



# **Know Your Audience: Pandemic Implications on Youth**

## How the pandemic affected the needs and services available to young people

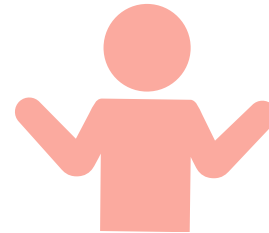
Winter Park Health Foundation needed to understand how the pandemic affected the needs and services available to young people in a tri-city area. We partnered with them to audit such support structures and then contrasted the results with pre-pandemic data.

# GROUNDING WITH DATA

EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC: YOUNG PEOPLE

To simplify how people responded to the pandemic...

- "Bruh" – some Gen Zer, probably
- "Bro" – some Gen Yer, my guy
- "Dude" – some Gen Xer, yo



Tongue-in-cheek jokes aside, we reviewed the published evidence and conducted local research to indicate how the pandemic affected young people in Central Florida.

- Generation Zers (Gen Z: middle school to early professionals) report higher rates of anxiety, depression, and distress than any other age group.
- COVID-19 greatly declined older children's (ages 10-18) emotional and cognitive health.
- Gen Z professionals identify the most important component for their wellbeing at work to be social relationships and socio-emotional experience.
- Despite a decline in their mental health, the use of alcohol and nicotine also declined among young people.
- Among homeschooled students, abdominal (not upper body) muscular strength and endurance were significantly lower.
- Gen Zers report first seeking mental health solutions via advice from other young people (using TikTok, Reddit, etc.), following therapists on Instagram, downloading relevant apps, etc.
- Green spaces promote youth wellbeing including personal development, physical functioning, emotional status, and have positive effects on their overall wellbeing



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## EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND SHUTDOWN

The pandemic made it tough—read: dangerous—to gather. Events were postponed or canceled. Fellow hobbyists and identity-based affinities (scouts, etc.) were segregated. Routine activities were disrupted. Group recreation was restricted.

The result: chronic lack of socialization. The pandemic took away more than friendly hangouts and the practice of social skills. Social gathering is key to physical and psychological health. Working and enjoying time with others activates biochemical processes important for child development.

Of course, COVID-19 caused innumerable personal effects on individuals. The virus degraded young people's economic opportunities, social connectedness, and health (if not life entirely)—either directly or among loved ones.

The hidden message behind a sudden and widespread mental health crisis: young people are living through chronic, toxic stress. Some medical and social practitioners compare the pandemic and its after-effects to a daily traumatic experience.



Toxic stress can endanger one's sense of safety or predictability—whether experienced when young or old, but especially during one's childhood. This can lead to distractibility, mental fog, emotional fragility, social and relational instability, too little or much sleep, increases in medical illnesses, rumination, worry, depression, sensitivity, and either periodic or acute feelings of anxiety.

Consider potential effects on Gen Z as employees: misunderstandings of the scope of projects or work duties, irritability between coworkers, prioritizing secure environments, difficulty with work-life separation and balance, and inattentiveness during meetings.

**WORK NEEDS TO BE A PLACE WHERE SOMEONE LOOKS FORWARD TO GOING**

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## EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC: YOUNG PEOPLE

Consider potential effects on Gen Z in the public: may need extra time and clear information to make purchase/engagement decisions, increased distractibility online, changes in how peer-to-peer marketing works, prioritizing trust, and sensitivity to consumer experience (watch out for “Karens” as Gen Z gets older!).

- Messaging needs to be clear, direct, and authentic. Traditional corporate marketing does not work as well. Get creative to capture attention.
- Engagement opportunities (“click here to learn more,” etc.) must be user-friendly and trustworthy. Content is glossed over rapidly and not viewed in its entirety.
- Take advantage of customer reviews and web-based information sources like Yelp and Google. A clean online presence can be critical—bad news travels fast on broadband.

For any audience, evidence shows that green spaces promote youth wellbeing. This includes personal development, physical functioning, emotional status, and positive effects on one’s overall wellbeing.



Additionally, bear in mind other unique (pre-pandemic) characteristics of young people. Gen Z...

