At Home in Liverpool During COVID-19

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Stay Home Stories

This report presents findings of the project 'Stay Home': Rethinking the Domestic in the COVID-19 pandemic' ('Stay Home Stories'), funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of the UK Research and Innovation rapid response to COVID-19.

The project has been led and conducted by researchers at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL, UK) and University of Liverpool (UK).

www.stayhomestories.co.uk

@stayhomestories

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Front cover image: Sefton Park, author's personal photo (Kathy Burrell)

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1. Introduction

This report explores people's experiences of being 'at home' in Liverpool during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based upon interviews with 33 participants from a range of ages, ethnicities, faiths and migration backgrounds in Liverpool that were conducted as part of the 'Stay Home Stories' project

– a collaborative research project in partnership between Queen Mary University of London, University of Liverpool, the Museum of the Home[1], National Museums Liverpool and the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (see **www.stayhomestories.co.uk**). The report was launched at an event organised by Kathy Burrell and others on the project team at Toxteth Library on 18 November 2021 as part of the 2021 Being Human Festival.

The report identifies the wide-ranging and unequal impacts of COVID-19 on experiences of home in Liverpool, including the effects of loss, isolation and loneliness on mental health and wellbeing, the impact on neighbourhood and community relationships and connections with local places, and how the pandemic has influenced people's relationships with homes beyond the UK. Experiences of home during COVID-19 are connected to long-term inequalities within the context of Liverpool, including those of structural racism, austerity and deprivation. Local faith groups and community organisations are highlighted as important providers of multiple forms of support during the COVID-19 crisis.

Focusing on people's experiences of life at home in Liverpool during the pandemic, the report draws on interviews carried out (i) by Liza Caruana-Finkel, Patrick Graham and Anna Key with people from Liverpool's African-Caribbean, Chinese, Greek, Maltese, Polish, Spanish, Sri Lankan, Yemeni and mixed heritage communities and (ii) by Miri Lawrence with faith leaders and interfaith workers in the city. Our participants included 18 women and 15 men and ranged in age from 20

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to 70. Participants worked in a wide variety of occupations, including hospitality, retail, health and social care, public administration, charity work, community development and education. Some participants worked from home or were furloughed during the pandemic, whilst others, including keyworkers, continued to work beyond the home. Some participants have lived in Liverpool for all or most of their lives, whilst others have moved to the city more recently. Participants lived in a variety of housing types (including semi-detached and terraced houses, flats and student accommodation) and tenures (including social housing, rented and privately owned accommodation). They also lived in a range of household and family arrangements, with some in single-person households and others living with family members or with others such as flatmates. Faith was important to those of our participants who identified as Christian (Anglican, Methodist, Orthodox, Quaker and Roman Catholic), Hindu, Jewish (Orthodox) and Muslim.

Key findings:

Liverpool during COVID-19

• The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Liverpool City Region has been disproportionately significant for people from racially minoritised groups and those living in particular wards;

• The pandemic has magnified pre-existing inequalities that are rooted in structural racism and the legacies of austerity and economic decline;

• Whilst the pandemic has brought significant pain and hardship to Liverpool, it has also shown the strength of its communities. Neighbours, local organisations and faith groups have come together to support each other and develop new forms of solidarity and care.

Exclusions, anxieties and isolation

• People's experiences of the pandemic have been shaped by differentiated and intersecting personal circumstances;

• These personal circumstances include: illness; bereavement; mental health and well-being; working at home and/or beyond it; racialised inequalities; home-schooling; digital connectivity; access to maternity care and children's services; and household and other relationships both locally and abroad, particularly with older relatives.

Neighbourhoods and community life

• Liverpool's streets and neighbourhoods felt empty and isolated, particularly during the first lockdown, but neighbourliness endured and reshaped itself through encounters with neighbours, care for vulnerable neighbours, and more formal local support across different communities;

• People's experiences of the pandemic were significantly improved by the ways in which local, faith, ethnic and cultural communities came together to support each other;

• Anchored by their neighbourhood, some migrants to Liverpool feel more at home than ever in the city.

Religion and home

• Religious practices were sustained during lockdown across different faith communities;

• Some people identified the benefits of worshipping at home. Most described challenges that included digital skills, connectivity and fatigue; celebrating major festivals at home for two consecutive years; maintaining faith-specific rituals and other practices; and the lack of clear and consistent government guidance;

• Some faiths – including Islam and Hinduism – have strong traditions of creating sacred space at home for prayer and other forms of worship. Some people from other faiths created sacred space at home and many focused on curating space seen online;

• People of faith missed gathering together, particularly at times of illness and bereavement and with extended family separated during lockdown and other restrictions.

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Parks, green and public spaces

- Access to outside – and particularly green – space was crucial for physical and mental health and well-being, but uneven access to gardens, balconies and parks reflects wider structural inequalities;

- Some neighbourhood connections, including for migrants to Liverpool, have been deepened by changing relationships to parks, community gardens and the waterfront;

- Parks and other public spaces helped to facilitate social and family connections during the pandemic and became an important part of daily routines for many people;

- Although parks are public spaces, they are neither accessible nor able to offer sanctuary for everyone.

Keeping in touch

- Strict, and often unpredictable and uneven, travel restrictions prevented people from visiting other homes and brought significant changes to family relationships, expectations and routines;

- COVID-19 intersected with Brexit and other immigration policies and border controls to cause significant uncertainty and anxiety;

- People relied on technology to keep in touch with family and friends in other countries and to share celebrations and other experiences together. Regular digital contact made some people feel closer to their families than before;

- People found other, non-digital, ways of feeling connected to other homes, including through ordering or making food and celebrating traditions and events more enthusiastically than before.

Children and young people's mapping project

- Maps drawn by children and young people about life under lockdown reveal constraints, boundaries, the reconfiguration of places within and beyond the home, and the significance of outside space.

2. Liverpool during COVID-19

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences across the UK, the Liverpool City Region has been hit particularly hard. As of the end of September 2021, 78,366 cases and 1,304 deaths due to COVID-19 have been recorded in Liverpool (ONS 2021).

Liverpool has had the highest mortality rate among all of England's core cities, and more than twice the national mortality rate (The Case for the Liverpool City Region, 2020). The impact of the pandemic has also been felt unequally within Liverpool, with death rates varying by ward, ranging from 410 per 100,000 people in Yew Tree to 73 per 100,000 in Central. This has increased the gap in life expectancy between the highest and lowest wards to 13 years (Liverpool's COVID-19 Journey, 2020, 29) (see Box 1).

- **78,366 cases and 1,304 deaths in Liverpool City Region due to COVID-19 March 2020 – September 2021** (ONS, 2021)

- **410 per 100,000 death rate in Yew Tree ward compared to 73 per 100,000 in Central**

- **13 year gap in life expectancy between Liverpool's highest and lowest wards** (Liverpool's COVID-19 Journey, 2020, 29).

Evidence from across the UK has identified that people from racially minoritised groups are more likely to contract, to become severely ill, and to die from COVID-19 (Public Health England, 2020). The disproportionate impact on black and ethnic minority groups is reflected in the North West, where excess deaths as a proportion of population by ethnicity were higher among Asian and Black people than White people and highest among Black people (Public Health England, 2021) (see Box 2). Social and economic inequalities driven by structural racism are crucial factors contributing to the unequal impacts of COVID-19 on racially minoritised groups (Vaughn and Obasi, 2020).

