

Case study - James, 19, trans man, Glasgow

James is a student at one of the universities in Glasgow. He currently lives with his partner and a friend. James shared his experience of lockdown with us over the phone.

“The start of lockdown was really difficult. We both hated it. From a mental health point of view, we had a really difficult time to get into it”.

Life during lockdown felt bizarre and James didn't feel he had the support he needed to maintain a positive outlook. Looking back at the start of lockdown and the confusion about rules, they often felt suffocated and trapped in the flat. They felt more positive once they were able to establish a routine and go out for an hour or two to get some fresh air.

In terms of accessing support, James and his partner felt they had been failed by public mental health services. Until the situation became clearer, it was felt that the NHS mental health services had gone into shutdown. Their experience of accessing support through their GP wasn't particularly positive either.

“We were basically told that we're really too complex for them, we need to refer you to a psychologist. That's all good, but the next available appointment is in January.”

As a result, their mental health started deteriorating. They were aware of available LGBT+ support services, but they also knew they were overwhelmed and waiting times were likely to be long. Similarly, Sandyford healthcare services for trans people had to be postponed until the rules allowed for patients to be seen. However, people were already faced with long waiting times, often requiring years before accessing the support they need.

James turned towards self-care and finding ways to improve their mental health and wellbeing on their own such as finding activities to do online. However, they often didn't feel comfortable attending.

“I don't think it's just us who feel really anxious about video calls. Many people, especially those who are not out, aren't keen to go on video calls.”



Nevertheless, James highlighted the importance of organising virtual events. They argued that this gives people something to do even if they can't speak or turn their camera on. It shows them there still is a world out there and there is potential to feel okay again.

Their experience of lockdown would have been vastly different had they been able to access the necessary mental health services way before reaching crisis point. They felt that often people's mental health is disregarded by services until they are at a point that they described as "too late". He also said that services can be intimidating and can be quite confusing.

"LGBT+ people are less likely to ask for help when they need it. We always feel that our situation isn't bad enough or isn't worth immediate attention. And when we do get to access support, it feels like you need to educate the person rather than getting the support you've been looking for."

James is heavily involved with various societies in his university so was able to share some of the experiences of other students in Glasgow. He said that many felt really isolated and lonely, especially those with flatmates that are not accepting of their sexual or gender identity. If they are in that situation, they often feel unable to reach out for support, so it is important for other people to be more proactive.

For James, going forward means having more opportunities to socialise that aren't digital and having more safe spaces available for LGBT+ people would be really important. He also highlighted the need for mental health support services to be more streamlined and better signposted, so people can access the support they need according to the severity of their situation.