

# Coping with Lockdowns

Jason Kevan | London Back Office

Star  
Article



## Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic and 3 National Lockdowns

I work in Back Office as a Passport Application Examiner and have done this role since 2015. I suffer from Asperger's Syndrome and have found the COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdowns very hard to deal with. At times I have had mental health issues, high levels of anxieties, depression, and I get irritated and short tempered.

When the first national lockdown started in March 2020 and the COVID cases were high, I did not work for four months and was told to stay at home shielding. In that four months I found it stressful and got bored a lot and had lots of anxieties and depression. I kept myself occupied as much as I could in this time doing things like cooking, bike rides, going out for walks and watching TV programmes I like, reading books and listening to music, but felt very lonely even though I live with my parents. I have missed seeing lots of people, going out to the leisure centre, the gym, going to the pub, restaurants, seeing close relatives and friends, going to work and seeing my work colleagues. I also missed the work routine. I missed going on holiday in 2020. I was planning to go to Portugal in June 2020 and Crete, but holidays were cancelled.

When lockdown was lifted in July 2020 it was nice but still not the same as before as there were still lots of restrictions and not many people were around. I returned to work in July and was pleased to be back but it was very empty at work in London and on trains, lots of people working from home or staying at home because of health issues.

When the national lockdown was brought back in November 2020 for a month, my mood dropped again and I became depressed and hated the period of staying indoors again, especially in my spare time. Then it was released in early December, London was put into Tier 3, then Tier 4 which meant tighter restrictions again and I found that hard and being the Christmas period it meant not being able to go out to the pub at Christmas and New Year.

Once Christmas was over, we were all put into National Lockdown 3 and I have found this one very hard to deal with and miss going out at weekends and doing normal things. I cannot deal with watching the news on TV or reading the papers or newsy stuff on social media, and I feel stressed if people tell me negative predictions about what they think will happen in the future for us getting out of lockdown and the end of COVID-19. At present I am keen for the vaccination to be rolled out to as many people as fast as possible, and still cannot watch the news or read newspapers and limit my time on social media. I try as hard as I can to avoid chatting to people about COVID. I am worried how long this will last and in case I cannot go on holiday this year or see my close relatives and friends. I fret about how the economy will survive this, and I often worry about my job at HMPO with this pandemic.

I also worry about getting the virus and passing it onto my parents or anyone else close. I cannot wait for this all to be over, COVID-19 being history and national lockdowns and restrictions being a thing of the past. I can't wait for free movement and for everyone to be vaccinated against this awful pandemic.

The thing with Asperger's Syndrome and the pandemic is that it is so unpredictable and things can change very quickly from people becoming ill and suddenly passing away, to making arrangements to go to a social event, or on holiday, or to meet up with someone - then things change quickly and you cannot do this. There is lots of uncertainty with this whole situation. People with Asperger's Syndrome, like myself, like reassurance and to plan for things and do the things we plan to do, and we don't like our routine upset.

# Football beyond COVID

Helal Miah | London Back Office Manager

When the lockdown hit, communities across London and the UK were left devastated. Families who were already struggling were hard hit by the coronavirus, with many people losing their jobs or struggling to get food.

Many areas in London that were already poverty-stricken saw conditions deteriorate alarmingly, owing to the disastrous effects of the pandemic. Homeless, elderly, poor and vulnerable Londoners who are self-isolating also increasingly struggle to access food, which was evident in our borough, even more so than in any other part of London.

Tower Hamlets is the second poorest borough in London and the suffering of the vulnerable was more conspicuous than anywhere else. Tower Hamlets also has a very large Bangladeshi population, with subsequent studies showing that this group was more likely to be adversely affected by COVID-19 than any other BAME group.

Our area, in particular, was left decimated by the alarming daily increase in COVID cases. With the pandemic in full swing, our community was suffering. We had to do something. We had to act! Being the Chairperson of the Residents Association, I had to make decisions.

I initiated a meeting with a local children's football team (Burdett FC). I am an Executive Board member for the football club. At the meeting, we focused on brainstorming ideas about how we could help the community. We had numerous good suggestions, but the one thing we all agreed upon was to set up a food bank. We acknowledged that one didn't exist within a 3-mile radius.

I took responsibility for setting up the food bank and informed all those present that we needed to invite other local stakeholders to participate, in order that the community could derive maximum benefit from the food bank. I compiled a list of local contacts and invited them to a stakeholders' meeting. The list included Tower Hamlets Council, two local churches, a mosque and three local schools; as well as the local Tesco, LIDL and Asda. The consensus was that we would work in partnership to deliver the services of the food bank. The Council was really impressed with our system and with the stakeholders' group. We identified a possible location whereupon the Council immediately awarded us £9,000 to kick start the project.



Helal managing and observing the packaging and delivery of 100 ready made meals.