- is largely tech-centric and relies heavily on devices, social media, online reviews, and productivity software—among other digital tools;
- employs tools and information (such as social media branding or crowdfunding websites) to enrich their uniquely entrepreneurial spirit;
- was raised by “co-pilot” parents, who encouraged self-agency during the upbringing;
- matures very differently than other generations in terms of communication styles, approaches to conflict management, professional/vocational goal-setting, educational attainment, etc.;
- prioritizes teamwork and collaboration;
- responds well to genuineness from influencers with whom they identify;
- cyclically influences others while being influenced by others;
- communicates differently (when did “Karen” stop being a name and become a term?);
- is timid to spend money and conserves finances;
- engages in politics greatly and that relates to many aspects of its life;
- investigates topics of interest to vet their options among other users (such as through peers or via other young people on TikTok and Reddit);
- chooses relationships that align with their worldview;
- strongly desires to feel safe and secure; and
- eagerly breaks away from routines.



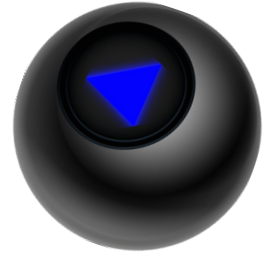
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## BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF THE PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Let's pull out the magic 8 ball and look forward.

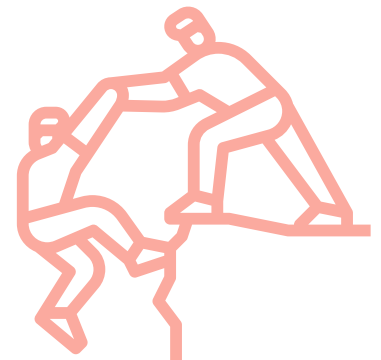
Young people were strained in their ability to interact with others during the pandemic. They lost out on fun activities with others and—as a result—missed out on activities crucial to their socio-emotional development.



As a result, emotional and cognitive struggles demonstrably worsened in young people. Some effects on the community's physical and mental well-being will be largely predictable. Unfortunately, several long-term changes in perceptions and behaviors held by Gen Z and Generation Alpha (Gen Alpha: the generation following Gen Z) are unforeseeable.

Psychological decline affects more than the experience of one person. Without considerable shifts in organizational culture, we expect increased incidents of interpersonal conflicts, use of sick days, frequency and severity of illnesses, and occurrences of burnout.

Criminological, socio-political, and economic shifts are difficult to foresee without diligent monitoring. A wide-scale escalation in severe depression diagnoses could correlate with increases in the number of people using disability insurance, for example. However, younger generations understand mental health issues better than older generations. Awareness surrounding, assessments of, and resources for mental illness have never been better nor more available. Watch carefully as Gen Z and Gen Alpha define their values and leadership approach to tackle such systems-wide issues.



Relationships will flourish where authenticity and genuine mutual care exist in abundance. Trust will take time and difficult actions, but its benefits will be priceless.

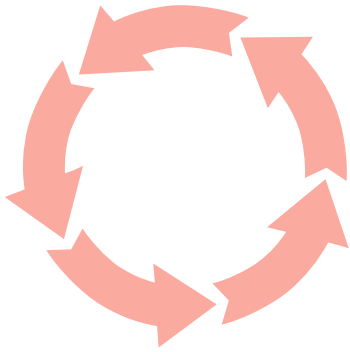
**YOUNG PEOPLE LOST OUT ON FUN ACTIVITIES WITH OTHERS AND MISSED OUT ON ACTIVITIES CRUCIAL TO THEIR SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**

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Patience, personalization, and proficiency will be key. Individual and organizational flexibility—plus managerial humility—will help cross-generational cultures interact smoothly. Expect business culture to shift to one of a more personal nature. Informatics and AI will be more accessible to smaller shops (and employees will begin to expect it), allowing a more individualized approach to technology-driven human relations (i.e., benefits will not have to fit everyone).



However, in line with what is being seen in Millennials (Gen Y: the generation preceding Gen Z), we expect that the previous trend to work in the same firm and career over one's lifetime will only shrink further. Business needs for continuous motion will push and pull in unexpected ways among Gen Z's fast-paced and progress-craving lifestyle. Authenticity and brevity in social and professional relationships may have unforeseeable benefits and challenges.

