

# Children's lives can't just be put on hold... we cannot furlough young people's learning

 [boingboing.org.uk/young-peoples-learning](https://boingboing.org.uk/young-peoples-learning)

15 March 2021



**Children's lives “can't just be put on hold while we wait for vaccination programmes to take effect... we cannot furlough young people's learning”**

*Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's Chief Inspector*

**Reflections from co-leaders of the Resilience Revolution about their experience of learning loss and their determination to make their voices heard.**

This blog is co-authored by Hannah Eaglestone (17) and Danielle Aoslin (18) along with a significantly older, co-leader of the Resilience Revolution in Blackpool. As experts in their field, Hannah and Danielle are best placed to share their experiences of what it feels like to have their futures disrupted, their education put on hold and their voices silenced. Having had the privilege of working alongside them both over the past few years as well as co-writing this blog, it's abundantly clear that their voices won't remain silent for long...



As co-leaders of the Resilience Revolution, we work tirelessly to support individual resilience building or **'beating the odds'**, whilst at the same time taking every opportunity to **'change the odds'** by actively challenging social inequalities and petitioning for systems change. Blackpool remains at the wrong end of many indicators measuring income, employment, educational attainment, mental and physical health. Rather than the high levels of deprivation defining their lives Hannah and Danielle use pride in their town to raise awareness of how young people can be a pivotal part of building more resilient communities and using social activism to demand change for those facing the most disadvantage.

At the beginning of January 2021 Central Government announced the latest national lockdowns and the closure of schools and colleges to most young people. For most of us, this felt like a return to the frustrations and uncertainty of the first lockdown. With Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education confirming that GCSE's and A-level exams would not go ahead this summer but will be replaced with teacher assessed grades, the reoccurring question of 'how it is going to work this time' re-emerged.

As Danielle explains:

"I am Danielle a Year 2 college student at Blackpool and the Fylde College. When I first heard the news about A-levels and GCSE'S being cancelled I was very anxious and stressed about what this meant for me as a level 3 BTec student. My main worry was, the day after the announcement was made I was due to sit a 3-hour exam. There were many thoughts rushing through my mind. Am I going to sit this exam? Is it going to count to my final grade? Who am I up against? My mind was sending me to many what ifs.

As soon as the announcement was made, I got a message from my tutor. He was just as in the dark as I was. He told me it's the government decision to keep you guys doing your exams, it's not a decision I agree with but it's what's going to happen so try and keep positive and have a good night's sleep. I know you are hardworking and I'm sure you will smash this exam and show them your knowledge. A couple of hours later I got a message from my tutor saying it was the college's decision as to whether we are examined. The college decided to keep the exams running.

I therefore, went into college to sit my three-hour exam. It was hard but I knew it was what I needed to do for myself and to pursue my future career. About an hour after I got home I got another message saying that the exams are no longer going ahead.

This made me panic. I was thinking – well, what is going to happen with the exam I have already sat? Will it go off predicted grades; will my tutor get a say; will I have to sit my exams at a later date?

I have now found out that it will be teacher-assessed grades and it will be unlikely that I have to sit any exams. My tutors have told me to focus as much as I can on coursework and shine, as they know I can.”

It’s hardly surprising that young people are feeling let down and under increasingly high levels of stress and anxiety. Most of us are all too familiar with the recurring dream where you are back in the exam hall, staring at that blank piece of paper without a single idea of how to answer the question. The clock keeps ticking... but the time’s up for Ofsted, the Department for Education and the politicians. Our young people deserve better.

Hannah an A-Level student at Blackpool Sixth Form, studying A-Levels Law, Psychology and Sociology adds:



“Have you ever felt like your best is never good enough? Well A-Level students across the country are feeling as though their hard work, determination and resilience over the last 16-months is not allowing them the outcome that they deserve. In a world of uncertainty, students are finding it difficult to understand what is being asked of them in regard to education and there is no clear view of what they are expected to prepare for. The last 12 months have brought a lot of stress with numerous lockdowns, lost lives and indistinctness from the government. Students are now facing being sold short with grades that they do not deserve, as factors are not being taken into account despite everyone having a different experience of the current circumstances. There is a lack of reassurance for students that a definitive assessment method which is fair will be put in place in which everyone has an equal opportunity to achieve grades that represent the hard work and hours of revision they have put in. Grades being based on algorithms was proven to not work successfully for the A-Level students of 2020, what does this mean for the students of 2021?”

