



## Letters from Lockdown

**“WE’RE DOING OK, US VULNERABLE OLDIES. VALUABLE OLDIES.”**

At Ageing Better in Camden we firmly believe in amplifying the voices of older people in our communities. Now, more than ever, we strive to support our members to raise their voices and share their experiences.

Far from being a great equalizer, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed some of the deepest inequalities that have often remained hidden in our society. Our members have been writing a weekly newsletter for one another, to keep informed and connected in these challenging times. It has also brought us all closer together as we share our personal experiences of lockdown.

Here, Sue Heiser shares her experiences.



Over the past months, calling members and getting an insight into each individual’s experience of lockdown I’ve learned that this virus may not be a great equalizer, but it has brought us closer together as we share more openly our personal ups and downs.

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*We all have different ways of finding a manageable ‘ordinary day’ in lockdown.*

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To keep my sanity, I bake. I’ve always baked – I’m not the panic buyer who ripped off all the flour at your local supermarket. I had supplies, to begin with. When I began to run low, that’s when the networking started and it’s proved easy, in these days of kindness and looking out for each other.

Alan, my oldest and most shielded friend, is a whizz on-line and was able to find me two bags of organic wholemeal which he couriered over. And then a call from Annabel – I’ve found fresh yeast, do you want some? It seemed to me such a faff for her to buy and send from south London, but no, it offered her two excursions to engage her 6 year olds – once to the cinnamon bun seller who had yeast, and another purposeful walk to the post office to send a small parcel to this old woman they had never heard of.

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*And then there's Issy, who shares with me her fruit box*

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And then there's Issy, who shares with me her fruit box that is delivered to her door each Monday morning; in return I bake her a wholemeal loaf and peanut butter cookies for her bedtime snack, which I leave on the balcony walkway to her flat, giving me a short walk for exercise. Reciprocity and mutual support is the name of this lockdown game.



My nephew cycles for fitness – would this do aunty? Two bags of flour appeared on my phone screen which he'd found in Brixton. The 12 k round trip kept him fit, gave us a distanced chat on the doorstep and I waved him off with chocolate and courgette cake to share with his girlfriend. That cake recipe was a first for me – it works surprisingly well.

And Diana, who keeps my spirits up with her intellectual flair for problem solving and tireless good work at UCH – she squeals with delight at the thought of home-made cake and a slice of vegetable pie for her supper. Her abilities are endless but, she admits, she's no cook.

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*We pass our loot across the threshold and exchange gossip*

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And Ian, my fit, young-looking neighbour who has to show his bus pass as ID before he's allowed to join the oldies queue at Waitrose – he gets me fresh eggs and baking powder and odds and ends I need. His choice is bread and French apple tart. We pass our loot across the threshold and exchange gossip about the tensions in our block of flats as lockdown gets to those who have no garden and are coping with small kids, fragile mental health and separation from family during Ramadan.

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*My mood, in this Coronacoaster of highs and lows, was plummeting and the hot cross buns didn't get made*

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Easter was hard – no large family gathering in my flat with an Easter egg hunt in the garden, overeating and games. My mood, in this Coronacoaster of highs and lows, was plummeting and the hot cross buns didn't get made. I remembered those I had been talking to on the phone whose faith was sustaining them in isolation. I have no religious faith, but their words were comforting - their god was by their side, locked in with them. In time my mood lifted. The buns got made, but without the cross and neighbours benefitted once more. We're doing OK, us vulnerable oldies. Valuable oldies.

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