



TEENTIMES

FOR THE YOUTH, BY THE YOUTH!

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Yasmine Essed

Young Person of the Year (2021)

Humanitarian Heart

A friendly challenge to MP Brison: Deliver the Graduate Head Start Tax Law

Teen Times has taken note that MP Rolando Brison is making strides to bring more attention and support to E-Sports (gamers rejoice!), which is all well and good – and admittedly important in today's world. We still believe there are more important initiatives that should be moved to the top of the list. One of these ideas was one we fully supported during the last elections and one which was part of MP Brison's platform: the Graduate Head Start Tax Law.

We want to issue a friendly challenge to MP Brison to get this tax incentive for returning students done within the next year. It is a challenge not just because we are tired of beautiful sounding campaign promises, but also because we believe that this idea was worthwhile to support then – and is still worthwhile to support today. It would be a great “head start” for our young adults returning home.

Back then, MP Brison had said that with an eye towards assisting young academics, who choose to return home after completing tertiary education, he was preparing a Graduate Head Start Tax Law to finally give these students a fair chance at success upon returning to the



island by placing them in a lower wage tax bracket. If two years ago, the draft was then being prepared, we expect that it might be further along now.

The tax law is designed to put any returning graduates that can prove they have graduated from tertiary education within the last two years, an opportunity to qualify for the favourable wage tax rate for their first four years of employment in St. Maarten.

“Under the current taxes, anywhere from 24 to 47 percent of your income is deducted by wage taxes. So, currently, someone on a US \$2,000 gross salary, only ‘takes home’ roughly \$1,400. The goal of the tax law amendment would allow for much more of the gross income to stay with the returning student, giving them much more spending power,” MP Brison had said at the time, adding that under the new Head Start Tax Law, the earner of a gross salary of \$2,000 would now take home closer to \$1,800 per month (depending

on social premiums, marital status, etc.). “That’s an extra \$400 a month in such a scenario. We are effectively giving every returning student a 30% pay raise,” he’d said.

Addressing the “how” questions, MP Brison had explained that the general tax law would be amended to create a provision for the new Head Start Tax provision, clearly defining the requirements which would include having graduated within the last two years and being a maximum wage tax break of four years.

“We will amend the income tax law to reflect the relevant reduction for those who qualify. The financial impact will be justified in the law by means of the additional economic impact. For example, 400 returning students now spending \$2,000 a month locally, that they otherwise would not

have been spending, is an additional 9.6 million a year in new economic activity, close to 1% of our GDP,” he had said, adding that “we will have more of our own local expertise returning to contribute to our society in the workforce and business market.”

Brison had explained that the idea for this incentive law stemmed from his own personal experience when coming back from the Netherlands. “For the first time going into the labour market at a Bachelor’s degree or a higher level, when I was told what my gross salary was, I was mildly ok with it. But after, when I saw my pay slip and saw the huge wage tax deductions, I knew this was a problem. It puts returning students at a big disadvantage compared to if they were to stay in the Netherlands or in the US to work.”

The MP had said that in order to encourage students to come back to St. Maarten, not only should the burden be placed on businesses to pay local young academics more, but government must take the steps necessary to put them in a more favourable position to get them back home.

“Give them incentives to come back. They really want to, but realities – such as high wage taxes which make starting out really difficult – are keeping them away. I would much rather have our students contributing something to our tax base while still successfully starting a life and a career, rather than not contributing to it at all by staying away and contributing to another country’s tax base,” the MP had said.

Exactly. So, a friendly challenge has been laid down with no “mal-intent”. We just want to see this become a reality. Your move, MP!



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MP SOLANGE DUNCAN STEPS UP!

In 2021, Teen Times presented our proposal to the MPs of the PFP faction to assist us in getting our proposal through the correct channels to realize the implementation of comprehensive St. Maarten history in secondary school curriculum. This issue is very close to our hearts.

That is why we were very happy to have been informed that MP Solange Duncan tabled a motion in Parliament that in part resolved to: *"Request the Government of St. Maarten to establish a multi-disciplinary work group to review curricula and related materials in all primary and secondary schools and present a plan of approach to Parliament for ensuring that local history, heritage and civic education are effectively taught in all schools within nine months."*

MP Duncan even called our name in Parliament (boom!) when she recalled what we wrote on the issue: *"For far too long, we have sat back and watched our young people inundated with this history of Europe and in some schools in the United States. While we believe this is also necessary and do not want to diminish the importance of global history, only in very limited instances on the elementary school level is anything about St. Maarten's history actually taught. Our students therefore lack valuable knowledge of their history as compared to their peers in the wider Caribbean,*

in particular on the secondary school level."

The MP's motion in its totality is very important not just for history in schools, but for culture and national heritage in general. As we have shown through various surveys over the years, teens on St. Maarten can quicker tell you about American heritage and norms than St. Maarten's, and it's not even close. This is a major problem for nation-building and for young people to appreciate their history. More importantly, it seems to us that the MP understands that once you "fix" these shortcomings in the upbringing of our youth, you instill in them pride and a sense of purpose. Many underestimate how these traits shape young people and the obligation that government has in this.

The MP's motion reads as

follows:

The Parliament of Sint Maarten in its meeting of today, Friday 21st January, 2022, CONSIDERING THAT:

1. St. Maarten, like any other country in the world, is rich in culture and heritage.
2. There is a dire need for the effective inclusion of St. Maarten history, heritage and culture in primary and secondary education curriculums.
3. There is a national yearning for more knowledge, understanding and appreciation for St. Maarten history, heritage and culture in order to strengthen our national identity.
4. Article 18 of the Constitution of St. Maarten states that "It shall be the constant concern of the government to focus on the protection of children and young people and to promote their



right to education, welfare, cultural development, and leisure activities."

