



# REBUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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Lockdown, Covid and furlough were words we had probably never used before this year. But are now part of our everyday diction. But it's not just words, but lived experience, that has shaped this group of five people to begin a process of profound re-evaluation.

As well as building a strong bond we've covered so much, but principally we've concluded that we need to focus on our time, to reflect better, find space, conserve energy and release our creativity.



## TIME

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*“Reduce the number of journeys by both car and air – lockdown has shown that with modern technology we don’t have to be rushing all over the world to be present in meetings, we can work better and with less environmental impact.”* **John**

Suddenly, many of us found we had a lot more time than we could imagine. For some, this was scary, especially the self-employed amongst us, but after the initial shock, the extra time allowed us to begin thinking creatively about how we could overcome the challenges of lockdown, re-engineer our businesses and begin to build back better.

For those who continued to work at or near full capacity from home, not having to commute or attend pointless meetings meant we still had more time to dedicate to what we began to reappraise and appreciate as the important things.

Having extra time and flexibility allowed us to shop more locally and cook more adventurous and wholesome meals rather than dragging ourselves round a supermarket to buy a frozen meal to sling in the microwave before collapsing in front of Netflix.

## REFLECTION

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*“My learning has come from surrounding myself with people that reflect who I want to be, how I want to feel, ultimately people who help make me a better version of myself.”* **Steve**

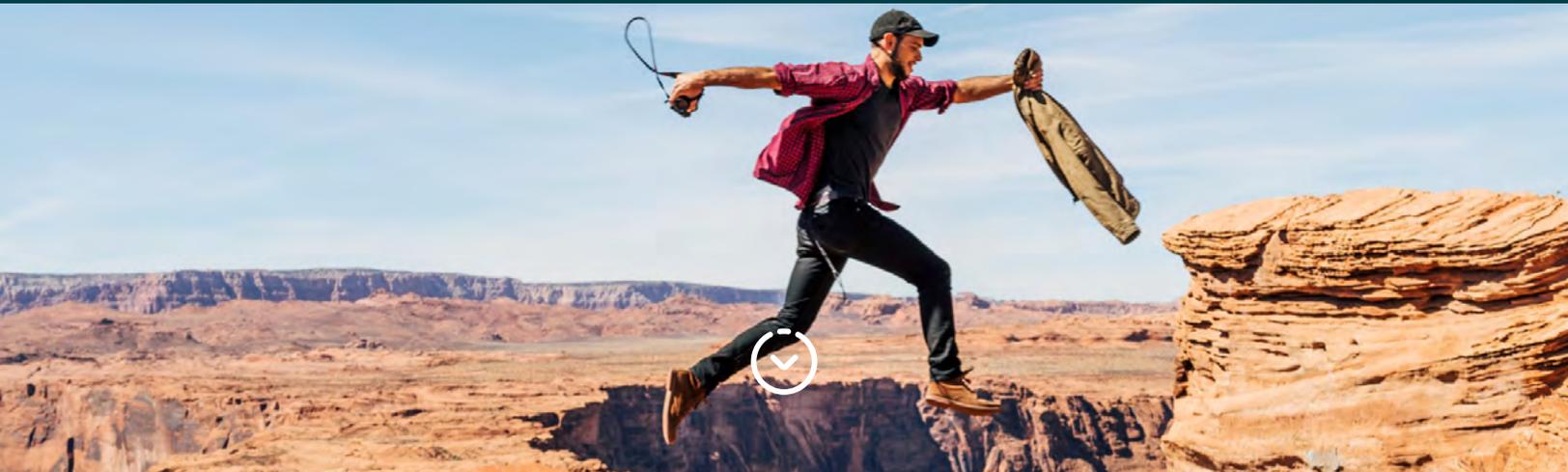
Most of us found we had more time on our hands and we used this to think pretty hard about lots of things. It was through this reflection that we began to question our views on the important things. New perspectives and insights flowed from this period of - sometimes enforced - reflection. It's perhaps a habit we should make more time for when and if things return to normal.

## SPACE

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*“Spend more time appreciating and connecting with nature – watching wildlife and growing flowers and veg to reduce feelings of stress, improve physical health, improve confidence and self-esteem. If you use it more, you will protect it more.”* **John**



Under the strictest part of the lockdown, getting outdoors in nature to exercise was the highlight of the day - and the importance of being outdoors in nature assumed a much higher priority. Some missed the buzz of crowded pubs, restaurants and events, but for others, not having to deal with packed supermarkets, overcrowded trains or congested roads was a revelation.

Yet despite the absence of crowds, seeking contact with smaller groups of friends or neighbours became more important. The weekly NHS clap was a focal point for many communities - as was the rapid emergence of neighbourhood mutual support groups.

The experience differed quite dramatically for rural and city dwellers, the former really appreciated direct access to wide open spaces; the latter understood the importance of access to well-maintained green spaces inside the city limits.