Ratio of registered to expected deaths in the North West, March 2020 – September 2021[2]

Ethnic Group	Female	Male	Total
Asian	x1.40 higher	x1.47 higher	x1.44 higher
Black	x1.49 higher	x1.64 higher	x1.58 higher
White	x1.13 higher	x1.16 higher	x1.15 higher

Source: Public Health England (2021), https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/static-reports/mortality-surveillance/excess-mortality-in-North-West-latest.html

[2]As the report explains, the 'ratios are relative to historical trends within each group, and not in relation to another group. For example, in the ethnicity section the ratio for the Asian group is the ratio between deaths in this group registered in 2020 and the estimate of expected deaths in the Asian group based on the preceding 5 years. It is not the ratio between the Asian group and another ethnic group' (PHE 2021).

In addition to the human tragedy of lives lost, severe illness and long-term ill-health, Liverpool has suffered disproportionately from the wider social and economic effects of the pandemic. Liverpool had among the highest rates of unemployment and business closures in the UK during the first lockdown (Magrini, 2020). In October 2020, the Liverpool City Region was among the first areas of the UK to be placed in Tier 3, the highest level of the three-tier system, after recording the second highest infection rate in the country and with Liverpool's hospitals reaching 85% capacity (The Guardian, 2020). The tight restrictions on gathering and hospitality took a further social and economic toll on the local community. During 2020, the Liverpool City Region faced an estimated bill of £341m, with leaders describing recovery from the COVID-19 crisis as the greatest challenge Liverpool has faced since 1945 (The Case for the Liverpool City Region, 2020).

As household income levels have fallen, the demand for food banks has increased rapidly, while local services have also seen increases in domestic abuse and safeguarding concerns.

The pressures of three lockdowns and other restrictions have resulted in an increased need for mental health support, particularly among children and young people (Liverpool's COVID-19 Journey, 2020, 42-45).

This report shows the wide-ranging impacts on individuals, families and communities as people describe the pain of losing loved ones, disconnection from friends and family, and the strains of homeschooling or working from home. Other people had to manage the risks of working in hospitals or in other forms of essential work beyond the home. The report highlights how people's experiences are shaped by underlying forms of exclusion and inequality, including structural racism and more restrictive immigration policies.

The pandemic has magnified pre-existing inequalities that are intertwined with legacies of austerity and economic decline. Liverpool is the third most deprived local authority in England and 45% of the city's neighbourhoods are among the 10% most deprived in England (Liverpool City Council, 2019). Between 2010 and 2020, £506m of Government funding was cut from the Liverpool City Region, equating to a cut of £336 for every resident – almost twice the England average of £188 per person (The Case for the Liverpool City Region, 2020, 10). Whilst the city experienced rapid growth in the arts, culture and tourism sectors since becoming European Capital of Culture in 2008, these sectors have also been among the hardest hit by the pandemic.

- **Liverpool is the third most deprived local authority in England, with 45% of its neighbourhoods among the 10% most deprived in England** (Liverpool City Council, 2019).

- **2010-20: £506M of Government funding cut from the Liverpool City Region: a cut of £336 per resident compared to the England average of £188 per resident** (The Case for the Liverpool City Region, 2020, 10).

- **£341M cost of COVID-19 to Liverpool City Region: the greatest challenge facing the city since 1945** (The Case for the Liverpool City Region, 2020).

Whilst the pandemic has brought significant pain and hardship to Liverpool, it has also shown the strength of its communities. Neighbourhoods, local organisations and faith groups have come together to support one another, from delivering food parcels to providing emotional support to vulnerable community members (Liverpool's COVID-19 Journey, 2020, 53; Liverpool Echo, 2020). Local practices of care are visible throughout this report, with people describing an increased sense of solidarity. The report also highlights the importance of outdoor public and green spaces for providing relief from the isolating conditions of lockdown and enabling connection to local places. However, like other aspects of the pandemic, access to outdoor space is uneven and shaped by wider structural inequalities.

3. Exclusions, anxieties and isolation

We begin by acknowledging the very real and wide-ranging difficulties that were shared with us during our research. Some people we spoke with had experienced the death of friends and loved ones, either within immediate or extended families, or more widely in their communities and neighbourhoods. This is an important reminder of what has been at stake during the pandemic, urging us not to forget the devastating impact it has had on people's lives. As one L8 community development worker reflected: *'We've had deaths in our community as well, you know, like a lot of our, you know, elders, especially in the Yemeni and Somali community that use our local mosques around here, we got to know about them and it was really sad.'* The severity of the situation was brought home to Jimi when he realised that an old friend of his had died: *'Before the first lockdown, I ran into someone who I hadn't seen for the past six or eight months and the guy was a good enough friend, we were more close when we were kids than anything else. But the guy was always a good guy and every time we saw each other we'd always like stop and catch up, you know, for about twenty minutes before we go on where we're going … last summer the guy was dead. Dead from COVID, just like that.'*

The threatening and frightening nature of the virus was palpable in many of our conversations. People spoke about difficulties seeing vulnerable family members, even after restrictions eased, for fear of inadvertently infecting them. For those who carried on working outside the home, responsibilities to other household members and the risks of bringing the virus home weighed very heavily. One health care worker spoke about how hard it was to go out to work each day and then come home to her elderly mother, caught between two sets of caring needs. Someone else was living with his grandmother, continually using hand sanitiser indoors to try and protect her. David, a hospital doctor, was unable to visit his parents for the same reasons. One woman felt forced to give up her classroom assistant job because she felt the risks of bringing the virus home were too high.

Different people highlighted different aspects of the isolation of the pandemic too. Those who were shielding talked about the disconnections of not seeing people, or not feeling safe enough to go out at all. In the words of Kelly, who identifies as Black British:

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it's the isolation and the feeling of loneliness and not being able to talk to someone when you want to talk to someone, and not being able to go to the shops, relying on deliveries or a delivery slot which may not be suitable for you but you have to rely on them. So they're the kinds of negatives, you know, not being able sometimes to see your neighbours because everybody's locked behind closed doors, you know, not being able to get on public transport. During the first lockdown there never used to be a soul on the road, you wouldn't see a car, you wouldn't see a person, if you went out for a walk or anything you just didn't see anybody, which again left you feeling vulnerable.'

The toll on people's mental health came through in many of our conversations:

'I think there'll be a lot of mental health issues going forward because people aren't able to focus and plan, right. Or plans get thrown into disarray, right. So there's only so many times you can take that mentally before, you know, potentially you may snap, you know, you might give up. It depends how resilient people are and I'm not sure – I'm not sure most people, you know, can put up with this much longer.'

People also spoke more specifically about maternity experiences and children's services. Mithila was unnerved about being told to shield because she was pregnant. Ewa missed seeing the health visitor in person for her baby's first year check and would have preferred the reassurance of a face-to-face visit. In fact, many people spoke about the particular impact on children and young people – especially noting long waiting lists for any youth mental health support in the city. Nasra talked about how hard it was to explain to her six-year-old what was going on:

'at first, I was scared to let her play out and stuff. So yeah, I think it was really difficult for them to understand. I stopped putting the news on because it was terrifying her.'

Not being able to see as many people as usual was '**kind of isolating. It was weird.'** As all these examples show, social distancing went far beyond the notion of staying two metres apart – many social connections themselves became strained and distanced.

Other strains were apparent for those working from home and finding it increasingly difficult to differentiate between home and work. The sheer toll of online working was articulated very clearly by Magda, a Polish charity worker:

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I was just feeling really overwhelmed with the number of Zoom meetings that I had. It felt quite oppressive because I was seeing my friends on Zoom. And then sometimes I would spend like 80% of my working week just sitting on Zoom meetings. And yeah, and then really, you can't really do anything else because you know, if you can only leave the house once a day, you can't really balance it with real time. So, you just feel like you're just sitting in front of your screen all the time.'