5. Nation building is an area of focus of the Ministry of General Affairs for 2022.
6. Government in its Governing Program 2020-2024

has stated that it will actively protect and promote the natural, tangible, and intangible cultural heritage of St. Maarten.

7. The Parliament of St. Maarten represents and protects the general interest of the people of Sint Maarten, and treat these interests as paramount.

RESOLVES TO:

Request the Government of St. Maarten to establish a National Heritage Week.
- Request the Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (ECYS) to present to Parliament a draft plan for the establishment of a Culture Council by August 2022.
- Request the Government of St. Maarten to establish a multi-disciplinary work group to review curricula and related materials in all primary and secondary schools and present a plan of approach to Parliament for ensuring that local history, heritage and civic education are effectively taught in all schools within nine months.

As we said last year: "We believe that before a young person can optimally elevate our country in various fields, said young person must know their history and appreciate their past to fully embrace their future. This education of their history, the country's history, should start within the schools. More specifically, with curricula or courses that focus on St. Maarten's history and development. We do not expect this project to be completed overnight, but we must make it a national project and after years of talk, we must make a start for the sake of our children, future generations and for the love of St. Maarten."

We thank the MP for stepping up.



Feature

Young Person of the Year (2021)

Yasmine Essed – Humanitarian Heart

Teen Times' Young Person of the Year is always announced a little later than most publications and almost always in January – so with that explanation, we are right on schedule.

What determines a man or woman of the year? Common practice would tell you that the title should go to the biggest newsmaker of the year. In other words, the person who made headlines – good or bad, and consistently – throughout the year. More recently, we have seen the honour placed upon people who have made an impact on the lives of their fellow men and women.

We subscribe to the latter when considering our Young Person of the Year – and we believe that the amazing Yasmine Essed is more than deserving of the honour for 2021. What is the purpose of life? Many people will answer many different things. We would not hesi-



tate to guess, however, that many of those answers would be to do good unto others and to help make the world that much better, even with the smallest gestures.

What Yasmine has been doing in Ghana, Africa, is awe-inspiring, caring, heart-warming, courageous and a tribute to her humanitarian heart. Making the lives of children

at a shelter better and impacting their lives with positive action so that they can enjoy a better quality of life is a mighty noble cause. To possess the passion and drive in oneself to say "I am going to put the less-fortunate first" is everything we hope to see from the human spirit.

Teen Times has observed Yasmine's community service efforts for quite some time here on St. Maarten. Her work with children in not unknown, but these trips to Ghana are very special and set an amazing example of selflessness. The looks on the faces of these children are priceless and the work that Yasmine continues to do is immeasurable in its importance to them.

We are proud to name Yasmine Essed as our Young Person of the Year 2021. If you don't know Yasmine and her work, enjoy this read and this inspiring human being.

1. Who is Yasmine Essed?

I am a 22-year-old, proud St. Maartener of Surinamese descent, born and raised right here on our beautiful island. I attended Sister Magda Primary School and VWO at Milton Peters College. Currently, I work in real estate on the island at Island Dreams Realty, which I really enjoy, but my first passion is and will always be helping others. Kindness, humility and integrity are three very important morals to me, through which I navigate my life.

2. Please tell us a little about your passion for helping others.

I started my community service work as a volunteer at K1 Britannia Foundation when I was 15 years old, whilst attending Milton Peters College, where my passion for humanitarianism started. Throughout the years, I have worked as a Project Manager at NGOs, such as K1 Britannia and Sint Maarten Development Fund, in fields such as foster care, community outreach and disaster relief. From the very first time I volunteered, that feeling I got of knowing that the little bit of time, effort, and love that I put in could have such a big impact on another, stuck with me and has grown with every experience.

3. Who or what inspires you to continue being such a humanitarian?

Seeing the results of giving back and making a positive impact on someone's life is the fuel to my humanitarianism. Also, a person who inspires me very much is Prince Jamal Issaka. He is the founder of the Dream Africa Care Foundation in Ghana and has become someone that I look up to and respect tremendously for his dedication to humanitarianism. Through him and the children of his shelter in Ghana, I am inspired every day.

4. Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?

I would have to say I'm most proud of what I was able to accomplish during my last trip to Ghana. Through the contributions of 24 kind St. Maarteners, I was able to bring two suitcases filled with school supplies and other necessities; I raised a total of US \$1,031 in donations. With that money, I was able to take the children of the shelter in Ghana on two field trips; buy the necessary food, medical- and school- supplies, renew the health insurance of the children in the shelter and more. The fact that together as St. Maarten people, we were able to give back and contribute to the children in Ghana makes me very proud.

5. Is there a moment you always use as motivation to keep going?

It's difficult to decide on one moment that motivates me to keep going – every moment spent with the children in the shelter, the warm hugs, the smiles filled with love and appreciation that are beamed my way ... those moments keep me going.

6. Tell us about the trips to Africa.



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Yasmine Essed

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How did they start? What do you do there?

The first time I went to Ghana was in 2019. I had always wanted to volunteer abroad and I had reached a point in my life where it was the right time to make that step. Seeing that most of the slaves that came to the Caribbean and Suriname came from West Africa, and most likely from Ghana to be specific; I decided that is where I wanted to go and volunteer. I volunteered for three months at the children's shelter of the Dream Africa Care Foundation where I helped the kids with their homework, tutoring and after-school activities. I completely fell in love with those children and the country, which led me to find my purpose as a humanitarian and my aspirations to start my own NGO between St. Maarten and Ghana. I had wanted to go back to Ghana in 2020, but due to the COVID pandemic, I was not able to do so. I finally made it back there in December 2021 and was able to contribute through the help of my fellow St. Maarteners.

7. Do you plan on traveling to other places to do the same things?

I definitely plan on traveling to other places, but I think for now I would like to keep my focus on Ghana and the Dream Africa Care Foundation. I believe I can have a bigger impact if I focus on this group of children than if I try to help children all over the world at the same time.