Also, there are plenty of pandemic implications we cannot yet see until after many years. There are also several components of culture that older researchers would simply be unable to capture. It is difficult to distinguish between a flaw and a feature in what could be—at least someday—considered a component of Gen Z and Gen Alpha culture. What older generations might consider “abnormal” or “worrisome” could one day be a typical walk in the park.

Look at trending styles of humor. There is a growing enjoyment for the random and unexplainable. Turn a name into a verb. Insult your dearest friends to keep their attention. Tell half the internet about how your aunt pronounces “cucumber” weirdly. Set a punk song to a particularly hard-core-looking tangerine and BOOM you have a viral short-form video.



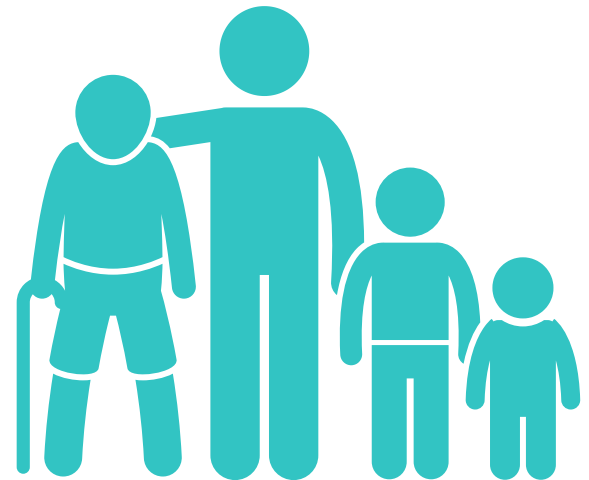
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Some of today's humor builds connections from seemingly isolated incidents into shared experiences. Others simply help the world seem a little less serious. Much of culture is how we cope with change.

Feel old yet? Well, fret not. Us, too. Keep your head up and your eyes open. There are constant changes along with new and strange trends. The big picture can feel impossible to understand.

Take this advice: reach out to us. Getting a good grasp on things is what we do. Period.



## THE BOTTOM LINE

All in all, impacts from the pandemic should largely be viewed merely as changes: in the world and in how you do business. Change does not mean bad. It's our goal to underscore these changes and relieve some of the uncertainty in your work. Your awareness of change allows you to plan and act to make the best of any change; there are hidden assets in any situation.



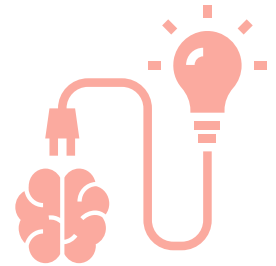
The future is not so bleak. There is some hope exemplified in one datum above: a decrease in the abuse of alcohol and tobacco among young people. Interpersonal resources such as mindfulness techniques, virtual therapy, distribution of health information and activities, nutrition, lifestyle skills, and so much more are widely accessible. A traditional (negative) outcome of poor mental health turned the other way.

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EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC: YOUNG PEOPLE

As always, knowledge is power. How might your operating model shift to meet the generational impacts of the pandemic?

You will need to keep up to date with the impacts of the pandemic and other life-changing events. There is no better way to tap into your changing community than by working with our interdisciplinary experts.



Do you still have questions about the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow? Reach out to us today. No one can know the future. However, with the right information laid out in the right way, you can be the first one to adjust to a change that the rest of the world never saw coming.



Your Grounded with Data team comprises the smoothest and smartest data nerds you'll find.

- Patti serves as the Mouth of the operation by translating the data geek speak and giving your clients valuable stories behind their data.

Dr. Jack is the Brains, helping your clients realize their needs and sort through the data chaos to find wisdom.

***"Thank you to Patti, Jack, and the Grounded with Data team for your comprehensive assessment and recommendations for the Winter Park Health Foundation's Children and Youth Initiative. Your thorough and timely work provided us with eye-opening data that will play a central role in the future of the Foundation's youth-focused philanthropic work."***

***-Melodie Griffin, Community Outreach Director, Winter Park Health Foundation***

To see more of our team, [check out our other players on our website.](#)

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