Home-schooling had a significant impact on many people and became more burdensome with the second lockdown from January 2021. Luke was worried about the impact of the pandemic on his daughter, who had only recently started secondary school when lockdown hit, and felt disconnected from it all. Saba, of Yemeni heritage, spoke powerfully about the unequal access to technology and its impact on home-schooling:

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Yeah, he [son] needed a PC, he didn't have a PC at the time, so it was like he didn't have a laptop because I needed my laptop for work, my husband needed his laptop – it was hard from that point of view, and we had access to technology. Some families had no access, they only had a mobile phone, so you can really like – yeah, so it was very difficult … if this was ever to happen again there needs to be look, you know, a review of what people have access to from a digital and tech, you know, technology point of view. But then, even if they have a laptop – if they have access to wifi, some families like were utilising their data on their phones running up huge bills, you know, so data packs came through eventually but came through late.'
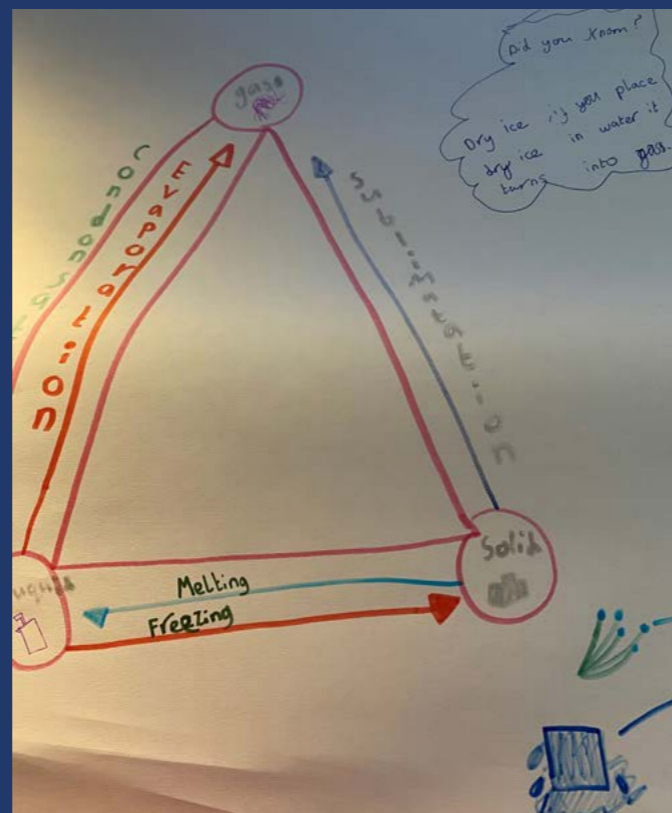
Home-Schooling, author's personal photo (Kathy Burrell)

Different kinds of isolation and inequality within education were clear in the testimonies of two international students, who struggled to meet people or gain a foothold in the city. Wictoria came to Liverpool from Poland to start her course during the pandemic and shared the following:

'A lot of people, including myself … spent the period from January to March without contact with others, not spending our free time in a social manner. In my case it was also caused by being the only person in my flat during this period. But I know it was a time when social life ground to a halt. It was very visible in the halls. There were no people around, and those who were, kept a low profile … My problem was that I didn't know where to start meeting people.

I realised during the lockdown what a huge part of my social life had been simply going to school [university]. ' Yujia, an international student from China, had similar experiences: *'your activities are confined. You are only allowed to do things within the household and you cannot go outside to explore the city. And most of the time, you're staying at home doing your own work. And it's hard to make friends, and there is hardly any social activities and opportunities for you. So, most of the time, I'm talking to my parents and friends in China by phone and it's very hard to make friends with people in Liverpool.'*

The interviews underline some of the structural inequalities and exclusions already within the city that were made worse by the pandemic. One person especially pointed out the racialised nature of these inequalities: *'Liverpool is a very difficult place, I think, to try and navigate if you're of ethnic minority anyway. You know, it's your home, but at the same time, it's a difficult place for you to navigate and, like I say, the hostility that you face sometimes. And sometimes it might not be so direct. It might just be, you know, unemployment is crazy. And I've got great experience. But, yet, in my home city, it's very difficult for me to excel up until recently. It's structural racism, without a doubt. Liverpool, you know, it's been well documented.'* Marek, from Poland, spoke about the difficulties he had already been having with Brexit, discrimination and feeling unwelcome. It is an important reminder that whatever the hardships the pandemic brought, they were piled on top of pre-existing struggles.

The isolations and exclusions felt in people's lives could also be seen in the fabric of the city's spaces. The following description of around Lark Lane illustrates this vividly:

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the locality itself felt very kind of weirdly isolated … our street, which is normally very loud, became really eerie and really deserted. And you couldn't really hear anyone, so that almost felt like a little bit isolating. Like when there was clap for carers, we couldn't really hear anyone clapping on our street because everyone moved out … It's overlooking the whole of Lark Lane, so I can see the restaurant in front of us and the little Indian restaurant and another cafe. It was quite sad to see those places during lockdown because you know, they're normally so full of life and I really felt bad for the people who own them, because I think it must have been quite hard.'

Leonora, a health worker of African Caribbean background, made similar observations: *'…people were staying in. We didn't really see many people out on the streets and that. People would just close doors. So, a lot of closed doors, you know, empty streets, loads of parked cars, and that's all you'd see really all day, particularly very much at the beginning, yeah, you didn't really see each other. It was like, yeah, an empty street.'*

Lockdowns palpably changed the nature of the city's different neighbourhoods, and we turn to this theme next.

4. Neighbourhoods and community life

Whilst the spaces of streets and neighbourhoods did feel more empty and isolated, especially at first, the interviews revealed how neighbourliness itself endured and reshaped. As Leonora continued: *'Gradually, people got, you know, a bit more comfortable popping their heads out, you know, talking at the doors. I think the closest we came to – everybody came to being near each other was when they were doing the clapping for the NHS when that phase was going on. So, that was a moment where everybody came out to share, you know, and I think it was – yes, people were clapping for the NHS, but I think it was also a need for people to see each other and just have that response to each other. You'd see your neighbour across the road and you'd be, "Hi." And waving and smiling. It was so nice to meet someone to smile at and wave to and make that connection, even if it was at a distance because it kind of brought the street alive again, you know, where it's been dead for weeks. You know, so I think those moments were kind of quite special.'*

There was general agreement that people had started saying hello to neighbours more often and appreciating mundane social encounters more enthusiastically. In the words of Sheila, of European and South Asian heritage:

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'I do feel that … like the neighbourhood, I feel like people do speak to each other more in the streets. And, you know, it's just those chats at, like, supermarkets or the corner shop or just bumping into someone in the street that have changed a bit. And there is sort of, like, a little bit more small talk. Just more saying hi, and stuff like that, which definitely wasn't the case before.'