8. In your pictures, you look genuinely happy to be there. What makes this place special?

The people in Ghana are so friendly, happy, and genuinely appreciative of life, that it is contagious! Being there, especially around the children, teaches you every day that there is so much to be happy and grateful for in life. Selflessness is a given over there.



9. What is next for you?

What's next for me is to start my own NGO between St. Maarten and Ghana, and eventually the Caribbean and West-Africa, connecting the diaspora through volunteerism. I aim to establish the NGO this year and hope to be able to take my first group of St. Maarteners with me to Ghana by the end of 2023.

10. Do you have any regrets about giving so much of yourself to others?

Never. I believe the good that you put out into the world will always come back to you in one shape or another. I will always continue to give the best of myself to others and I encourage everyone to do so as well.

Thank you, Yasmine, for being an example that the youth of St. Maarten can be proud to follow. Stay awesome!



TEN MOST COMMON PROBLEMS TEENS FACE IN 2022

Only a few decades ago, the most common problems teens faced were finding a career path and starting a family. In fact, the word "teenager" wasn't even a thing until the 1920s. Today, however, teens are facing problems unique to our time.

Here are the 10 most common problems teens face in 2022.

1. Acceptance

Even the most self-assured person struggles with acceptance from time to time. However, teens have it especially hard, due to their lack of maturity and perspective. The best thing we can do is offer parental acceptance. A recent study published in the journal *Plus One* showed that there was a significant link "between children's psychological maladjustment and perceived paternal and maternal rejection".

Help your teen feel accepted by assuring them of your unwavering love and guidance – no matter what.

2. Stress

The pressures teens face from school, parents and peers, can create ongoing patterns of stress. Being stuck at home and away from regular life adds to that feeling. It's imperative that we help them deal with life's stresses in a few intentional ways:

- Help them establish healthy boundaries.
- Teach them how to prioritize to simplify their life.
- Create a safe atmosphere at home.

- Let them talk about their feelings openly.

3. Depression and Anxiety

Perhaps, more than ever before, teens are battling depression and anxiety. Some studies show depression is linked with social media. Regardless of the source, it's crucial for parents to watch for the dangerous warning signs of depression and anxiety. Find a trustworthy doctor and consider therapy if your teen shows signs of ongoing or worsening symptoms.

4. Self-harm

Unfortunately, youth today are faced with more temptations than we ever dreamed possible. Not only are they enticed by substances such as drugs and alcohol, often they're tempted to self-harm. It's imperative that parents open their eyes to this issue. Even though it may be easier to ignore, we simply must be proactive.

5. Bullying

Even with the anti-bullying programs today, the issue still remains. Teens everywhere are facing torment from their peers on a daily basis. It's important for parents to work closely with schools, clubs, and workplaces to ensure they have anti-bullying policies in place. Truly, we can take a stand against bullying.

6. Desensitization

Sex, drugs, and violence have been part of the teen culture for many decades. However, it seems like kids are becoming dangerously desensitized. It's important to understand why kids do drugs, and look at ways



to stop the desensitization toward violence and sex. Common Sense Media offers some good tools in this area.

7. Sex

This list wouldn't be a relevant article if sex wasn't mentioned. Although it's been a temptation for teenagers throughout history, the prevalence of dangerous sexual behaviours has exploded in recent years. Communication is KEY for parents of teens. Although these types of discussions are uncomfortable, they are absolutely necessary.

8. Disrespect

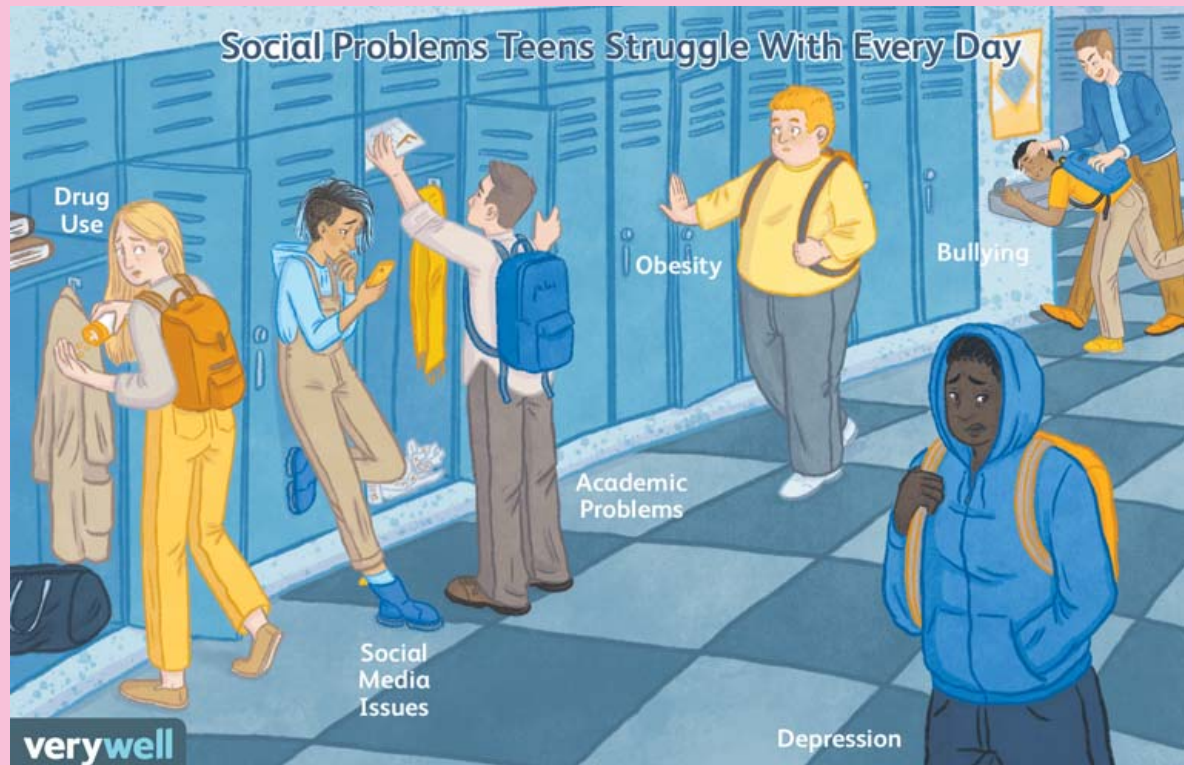
There seems to be a lot of confusion when it comes to respecting authority these days. Teens are seeing their favourite movie stars and sports figures controversially displaying anti-authority messages. Standing up for things you believe in and teaching respect are both very important. Parents have the primary responsibility in not only portraying respect, but also requiring it from their kids.