It means that with only a few short months to go before exam season should be in full swing, young people all over the country are still in limbo, still waiting for answers and decisions to be made.

I don't know about you, but pre-pandemic I'm sure I wasn't alone in thinking that Sage was one of those rarely used herbs that sits quietly at the back of the cupboard waiting for Christmas to come and emerge triumphantly to stuff a turkey! Now, thanks to regular 5.00 pm news updates from Downing Street SAGE is firmly in the public's consciousness. Back in October advisers on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), which feeds directly into UK government decision-making had already warned ministers there was a risk of our young people becoming a "lost generation" because of the UK government's pandemic policies. The Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield has asked the government for a 'Road Map' for the wider re-opening of schools and for SAGE's sub-group on schools to be re-convened to consider the impact of school closures. The response from the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education is far from encouraging however, with the same old sound bites being delivered telling us schools will re-open from 8<sup>th</sup> March but lacking in the clarity and detail required to instil confidence.

The responsibility to act swiftly and decisively has never been greater and Hannah adds:

"Although there is a great amount of uncertainty in this current situation, there is a greater concern that needs to be challenged; why are students not being allowed the opportunity to voice their views and opinions on the decisions that are being made? A-Level students are the ones who are having to accept these decisions despite it having a significant impact on their future. Universities are being chosen without the chance to visit them. Those choosing to go into full time employment are going to struggle as the economy is in a crisis as a result of lockdowns. Students have an inability to search for available apprenticeships. The future is out of our hands. The future is decided without our input. The future is uncertain."

Ofqual and the Department for Education have formally launched a two-week consultation on a system for how results will be decided, as well as a consultation on learning loss. For the co-leaders of the Resilience Revolution this is not an opportunity to be missed. Danielle and Hannah along with the **Resilience Revolution Education Voices** group have been campaigning hard to challenge the status quo and recommend changes in the education system. They are determined to have their voices heard as COVID-19 has highlighted the disadvantages that are present in the education system. The Resilience Revolution has provided an opportunity to challenge the government to include unrepresented voices in the decisions made regarding education initiatives. This year, it is more important than ever that young people have the opportunity to have an input towards the decisions made for GCSE's, A-Levels and BTECs grades that would have been taking place in summer 2021.

As Hannah explains:

“Danielle and I have the opportunity to talk directly to the Department for Education regarding how we feel about exams and the plan for grades this year, and also have the opportunity to speak to Ofqual about learning loss”

Danielle adds:



“This opportunity came about from being part of **Resilience Revolution Education Voices**. I have spoken to the Department for Education about the plan moving forward with the summer 2021 exams, which has led to Hannah and I being able to attend a focus group around learning loss due to Covid-19. I had an open discussion about what happens in summer 2021 and influenced the Department for Education on what I believe students in Blackpool want to see. This has also led to us explaining to Ofqual the impact of Covid-19 on learning.”

It is evident that the right to an education has been side-lined for far too long and not enough political energy has been invested in re-opening schools and higher education settings.

The new Marmot review ‘Build Back Fairer’ published recently has also looked into the pandemic and the socioeconomic and health inequalities in England. Some of their findings from the first lockdown are not surprising but are none the less scandalous and are particularly pertinent to towns like Blackpool. It has shown that:



- The closure of schools in the first lockdown disproportionately impacted more deprived children and will have caused delays in development and lost learning.
- Learning loss was far greater in the most deprived schools.
- Children from higher income families spent 30% more time on home learning than those from poorer families.
- 66% of private secondary school pupils could access online lessons, compared to just 6% of state secondary schools.
- Child poverty rates are likely to significantly rise as a result of the pandemic.
- Lockdown measures have had profound effects on young people's mental health with 80% saying their mental health has deteriorated.

