

Brain Winter Newsletter

February 2021, Volume 1, Issue 2

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Dear reader,

We are so excited to share our second edition of the e-BRAIN newsletter with you! We hope to give you an idea of how we have individually coped throughout these incredibly difficult times and give you an update on the study (and its new members!). We're also going to share different ways of getting involved with e-BRAIN. As you know, the focus of e-BRAIN is mental wellbeing for everyone, so make sure you look after your physical and mental wellbeing during these times, practicing kindness to yourself and others.

Well wishes and solidarity, wherever you may be.

The e-BRAIN team

Coping Throughout Lockdown:

What has lockdown been like for the e-BRAIN team?

What did I find difficult? Not being able to travel. No more cinemas, vintage markets, and winter wonderland. The need to home school my little ones while I, myself also need some schooling. Having to rely heavily on online shopping but always struggling to book a slot.

What did I achieve? I managed to use these lockdowns to cram **Japanese with Duolingo**, a free website especially designed for language self-learners. I have made such progress that I would never have otherwise expected so far. But the sad thing is I still can't travel to Japan now, despite the fact that **I am now perfectly able to greet people and order food in Japanese.**

How have I coped throughout lockdown? I kept my exercise routine and started to collect doll house furniture. I guess the lockdowns have sort of made me a collector of 1980s Sylvanian Families.



Alice



I found the first few weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic **weirdly relaxing**, and I quite enjoyed having a lot of time to myself. Not having to commute and not being able to go out and socialise meant I suddenly had **a LOT more free time**. I loved that I had the time to cook properly every night, binge some TV shows and take lots of naps.

After a few weeks, the novelty wore off and I started to find it **really difficult**. The parts I found most challenging were trying to work from home in a flat with 3 other young professionals (trying to focus while listening to 3 other zoom calls is a challenge!) and missing seeing friends and family. **I found it very hard that I could no longer do my favourite part of my job:** meeting our participants and other young people through our school engagement activities!

The thing that helped me cope through all of it was exercise – I have been running as much as possible and playing tennis every week (when allowed). Not only have I felt the **physical benefits** of regular exercise but also the **mental health benefits**. I think seeing myself improve at something and **having a goal** is also really helpful for my mental wellbeing! I am going to try to keep up with running during this current lockdown, hopefully wanting to escape the horrible weather will **spur me on to a 5K personal best!**



Becky



As a Chinese student, I felt **distressed** at the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020 because I could not go back to China at that time. The flight ticket prices were extremely high, and the uncertainty of the UK situation made me **worry about whether I could complete my PhD project on time**. My family were worried about me as well and we had a **video call every day** to confirm my physical and mental health. In the meantime, I was working from home to focus on my review and prepare for my upgrade proposal. However, the inability to concentrate and the low efficiency at home made me struggle with my work for a while. Luckily, I received **huge support from my supervisors and my flat mates**, in the form of regular online meetings within our research group and **shopping, cooking and planting with flat mates**. During the 2nd wave of COVID-19 pandemic, the most worrying concern for me was the research progress. With the impact of lockdown, we recruited less participants than we anticipated. Moreover, the subsequent lockdown made it worse! Gradually, I found worrying did not work at all and might make my situation worse! **Then, I began to adapt to the new lifestyle working at home, which was also living home life!**



Xuemei



Firstly, to make the most out of the current online resources available to me, I began to use LinkedIn and Twitter to acquire more information and **access to free online seminars and conferences**, which were relevant to my research and my interests, such as **statistics courses, mental health conferences and gender equality webinars**. Secondly, I found I can easily concentrate on reading papers for a longer period when I gradually adapted and learnt various topics. Thirdly, apart from the time spent studying, I managed to find my own interests, including **learning a new language** (German), **learning a new musical instrument (Ukulele)**, daily exercising (Zumba), reading Chinese and English paragraphs every day and practicing Chinese handwriting. For each activity, **I set a daily goal and marked each one on my flat window every day** to see how many of them I have achieved in a week or in a month. After 2 months recording my progress, I found myself to be more well-organised, both in my daily work and life. I have progressed further than I had realised!

From being anxious to being adaptive, I believe I have gotten through the most difficult time throughout this pandemic, with **support from my family, colleagues and friends**, as well as standing in a **different perspective to find the bright side**, to rearrange my life and to **be more positive**.



Nuria

Lockdown was and continues to be a **difficult time**. I very much miss hanging out with my friends and family. Most of my pre-lockdown hobbies (climbing, going to the movies, gigs or the theatre, going out with friends) had to be replaced with **lockdown-friendly activities**. I started doing **yoga and running** – both really help me to **keep my spirits high**. Also, my friends and I try to see each other regularly online. We either **video chat or play online games together**. Sometimes, we just send voice messages. And sometimes, we don't feel like doing anything at all, **and that's okay**, too. Not everything in the past year has been bad though. For example, **I started this job and now get to work on this super interesting study with a wonderful team!**

Without a doubt, going through lockdown has been incredibly difficult, **impacting both my mental and physical health**. It has been a **delicate balancing act** trying to dedicate time to and separate work, exercise and time for doing things I enjoy, especially when I'm in the **same room all day!** I really miss going to the library, seeing my friends and colleagues, and visiting my favourite restaurants (looking at you, Wagamama's).

