



Growing Hope |
Registered charity 1176358

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The impact of coronavirus on Growing Hope families

Lockdown has been a challenging time for everyone in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. As an occupational therapist, working with children and young people who have additional needs, I have seen families go through a range of emotions throughout this time.

During the first lockdown, we were able to continue sessions virtually. Whilst carrying out these sessions, I found that every week I was faced with parents in tears who were struggling with the balance of supporting their children at home, without their usual support network. Structure, routine and external support are essential for families who have children with additional needs and the loss of this had a significant impact on parents' mental health. As restrictions started to lift, we were able to support families by giving recommendations to children's schools as to how to enable children to transition back into attending school again. We saw parents glimpse hope through the opportunity for respite and children slowly re-adjusted to being back in school.

Over the summer holidays, as restrictions continued, families have had mixed experiences. Now in a second lockdown, most parents have reported that as their children are in school they are able to just about manage. However, it seems that the lack of general support is wearing thin – without as many after-school clubs, leisure opportunities, or the option for others to provide ad hoc childcare, parents' stress levels continue to be high. The lack of these additional services means that children and young people are often displaying challenging behaviour and parents are sometimes unable to find enough engaging activities for young people to complete at home. This is in addition to their worries for their children's educational development.

Despite this, there continues to be hope. With a vaccine on the way, activity ideas, advice from Growing Hope therapists, and support from other organisations, we have been amazed at the resilience of the families that we are working with. We are cheering every family on towards the day when normality resumes.

I was recently struck by [an article by the BBC](#) which commented on how children have forgotten how to use a knife and fork through lockdown. The article goes on to detail that schools have also seen a reduction in children's social skills, reading abilities and toileting ability. As therapists at Growing Hope, we assess children's ability to participate in activities that they complete every day (such as using a

Providing free therapy for children and young people with additional needs and their families in partnership with local churches across the UK.



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knife and fork, handwriting, getting dressed, concentrating on tasks, communicating with their peers, managing emotionally and moving around). We are able to provide intervention to help support children as they develop these skills. We anticipate that following lockdown and the introduction of a vaccine we'll see an increase in the demand for support for children with a range of needs for our therapy services. Until this point it feels like everyone is in survival mode - getting themselves and their children through the day to day. Once we're out of the other side of the pandemic, Growing Hope will be here to support new families whose children are in need.

As Growing Hope we aim to bridge a gap, where the NHS is often overstretched, in order that we can support families with the help that they need. We currently run two local clinics in London - one in King's Cross (for families in Camden and Islington), and one in Brockley (for families in Lewisham and Southwark). Our vision is to see twenty clinics set up across the UK by 2030 - we want to be setting up clinics all around the country which can provide for children who are in need at this time. If you could be a part of setting up a new Growing Hope clinic in partnership with a local church near you please do [get in touch](#).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Naomi Graham", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Naomi Graham, Founder & CEO, Growing Hope