

## “The New Normal from the Pandemic”

Harshita Shet

“Zoom.” This word makes you think of something moving fast or magnifying an image; at least before COVID-19. But guess what I am talking about, virtual meetings during this unprecedented time. People were able to connect using Zoom video communication technology. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused great turmoil in society, both locally and globally, which has led to a devastating disruption economically and socially. Millions of people have lost their jobs and businesses, and fallen to poverty, while millions of people are undernourished, and several lost their loved ones. This economic recession has led to many mental health issues including depression. Recently I was interviewed in NBC’s Today’s show to talk about mental stress high school kids go through called “Kids Under Pressure” segment.

This pandemic impacted the education sector significantly. However, one thing to keep in mind is that the existing Information Technology (IT) connected teachers and students. In spite of this uncertainty, Zoom technology brought teachers, peers and classmates together. Online classes were adopted through this mode of technology. Amidst this crisis, it opened a positive outlook in our lives. Even though we were not able to sit next to each other, we were able to see each other, talk, laugh, share thoughts, make plans, do presentations, perform music, etc., Personalized training, distance learning, accessing resources was possible just being in your own room. As a tutor, I heavily depend on this program to connect with my students. I would consider this is a positive impact on us.

I am very social person and interact with my friends, teachers or students often. Due to the pandemic, I have been home-bound and not able to see friends in-person the way I used to. I play basketball, track and volleyball, and I perform Indian classical and Bollywood dances. These activities were allowing me to meet many people and keep myself fit, healthy and moreover interact with the community and friends. I miss working out in the school gym and rehearsing dance with friends. But to keep myself fit I have been working out at home, which is not the same, but I must make this my new normal due to the circumstances we are currently living under.

I believe in helping communities which are most-affected by COVID-19, especially during this tough time. Change starts from within and we need each other especially during times like this. I have been volunteering and fundraising for many causes for a long time. But doing volunteer work virtually is very difficult. But this did not stop me from my goals. I decided to run many fundraisers and collected funds for socks and underwear for teens, and donated to “Sharing Shelf”, I collected winter clothing, quarantined the bags for 15 days before donation and donated to “Sharing Shelf”, collected non-perishable food, and donated to “Feeding Westchester.” I made several Christmas cards, Valentine’s day cards and sent them to senior citizens, as I was not able to visit nursing homes to hand deliver them. I am also an advocate of feminine hygiene products, I continued raising funds for “My Sisters’ Place” by PayPal.

As people started working from home, many cars were not on the streets, which reduced pollution, minimal to no commuting time for many, energy savings for big office buildings, and family time together to name just a few benefits. This technology allowed me to connect with some of my distant family members, whom I had not seen or talked at all, due to living in different countries. This pandemic brought families together. This is one of the greatest benefits one can dream about and one of many things I am truly thankful for.

Hope plays a major role and motivates us to look forward and provides us with a positive vision for the future showing us the vast amount of possibilities to achieve. We have to be optimistic. Research depicts hope will improve mental and physical health. Hope gives meaning to our lives, especially during tough times such as the pandemic. I also realized that the communications with my friends and family tend to be a better path for the future. The pandemic has shown me that it is important to focus not only on long-term hopes and goals, but on the short-term too. We need to focus on present conditions and ask ourselves, how we can address them. It is time for us to act and we need to make a difference in the community. With hope and support you can embrace a “new normal” and follow the light of hope.

In conclusion, I would say even though COVID-19 has brought so many bad memories, the feeling of hope in all of this is a positive thing which will make us all stronger together for a better future. We need to embrace a new normal life and make the best out of it. We have lost so many lives, we must be safe and strong, socially distancing, and practice wearing masks. The most important attributes I have learned during this pandemic are to be strong, have patience, be hopeful and never forget to help others when they need you the most!