However, the lockdowns have come with various and unexpected benefits. I've had much **more time to focus on my work**, which has been so helpful considering I'm a serial procrastinator. I even started my e-BRAIN role during lockdown! I've **saved lots of money** by not commuting or using public transport, although I miss sitting on the bus/tube and listening to a bit of music. I have also had a lot more time to **play video games and have discovered a few new favourites** (Animal Crossing, Among Us, Fall Guys, Gris, Dark Souls III and more!). With the **support of my fiancé, friends and colleagues**, coping throughout lockdown has been a lot easier and much more manageable for me.



Maryam



Ok, so here we are in lockdown again, just as we thought we had managed in the previous one. **Lockdowns are hard**, and I find this last one **even harder**. If they had told me last year that in February I still would have not been back in my office I would not have believed them. So here I am, **still at my kitchen table**. So many things I am missing, going out and meet friends, travel to see my family in Italy, seeing my team in person and have our coffee breaks and laughs **without a screen in between**.

But hey, **it's important to keep positive**, and this is where I have been putting my energy. So many nice things one can do even in lockdown. I have been able to **keep running outdoors**, which I can do even just on my street! I have been exercising using the free apps and videos available online. And sometimes not having social commitments at the weekend means **I can watch more TV with my family!** In this era, **we are so lucky we can still meet friends virtually**, so we have started to connect online and cook together, while we chat and have our cup of coffee. **These things works for me, for now, I just need to keep them going!**



Paola

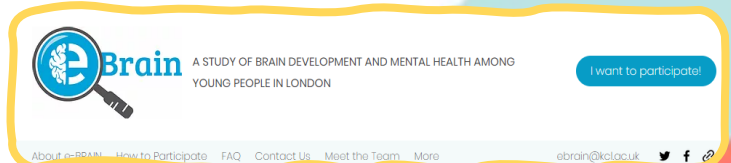
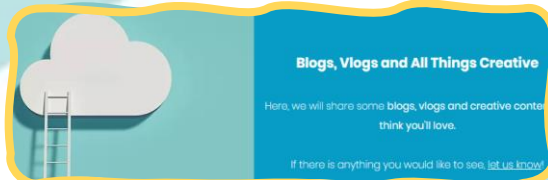
The last 12 months have been different to say the least! Like many people all over the country, our work has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We were so disappointed to stop our study visits back in March 2020 but it is always **our top priority to keep our young participants, their families and our researchers safe!**

During our break from data collection, we **launched our social media and website** to make more young people interested in e-BRAIN. We also formed some new collaborations and fostered our existing relationships with schools despite the pandemic, with **virtual assemblies, mental health and careers sessions!**

Updates to our website!

We have added a list of [mental health resources](#) for both young people and parents, more info about us and our journeys on the [meet the team page](#), and a page for [blogs, vlogs and creative content](#) that we think you'll love! (underlined = links)

www.ebrainstudy.com



Can you see your school?

Schools we are collaborating with:

- Archbishop Tenison's School
 - Ark All Saints Academy
- Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich
- Harris City Academy Crystal Palace
- Kingsdale Foundation School
 - Oasis Academy Arena
- St Thomas More Catholic Comprehensive School



We have been so excited to resume our study visits in Autumn 2020, to welcome new participants and seeing some again for the first follow up, with new **COVID-safe procedures**.

And now, in this new brief pause we are using the time to **organise the data, work with our schools and planning for restarting the visits!** We can see the light at the end of the tunnel with a vaccine on the horizon! This year has been **tough, for everyone, especially young people** who have missed out on a lot due to the pandemic. This makes our research into **how adversity can affect young peoples' wellbeing even more important!**

A huge welcome to our new placement student, Hritika!

Hritika is in the 2nd year of her **Cognitive and Clinical Neuroscience degree** at the University of Westminster. She will join us in **September 2021** as a placement student in e-BRAIN!

She has written a brilliant piece about what lead her to applying for a placement with us and the **remarkable experiences** which fueled her enthusiasm for young people's mental health.



When we think about life adversity, we tend to think about it as something we face as we grow older. The older we are, the greater the responsibilities and stresses of day-to-day life inevitably pile up, sometimes leading to mental health problems such as depression. **But what about those who face early life adversities?**

My first time witnessing the implications of early life adversity was while **volunteering at Sufra food bank**. Coming to terms with **the harsh reality** refugee children (some as young as 3 years old) faced fleeing their home and having to leave everything they've ever known behind, was an **eye-opening experience**. Listening to their stories made me realise that for some children, the **responsibilities and stresses of life catch up much sooner** than expected. It was no surprise that many of them struggled at school both academically and socially and did not have much self-confidence. I couldn't help but wonder how, without the appropriate support, the early life struggles of these children would continue to linger on for years past their childhood.