One woman talked about eventually letting her daughter play out in the street and how important these activities became for bringing people together: *'At first, again, no one was*

coming out. And then increasingly, the kids started, you know, getting thrown out, which I was so against at the time. And it was annoying me because [my] daughter was then looking out the window wanting to play out. Eventually, I gave in and let her play out. So then the street become just like an old school street where the kids are all playing out. I then sat on my table in the front. And then you chat more to the, you know, other mothers and stuff.'*

Care for potentially vulnerable neighbours came through very strongly too, with many people looking out for older people on their street, offering to help with shopping and generally checking in on people. Alexandra, originally from Greece, shared the following: *'I got to meet my neighbours better, obviously because we were using the outdoor space. People coming and going. We – our direct neighbour was an older man and, you know, we would ask him if he needed any shopping. Sometimes we would do shopping for him. Yeah, it changed a bit and it's been nice.'* According to David, *'I noticed there was quite a lot of people ensuring people in the neighbourhood had support. So, the leaflets were coming through the door, like my door, from volunteers who were like looking for people who might have needed help during the pandemic.'*

Several people also spoke about new WhatsApp groups being set up to help foster connections and co-ordinate local efforts, from parents' school messaging networks to groups s et up for specific streets, and the comfort and reassurance these offered.

There was also praise for more formal local support efforts across different communities in the city. Adam wanted to single out how important Merseyside Polonia has been for the Polish community: *'As far as Merseyside Polonia is concerned, the forum with local community leaders was a great initiative. I'm not sure whether it existed before the pandemic, but I liked it and benefited a lot from the meetings with a doctor from the Royal Hospital who was talking about vaccinations, about the current situation, Coronavirus statistics, this was definitely good.'*

Local community support was very significant for Saba too, who spoke movingly about the role of her local mosques in keeping people together: *'With anything that sort of happens, I think like if you are a person of faith – and we are people of faith, and it just amplifies. It's like so if a tragedy happens or an adversity happens or something good happens, your faith comes in – kicks in, you know, in one way or another … So the mosque set up a support group to – for all of its congregation in a WhatsApp group so they can keep an eye on each other, they also looked after their neighbours whether they were Muslim or non-Muslim …. when COVID happened, because everybody had to pull together, like we knew exactly what the Pakistani community were doing, what the Caribbean community were doing, what that mosque was doing, what the Somali associations were doing, we all got to hear what was going on in the community. And just – there was just like anybody – people would go out in the middle of the night to get somebody nappies, you know, or, you know, our neighbours are all on a WhatsApp group so it was just like someone needed paracetamol or could somebody pick up an extra bottle of milk, it was – it was so lovely … With our communities as well – and I say our communities because it's hard just to talk about the Muslim community when you see so many other communities doing it as well. Maybe it's just an L8 thing, but food – food was such a big thing, people would drop food off on your step. You know, or random stuff as well, like – like, you know, just random stuff that just made you like know that somebody was thinking about you. And the same, vice versa, we'd do the same elsewhere.'*

Lark Lane by The Academy of Urbanism, licenced under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

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So I'd say one of the biggest and best things that came out of COVID was how – how the community just came together and how it was really apparent that where you were in the UK was dependent on how your community came together. For Liverpool 8 and for some of the bad press that we do get, what we excel at is coming together in times of adversity and supporting each other.'

Sheila shared similar thoughts about her L17 area, and Liverpool more generally: *'So, if I'm thinking about Liverpool and also the area that I live in, I think what's been really great about the pandemic has been kind of that, like, community and people getting together to help each other. And I think – I feel like the camaraderie or the solidarity between people in Liverpool is always something that I really loved and that I like to be a part of. And actually, in the pandemic, I think that really shone through, with Mutual Aid groups setting up. And especially in the area where I live, sort of L17, there's always people kind of helping each other, people reaching out, orders, stopping and having a chat. And yeah, I really like that and it's just made it, you know, made me more proud to be part, you know, of this community and of Liverpool being my home … I am part of the groups. I did join the Mutual Aid group. I also – I volunteer, locally at a charity … So, what we did before the pandemic was sort of inviting people in to have, like, meals that we've cooked from sort of surplus food that's been donated by local businesses. And during COVID that kind of changed because we couldn't have people come in. So, we started delivering the food. And that is something that I did. And, you know, a lot of people who were furloughed or who lost their job during the pandemic really relied on that. And also, in many cases, sort of that weekly food delivery was the only social contact they had. So it was nice for me to be able to give something back to the community and doing that as well.'*

These sentiments were very strong throughout many of our interviews, with several people saying that they now felt more at home than ever in the city, and that it was their immediate neighbourhood which was anchoring them so strongly. The feeling of neighbourhood identification and commitment is an important theme then, but again it is important not to forget the inequalities behind some of these experiences, and the differential impacts that played out in neighbourhood and community life. As we will see when we turn to our next section on religion and home, community connections were severely impacted through cancellations of weddings, limitations on funerals, but also religious festivals. Eid was especially significant in some of our conversations, with one person talking about the timing of the lockdown announcement on plans and preparations:

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One of the lockdowns, I think it was the second one, was made by Boris the night before Eid, so while families were getting ready for Eid celebration it was announced that we were going into a lockdown, so you can imagine the upset, so last minute, it was unbelievable ... I ... remember reading something on Facebook and it was like I was in my Eid clothes when I got the announcement, and it was like you made a joke of it but there was upset there as well because it was like come on, you know? Before like such a massive celebration as well, it was like – so that really like sort of took away some of the sweetness of those celebrations as well because it was under a cloud of not being able to be with family, what's the point of celebrating if you can't be with family?'

In Magda's area, initial attempts to set up a volunteering WhatsApp group fizzled out because the relative affluence there meant that there was no great need for that kind of support. When communities work hard to pull together, it is not just because they want to, it is also because they have to.

'Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Christian Faith Living Room, with thanks to Liverpool Community Spirit'.

5. Religion and home

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a domestication of religious practice, including those elements that previously took place in places of worship regarded as spaces of religious fellowship, sociability, action and charity (see Lawrence, 2021; Owens and Geiringer, 2021).

Focusing on a range of faiths and interfaith organisations in Liverpool, this section examines the domestication of religious practice during the pandemic.

Livepool has a distinctive context when examining faith during COVID-19. As Richard, an interfaith leader, explained:

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Liverpool has got a bit of a unique history in terms of its diversity. Liverpool Eight in particular. We've got some really old historic communities, the oldest Black community in Britain, maybe in Europe as well. Very old Jewish community, historic Jewish community, an old Muslim community, the first mosque in the UK. A very old Indian community, going back pre-second World War, so – and Sikh community and Hindu community and old Bahá'í community. So, it's a really good place to do interfaith work, and we really have drawn on that – the wisdom of those traditions. And I love doing that. And at the heart of it all, I suppose, is opening up hearts. And we try to create environments where people feel confident, comfortable to open up their hearts, listen to people who are different from themselves, people who they might have been previously a bit afraid of, a bit worried about. And so, that's at the heart of our work, it's heart to heart.'

Our participants of faith universally confirmed that religious practices were sustained during lockdown, even if this required adaptations to worship. The importance of continuing religious practices were articulated in a number of ways, including praying for the end of the pandemic, enhancing the emotional well-being of individuals, retaining links with religious communities and, as highlighted in the previous section, supporting those who were vulnerable. For example, one British Yemeni Muslim explained: *'It was not just about your obligations that you pray, you fast, you do this, it wasn't just about that, that you look after your neighbour and your neighbour looks after you … that really shows like how beautiful a faith can be and in times of adversity as well.'*

For some participants there were a number of perceived benefits to worshipping at home, including the comfort, convenience and intimacy. Others described the religious obligation to worship on a regular basis and at fixed times. In addition to the spirituality of private prayer, some experienced a deeper relevance to events previously celebrated in large gatherings. For example, Daniel, an Orthodox Jew, attended one Jewish new year service at home and the second in synagogue: *'I felt it more being at home, to be honest, so much so that on Yom Kippur I didn't go to shul [synagogue] either, I stayed at home and felt that it was going to be more meaningful and hopefully to God that I would be at home … I quite enjoyed davening [praying] on my own at home because it gives me a different perspective, a different ruach [spirit], but a nice ruach.'*

Some participants followed faiths that had strong traditions of creating sacred space to enable prayer and other forms of worship at home, including Islam and Hinduism.