9. Trust

Teens today struggle with trust issues. Many of them don't feel like they can turn to their parents for advice. This leaves teens extremely vulnerable. We can help them by encouraging them to talk to other adults that we trust. Point them in the direction of a counsellor, coach, or respectable friend. They need trustworthy mentors to guide them through their problems.

10. Motivation

It used to be that teens couldn't wait to find a job, get a car, and build a life of their own. Today, however, teens seem to struggle with motivation and the confidence to move forward. It could be due to the fact that teens have become more reclusive in their virtual worlds. Or, it may be that parents aren't as proactive in encouraging independence. Whatever the cause, we can motivate our teens and help them make important decisions regarding their future.



10 reasons to be optimistic for the future, from young change-makers

As the coronavirus pandemic rages on and each week seemingly brings new social injustices all over the world or preventable catastrophes, it's easy to feel hopeless – even to the point of paralysis. So how do citizens intent on changing the world keep going? Ten young organizers and activists were asked what makes them optimistic and this is what they shared, along with other key takeaways.

Many of the young people featured in this article are driving dialogue, action and change through The Davos Lab – a Global Shapers Community initiative to mobilize interested citizens and stakeholders in more than 150 countries to shape a youth-driven recovery plan to address COVID-19 and the world's converging crises.

Collectively, they highlighted extraordinary solutions, mind-sets and simple actions, big and small, to address the challenges of today and provide hope for a better tomorrow.

1. "Intersectionality can radically improve recovery efforts."

Ashleigh Streeter-Jones (Canberra Hub) is the founder of Raise Our Voice Australia, a non-profit working to increase the number of female and gender diverse voices from all backgrounds in politics and policy-making.

"Throughout The Davos Agenda, leaders consistently acknowledged the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women, young people, people of colour and other persons from marginalised backgrounds. Participants reinforced the importance of public, private, and civil society partnerships to create an inclusive post-COVID world. It is on all of us to build back better and create a society that leaves no one behind. Davos reignited my mission to foster more diversity in public policy and to embrace public policy as a tool for change."

2. "Put simply: we need more women in leadership."

Sikander Bizenjo (Karachi Hub) is an economist and development practitioner. In his hub, he and fellow Global Shapers have provided more than 60,000 books to libraries in need throughout the pandemic.

"Female-led countries have been held up as exemplars of how to manage this pandemic. What was obvious throughout The Davos Agenda is that we need more women in leadership – not only to help drive recovery efforts, but also to build a stronger, more equitable post-pandemic world. The gender divide is prominent in all societies and until we have inclusive leadership, we cannot truly progress."

3. "Climate action must be at the heart of recovery efforts."



Rumaitha Al Busaidi (Muscat Hub) is a marine scientist and the Director of the Environment Society of Oman.

"With COVID-19 infections continuing to rise and the entire world feeling the economic impact of the crisis, getting the virus under control is an immediate priority. But recovery goes beyond vaccination plans and returning economic systems to 'normal'. A sustainable recovery requires efforts to address climate change and I was happy to see that this was the most talked-about topic during The Davos Agenda. The calls to action for business leaders are clear: We need responsible industry transformations and green growth."

4. "We need empathy, self-awareness, and integrity."

Taylor Hawkins (Sydney Hub) is the Managing Director of Foundations for Tomorrow, a non-profit working with Global Shapers to mobilize youth to shape a more equitable and sustainable future in Australia.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health emergency – but it is far more. It is an economic crisis, a social crisis and a human crisis. With so much suffering around us – loss of life, unemployment and sickness – the need for empathy, self-awareness and integrity in business, leadership and society is more urgent now than ever and this was reflected in so many of the messages shared by world leaders during The Davos Agenda.

This was echoed in acknowledgments of the need to observe early warning signs as well as the consistent reference to the requirement for shared goals, strategies and accountability in the international community. When leaders of different, even opposing, world views can come together for collective problem-solving, the possibilities are endless.

5. "We are only as strong as our weakest link."

Caela Tanjanco (Manila Hub) supports high-impact entrepreneurs in emerging markets. Caela and other Global Shapers are leading voter registration and education campaigns in advance of the 2022 elections.

Pandemics know no borders. We cannot address the world's converging crises in silos. We need to share technology, provide equitable access for vaccines in developing countries and agree globally on shared health and safety guidelines for travel and trade. We are only as strong as our weakest link, so it's critical we ensure no one is left behind. I am hopeful from The Davos Agenda that the international community agrees.

6. "We need intergenerational partnerships and allies."

Shalin Jyotishi (Washington DC Hub) is a researcher, writer and policy advisor fulfilling his mission at New America. He and his fellow Global Shapers are working with the World Economic Forum's AI Platform to launch the AI Future Lab, a community of practice for young people dedicated to advancing responsible AI.

"The Davos Agenda affirmed to me the importance of intergenerational, public-private partnerships. When leaders of different, even opposing, world views can come together for collective problem-solving, the possibilities are endless. This crisis has emphasized our obligations to one another and other generations, even in the face of personal sacrifice, and I am hopeful that this spirit will be maintained post-pandemic."