When I first came across the e-BRAIN study, **I knew I had to be part of such an important piece of research**. This is a fantastic opportunity to be part of valuable mental health research, but **what struck me is that the study involves young people**. At this stage, there are numerous and sometimes drastic changes that take place in a young person's life. I think many of us can be naive about the extent to which early life adversities can be detrimental. A lot of research focuses on overcoming the emotional side of early life adversities at the expense of neglecting the physical impact it can have, particularly on the brain. Instead, this research **aims to understand how adversity may affect the development of the brain** as well as mental health later on. This could eventually **help develop specific ways to support young people who experience adversity**, to help them maintain good mental health.

During my placement year working on the e-BRAIN study, I hope to **apply my knowledge** as an undergraduate student and contribute to an actual research study. This is a great opportunity for me to also get experience in **exploring possible careers** in psychology and neuroscience. This will also ultimately help me make **a better-informed decision about the future**, as I will have a valuable experience to reflect back on. Overall, I hope to **improve my confidence in settling into a work environment**.

Meet the newest member of the e-BRAIN team, Maryam!

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Hi, I'm Maryam! I joined the e-BRAIN team as a research assistant in December 2020 and it has already been **quite an incredible journey so far**. I am so grateful to be a part of such **impactful and valuable research**, and such a wonderful research team!

I completed my part-time **Masters in Neuroscience** in September 2020, and prior to that completed my **undergraduate degree in Pharmacology** at the University of Hertfordshire in 2017.

Outside of academia and work, **I love playing video games**, mostly on the PC but I also have a Nintendo Switch! I love **creative writing** and have contributed [a number of blogs](#) as a member of the [Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience](#).

In my spare time, I'm a **volunteer befriender** at [Maytree](#), a residential respite centre for people who are feeling suicidal; I have been taking a break from this role throughout the pandemic. I'm also an **MSc Neuroscience global majority leader/BAME female coach & mentor**, providing mentees with a safe space, whereby they can discuss the realities of being a female student of global majority background in science, whilst also receiving academic and personal support throughout their journey on the course.

I can't wait to eventually **meet my team in person** and **meet all of you at school and on study visits!**



Opportunities with e-BRAIN at King's College London!

Writing and Work Experience

If you like **creative writing**, you could potentially write a **blog or written piece** that we could **feature on our website or in our spring newsletter!** We'd love to hear from you if you have a topic you would like to write about. **You can reach us via email: ebbrain@kcl.ac.uk**



We are offering **virtual work experience opportunities** to students at schools who are interested! **Please express your interest via email: ebbrain@kcl.ac.uk**

When everything reopens and it is safe to do so, we can **visit your school** and talk to students about our careers within research, our journeys here and **what it's really like to be a scientist.**

We can also **take a group of young people** who are interested to **see what a real lab is like** on a **lab visit and tour!**



Send us your lockdown creations! – The Lockdown Resilience Creations Challenge



We would like to invite you to take part in our **Lockdown Resilience Creations Collage Challenge!** The theme of the collage is **resilience** (the ability to cope with ups and downs, bounce back and adapt to life's challenges), **hope, kindness** and **positivity.** We want to see your creativity and we think it'll be **lots of fun!**

You can send us **photos or scans** of drawings or paintings, arts and crafts, photographs you have taken, poems, sculptures or models!

The collage **will be part of our spring newsletter** and **posted on our website!** Everyone is welcome to take part and we will credit your name alongside your creation once the collage is published.

Please email any submissions to: ebbrain@kcl.ac.uk



Upcoming Mental Health events and dates



1-7 March - [Eating Disorders Awareness Week](#)

1 March - [Self Injury Awareness Day](#)

30 March - [World Bipolar Day](#)

April - [Stress Awareness Month](#)

10-16 May - [Mental Health Awareness Week](#)

June - [International Fathers' Mental Health Day](#)



Dear reader,

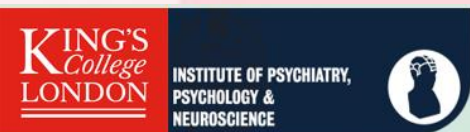
Thank you for reading our newsletter. We hope you enjoyed it! If you'd like to get involved with the study, find out more or have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch! You can find all of our contact details and social media accounts below. We look forward to hearing from you!

The e-BRAIN team



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This newsletter was created by Maryam Matter



@e_brainstudy



@ebrainstudy

We are inviting all young people from Greater London aged between 11 and 14 years (Years 7 to 9) to take part



e-BRAIN is a study of brain development and mental health among young people in London, being conducted by researchers from King's College London

Get involved or
find out more!



ebrain@kcl.ac.uk



ebrainstudy.com