Islamic Faith Living Room, reproduced with permission from Liverpool Community Spirit

There were some narratives of creating sacred space at home, but there were more examples of curating space seen online. As Christopher, an Anglican vicar, pointed out, although he tidied the space viewed by congregants during services, it was important that he was *'very consciously saying this is my living room that I'm speaking to you from…I'm talking into your living room from my living room.'*

Although a number of positive aspects of online worship were described, there were specific challenges to the first and longer lockdowns respectively. The initial lockdown meant that digital skills had to be learnt quickly alongside a disparity between those communities who had technical expertise and those who struggled, echoing home-schooling experiences and exclusions. As a Methodist Christian explained, the lack of technology in her church has resulted in a crisis situation: *'we're at a point where it looks like we potentially might close down.'* Daniel, an Orthodox Jew, explained that in the first lockdown communal worship came to '*a complete halt*'. Other communities began with basic technology but gained skills and help over time. Michael, a Roman Catholic Priest, said: *'We started with a telephone, and then a tablet.'* Michael explained why services were held even with only a hand held phone: *'it gave a sense of community and a means of prayer.'*

At the other end of the scale, some communities had technically-experienced members, and in some cases those previously disengaged became actively engaged through facilitating worship online. Indeed, some faith leaders felt a sense of competitiveness amongst their colleagues as each tried out different forms of online worship including Zoom, Facebook live and pre-recorded worship.

The first lockdown was remembered as both daunting and exciting. The rapid response by faith leaders to continue communal worship was appreciated by congregants, and creativity was particularly valued: *'And of course the entrepreneurs loved it and the techy people loved it, so new people popped up saying we'll sort this out for you… And the sudden burst of creativity and energy on that in the face of crisis was remarkable.'* (Christopher)

However, the longer lockdown brought additional challenges. Many participants experienced Zoom fatigue, especially when major festivals such as Passover, Easter and Ramadan were celebrated at home for a second year running. Christopher

summed up the difficulties experienced by a number of faith groups during the longer lockdown: *'We've gone from an acute crisis to a chronic one and chronic is so much harder because acute is quite exciting and you know, you respond and so on. But the chronic one is just really difficult.'*

Lack of clarity from the government brought added pressure on faith leaders as to whether to open up places of worship or remain closed and this, in turn, caused discontent amongst congregants as comparisons were drawn between places of worship and faith leaders. As Indrani, a Bengali Hindu, put it: *'Nobody knew what is right.'*

Faith groups differed in terms of specific rituals that presented challenges. Although comparisons were identified across faith groups, there were specific challenges related to individual religions. Daniel described the prohibitions that prevented Orthodox Jews worshipping online during Shabbat and religious festivals and Indrani described the difficulties worshipping in front of Hindu statues and deities. Michael, a Roman Catholic Priest, described the inability to distribute communion to parishioners as *'extremely painful'*. For those returning to Church a number of precautions included wearing gloves, applying hand gel, and using tweezers, which Ela, a Roman Catholic, described as '*very sterile*'. Those distributing communion had to learn new guidelines, as Christopher explained: *'And of course the first time I did it I forgot to put my mask on again, so you're getting in people's faces with the thing, and they tend to shy away from you … Here's something precious and significant and for many they've not received Communion for months and it's something that's always been very important to them and they come and they're torn because here's this idiot doing it wrong.'*

Religious leaders went to great lengths to make adaptations to ensure these rituals continued during lockdown. As Indrani explained: *'We usually pray to an image. So we keep the image for a few years. It's a clay model … But this time he [the Priest] couldn't get it from storage and all. And it's – you know, the house is not big enough for those. So he [the Priest] had his own image. And he set up a shrine and everything there. And his wife helped him to do the prayers. And we were all asked that if we want to put a picture or some image in our homes, to do that. And most people have got something, as I say. So we were actually sitting in front of the image there.'*

By far the most missed aspects of worship pre COVID-19 were gathering in person. As Ahmed explained:

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The only impact it had on me is no mingling with the brothers and the sisters and the community again. That's the only thing we're good at … nobody went to anybody's home.'

Sometimes faith groups found other spaces to worship that enabled meeting one another safely, including drive-in services, breaking the fast during Ramadan outdoors with neighbours and forming minyanim (quorum of 10 men required for orthodox Jewish worship) in neighbouring gardens. The inability to meet co-religionists was felt most strongly at times of sickness and bereavement. And this was acutely felt by extended family separated during lockdown. Several participants shared narratives of not being able to say goodbye to loved ones who had died or to attend funerals. Funerals were intricately woven with religious rituals and regarded as aiding the grieving process. A Christian Ordinand clarified the significance of funerals: *'It's a marked moment, it's a seminal moment for many people and the last opportunity to say a public goodbye … It's one of the last things you can do for people is to show up at someone's funeral, and not being able to do that has had a tremendous impact on people's well-being and mental health.'*

The Chapel is Closed by Thomas Cizauskas, licenced under Y-NC-ND 2.0

Practices located in the home were also compromised, especially wakes and shivas, bringing food and comfort in the homes of mourners and ongoing face-to-face support. Added stresses were placed on families in mourning, ensuring that funeral attendees were safe and deciding, due to reduced numbers, who could attend. Leonora described an uncomfortable feeling of privilege by being invited to a funeral in contrast with feeling 'shut out' if not invited.

The inequalities experienced during lockdown were felt by faith groups, including the relaxing of restrictions to accommodate Christmas, compared with the sudden announcement of lockdown amid the final preparations for Eid, decisions for some places of worship to remain open and others to close, the decision to open pubs whilst religious buildings had to close, and the announcement that the Archbishop of Canterbury was visiting hospitals whilst other faith leaders were prohibited from doing so. These perceived inequalities were in addition to those already identified during COVID-19. Thus religion during lockdown provided both connection and disconnection, inclusivity and exclusion, opportunities to bridge barriers as congregants visited other denominations and places of worship, but also divisions. Leonora, a member of the Methodist Church, felt that the inconsistencies of government guidance were *'confusing'* and *'unsettling'* and the decision for her church to remain closed felt unjust and inequitable: *'And it felt it was taken away from us that right to just go there and be at a place where you can be at peace, was taken away when you most needed it, you know?'*

One theme common across the interviews is the question of whether religious belief and practices will permanently change because of the pandemic. Many participants pointed to the more dispersed and hybrid forms of worship and ritual becoming permanent fixtures. Whilst the majority of participants felt that online services were 'not the same' as meeting in person, most felt that they would continue to worship meet or teach online in the future.

6. Parks, green and public spaces

We move now from faith and religious practice to explore another theme which resonated strongly across our interviews – the importance of access to green space. As one person shared, *'I feel really lucky that we've got such amazing parks in Liverpool'.* Local parks and green areas took on enhanced significance in people's lives, not least because they offered, as another person put it, a break from *'being confined inside'* and *'just something different than being like, you know, the same four walls again'.* The *'daily walk',* taking children to run around and let off steam, playing football, dog walking – all these things became important marker points, or safety valves, for days otherwise spent inside.

