

# Ansuz Update . . .

June 2020



**W**elcome to the June edition of the Ansuz Action newsletter – our first one as it happens! We are very excited to be finally up and running. Our [website](#) is also now live, please check it out and subscribe so that we can stay in touch with you.

We look forward to bringing you stimulating and useful content on the world of work and organisations, organising for power and keeping you up to speed with all that you need to be engaged with living a dynamic and fulfilling life. It's an eclectic mix, reflecting our passions, our experience and our mood.

We write this newsletter ten weeks into lockdown – and no matter how well you may feel you've adapted, it feels like it's been forever. We've all experienced things we've never known before and been required to dig deep into our [comfort and courage zones](#). At the same time many people are doing imaginative and new things, and there are encouraging signs of people re-engaging with ideas and actions around local food, servicing the commons, mutuality, and living more sustainable, resilient lives. Never has day-to-day resilience felt more vital or up close and personal. Lockdown has been touted as an ideal time for making future plans, but when we really don't know the scale of the impact of this pandemic, exploring what's next and what's possible is challenging.

One thing we have asked each other is "what have you learned about yourself during lockdown?" here's what we came up with:

Ruth

Bread making just isn't for me – I'm not fascinated by my burgeoning sourdough starter and I'm happy to leave it to those who can bang out a perfect loaf with flair.

I love football even more than I thought I did, which was already an awful lot. I miss beyond measure agonising over the Os every Saturday.

Having more time – to think, to be curious, to do not very much at all – is great. I'll never be super-busy again.

I find engaging with people online easy and enjoyable. It must suit my learning preferences. Zoom? Microsoft Teams? Bring them on!

Helen

I love The Repair Shop on BBC. I am in awe of the skill and creativity that each artisan brings, I love how they work together and I've always been a sucker for an emotional back story.

I really enjoy jigsaw puzzles. I've noticed that I am watching less and less TV and needed to find something to do. Wow how times flies when you're lost in box of 1000 pieces!!

Action learning is definitely my preferred method of problem solving. I love the process of having others tease out the answers that are buried deep within you.... so empowering!

Audiobooks are not my thing... I am too easily distracted either by my busy brain or something else going on. I will suddenly realise that I haven't heard a word that was said and have to rewind.

Email us on [info@ansuzaction.org.uk](mailto:info@ansuzaction.org.uk) to tell us what you've learned about yourself during lockdown.



## Things to read and watch...

**T**here has been a plethora of thought-provoking content out there during lockdown. We thought we'd suggest a few of our favourites...

Many of the think and do tanks we follow are offering accessible and bite sized comment/conversation webinars. The New Economics Foundation runs a [weekly webinar](#), or for a more in depth look at their weekly topic go to their weekly economics briefing [podcast](#). All back issues of both are available on nef's website. Positive Money launched its radical report [The Tragedy of Growth](#) in a mid-May [webinar](#). The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has launched its [Community Wealth Building Centre of Excellence](#). And check out the Action Network's recent webinar discussion [Into the Portal, Leave No One Behind](#) with Naomi Klein and Arundhati Roy.

At more of a ground level, Guardian journalists John Harris and John Domokos have launched their [Life in Lockdown](#) short films within their Anywhere But Westminster video series.

This [Sustain blog](#) explains why community growing spaces and allotments should be supported by councils and landowners during the lockdown and for the duration of this crisis. And [Hubbub shares findings](#) from its survey to explore how Covid-19 may have changed our eating habits.



## Monthly musings...

**W**ith talk of coming out of lockdown and 'the new normal', Helen reflects on resilience and the world we are bouncing back to...

Over the past 10 weeks, it is rare that I have had a conversation (Zoom, phone, MS Teams, Skype, WhatsApp etc) that didn't, at some point, touch on the question "So how are you coping with lockdown?" If I haven't asked it, it has

been asked of me. My response has depended on how far into lockdown we have been, how I am feeling, what's going on for me at the time, and who is asking.

