

Reflections and Redirection During COVID-19: One Self Advocate's Journey

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At the beginning of the pandemic, I thought that I would do well with staying at home most of the time because I had grown up with a lot of isolation. I used to really love visiting remote areas of the state on my own and avoiding people. I struggled with undiagnosed germaphobia, social phobia, and a bit of agoraphobia most of my younger life.

I worked on these characteristics of myself over the last few years to go out more and see more people. I would work to go to more activities in the community. I have loved to go to places and do many things with friends and for work these last few years. I would soon realize many things about myself.

I have found this time has been very hard for me in the beginning. I was scared to go out. It was hard to go to work. I felt nauseous every time I had to leave my house to go anywhere. I lost interest in daily life. I started to realize how much I missed human interaction, meaningful connections, and community activities. For most of my life, I hated being touched. I now find myself missing the human connection and physical touch and going to events with people. I miss visiting my friends and family and giving them a hug, as well as shopping at my favorite places.

Then I gained knowledge about Covid-19 through reading hundreds of news articles and articles on medical or scientific data. I thought about different ways of thinking and fulfilling my life needs. I took the time to reflect on things.

Then I saw a quote by Fred Rogers: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" It really made me think about looking for the great work people are doing to help others and think of what I could contribute.

I started by thinking about where I wanted my life to be. I made decisions to change my life path. I started working on everything I've ever wanted to do with my life. I opened my own shop with my artwork online. I ordered a backdrop to start doing videos online. I purchased a Cranio-electro stimulation device my therapist mentioned to me that helps with mood. I ordered a virtual reality device. I even purchased a sewing machine to pursue my talents. I ordered a smart scale

to track my weight and a food scale to weigh food and ingredients to try new recipes.

I have decided to change my thinking about having things go back to “normal” as people say. I have decided to think of what a new world would look like and work to create that. I found ways to stay connected with technology. I researched ways to cope with the lack of close human contact. Hugging a tree is really a nice alternative. Staying connected with nature is a favorite of mine.

I read recently that the hole in the ozone layer was healed after only a few months of people having to change their daily life. What is happening is something that makes people think about the planet, and how beautiful it could be if we worked to have a cleaner environment.

I have decided to be mindful of things to be thankful for during these hard times. I have been thankful for what I have and try to help as many people as possible. I have worked to connect people with resources, offer emotional support, and bring those I care about supplies and food in the last four months.

I know that not all of us can aspire to do great things during this time. Some of us are in survival mode. But, take care of yourself and do the best you can. We can all find ways to help ourselves and others even if it is a phone call or sending a funny MEME to a friend or loved one.

I know that science will continue to progress. I know that there are new clinical trials with a medication called Remdesivir that have been in the works to help with treatment options. I read that one organization could start having a vaccine ready by as early as the fall.

I am happy to see that staff and people supported are starting to have more access to protective equipment supplies like masks and gloves. I look forward to seeing a new life that will arrive from greater access to technology and innovation, as well as more clean environments and safety practices.

I look forward to the future when we can go out into the community and do our activities without having to worry. When we can connect with friends and family again, and go to our favorite restaurants and movie theatres without so many limitations depending on what county you live in, when it is okay to travel more than in your local area.

The Governor has many counties well into their phases of opening in the state, and the steps are in motion. While things are in motion we all need to do our part to stay safe and not go out as much as possible. This is especially true for the people that are at the highest risk. We need to protect our loved ones and our own lives and have compassion for others. When we do go out, we need to wear

our masks or face shields that are required now in the entire state. I am thankful that the Governor is taking our health and well-being seriously.

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Corey Coloma works as a UCEDD interviewer for the National Core Indicators project, and during the COVID-19 interview pause he worked on the pilot remote surveying project.

Links in reference:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/27/world/europe/coronavirus-vaccine-update-oxford.html>

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/covid-19-vaccine-may-be-ready-by-fall-and-other-reasons-for-hope#A-vaccine-by-the-fall?>