For Miriam, having a terrace (on a balcony) was a crucial way of feeling connected to nature and the outdoors during lockdown:

> **I think my outdoor space, my terrace is definitely more valued now than ever. No, no, it's always been an important part of the house and I didn't realise. Because I have really big, glass windows. So even if I'm working all day, because I can have a look at the outside world, it's also really relaxing because I have water, there's this lake, I have birds and stuff. I can see the sunset. So it feels like I am outside. So sometimes I will spend, like, three or four days at home without realising that I haven't been out.'**

Mithila described the importance of her local community garden for building relationships with her neighbours, which became particularly valuable during the pandemic: '*So when we moved in we noticed there's a community garden opposite. And our – the person that owned the house before had pretty much set it up. So, it'd been going for about six years and it's just amazing. From the street, you can't really tell how far back it goes. And there's lots of beds for people to grow veg and stuff. And we've – in the last couple of years we've planted loads of fruit trees, so more for the little ones; we've got a*

polytunnel. And really, anyone that's local can get involved. We've got a Facebook group. So, we tend to direct people to the Facebook group and say, just get in touch and we'll sort out if you want to have a wander around and see. And then there's quite a range of people that come along. So, other people like me that's got little kids or older people, people that are new to the community and just want to get to know people. And people of different places. Sometimes there's a bit of a language barrier. But it's amazing how much you can communicate with hand signals and pointing at different veggies and veggies in different pots and stuff like that. So yeah, that's been really nice and a real sanctuary during lockdown as well.'

During the first lockdown, some people felt a sense of uncertainty about whether spending time outside was safe. Nasra described how her small garden was the only place that she felt safe to be in with her daughter, and how they developed a daily play routine. As time went on and it became clear that outdoor spaces were safer, she visited local parks and spent time with her mum in her garden:

'So we've only got, like, the backyard space which I was using, again, when it was the first lockdown, terrified to go out. Even in the back [yard] trying to play football or basketball that would be each day as well just to get fresh air. And then the community itself is a very close-knit inner-city community, high residential, I suppose, very close to Liverpool City Centre. So yeah, a lot of people. Like, I say, not a big massive garden space, but I'd go to my mum's. She's got a garden. So we'd hang out there a lot.'

A lot of the discussions about parks and green spaces also revealed much more profound connections building up around these outdoor activities, strengthening the sense of being at home locally, and, for some, offsetting some of the physical isolation of lockdown. From this perspective, some neighbourhood connections have been deepened not just through social and community ties, but also through a changed relationship with the city's different pockets of public space. According to Adam, 'perhaps due to running in the local vicinity we discovered new shops or interesting places we wouldn't have found in any other way, we used to usually leave home, get a bus and go to the city centre to spend time

there. As a consequence of trying to limit the use of public transport and going to the shops by car, you could say that we got to know our local area better'. Similarly, in the words of Alexandra:

> **I've definitely been at the park more than I ever have been. I'm not going to town at all. I think when the lockdown started, I did a few bike rides. Because we were also – like everything was shut, everything was very quiet. And I went for a couple of bike rides down Bold Street, to the docks, to the business district. But it was all empty and there was no one there … my world has felt really small. I live close to the parks, … I can be walking within an hour range from my house and that's everything … I've definitely felt more ownership of the park.'**

Sefton Park was extremely important for Magda, a constant throughout her experience of the pandemic and fundamental to sustaining a sense of wellbeing: *'I think that like I know every nook and cranny of the Sefton Park. I think I was just going there like every day, because – especially when, you know, when you were only allowed to leave the house once a day like I haven't missed a single day, leaving the house and going around the park and running around it. So, I became like really, really appreciative of that space, and almost kind of started approaching it a little bit more mindfully, I guess, than before. I kind of took it a little bit for granted … I started like bird watching in those parks. And got like binoculars to like engage with it a bit more mindfully and to like learn what birds actually live in that park. So, I've picked that up during lockdown and I've also learned to recognise loads of plants, which I don't think I was able to do before the lockdown …. So that yeah, I definitely became like mindful of that and I started walking every*

day. First thing I do, I just go for a walk around like either Princes Park or Sefton Park, and kind of like yeah, track what's changing and trying to pay attention to birds and plants, and see like what's growing.'

It isn't just green spaces which were so important. For Luis from Malta, living near the waterfront played a similar role: *'we're Mediterraneans and we come from an island, and we're used to seeing and living by the water. And that is, at least to me, comforting in a way to be able to, for one, from my living room, I can see water and I can see the docks, and I can see the river, and I can see the tide. And also, if I walk, if I get out of the house, I'm immediately by the water, although it's a different type of water than, you know, Mediterranean waters, but it's still satisfying in a way and then we go for walks along the waterfront.'*

Waterfront, author's personal photo (Kathy Burrell)

The scope for these spaces to facilitate social and family connections were also movingly underlined in our conversations. Saba spoke about how her park helped her stay close to her father, uniting them in new shared daily routines which became vital in later helping her recover from the virus:

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where we live in Liverpool 8, we've got direct access to Sefton Park and Princes Park down the road, again, so my children were really lucky, you know, in that they had access to that safe, you know, even more safe outdoor space … One thing that we did as well is that – so even though we moved to the close and we were so close to [my] mum and dad, not being able to have that contact all the time was so – it was just horrible. But me – when we were allowed to go for walks with somebody from another household, me and my dad set up this, um, we'd walk round Sefton Park every day, me and him, and that was brilliant… because my dad is staunch, he's like it's just a bit of rain, I would be soaked to the skin, I'd be freezing. And he'd be like you don't have to come love, you don't have to, but then I just knew. And we did it, we did it solid, we did it solid until – and it was mostly because when I got the COVID I got it really bad – it really knocked me for six, like it took me quite a while to recover. And because my dad knew how to video call at that point, he'd video call me, see my face and turn it off, 'cos he couldn't look at me because I was so sick. Then when – when it came to like, you know, being able to, you know, getting over the COVID and stuff, I wasn't really that strong enough, so he was like come on, let's go to the park, you know. So that was – it was almost like he was trying to help me on my road to recovery and I was also taking it as an opportunity to bond with him as well, so we'd have the best conversations.'

Sefton Park, author's personal photo (Liza Caruana-Finkel)

Not all of the recounted experiences were so positive. Even though they are public spaces, parks are neither accessible for everyone nor able to offer guaranteed sanctuary. For Mithila, anxieties around using play equipment in their local park reinforced the closeness of the virus, and its curtailing impact on her young son's world: '*I think I relied heavily on the parks. The only thing I – well, one of the things I found tricky was when you couldn't use the swings and the play equipment. My son took it quite personally and thought it was his fault. And I found that really heart-breaking that he thought he'd done something wrong, and it was punishment that he couldn't use it and to kind of explain to – he was just three then. But no one could use it and it was locked and he hadn't done anything wrong and he hadn't done anything bad. But there was this virus going around and we have to be extra careful. I think he'd got it, at some point, it clicked. And then he'd be like, "I hate Corona." Like, "I know I hate it too." It makes life really hard.'*

'*There are inequalities embedded here too. For those without their own private outside space, parks and public areas were the only respite from being stuck indoors, making their public function all the more important. The interviews also hinted at variable access to green spaces across the city. South Liverpool especially is blessed with several beautiful parks, but other people felt less well catered for in terms of usable and secure green areas to visit. Wictoria spoke about having no green space near her university halls, and when Bartek moved house during the pandemic he saw the difference between his old and new neighbourhoods: 'In the old house we used to do long walks because we lived near Calderstones Park. There is a really pretty golf course over there too which was closed and could be used for walks, and it is beautiful. We used to go on long, 2-hours' walks every day. Now we also try to go on walks, but we only have Garston Park here. It doesn't really have any trees, only on the perimeter, but inside it is empty. There is a kind of outdoors gym, but we don't use it.'*

'Waterfront', author's personal photo (Liza Caruana-Finkel)

Parks may well prove to be an enduring emblem of pandemic lives, incorporating those more meaningful moments of calm and connection, as well as wider inequities and anxieties.