The week before the lockdown proper, I answered a call to action from a local resident who set up the "New Milton Covid Support Group" on Facebook. This was the start of one of thousands of Mutual Aid (MA) Groups that have sprung into action across the UK (and the World), led by people in communities, alert to our shared vulnerability in the face of the threat of Covid 19.

In the midst of a global pandemic, it is unsurprising that in conversation with friends and colleagues, across the webinars and Zoom calls or on the news, our resilience, as individuals, as communities, or as a nation, is a recurrent theme. As Social Justice and Social Change Consultant Minda Burgos-Lukes stated during the NEF Weekly Briefing on [Organising During the Crisis](#), "We are stuck in resilience, trying to look at ways in which we can survive this and how we bounce back from this"

This really piqued my interest, so I thought I'd do a bit of reading... and wow, what a rabbit hole that turned out to be!! The first thing I learned is that resilience is a ['fuzzword'](#) ; it means many different things depending on who uses it and in what context. Now, the great thing about that it is gives me a little poetic license here to lend my own reflections on narratives around resilience.

What is clear to me about resilience is that it has become a buzzword over the past decade in particular within social policy in the UK. This coincides with the UK Govt's 2010 austerity policy to enable us to 'bounce back' from the global financial emergency - there's a reason the slogan "Keep Calm and Carry On", made a resurgence in November 2008.

The austerity narrative presents hardship, instability and insecurity as necessary, inevitable even. Individuals are judged on their resilience, their ability to cope with and come through this adversity. And

who wouldn't want to be seen as resilient? And what if we don't study hard, meet our targets, work hard, avoid risk, make healthy choices, focus on our wellbeing... If we fail is that a sign that we lack the right set of internal qualities, mental toughness or the drive to do well and contribute to the economy and to society. Resilience has become another taken-for-granted construct of individual responsibility that obscures structural inequalities and political decision-making.

And this matters, because it is this same framing of resilience that dominates the narrative around the coronavirus crisis, that we are 'all in the same boat', that the virus is a threat to us all. But what this overlooks is that whilst we may well face the same threat in the shape of the virus, itself, our vulnerability to the virus the way we cope and adapt in lockdown and come through this crisis will be down to privilege and one's experience of social and economic inequality as much as strength of character. Even the talk of genetic susceptibility or personal pathologies explanations in relation to vulnerability to the virus, particularly in [BAME](#) groups denies the [structural inequalities](#) in the UK.

It is the same framing that influences the 'popular press' and thus 'public opinion'. The outrage, as those without gardens and outside space head to city parks during lockdown to maintain their resilience. The memes on social media like [this](#)... and don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with being motivated and self-disciplined, but come on...

And here's the thing... what has been happening in communities during lockdown, with mutual aid, organising groups and other community efforts; with the building of trust and relationships that has created opportunities for people to understand their neighbours' different situations;

working together on alternative solutions on how to get food, medication and essential supplies, of how we reach those who are newly isolated and find those who were already invisible; the creation of new lines of communication and alternative social spaces; all of this has begun to create sense of collective struggle.

For me, lockdown has been like 'pressing the pause button'. So how do we use this opportunity to change the narrative of resilience to one which is based around solidarity and mutuality. A resilience which sees collaboration, creativity and

resistance as vital tools to envision and explore alternative systems of living, a bounce forward rather than a bounce back. As [Kate Tempest](#) says "There are no new beginnings until everyone sees that the old ways need to change"... so how do we make this new resilience contagious.

Our vision at Ansuz Action is to help people by supporting organisations to think and act differently and build power to organise for change. How can we work with you to build a collective resilience which enables us all to call the shots and co-create our world?



## And our survey said...

**W**e asked a few friends about life and work in lockdown. Here's what they told us...

### Cath Loughurst

**C**ath is CEO of charity **EBP South and Basingstoke Consortium**, leaders in inspiring and preparing young people for the world of work by connecting education and business.

