delivered out of hours. We connect and support people for better health and wellbeing.

Responding to COVID-19

On the 11th March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. As a result, we made the decision to suspend all face to face activities.

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting social distancing measures have drastically altered the way that we live our lives. They have also created health, economic and social uncertainty and insecurity.

COVID-19 and Mental Health

According to the Office for National Statistics, almost one in five adults (19.2%) were likely to be experiencing some form of depression during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Centre for Mental Health, a charity providing life changing research, economic analysis and policy influence in mental health, states that:

“Some groups are more at risk of experiencing mental ill health, including people with existing mental health conditions, NHS workers, ICU patients and their families, those who have been bereaved and those affected by unemployment. As further evidence becomes available, the figures may rise: for example when the extent of the unequal effects of the pandemic on Black and minority ethnic communities, on care homes and disabled people becomes clear.”

We suspected that this would be a difficult time for our participants. Many were asked to ‘Stay at Home, Protect the NHS’. Some had underlying health conditions, so were at higher risk, and were advised not to leave their homes at all.

Participant voice is at the centre of the Stuart Low Trust.

We invited participants to share their thoughts on their experience of social distancing measures and any concerns about our return to face-to-face activities. In particular, we wanted to know about what we can do to make people feel more comfortable and less anxious about attending our activities.

Who we surveyed

We were keen to capture as many responses from our participants as possible. We created an online survey and invited responses. In addition, a questionnaire formed part of our monthly postal mailout.

We received 18 responses in total between 11th March and 30th June 2020. The highest rate of responses to the survey were in April which would have been the height of lockdown in London.

We did not ask for demographics data. However, data from our 2018 impact report suggests that our respondents are likely to be:

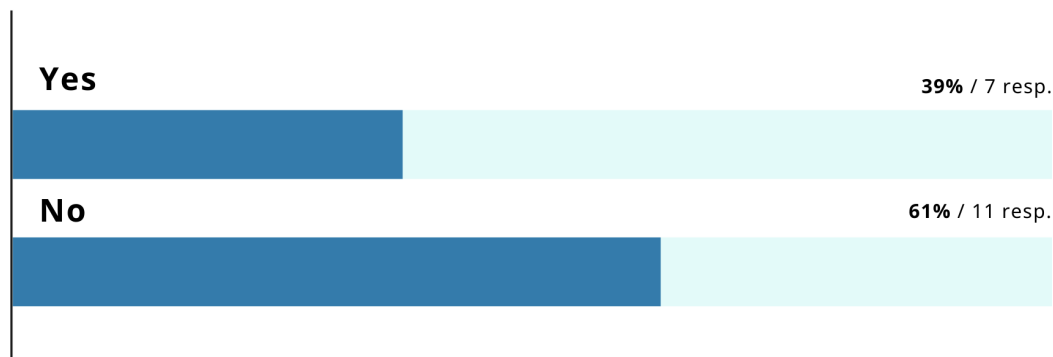
- Older people
- Living in Islington or the four neighbouring boroughs (mainly Camden).
- Identifying as white.
- Single (including divorced and widowed).
- ½ identify as male and ½ identify as female.

We also know that many of our participants have disabilities, but do not disclose this information to us.

What they told us

Are you currently being advised to self-isolate?

18 out of 18 answered



39% of our respondents had been advised to self-isolate.

