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Keeping positive during a pandemic

People who are extroverted tend to seek social stimulation and opportunities to engage with others through social interaction. Yet, whether you have an introvert or extrovert personality, loneliness can strike anyone. Being an extrovert by nature, experiencing enforced lockdown earlier this year was initially extremely daunting and challenging for me. Although well past the 'flush of youth', I am still in a section of life where my calendar was filled with meetings, attendance at international conference/exhibitions, networking and travelling, giving me a purpose to manage my professional and home life with positivity.

However, that all came to an end with the emergence of coronavirus at the beginning of 2020 leading to lockdown and travel restrictions. Suddenly, I was unable to work and network with friends and colleagues. As with so many people, I became more aware of the emotional effect of being isolated and how being unexpectedly removed from social groups, friends and loved ones, as well as the lack of interactive and intellectual stimulus, can so easily lead to depression.

Having experienced a deep sense of loneliness on occasions during the early days of the pandemic, I needed to feel in contact with the world again and elected to keep in touch with everyone by starting

'Notes from the wilds of Suffolk'. These monthly 'notes' went out to my international network of friends, colleagues and all involved in the Leg Club association via e-mail, as a simple means of communication and staying in touch.

Following an email conversation with a friend we begun to share recipes, and this gave me an idea for a Leg Club cookbook. The following months 'notes' called for recipes, as many elders have fantastic recipes and I felt it would be inspiring to receive much-loved family favourites.

I was amazed at the international and intergenerational response from friends and families, who kindly shared their favourite recipes. This enabled me to create a recipe book as a fundraising venture for the Leg Club Foundation charity. What started as a way of reducing feelings of social isolation and tackling the lockdown blues with a few friends and sharing a recipe or two, rapidly grew into what is now the *Leg Club Favourites*. There is a recipe to suit everyone in this eclectic book, as it includes quick and simple meals, as well as more complex dishes.

More than 150 recipes were contributed by over 70 individuals in just a few weeks. The content comprises much-loved family favourites and signature dishes from around the world, with many friends providing an emotional account of their selected recipe — a truly humbling experience. Giving insight to their chosen recipes reaffirms the importance of sharing, as everyone has a story to tell —

communication is so important in this day and age, regardless of if you are an extro- or introvert.

As individuals, we all have a natural, psychological need to socially belong, which enables us to have a positive sense of self-worth and helps to cope with the reality of what's going on in our personal lives. For me, being tactile along with non-verbal communication and facial expressions are an important language, and this was and still is greatly missed while social distancing. Yet, when I see the recipes in print, it conjures up the wonderful correspondence I have experienced over the weeks with all who have contributed.

Through this project I was able to maintain communication with my family, friends and colleagues within the Leg Club network, and keep mentally active and enjoy the challenge of independently creating a project from the embryonic stage through to fruition and publishing, which has been an amazing, but productive and meaningful, learning curve.

All monies received from the sale of the book will be donated to the Leg Club Foundation (CRN 1111259), and thus directly support the work of the Leg Clubs, which care for people with problems of the lower leg and wounds in a community setting. Many people with leg wounds are isolated as a result of pain, mobility issues and the stigma surrounding their wounds. This book will make a much-needed contribution to this undervalued and, sadly, often neglected group of people.

JCN