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## ENERGY

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*“What lessons have been learned? How we care for our own environment and collectively ensure that we take note of nature and how our planet is more than capable of repairing itself when mankind stops interfering on a global scale.”* **Simon**

Working less intensely, not commuting, having time to exercise properly meant many of us had more energy to dedicate to life outside work. Some of us found new balance between working and family life and were inspired to become much more engaged parents. There was a sense that work consumes too much energy, leaving little inclination at the end of a busy day to engage in the community, nature, friendships and be properly present for our families and our children. There was also a sense that a lot of the demands that work placed upon us were arbitrary and unnecessary.



## CREATIVITY

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*“The bottom line is a revolution in spirit, in kindness, in a new conception of how we live our lives in relation not only to each other, but to nature, to our air, our rivers and seas and a different understanding of how our land is our common treasury.”* **Michael**

The combination of more time and more energy triggered a surge in creativity which created a positive environment for innovative responses to working through the pandemic. Too often, our working lives are spent ticking boxes and jumping through hoops; leaving precious little time or energy to maintain a sense of mission and purpose. There was a consensus that this needs to change, post-pandemic, and a new-found willingness to take risks to bring this change about.

# CONCLUSIONS

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*“The beauty of these commitments is that all of us can commit to the majority of them NOW. We don’t need funding or permission or Government intervention – we can just decide that this is how we want to live our lives.”* **Mark**

Essentially, we all agreed that we spent too much time chasing short term goals, career progression and the material benefits that go with working a 50-60 hour week without stopping to examine the reasons why.

We justify spending 10-15 hours a week on the road or on the train and working longer hours and jumping through those hoops to provide what we think our families want - smarter clothes, flasher cars, fancier holidays, and accept the sacrifices these entail.

Stripped of these day-to-day indicators, brought closer to what matters, it has forced us to question why we even do what we do. Conversely, those of us who do value our professional ambitions have placed our skills into a more focused perspective.

None of this is rocket science. Some of us are lucky enough to have a degree of agency in maybe choosing to work smarter in the future; perhaps focus on providing more of what our families and communities need, rather than want. We can choose to adopt more of the healthy behaviours set out above and have a positive impact on our immediate communities.



# THE BIGGER PICTURE



*“We have to all of us commit to get on and do stuff... we must 'make power, not take power'; demonstrate we are effective community leaders and actors”.* **Michael**

From a wider perspective, millions of people in poorly paid, insecure jobs do not have the privileges we enjoy. Many of them work 60 or 70 hours a week simply to make ends meet.

Covid has exposed some fundamental fragilities at the heart of our society. Like the shortcomings of ‘just in time’ supply chains, Covid has revealed a swathe of ‘just about coping’ communities which could still be devastated by the legacy of this crisis.

These people are working too hard to properly look after themselves or their families. They have no spare time or energy left to invest in wider society and they are often bounced into compounding the challenges they face by making unhealthy lifestyle choices.

By pulling together in the early stages, our society coped well with the initial shock to the system. The immediate instinct to contribute and help more the most vulnerable in society was a powerful impulse. But the aftershocks have the potential to flatten the fragile post-Covid recovery.



The government also addressed the immediate threat posed by Covid and effectively declared a national emergency. In so doing they demonstrated that a national priority can mobilise a state to save lives and reboot society. What if they took the same approach to tackling climate change? Or child poverty?

*The key learning is this: society was able to pull together to withstand the initial shock because millions of people suddenly had the time and resources to look out for and look after both themselves and the more vulnerable people in their immediate communities..*



But if normal service is resumed, and all working age people are forced back onto the treadmill, the cracks will soon begin to reappear.

In order to build back better, everyone who needs to work to earn a living needs greater financial security and agency and a bigger slice of Britain's GDP.

Lockdown gave us – educated, skilled, comfortably off, privileged and socially engaged – the time, space, energy and creativity to redesign our working lives to work better for ourselves, our families and our communities.

We are on a journey, a long walk to examine where our values and our ambitions are in alignment. There are plenty of others out there doing the same thing – More in Common, the RSA, the People's Powerhouse, the Churches, local groups closer to where we all are. Even Freshwalks has been empowered and boosted by a new sense of purpose.

At the heart of it are relationships. Stripping out the transactional and replacing it with a conversation, an understanding, a shared sense of what we can do collectively, differently, to change, to recognise the value in each other. This requires a regular commitment of time and energy over the long term.

Here's a final quote that sums everything up:



*“Relationships of all types are built on small, consistent deposits of time. If you want to connect with your kids, your family, your neighbours, your community, your colleagues, your world, your ‘whatever’, you’ve got to be available consistently, not randomly. You can’t cram in what’s most important at the time and hope that’ll do.”*

**Simon**