*Q: How has your working day changed since Covid 19 lockdown?*

**A:** Now working completely from home. Similar routine, but everything is virtual – all meetings etc. Lots of focus on decision making, with limited ability to think and plan ahead. Crisis management in some cases, particularly around finances, and needing to provide a lot of support to staff through the uncertainty.

*Q: How has the work of your organisation changed since Covid 19 lockdown?*

**A:** Our clients are much less accessible as they were all in school. We are providing

some services online, but not in the way we were because of safeguarding and GDPR issues from schools. Some of our work (large events) has disappeared completely and we have furloughed two thirds of our staff.

*What transformation do you want to bring about as a result of 'all this'?*

**A:** People more thoughtful about what is important. Greater emphasis on trust, the real focus of work rather than 'being present'; more consideration of our environmental impact and reviewing our consumerist approach. Better community approach and more local solutions to issues where possible.

*Q: How are you keeping motivated and optimistic?*

**A:** The above, plus an opportunity to review my personal work situation and learn more about what I enjoy and can cope with in my work.

*Q: Tell us one thing you've learned about yourself during lockdown?*

**A:** That I enjoy being at home more than I thought I would; am happy being around my partner 24/7; miss people but don't need to 'go to work' to feel connected and that the most useful connections have been in my neighbourhood.



*Karen Mellanby*

**K**aren is a Director at Mind the mental health charity. She is responsible for the direction, management and development of the Networks and Communities Department leading a team of over 100 people to deliver a multi-million pound portfolio of community mental health services and programmes.

*Q: How has your working day changed since Covid 19 lockdown?*

**A:** The biggest challenge has undoubtedly been the uncertainty and the unknowns – how long? What impact? We are living it on a day-by-day basis, so it is very difficult to prioritise and plan.

With everyone working remotely, we are using Zoom for meetings which are clearly not the same as face to face, but the meetings start on time and the business of the meeting is conducted efficiently, perhaps more so than before.

There is increased recognition of and emphasis on the need for regular, consistent and strong internal communications. We are all really supportive of each other, with more integrated working and the breaking down of silos across the organisation.

*Q: How has the work of your organisation changed since Covid 19 lockdown?*

**A: Internally** – focusing on the internal organisation and how to respond to very fast-moving change. We had to ensure that staff were set up for remote working and that our server could cope with the increased capacity. The website was put under extreme pressure with the extra volume of enquiries. We had to look carefully at our cash flow and financial

position and to ensure that our HR policies were fit for purpose.

**Externally** – we had to be in close touch with our local Mind network and ensure that any immediate risks were being managed. We had to consider the implications of transferring our services from face to face to on-line and digital approaches. It was important to focus on our beneficiaries and to consider what information that people with mental health issues need. We had to ensure that our internal communications and information sharing were consistent and that we had our narrative in place. We needed to ensure that we were well positioned to respond to need, both internal and external and be in a position to respond to any threats or opportunities that the crisis may present for the organisation.

*Q: What transformation do you want to bring about as a result of all this?*

**A:** Being clear on what the crisis and post crisis world means in relation to future strategic focus and direction. We need to be able to respond to need and opportunities but being too reactive can also run the risk of taking us away from our core goals from before. We will need to establish a clear strategic focus.

And for us as an organisation it is positive that there is a strong focus on mental health; in the current crisis people are recognising the implications for mental health. We need to build on that.

*Q: How are you keeping motivated and optimistic?*

**A: Personally** – Watching videos of my beloved Leeds United winning things! *(so old videos then – Ed)*

Tending my window boxes – they've never known so much TLC

Watching urban wildlife from my window – including the family of foxes getting to know each other next door.



**Professionally** – The speed at which we can make change if we have to, for example making a shift to remote working or transforming delivery of local services within two weeks. Instead of over-thinking the process, we have just done it, normally those kind of change projects would have taken much longer. And everyone is very supportive of each other – learning to respond to a different working pattern and being able to reach out and empathise with others.

*Q: Tell us one thing that you've learned about yourself during lockdown*

**A:** I can adapt and chair a Zoom meeting with 16 people!