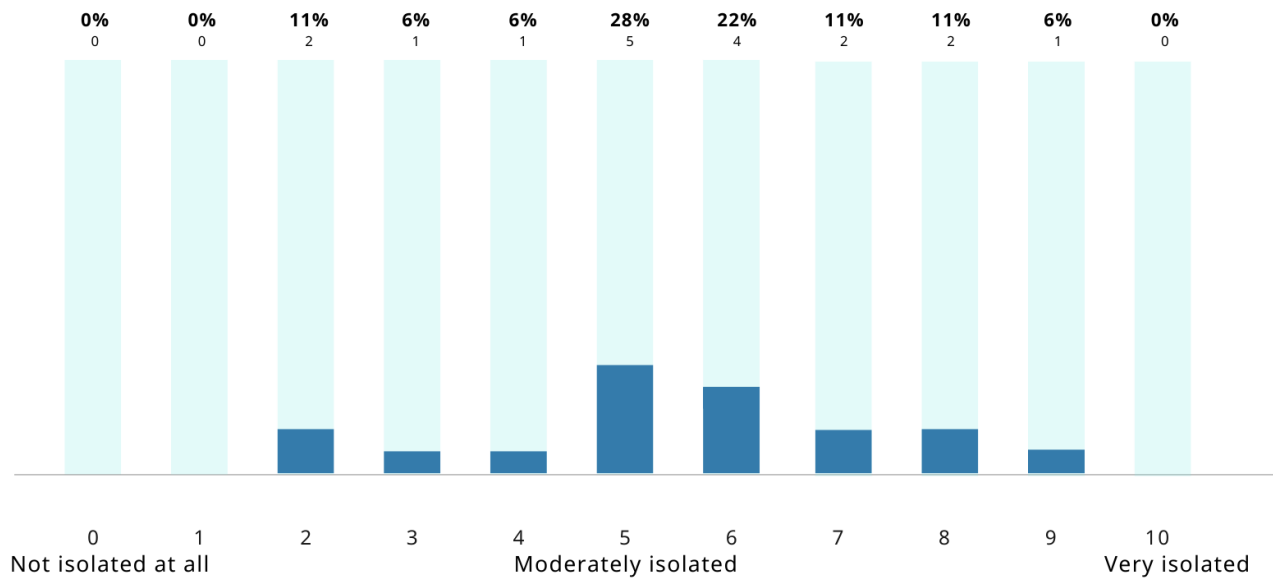
28% of respondents (4 out of 18) did not have access to an environment where they can do gentle exercise

22% of respondents (5 out of 18) did not have a person to talk to if needed

How isolated do you feel at the moment?

18 out of 18 answered

6 Average rating



The majority of responders rated themselves as **moderately isolated** (5 out of 10).

17% of respondents rated their own feeling of isolation as an 8 or higher out of 10.

How did we respond?

Delivering differently

During lockdown we maintained in regular contact with our participants. We increased the frequency of our postal mail outs, social media and e-newsletters. We also regularly updated our participants and partners about the latest developments at the organisation.

Support with managing their own health (mental, physical, or wellbeing)

- Signposting to support around specific conditions
- Wellbeing activities e.g. mindfulness videos created by our Mindfulness Trainer
- Signposting to free online talks and concerts
- Wellbeing tips
- Tips for maintaining your physical health whilst engaging with online activities

Delivering differently

Regular discussion groups

We delivered the following online sessions via Zoom:

- Philosophy Forum
- Choir
- Art workshop

Supporting a connection with nature

We shared:

- Mindfulness in nature videos
Information about local parks and green spaces
- Information about how to connect with nature in your home
- Virtual nature visits to places of outstanding natural beauty
- Links to talks about nature

Support with managing tasks from home

We have signposted our participants to organisations that can provide practical support with managing tasks at home.

Delivering differently

Providing online activities that participants can do on their own


Through our website and newsletters we have:

- Shared tips for activities participants can do at home e.g. tips to start singing
- Shared links to free online activities and events e.g. free online talks, theatre performances and concerts
- Shared information about online classes

There were two suggestions that we haven't managed to facilitate:

- **Facilitate participants spending lockdown with friends and family**
- **Run face to face activities**

After the social distancing measures



We take the health, wellbeing and safety of our participants, volunteers and staff extremely seriously. We are presently developing an understanding of the steps that may need to be taken in order to move towards re-opening our activities.

Stuart Low Trust will be using participant feedback to support us to think about how we return to face to face activities.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank all of our participants who filled out our questionnaire.

References

1. Office for National Statistics- [Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020):
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020>
2. Centre for mental health -[Covid-19 and the nation's mental health: October 2020](https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/covid-19-and-nations-mental-health-october-2020)
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