By Tina Pilkington: Pennine Lancashire’s local delivery pilot manager

Leah is the business support officer for Together An Active Future (TaAF) and anyone that knows her will know she is a strong, bright and very independent young woman. She moved into her own house in 2019, at the age of 19 – but despite enjoying this enhanced independence she came from a very close-knit family and still visited her mum, dad and grandma on a daily basis for a chat and brew.

She personally found national lockdown hard, as did her whole family. Her dad lost his job, grandma was isolated and, like many people, special occasions – like her 21st birthday – were spent with presents dropped on the doorstep and celebratory telephone conversations (despite their best efforts, grandma was not quite up to Zoom!).

When national lockdown ended in July, we recognised as colleagues the sheer relief Leah felt in being able to visit family, to have human (and dog) contact again and to have that all important brew. This was short lived though. Living in Pendle, it wasn’t long before Leah was placed under local lockdown restrictions again and when asked how she felt she simply said, “punished for doing the right thing”.

What I didn’t realise though, until I spoke to her, was just how much this has really affected Leah. Like us all, working practice for Leah has been from her living room. Often Zoom meetings with the team was the only face-to-face contact she had. While we quite often moan we need a break from the screen, she was grateful for it. The days we had meetings were often the only days she got changed out of her pyjamas, she admitted she was totally stuck in a rut. And as for leaving the house – that just didn’t happen.

Despite knowing she was resilient and strong it was very clear she was struggling and our one-hour conversation regarding local lockdowns became in her words a “therapy session”. She described how she felt “selfish”, which is why she didn’t speak out earlier – but then she really wanted to use this opportunity to raise awareness, she realised she wasn’t the only one feeling like this.

We both really reflected on how if Leah, with a strong network of family, friends and colleagues felt like this, how on earth is this effecting people who are truly on their own and don’t have conversations? That’s very hard to think about.

You remember I said she’d stopped leaving the house? We talked about how form of physical activity may help – just to go for a walk, make a play list of her favourite songs. She did this and it’s now a regular routine. But again, this conversation is with someone that works as part of a local delivery pilot, who understands the positive impact of physical activity, yet it hadn’t crossed her mind that this may be a good thing to do.

“Everything revolves around a brew”
Leah’s Story

What hit home for me is how our conversation really mattered – the opportunity to talk about how she felt, her honesty, tears and just the trust to open up. What also hit home was how easily physical activity came into the conversation.”