7. "Fear cannot drive decision-making."

Laura Reyna de la Garza (Mexico City Hub) is the Founding Director of PuenTechLab and is currently a technology policy student at Cambridge University.

"Uncertainty and fear are common ingredients of both the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, whether we are talking about algorithmic governance or finding ways to reengage with society after long periods of lockdown, decisions based on fear over facts will fail. Decision-makers must employ data to identify patterns, iterate and find solutions to the many complex challenges our world faces."

8. "A new normal requires a new social contract."

David Walcott (Kingston Hub) is a

medical doctor and entrepreneur. Over the last year, he has supported Global Shapers in more than 150 countries to implement community responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"While technology and globalization have led to unprecedented economic growth over the last two decades, growing inequality remains the biggest threat to our future. Disparities are rife, and countries around the world are not only struggling to equally distribute the vaccine, but also other basic needs such as housing, healthcare and education. It's obvious that the social contract that binds us together is broken, but I'm hopeful that the introspection forced by this pandemic will finally be the push the world needs to rebalance power with responsibility and achieve dignified outcomes for all."

9. "We must protect and invest in people."

Mariam Raheem (Lahore Hub) works at the intersection of data-driven research and policy-making. She and other Global Shapers in Lahore are working to uplift vulnerable communities, reclaim public spaces and build social cohesion during this critical time through community-based projects.

"While there are no simple pathways to building back better, one thing is loud and clear: we need to invest in people, our wellbeing and our future. All stakeholders must recognize diverse lived experiences, disrupt social narratives and abandon inherent biases to guarantee that the setbacks of today don't hold people back tomorrow. There is a very real threat that the resources, tools and vaccines that could help end the pandemic may deepen rifts and undermine the recovery of entire nations and generations. We need rapid and concerted actions as well as new paradigms that promote inclusive and equitable growth."

10. "We are all in this together."

Jodie Padilla Lozano (Guayaquil Hub) is a scientific researcher, activist and author. In Guayaquil, she and other Global Shapers are leading an international alliance for mass-professional training for youth.

"The coronavirus threatens everyone. We live in a deeply interconnected world where the failures and opportunities of one community are maximized overtime on a global scale. Regardless of where we call home, our income or the industry we work in, we are all in this together and each have a role to play in building more effective and inclusive solutions for the emergency of today and the recovery for tomorrow. We must work together with urgency and renewed responsibility to improve the lives of all stakeholders."

Future

THE REALITY OF COVID-19 IS HITTING TEENS ESPECIALLY HARD

BY CHRISTOPHER NULL (PARENT)

Just a few weeks ago, the conversation in my household revolved around one thing: Where my daughter was going to college. She's a senior in high school, high-achieving, and very driven. We spent the fall slaving over college essays and applications, 11 in total. The wait to hear from the schools she applied to was agonizing for her, and even though today's college admissions messaging is fully electronic, she would even bring in the mail at the end of each day – otherwise unheard of in our household – to see if there was something from a school waiting for her.

Now all we talk about is Covid-19.

The coronapocalypse has been devastating for us adults, but its impact on teenagers is arguably far greater. At age 48, I've seen a fair number of society's ups and downs. I was born during Watergate, panicked about nuclear holocaust thanks to The Day After as a tween, and watched the first Gulf War unfold on the televisions in my college's student union. Sure, I wasn't standing in bread lines or facing the firebombing of my city, but the last 48 years have had their share of tragedy and upheaval.

Zoe was born in 2002, a year after

the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Things were looking up at the time, and they've stayed pretty rosy by comparison. Yes, we had the invasion of Iraq, the spike in school shootings, climate change, the 2008 housing crisis, and #MeToo, but we also had an unprecedented explosion in both creativity and commerce. All of the tech services we now love, from Facebook to Netflix, got started in these years. Barack Obama was president – for eight years. The iPhone was invented, and they got Osama bin Laden.

Even the election of Donald Trump couldn't take much of the shine off the last two decades. As of 2019, our "Goldilocks economy" was seeing the lowest level of unemployment since 1969, minimal inflation, and a stock market at its all-time high. Not only was Zoe going to college, we were going to be able to pay for it and she was going to be able to get a job when she graduated.

In the space of a few weeks, none of those things are certain any more, and it's hitting her hard.

Everyone has had to abruptly adapt to "the new normal", and my initial thought was that kids would take it all in stride. My daughter spends the vast majority

of her free time in her room, on her bed, staring at her phone. Would shelter-in-place be any different, aside from not going to school for a few hours a day?

It is, and the impact on Zoe has been profound. She was devastated by the news, and she recently – after more than two weeks into stay-at-home restrictions – spoke to me about the ups and downs (mostly downs) of the experience. "I'm trying to deal with the fact that my high school career is over," she says. "Losing track and field, prom, and graduation sucks. And there's no way to cope with it because I'm just never going to get to do those things. It feels like the last four years of hard work have been for nothing."



I was suddenly facing the reality that not only were teens ill-equipped for this crisis, they're actually in a much worse position than adults. There's science behind this idea, as *Psychology Today*

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Feature





THE REALITY OF COVID-19

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writer Christine L. Carter notes: "Teenagers and college students have amplified innate, developmental motivations that make them hard to isolate at home. The hormonal changes that come with puberty conspire with adolescent social dynamics to make them highly attuned to social status and peer group."

I spoke to nearly a dozen high school students from all over the country and they overwhelmingly echoed the above sentiments. They were taking it in stride to varying degrees, but many were fatalistic about the future. They mourn the losses of (in order of increasing importance) prom, school groups, sports, and graduation. They hang out on video apps and social media with their friends, but they miss seeing them in person. And they miss the ritual of going to class and hanging out with people they've known for years, even if they've never been close friends.