Cathy Creswell, Professor of Developmental Clinical Psychology at Oxford and lead of the Co-Space study into how families are coping during the pandemic has said “*we have failed to listen and respond to these children and their families,*” and “*we risk having a whole generation unheard, forgotten and devalued.*”

### **Now is the time to listen to our young people.**

This is not merely a vague hope or part of an unattainable wish list. The right for children and young people to express their views and have these views taken seriously is something the government has stated they are committed to and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child expressly demands:

***Article 12 of the Convention establishes the right of every child to freely express her or his views, in all matters affecting her or him, and the subsequent right for those views to be given due weight, according to the child's age and maturity.***

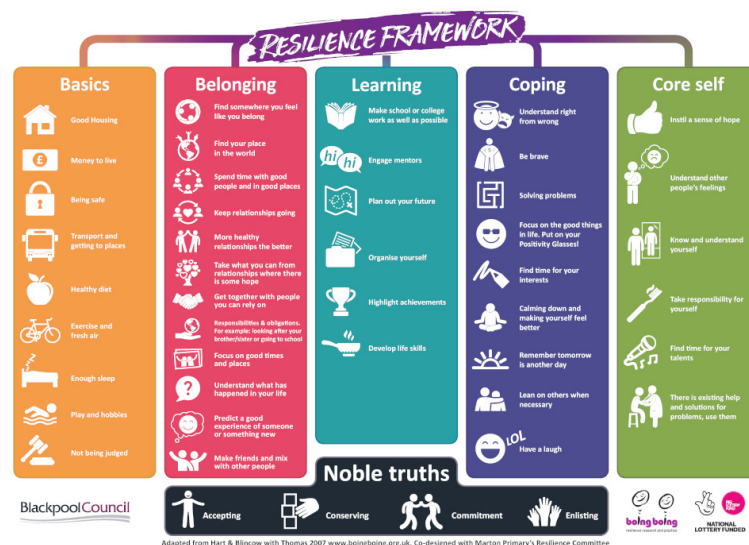
Ryan Robinson, Health and Society Tutor at Blackpool & Fylde College and member of the Resilience Revolution also feels strongly about the challenges currently facing young people and adds:

“It has been a very challenging period for both staff and students during these uncertain times, and we have all had to adapt and show resilience. From a teaching point of view, trying to deliver effectively online, monitor engagement of students and measure their progress in preparation for exams has been very difficult. Students also have to deal with their own challenges, whether this be sharing of resources with family members, connectivity issues or simply having to find an environment within the home conducive for effective learning. We have all certainly suffered from the lack of social time with friends and colleagues, face to face, which is so important for our mental health and well-being. Despite this, we are all working hard together to achieve what we need to achieve and I know that all my students will go on to having fantastic futures”

Although routinely overlooked in society and having to cope with some of the greatest challenges any of us can remember, young people in Blackpool continue to be an inspiration to us all. In their determination to be heard Hannah and Danielle are influencing their family and friends, their schools and colleges as well as government departments and examining boards.

In the Resilience Revolution, we use a Resilience Framework as a way to set out things that research tells us can help people and communities build resilience. It is made up of 42 actions we call Resilient Moves. One of the **noble truths** of the Resilience Framework is **accepting**.

Hannah and Danielle have used their acceptance of the current difficulties to focus on what they can achieve. Hannah has remained positive and feels that *“students have adapted to the changes and decisions made by the government and they have shown dedication to their education and remained resilient whilst overcoming their own personal adversities.”* Despite all of the difficulties Danielle has managed to secure a place at university. She feels grateful for the opportunities she’s had and would encourage all young people to *“speak up about the things they believe in, and by planning out your future you can certainly reach the goals you set.”*



This year has definitely been fraught with anxieties and uncertainties but Danielle leans on her **resilient moves** and ends with an important message: *“Keep up that positivity and you will get far!”*

This blog has been co-authored by Hannah Eaglestone, Danielle Aoslin and Karen Sweet.



The Resilience Revolution Final Research Report 2016-2022

## Resilience Revolution's Final Research Report 2016-2022

This report presents the research and evaluation of the Resilience Revolution programme (2016-2022).

The Resilience Revolution is an innovative whole town approach to building resilience, made possible by funding from The National Lottery Fund's HeadStart programme. Funding was available between 2016 and 2022, across 6 areas nationally in the UK with the purpose of testing and learning new ways to support young people's mental health (ages 10-16).

In Blackpool, the programme took the bold step of developing a vision for the whole town; giving everyone who lived, worked or volunteered in the town the opportunity to get involved. The Resilience Revolution embraced co-production as a way to design and test innovative projects. Co production meant a range of people, with different expertise, working together, as equals towards shared goals.



