



## Letters from Lockdown

**“ANY OTHER BLANKET RULE WOULD HAVE BEEN DISMISSED IMMEDIATELY AS UNFAIR AND DISCRIMINATORY. BUT DEALING THIS WAY WITH OLD PEOPLE SEEMED TO BE ACCEPTABLE”**

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, Diana Scarrott shares her views and experiences.



When a lockdown first became likely I was under 75 – just. So I was hoping that old people would be defined as over 75s which would let me pretend not to be old for just a bit longer. I don't like being labelled. Though 'lucky' would fit because, apart from being old, it turns out that I'm in quite a few low risk groups for Covid 19 – female, white, blood group O.

So I organised a newspaper delivery, made sure I had some food, and settled down to do as I was told. I started walking round and round Tavistock Square, then Bloomsbury's other Squares. My Garmin step counter was very pleased with me.

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Then in April people began to discuss how the lockdown might end. A longer lockdown for old people was seriously talked about, even as long as a year. Any other blanket rule would have been dismissed immediately as unfair and discriminatory. But dealing this way with old people seemed to be acceptable. Never mind that a lot of old people are fit and active and useful in all sorts of ways, not least as volunteers helping other old people.

I suppose this was a Government leak to test response. Happily, the response was rapid. Age UK and the BMA said 'rubbish' and the idea was dropped. And I cheered up more when I noticed that the World Health Organisation suggests 60 as the age threshold for taking special care.

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*However we define old, we shouldn't put everyone old into a frail and vulnerable box.*

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However we define old, we shouldn't put everyone old into a frail and vulnerable box. Messages get over-simplified. Old people's Immune systems are less good, a friend told me, and I should stay indoors. But by how much are they weaker, barring other medical conditions? I heard a GP on the Today programme say only a bit weaker and certainly not enough weaker to justify a year-long lock down.

So then I started to worry about whether what I was sort of understanding was true or just guess or spin or half-truth. At the start, I was looking at the BBC website every morning, as soon as I got up, to see the graphs of Covid cases and deaths and some comparisons with Italy, especially. And for a time, the Italian data was more clearly presented than our own, as a daily bar chart so you could see things levelling off and then getting better. I also watched the Government's daily briefings until the statistics became so obviously selective. I used to be a statistician. Statisticians have ethics. However awful a problem, managing solutions needs trustworthy measurement. When numbers become corrupt, we're in trouble.

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But I don't want to sound like Ms Angry. I live in a little block of flats, with ages ranging from 2 to 91. We now have a WhatsApp group to talk about things. And the response of organisations like Age UK Camden has been extraordinary, from the first minute of lockdown. The staff changed jobs, organised food parcels with supermarket and delivery allies, phoned people to check how they were managing, managed everything via Zoom.

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