Here's some select commentary.

"When you're in school, you only think about going home," says Emma (17, Novato, California, a classmate of Zoe's), "and now that you're home, going to school is all you want to do."

Jackson (16, Greenville, South Carolina) misses other rituals. "I miss sitting down in a restaurant with my family, which we used to do every Friday night," he says. "I just didn't realize how much I'd miss 'normal life.'"

Zia (16, Denver), a junior who has yet to take any of her college entrance exams, characterizes her

mental condition as "stressed" and "getting worse every day" as the crisis shows no signs of abatement.

Kam (17, New York) says he's keeping busy at home but, as a graduating senior, is "kind of freaked out about going to college after this. I'm an only child going from living with no one to living in a dorm."

These are all common sentiments. A new study polled students ages 13 to 25 about their current mood, and the top three results were "frustrated" (54 percent), "nervous" (49 percent), and "disconnected" (40 percent). Teens are anxious, they are upset, and they are nostalgic ... for February 2020.

But most of all, they are bored. God, how teens are bored! Many schools have hastily implemented online learning, but teens widely dismiss it as ineffective, at least for now. "Online schooling is mostly a joke," Zoe says, "just to say that we 'did school.' I do maybe 30 minutes of work a day now. The Zoom chats are super unproductive, just a waste of time."

Without hours and hours of daily structure, teens are left to fill virtually the entire day alone, and technology is not providing the answer. Netflix and Xbox can only get you so far.

Every teen I spoke to cited how crushingly bored they had become in just a few days. Aiden (16, Alamo, California) says the boredom is causing him to "go crazy." Jackson in South Carolina says: "It's so bad it can disrupt my sleeping. If this lasts a lot longer, everyone will be so bored. We're going to have to come up with a new way to do



things."

There's a lot of denial in the mix as well, though that is probably not suggest you can't, that you are best off staying out of a teen's way, but Ryan Fedoroff, National Director of Education at Newport Academy, a mental health treatment centre for teens and young adults, offers some tips. She says, "Be compassionate and truly listen to your child when they speak about their worries and the fact that they are upset with activities being cancelled. It's important to validate their feelings during this time, even if they are disappointed and sad. Ask your child how you can support them through this time. It is important to not try and solve their problems when they are upset. Just show compassion, validate, and be present."

So how do you help a teen cope? My personal experience would suggest you can't, that you are best off staying out of a teen's way, but Ryan Fedoroff, National Director of Education at Newport Academy, a mental health treatment centre for teens and young adults, offers some tips. She says, "Be compassionate and truly listen to your child when they speak about their worries and the fact that they are upset with activities being cancelled. It's important to validate their feelings during this time, even if they are disappointed and sad. Ask your child how you can support them through this time. It is important to not try and solve their problems when they are upset. Just show compassion, validate, and be present."

She also notes, and this is important, that kids watch adults for psychological cues. "If you are obsessively and overtly worried about coronavirus, or continuously mentioning how upset you are that their activities are cancelled, your kids will likely have anxiety about it too. We all need to vent, but try to do it in a private place

where your children can't hear you."

Fedoroff also suggests trying to create as much structure as possible in a teen's life: family meals, workouts, and reasonable "virtual learning time." (Khan Academy is still an awesome online tool.) If graduation is cancelled, you can have one at home on Zoom. Good news: Your kid is the valedictorian and gets to make a speech! Remember, this is an event that will define a teen's outlook for the rest of their life, a virtual 9/11 for Gen-Z. Positivity is unilaterally a good thing wherever you can find it.

Zoe does have a glimmer of optimism and hope underneath it all, as most teens do, as we all do. "I'm still hopeful that this is temporary," she says. "I'm not ready to give up the last three months of school, the last three months of being a kid. I want to prepare for the worst, but that's not me. If I think that way, I'll fall apart."

Really, she just wants a little more time, a few weeks to finish her high school career strong and officially close the book on her adolescence. More than prom, more than graduation, more than a medal in track, it's clear there's one thing she wants more than anything: the chance to say goodbye.

(Wired.com)



Feature

Teens in Covid isolation: "I felt like I was suffocating"

BY EMMA GOLDBERG

Before the pandemic, Aya Raji's days were jam-packed. She woke up at 6:30 a.m. and took the subway to school. At night, she practiced kick-flips with her skateboarding club and hosted "Twilight" movie nights for friends.



Once her school in Brooklyn turned to remote learning, starting last spring and continuing this fall, the days grew long and lonely. Nothing could distract her from the bleak news, as she stared at her laptop for hours during virtual class. Her mind racing with anxiety, she couldn't sleep up until 4:00 a.m.

"I felt like I was trapped in my own little house and everyone was far away," Aya, 14, said. "When you're with friends, you're completely distracted and you don't think about the bad stuff going on. During the beginning of quarantine, I was so alone. All the sad things I used to brush off, I realized I couldn't brush them off anymore."

Students like Aya felt some relief earlier this fall, when their schools opened with a blend of remote and in-person learning, although the rigid rules and social distancing required during the pandemic still made it rough to connect. And now, with coronavirus caseloads at record levels across the country, many schools are returning to remote classes, at least temporarily through part of the winter.

The social isolation of the pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of many people. But the impact has been especially severe on teenagers, who rely on their friends to navigate the maze and pressures of high school life.

Research shows that adolescents depend on their friendships to maintain

a sense of self-worth and to manage anxiety and depression. A recent study of 3,300 high school students found that nearly one-third reported feeling unhappy or depressed in recent months. And while it might seem counterintuitive for a generation used to bonding with friends via texts, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram, more than a quarter of those students said they did not feel connected to teachers, classmates or their school community.