7. Keeping in touch

Whilst a lot of interview time was spent talking about local lives, most of the people we spoke to had significant ties beyond Liverpool, and in most cases beyond the UK. One of the most difficult aspects of the virus was the impact of strict, and often unpredictable and uneven, travel restrictions, preventing people from visiting other homes (see Burrell, 2021). In some senses, distances were flattened as people could not visit family or friends either near or far. Wolda, of Jamaican descent, was devastated that he couldn't see his mother in London before she died, and we heard of many other heart-breaking situations, with people unable to visit and spend time with family even though they were not so far away.

The particular cross-border complications of having family overseas also permeated many of our conversations. At least two of the people we spoke to were directly caught out by changing travelling rules as they attempted to see relatives. Adam, who had managed to get back to Poland for Christmas, ended up staying there until March as the new lockdown hit. Coming the other way, Ela, who had flown from Poland to visit her son and grandchildren in Liverpool, ended up living with them for six months before she was able to return. For other people, travel was impossible, either because restrictions prohibited it outright, the cost was too high, or because quarantining made it too impractical with work commitments. This was compounded in some cases by worries over Brexit developments, confusing or expensive visa requirements and accompanying anxieties over border checks, as COVID-19 intersected with wider changes in immigration policies. It was the uncertainty which really seemed to affect people. Ewa's flights to Poland got cancelled twice; Ahmed spoke about how his family had to miss his sister-in-law's wedding in Nigeria, because it was too complicated to get there; Alexandra had to wait until summer 2021 to get back to Greece; Luis had to abandon plans to visit his family in Malta. Malika has not been able to go back to Tunisia since her father died; '*I haven't been back since because of the pandemic. To be honest I do have the intention to go now. Like I think 'cos he's buried there, you know.*'

The huge emotional costs of these disruptions were clear in our conversations. As one person shared:

> ❝
> I feel very homesick at the moment, to be honest …
> I do really, really, really miss it. And I want to go.'

So many people spoke about how hard it has been not being able to see family in person - to join key events, meet babies, share bereavements, and simply hug – and the particular difficulty of not knowing how long these separations would last.

With these physical distances hardened, and with cross-border travel out of reach, people relied even more heavily on technology to keep in touch (Sheringham, 2021). Leonora used a mixture of WhatsApp and Zoom to stay connected to her family in Jamaica, America and Canada: '*that was a lot of WhatsApping that increased. Because it's a cost thing as well, you know, you have to bear that in mind. And a lot of WhatsApping went on, you know, exchanging our photographs because that increased exchanging photographs because obviously, we didn't get to see each other… And it'd be a photograph sent over just some pictures of each family member and what we're doing and what have you. So yeah, that's how we kept in contact with the wider extended family ... We couldn't partake in family weddings. So again, that was done differently. They were done over Zoom. So, they were at a distance over Zoom, graduations at a distance over Zoom, and it was nice to be able to participate in that way, but it's not quite the same. But yes, that was the best we could do was to go on Zooms for the weddings and graduations and birthdays as well. Milestone birthdays, we had to do a few of those over Zoom where all the family would have a prearranged time and the family would all Zoom together and we could all wish the person a happy birthday and, you know, just participate that way. And it was – it was something. It was better than nothing. But it's never quite the same as the real thing.*'

Sheila appreciated being able to video call her mum in Germany, co-ordinating different celebrations to feel closer:

> ❝
> **Well, my mum lives in Germany, so I have not seen her for a year and a half now. So obviously that is quite difficult. But at the same time, although I haven't seen her in person, I feel like, because everyone's video calling now and that – it's not something that we used to do because we just, like – we'd speak on the phone but we wouldn't necessarily video call. But yeah, we started doing that quite regularly. So I probably speak to her more than before. And I feel I need to check in with her more just because she lives on her own. And, you know, I don't want her to be isolated. So, although we're kind of physically apart, I feel like perhaps we've grown a bit closer due to that regular contact. We also did stuff like Christmas celebrations and Eid celebrations over Zoom, which was, you know, not as nice as seeing someone in person. But, you know, it was still nice that we could actually do that. And we just, you know, agreed beforehand what kind of food we would make so we were kind of having the same. And then I put the tablet on the dining table like she was sat there, a part of, like, me and my partner sort of having dinner together.'**

Similarly, Ewa spoke about sending parcels at Easter and Christmas and video calling to open them, '*in order to feel that we were doing things together, even if we were in different countries.*' Yujia found she had more time to connect with her family in China than she would have done otherwise: '*Actually, I feel closer to my family, because usually when I study abroad in other countries, during my other experiences, I don't have time to talk to my parents. But because of pandemic, I don't have other friends locally. I have – I want to talk to my parents every day. So, actually we are closer because of the pandemic … for friends and families in China and other countries I am doing it on WeChat.*'

Other people shared similar experiences, this time with friends and family 'back home' having more time to engage with Zoom and WhatsApp, and older relatives becoming more accustomed to using new technologies.

It was clear that these situations led many of the people we interviewed to reflect more deeply on feelings of home and associated experiences of migration. There were lots of examples of people finding other ways to feel connected to other homes – ordering or making food, and celebrating certain traditions and events more enthusiastically, even without real time video calls.

Sheila found that cooking recreated some of the closeness she was missing: 'my mum's Malaysian … I cooked a lot of Malaysian food and stuff like that. It kind of like helped me with a bit of homesickness when I hadn't been there for a while.' She also asked her mum to take photos to send back to her of places she was missing: 'whenever my mum went out for, like, a walk and stuff, I'd ask her to take pictures of the local town and then send it to me. And around Christmas time, you know, they have like German Christmas markets and stuff like that. Obviously, it wasn't as big as it would usually be but there was some decorations and there was some people out singing and stuff like that. So she took, like, photos and videos and sent them to me, just so I could feel a bit closer.'

Lockdown Polish Easter, reproduced with permission from Paulina MacKrell

Marek started reading books in Polish again, and watching Polish jazz on YouTube, realising he missed Poland more than he had appreciated. This made him think about how much his sense of home in Liverpool was also predicated on being able to get back to Poland easily, being able to have both: *'And it just made me feel – made me realise that I actually miss Poland quite a lot and I think I was just wondering to what extent it was quite convenient at the beginning to go in a slightly different direction. And then when this limited of contact with Poland I would say that I've had because of living in the UK when it got restricted even more because of lockdown, and not even having this option of going to Poland – I don't say that I would've taken it, but it's always there. It was always like if I feel like going I can get a flight and pretty much the next day I can be wherever I want to be in Poland, and I think that was taken. And then I realised that this amount of my exposure to Polish culture was not enough and I think … I think what lockdown made me realise that technically speaking I live in two places because of the influence of the Polish culture and how important it is to me.'*

For those used to going back and forth relatively easily, the travel restrictions brought significant changes to family relationships, expectations and routines. Ewa was hit really hard when her father fell ill and she wasn't able to just fly back – something she had always assumed she would be able to do: *'it's just that the normal homesickness we feel as a consequence of living abroad is even stronger now. In the end, we haven't seen them for a very long time, and that's certainly hard. There was also the sensation of helplessness, for example when my dad was ill and a lot of things were on the shoulders of my mum. I felt helpless because I couldn't do anything or help. I knew I wouldn't have been able to fly over should something even worse have happened, God forbid. You can't act how you normally would being your parents' child, I would have normally gone over etc. It was all much more complicated, impossible even at the time. This was depressing, whichever way you look at it…. the main thing is that the normal homesickness is multiplied. One knows that our lives keep moving forward here, and theirs in Poland, but at normal times*

we had the sensation that we could have some impact on this, that we have savings at the bank, so if anything were to happen, buying a ticket and a 2.5 hour's flight to Poland is not a problem, is it. The pandemic caused a helplessness and unpredictability. One didn't know what one could do if there was a need.'