With the funding secured, I subsequently hosted a meeting with my team of players, all of whom are aged under 16. The team were excited to be able to serve their community. We grouped volunteers in 3 sub-groups; to deliver food, deliver medication and to act as a buddy for someone in isolation. The volunteers were really motivated and keen to begin! We held 3 further meetings with the stakeholders and the volunteers from the team and duly launched the Burdett FC Food Bank 2020.



Our under 16s football team – Burdett FC

In the first week that we launched we were inundated with requests for food and delivery of medication to

elderly people. We were providing nearly 100 nutritious meals a day and distributing them using car, vans, bikes and on foot.



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Under 16s preparing delivery instructions.

We had volunteers from the ages of 11-16, with adult supervision and myself as the Team Leader. From the outset, our food bank took off in a flash; and to thicken the plot at that point, we were just beginning Ramadhan. This made things a little more complex as we had to source meals that were made to a specific order, as well as having to deliver the meals in time for people to breakfast. As you can imagine, running the normal food bank was, in itself, a huge challenge without the added pressure of Ramadhan. During the fasting month, we were delivering 150 ready-made meals for the fasting community as well as 100 ordinary meals for the rest of the community. We successfully delivered 250 meals a day for 30 days during the fasting period.

With Ramadhan then behind us, we continued focusing on the food bank for our normal work. Again, we were very busy preparing up to 100 meals a day, which were delivered by our football team of enthusiastic young volunteers.

By this time our food bank was being recognised throughout the borough and even on a national level. We were shortlisted for the best food bank award in Tower Hamlets and also nominated to join the now world-famous Marcus Rashford (Manchester United FC) Food Campaign, and to become partners with them.



Helal with Simon, manager of the under-16 team

We are now continuing in partnership and look forward to expanding our horizons. As we were a football club leading a community initiative, Marcus Rashford gave us a personal shout-out on his social media pages. This heightened our reputation and expanded demand even further. Owing to the ensuing publicity, some of our bigger partners (Tesco, LIDL and Tower Hamlets Council) were overwhelmed by our achievements and the fact that we were running this food bank with kids under 16 years old. The sponsors were ready to contribute additional funding - providing us with over £10k in funding for the subsequent 6-month period. This provided a lifeline for us and for the families and vulnerable people we were supporting. The additional funds have helped us continue the food bank into 2021, and hopefully for the next 3 months at least.

Our food bank is a beacon of hope to so many vulnerable people and an example of excellence in a community in desperate need. In addition, our buddy programme also saw us successfully provide more than 500 hours of one-to-one support, whether face-to-face, or via Zoom. Our children are outstanding in their efforts and achievements, and display exemplary behaviour in their unparalleled commitment to the cause. Our service is now stronger than ever, and we are due to receive recognition in the Evening Standard in a feature piece in the newspaper regarding our work and its impact on the local community in Limehouse and Canary Wharf. We are extremely proud of our team and our volunteers, and would like to say that we stick together in the face of major challenges and events that impact our lives and our community.

Helal Miah  
Executive Board Member – Burdett FC  
Governor – Stebon Primary School  
Chairperson – BICWO Residents Association



Food parcels ready for dispatch

# Funny is Power

Melissa Deighton | London & CSOs Engagement team



This year's Red Nose Day has raised over £52 million so far to help people across both the UK and the world.

This year it's never felt more important to have some fun and raise money to support people living incredibly tough lives. We need the power of humour to turn laughs into lasting change.

The event took place on the evening of Friday 19 March on the BBC and included socially distanced presenters and a virtual audience.

Alesha Dixon, Sir Lenny Henry, Davina McCall, Paddy McGuinness and David Tennant were this year's hosts of the three-hour special.

Lots of famous faces got involved in the annual Comic Relief fundraiser which aims to tackle big issues including hunger, homelessness and mental health stigma. More than £45 million was raised on the night alone.

## Red Nose Day 2021 took place on Friday 19 March.

The London Engagement Team created a Just Giving fund page for staff to donate to and encouraged colleagues to dress in the colour red. The team also circulated a red-themed quiz created by our very own Dawn Crust for colleagues to have some fun –which was also shared with our Glasgow office. Colleagues were also requested to submit their clean jokes– some of which can be found below.

*It's not too late to donate. Our dedicated Just Giving link:*  
<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/loncsosrnd21>



Jason Kevan, Back Office examiner from London, participating at home

### Jokes submitted by colleagues

- Q. What sandals do frogs wear?  
A. Open toad
- Q. What's the difference between a hippo and a zippo..?  
A. ..One is really heavy, the other's a little lighter...

A patient tells his doctor,  
"Doc, help me. I'm addicted to Twitter!"  
The doctor replies, "Sorry, I don't follow you..."

- Q. What do you call a man hiding in the bushes?  
A. Russell.