"A lot of adults assume teens have it easy," Aya said. "But it's hitting us the hardest." Since the start of the pandemic, the National Alliance on Mental Illness has heard from many young adults experiencing anxiety and depression, which the organization attributes partly to social isolation. The group has cautioned parents and teachers to look for warning signs, including severe risk-taking behaviour, significant weight loss, excessive use of drugs or alcohol and drastic changes in mood.

The proportion of children's emergency room visits related to mental health has increased significantly during the pandemic, highlighting concerns about the psychological effects that lockdowns and social distancing have had on youth, according to a new analysis released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Researchers at the University of Amsterdam and Emma Children's Hospital released a study on the mental health of adolescents in the Netherlands,

which found that young people reported a significant increase in severe anxiety and sleeping problems during the country's lockdown period. Children were more likely to report mental health problems if they had a parent who lost work or personally knew someone infected with coronavirus.

Granted, for some students, the beginning of quarantine brought a measure of relief. They no longer had cliques to impress or bullies to ward off. But that "honeymoon phase" passed quickly, according to Dr. Cora Breuner, a paediatrician. As stressful as adolescent relationships can be, they are also essential for the formation of personal identity.

"Individuation and development of independence is thwarted or slowed way down when they're sitting at home all day with parents in the next room," said Dr. Breuner, a spokeswoman for the American Academy of Pediatrics.

An important part of teenage development is the realization that peers, not just parents, can be a source of emotional support. The twin crises of the pandemic and the economic downturn have imposed new personal hardships on students. Some are taking care of family members who have fallen sick with Covid-19; others have been thrust into dealing with their parents' unemployment or financial strain. Being holed up at home makes it tough to lean on friends.

When school turned remote last spring, Cath-

erine Khella, a health teacher in Brooklyn, asked her students to keep journals, which she read for signs of mental distress. Many were struggling but hesitant to reach out. One student wrote about feeling unmotivated to do schoolwork, getting frustrated with family members and experiencing emotions "like no other I have ever felt." Another student, Adolfo Jeronimo, wrote about living in a home with 15 people and becoming nocturnal to find some peace and quiet.

"I'd sleep all day because my sister was up crying and there was barely any food," said Adolfo, 15, a classmate of Aya's whose father was hospitalized with Covid-19 and was unable to work for four months. "Usually, my friends would've helped me, but I didn't have them, so it was harder to deal with. I felt like I was suffocating."

The activities that young people previously relied on for stability and joy have been disrupted. Extracurricular clubs and birthday parties are mostly cancelled. So are rites of passage like prom and homecoming. Students spend vast portions of their weeks staring at Zoom screens. Without school events and traditions to anticipate, many say they are struggling to get out of bed in the morning.

"Everything is stagnant now," said Ayden Hufford, 15, a high school sophomore in Rye, a suburban area north of New York City, whose school now has blended in-person and remote learning. "There's nothing to look forward to. On virtual days, I sit on the computer for three hours, eat lunch, walk around a bit, sit for three hours, then end my day. It's all just a cycle."

Ayden identifies as an avid "theatre kid," and was looking forward to his school play and science Olympiad. With those out of the question now, he turned to a recent online meeting for

student leadership council for inspiration. But that proved demoralizing because he had trouble staying engaged with the Zoom conversation.

"I laid down with my camera off and waited for it to be over," he said. "It's sad and somewhat lonely." And he added that forming new connections with classmates is nearly impossible in a virtual setting: "Unless you try extremely hard, there's no chance to make new friends this year."

The isolation has been particularly challenging for young adults who struggle with chronic anxiety or depression, and who would typically rely on their social circles for comfort. Nicole DiMaio, who recently turned 19, developed techniques to manage her anxiety over the years. She talks to friends, hugs her mom, exercises and reads books – so many that her family calls her Princess Belle, like the "Beauty and the Beast" protagonist. But nothing seemed to work during the early months of the pandemic.

Nicole's mother fell sick with Covid in late March after caring for a patient with coronavirus at Coney Island Hospital, where she works as a nurse. Nicole became her mother's caretaker, as well as her family's. She woke up daily at 5:00 a.m. to clean the house, watch over her younger sister and cook protein-rich foods, which she deposited outside her mother's bedroom door, while squeezing in schoolwork. Her mother did not want to be ventilated if her lungs failed, so each time she went to the emergency room seeking treatment, Nicole feared she might never come back.

Normally, Nicole would turn to her friends. But she couldn't see them in person, so instead she had to vent to them on Instagram and Snapchat. "Being 18 and taking it all in is a lot," she said.

Long-Haul COVID-19 in Children and Teens

BY PETER ROWE, MD, FAAP

Most kids and teens, who test positive for COVID-19, have mild or even no symptoms. But it has become clear that some are experiencing symptoms more than a month after they've been infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. A number of post-COVID conditions have been identified in kids. Most notable are continued or recurring symptoms referred to as "long-haul COVID," or sometimes as "long COVID" or "Post-Acute COVID-19". Research on this condition continues.

Who gets long-haul COVID?

No one is certain exactly how many people who've had COVID-19 end up being long haulers. One study showed that as many as 52% of teens and young adults between ages 16 and 30 may experience lingering symptoms six months after having COVID-19. The U.K. Office for National Statistics estimated that 12.9% of children two to 11 years of age, and 14.5% of children 12 to 16 years old, still experienced symptoms five weeks after infection.

What experts do know is that long-haul COVID can happen even in people who had mild or no symptoms of COVID-19. The symptoms they had during the acute infection may not go away, even long after their infection is gone. Sometimes, long-haul COVID symptoms start after a person is feeling better. Or, if they were asymptomatic (didn't have COVID symptoms), they may experience them weeks later. Any of these symptoms can be new and

different, or they may be the same as the ones your child had during the COVID infection.

What are symptoms of long-haul COVID?

The most common symptoms of long-haul COVID include the following: Fatigue and poor physical endurance; difficulty thinking or concentrating, also known as "brain fog"; cough; trouble breathing; joint or muscle pain; chest or stomach pain; mood changes; headache; fever; heart palpitations; loss of or changes in smell or taste; lightheadedness when standing up.