## **The Research Ready Communities pilot continued**

---

For the past year and a half Boingboing has been working on a Research Ready Communities pilot project in Blackpool alongside the National Institute for Health Research as part of their Under-served Communities programme. Typically, much of the funding for health research in the UK goes to universities in London, Oxford and Cambridge, but health research is needed the most in places like Blackpool, where the harmful impacts of health inequalities are worst felt.



## **Loops – a review**

---



On 22nd February Grace and Lauren, members of the Activist Alliance, attended the show Loops at the Blackpool Grand Theatre. It was a play made in collaboration with Liverpool Everyman + Playhouse, 20 Stories High theatre company and, “a brilliant group of activists and artists who all shared important stories of what their experiences were, with courage, honesty and jokes”.



## **Watch our workshops: how to do community co-research on health equity.**

Created as part of the ongoing Community Solutions for Health Equity project that Boingboing Foundation are proudly part of, we are pleased to share recordings of a series of workshops held recently in Blackpool. These workshops are free resources to be taken advantage of by any community members or organisations looking for a beginner’s guide to developing the research skills and knowledge needed to explore health inequalities in coastal areas.

Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2015 – adapted from Hart & Blincow 2007 [www.boingboing.org.uk](http://www.boingboing.org.uk)

	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
SPECIFIC APPROACHES	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong Help child/YP understand their place in the world	Make school/college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them	Instil a sense of hope
	Enough money to live	Tap into good influences	Engage mentors for children/YP	Being brave	Support the child/YP to understand other people's feelings
	Being safe	Keep relationships going The more healthy relationships the better	Map out career or life plan	Solving problems	Help the child/YP to know her/himself
	Access & transport	Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope	Help the child/YP to organise her/himself	Putting on rose-tinted glasses	Help the child/YP take responsibility for her/himself
	Healthy diet	Def together people the child/YP can count on	Highlight achievements	Fostering their interests	Remember tomorrow is another day
	Exercise and fresh air	Responsibilities & obligations	Develop life skills	Calming down & self-soothing	Learn on others when necessary
	Enough sleep	Focus on good times and places Make sense of where child/YP has come from		Have a laugh	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
	Play & leisure	Predict a good experience of someone or something new			
	Being free from anxiety & discrimination	Make friends and mix with other children/YPs			
NOBLE TRUTHS					
	ACCEPTING	CONSERVING	COMMITMENT	ENLISTING	

## **The Boingboing Resilience Framework**

The Resilience Framework is a handy table that summarises ‘what works’ when supporting children and young people’s resilience according to the Resilience Research base. The Resilience Framework forms a cornerstone of our research and practice. On this page we have pulled together lots of useful links so you can find out all about the Resilience Framework.



## **Prevention in Health and Social Care Inquiry Submissions**

---

Co-leaders of the Resilience Revolution made not one, but two submissions to the UK Parliament 'Prevention in Health and Social Care' inquiry last month. The inquiry is about preventing ill health, now and in the future.



## **A guide to becoming more eco-friendly in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast**

---

Hi, I'm Maya, and I wanted to say a big thank you to you for reading. These guides were created to help people in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast become more environmentally friendly, without feeling too overwhelmed by climate issues. They were produced as part of the Boingboing Activist in Residence project, which gave me the opportunity to work as an Eco-activist in Residence at Blackpool Victoria Hospital. I decided that I wanted to use this role to make two guides: one for local residents, and another for Blackpool Teaching Hospitals' Green Champions.

**NIHR** | National Institute for  
Health and Care Research



## **An introduction to the Research Ready Communities pilot**

---

For the past year and a half Boingboing has been working on a Research Ready Communities pilot project in Blackpool alongside the National Institute for Health Research as part of their Under-served Communities programme. Typically, much of the funding for health research in the UK goes to universities in London, Oxford and Cambridge, but health research is needed the most in places like Blackpool, where the harmful impacts of health inequalities are worst felt.



## **Online Resilience Forum – 3rd April 2023 – Psychological distress and resilience among a population affected by conflict**

---

This Online Resilience Forum from CRSJ and Boingboing is for anyone interested in resilience research. This month's forum is on 'psychological distress and resilience among a population affected by conflict' presented by University of Brighton PhD student Omar S Rasheed.

[Older Entries](#)