In Alexandra's words, *'it's been difficult, not being able to just get on a plane and go.'* And as Magda shared: *'I think I never really thought of Liverpool as a place I can't leave, and during lockdown, I felt a bit like oh, like if I needed to go anywhere else, I can't.'*

These extracts may be from specific biographies, but together they reveal a more universal truth about physical yearnings to stay in touch with people and places, wherever they are, and the impact the pandemic has had on this basic human need.

8. Children and young people's mapping project

This report has drawn on the experiences of adults from different communities in Liverpool during the pandemic. Another strand of the Stay Home Stories project focuses on the experiences of children and young people, both in Liverpool and throughout the UK.

Working in partnership with the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and with National Museums Liverpool, this work has focused on the ways in which children and young people (in key stages 2-4, ages 7-16) understand, navigate, renegotiate and articulate the meaning of home during and following repeated lockdowns (Brace, 2021; Endfield and Waldock, 2021; Waldock, 2021). The specific intention has been to explore how the crisis has been 'lived' through using a mass observation-based mapping exercise. The approach is based on a methodology developed from a Heritage Lottery Funded supported project "Hand drawn histories" that took place in Ancoats Manchester 2015 (Waldock, 2021). Hand drawn maps represent a vehicle for communication at a time of crisis and the method of drawing spaces not only allows for a co-creation of knowledge around place but also gives space for the voices of children to be heard.

Working with and via primary and secondary schools nationwide, participants have been invited to create maps of their home space during and after lockdown. Shared via a simple **upload system** and supported through a range of **teaching resources**, the maps received so far are providing a lens through which to explore the articulation of the home as an imaginative and metaphorical space while also affording insight into the lived experience of the crisis at home.

Initial analysis has revealed a broad range of themes emerging in the maps. We see the sense of constraint expressed in the maps and, together with written annotation on the maps, the drawings reveal how COVID has led to boundaries at once being constructed – the places people can go, places they can't – and blurred, with home spaces now serving as multifunctional spaces – places for schooling, play, exercise and work. We see evidence of a reconfiguration of the places within and beyond the home, with particular places within the home assuming more importance than others, whether these are family rooms, kitchens, bedrooms or play spaces, while it is clear that successive lockdowns have implications for the way in which the inside and outside worlds have been understood and experienced. Some of the maps, for example, reveal how outside spaces, whether this means gardens, yards, balconies, window boxes or parks, have become central to and have secured particular importance for lockdown life.

Through the autumn of 2021, this mapping work will be complemented by a Liverpool City Region (LCR) project that will draw upon children's narratives alongside their maps through an adaptive map-voice methodology to explore some of these themes further.
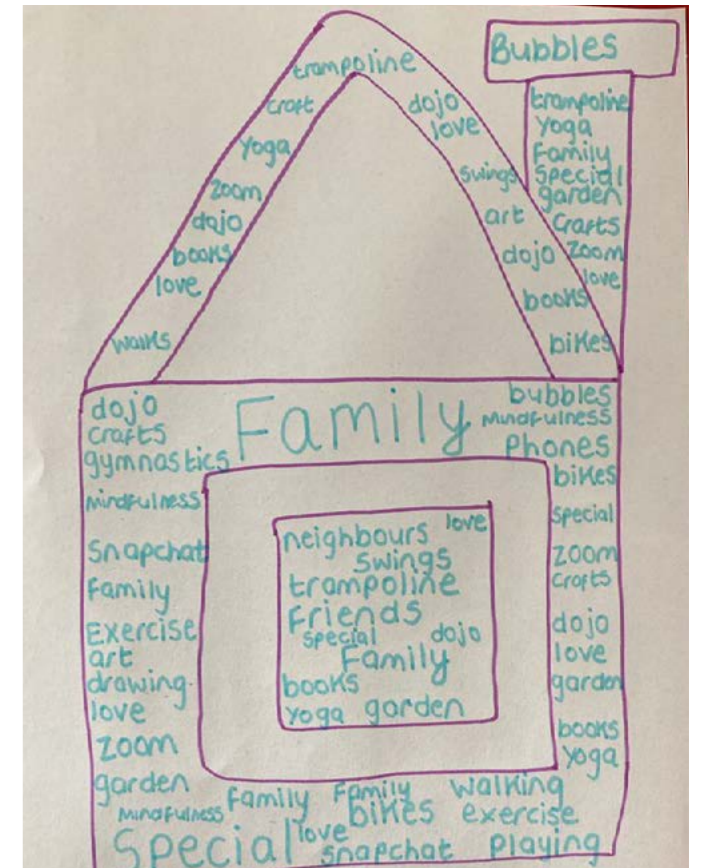
Maps produced at Family Workshop, Museum of Liverpool, 13 August 2021

9. Conclusions

We started our report with an acknowledgement of the difficulties the city of Liverpool, and its people, have endured during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our interviews have borne these hardships out. We have spoken to people who have been bereaved, been left less economically secure, and have had to face different kinds of mental health challenges.

Religious inequalities have been an important recurrent theme, seen in the differential treatment of Eid and Christmas in particular. The lack of social connection also stands out – the heartbreak of missing seeing family members in person, no matter how near or far away, and not being able to physically share celebrations or mourn losses together. Less weighty, day to day experiences of social distancing have also taken their toll. These isolations have been reflected in the fabric of the city's various neighbourhoods; for those long lockdown months Liverpool looked and felt like a very different place.

What we have also seen, however, are the pockets of hope and community that have persisted, and in some cases even flourished. The city's parks have been fundamental to lockdown life, as spaces for both escape and sociability. Several people also spoke about how lockdown and pandemic restrictions had enabled more reflection on life, valuing things more and not taking things for granted so much, a chance for more creativity, and reconnection with old roots. People have helped each other, found new haunts, made new routines. Reclaiming street and neighbourhood spaces for new forms of community has come through as important socially and politically – from children 'playing out' (see Stenning, 2020), to local volunteering and support efforts. In the words of Saba,

"

Lessons learnt is that there's a real need for those people in positions of power to really now connect with people who are at grassroots. So the people who were working on the ground with, you know, whether that was – whatever community or social group that was, their work carried on tenfold. And they were able to do things that, you know, larger organisations just took too long to get their acts together on.'

It is this centrality of tangible local ties and environments in people's lives which really stands out. Pandemic lives have clearly been partially shaped by local relationships and spaces. And yet, whilst there has been an almost universal weariness of platforms like Zoom, technology has simultaneously enabled bonds, near and far, beyond the local, to be made and sustained. This would not have been possible even a few years ago. Special occasions have been shared across borders, religious services recreated online, children have been able to learn at home, and more people than ever before have worked from home. Connections may have had to be reformed, and lost that immediate tangibility, but they have not been completely lost.

We end then by thanking our participants profusely for sharing these personal, often sensitive, but always relatable and powerful accounts. They have given us an insight into the human dimension of the pandemic that we can all recognise, documenting both individual and collective experiences that we have a duty to remember when this time eventually recedes into the past.

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