There are a variety of chronic symptoms your child can experience after having COVID-19. The specific symptoms your child has could depend on how severe their COVID infection was. For instance, if your child was in the intensive care unit (ICU) on a ventilator, they might have fatigue and weak muscles, as well as a fast heart rate and brain fog. These are common effects in people who have spent time in the ICU.

How is long-haul COVID diagnosed?



There's no specific test to diagnose long-haul COVID, so it's diagnosed based on symptoms. Your paediatrician may run other

tests or refer you to a paediatric sub-specialist, especially if symptoms continue more than three months. They will want to be certain there's nothing else causing your child's symptoms.

How long does it last?

That's still unknown. More studies are needed to understand what's going on.

What causes it?

Researchers are still trying to figure out what causes some people to experience long-haul COVID. It will probably take some years before we know much.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on what symptoms your child is having. Your paediatrician will treat individual symptoms, such as headaches, lightheadedness, or problems sleeping.

What about multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C)?

You may have heard of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), a serious condi-

tion that may be related to COVID-19. However, doctors don't know for sure yet what causes MIS-C. They just know that many kids who have had it either had COVID-19 or were around someone else who did. Keep in mind that MIS-C is rare.

When must you seek help?

If your child has been infected with SARS-CoV-2, stay in touch with your paediatrician to monitor for any lingering symptoms. Many medical centres in the United States are creating post-COVID care clinics so they can treat long-haul COVID more effectively. Your paediatrician can help you find a subspecialist or clinic if your child needs one.

Remember:

COVID-19 vaccines are the best way to protect your family against COVID-19 and post-COVID conditions, including long-haul COVID. Vaccines are currently available for anyone five years of age and older. Clinical trials are underway for children as young as six months old.



PREPARING TEENS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK

This article is part of a series in which OECD experts and thought leaders – from around the world and all parts of society – address the COVID-19 crisis, discussing and developing solutions now and for the future. Aiming to foster the fruitful exchange of expertise and perspectives across fields to help us rise to this critical challenge, opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the views of the OECD.

As the digital transformation progresses faster and faster, our education systems are struggling to adapt and prepare young people for the future of work. As shown by economic historian Carlota Perez in her seminal writings, general-purpose technologies transform business, the economy and society at large every half-century or so. Institutions are always the slowest to adapt. They're also the most instrumental in spreading the newfound prosperity across society.

In today's digitised economy, economic innovation and wealth creation increasingly depend on intangible goods – R&D, design, patents, management practices and software technologies such as artificial intelligence. This marks a paradigm shift in the “rules of the game” governing our production processes and labour markets. Policy-making and social change ought to take such a shift into account and build on the same factors: (ethical) data collection and processing, service personalisation, a virtuous cycle of feedback and iteration, and of course change-pursuing actions carried out at speed and scale.

Poliferie is an Italian NGO founded in 2017 to prepare students in disadvantaged areas for the future of work. Its mission builds on two assumptions. First, the aforementioned “rules of the game” apply to people as well: to thrive, students need to develop a “growth mind-set”. They need to see their mistakes as opportunities to learn and recognise education as a lifelong endeavour.

Second, as in many other countries, the Italian education system is still very rigid. Curricula take a theoretical approach to learning that leaves students unprepared for the soft skills-oriented labour market of today. The lack of direct bridges to the world of work

thwarts social mobility, as internships and hands-on work experiences remain a privilege of the wealthy and the well-connected.

Poliferie targets 16- to 19-year-olds and helps them find information on post-diploma opportunities (be it university, tertiary education or schemes for entering the labour market) and develop soft skills that they lack, and which are crucial for the world of work.

Through workshops, they have fostered positive change in the mind-set of students coming from low-income, low-education families and generally disadvantaged social backgrounds. Their evaluation questionnaires, which they ask students to complete before and after they attend Poliferie's workshops, show higher levels of self-confidence and a more positive attitude towards the future in those students who are exposed to this kind of cross-cutting, soft skills-based curricula.

After four years of activity reaching almost 2,000 students across 24 cities, they have learnt some lessons on what the future of work and education holds for young people.

First, a one-size-fits-all approach to providing information on learning and work opportunities has its limits. Quite often, students have very specific questions on career paths that would be best addressed by someone with the right background. As a consequence, one-on-one mentorships might be better placed to orient prospective high school graduates towards a well-thought-out choice of



what to do after gaining a diploma.

Second, as digital natives, young people have an intuitive if rough understanding of many of the technological trends shaping education and the labour market. Building on first-hand experience and examples is the most effective way of teaching and passing on knowledge to students. Being used to abstract, theoretical lessons, they highly appreciate practical exercises and group activities, which also gives them the chance to interact with, and learn from each other.

Finally, recruiting volunteers in, and bringing external speakers to smaller towns and struggling regions is a signifi-

cant challenge – students that need the most help tend to be concentrated in those areas. Remote learning, induced by COVID-19, has the advantage of enabling outstanding professionals to reach students practically everywhere.

Though not a given, provided they have access to digital infrastructure and tools (like a smartphone and a broadband connection) today's students have the possibility to access online learning opportunities that were unimaginable just a decade ago. On the other hand, building a trust-based relationship with them is clearly challenging with a lack of physical contact.

We have to keep on nurturing change in our education systems. Trial and error in pursuit of social innovation is the best way to do so. Luckily, the number of edtech startups and social impact organisations focused on learning is on the rise. There is a strong need for experimentation to find ways for all students to be equipped with the mind-set, skills and information necessary to succeed in the digital age.

The ultimate hope is that governments will then take advantage of these innovations and roll them out on a national scale. Everyone, no matter what their background is, should be able to enjoy the same opportunities and be ready to face the challenges posed by the future of work.

