A place to belong

The role of local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness

August 2018

UK YOUTH

Contents

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UK YOUTH

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> " We want to encourage other funders, sector leaders and policy-makers to join us in responding to these insights from the front-line. By working together we can unlock the full potential of local youth services to help all young people find a sense of belonging."
> The Co-op Foundation

Introduction

A message from UK Youth

Founded in 1911, UK Youth provides young people aged 9-25 with high quality services, delivered through a network of locally accessible youth organisations across the UK. Together we offer support, advice and training to over a million young people to equip them with skills for the future and help them engage in education, volunteering and employment. Our mission is to provide access to appropriate, high quality services for young people in every community so that all young people are empowered to build bright futures, regardless of their background or circumstances.

We are delighted to present this work with the Co-op Foundation as part of our purpose to amplify the needs of local youth organisations at a national level and advocate for their vital role in society. Although youth organisations play a key role in thousands of young people's lives in local communities across the UK, what they do for young people is not always widely understood. By looking at a timely and important topic like loneliness, we hope this research can shed further light on how it can be addressed, better articulating not only the existing role youth organisations play in addressing it but also how they can be further supported and strengthened to do so in the future, as part of a wider strategy.

A message from our supporter, The Co-op Foundation

Youth loneliness is widespread, but not widely understood. That's why the Co-op Foundation launched 'Belong', our UK-wide network of partners helping young people beat loneliness through co-operative action.

We know good-quality youth work can act as an important line of defence against loneliness - particularly for the most vulnerable young people, who may lack strong support from family or friends. But we also recognise that many youth services face challenges that may affect their confidence and capacity to tackle loneliness as effectively and sustainably as they would like to.

By funding UK Youth to carry out this research, we wanted to start a wider discussion about the role of youth organisations in tackling loneliness. We want to encourage other funders, sector leaders and policy-makers to join us in responding to these insights from the front-line. By working together we can unlock the full potential of local youth services to help all young people find a sense of belonging.

As this report is published, the Co-op Foundation is proud to be working in partnership with the UK Government on a dedicated £2 million youth strand of the Building Connections Fund. This will be used to scale up, join up and build the evidence base for effective approaches to youth loneliness.

For more information about the Co-op Foundation, our Belong network and the Building Connections Fund, visit www.coopfoundation.org.uk. Everyone can play a part in tackling loneliness in our communities, and we encourage all readers of this report to get involved.

Executive summary

Introduction and methodology

This report focuses on the role of local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness from the perspective of youth workers. We looked at four themes:

» awareness of youth loneliness
» capability to address youth loneliness
» barriers to addressing youth loneliness
» support required to more effectively address youth loneliness.

Evidence was collected on these four themes using three methodologies with youth workers from across the UK: a quantitative online survey with 152 respondents, three focus groups, and 12 in-depth interviews.

Youth loneliness from the perspective of youth workers

This section focuses on youth loneliness from the perspective of youth workers. Overall, we found six key insights:

» Youth workers agree that loneliness is a problem they observe in young people;
» Youth workers think the problem is made worse by cuts to youth services;
» Youth workers are aware of the complexity of youth loneliness, especially around when it occurs, and how it can be both a cause of problems and an effect;
» Youth workers identify four key risk factors to loneliness in young people: going through difficult situations, having weak social networks, having high expectations of their social networks, and not having the skills to cope with difficulty;
» Although most youth workers feel able to identify loneliness generally, doing this on an individual level with young people is still challenging due to its sensitivity and complexity;
» Youth workers report that young people don't generally actively seek help for loneliness, either through not identifying it themselves or not wanting to admit it.

How youth organisations currently address youth loneliness

This section of the report explores the current capability and role of local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness. Overall, we found seven key insights:

» Youth workers believe they are already addressing youth loneliness, even if it isn't always a stated goal or made the explicit purpose of their activity;
» Local youth organisations provide safe spaces for young people to engage and build relationships;
» Local youth organisations foster a sense of belonging for young people, especially for those without strong family units;
» Local youth organisations provide positive relationships with other young people and trusted adults. These build community and encourage young people to take part in positive activities;
» Local youth organisations support young people to gain the skills to respond to difficulty through taking part in different types of activities;
» Local youth organisations refer young people to specialist support in health, social care and advice;
» Local youth organisations provide this support best through the consistent delivery of three major types of youth work: centre-based open access provision, targeted programmes, and detached youth work.

The support needed by local youth organisations to more effectively address youth loneliness

This final results section explores the additional support youth workers request to enable them to more effectively address youth loneliness. We identified seven areas of support:

» Youth workers need clarity on what the accepted definition of youth loneliness is, and what the strategy and vision is for addressing it;
» Youth workers are clear that young people must be at the centre of developing solutions and responses to youth loneliness;
» Youth workers request renewed and specific funding to deliver more and better relationship-based work with young people;
» Youth workers think that more needs to be done to help them reach young people who aren't currently engaging in local youth organisations, both through detached youth work and better referral-in processes from other organisations working with young people;
» Youth workers would value advice, guidance and resources to help raise awareness of the issues of loneliness;
» Youth workers would value programmes, activities and resources that specifically address youth loneliness;
» Youth workers would value better support and pathways to refer young people to health, social care and other specialist providers when they need it.

Recommendations to support youth organisations to more effectively address youth loneliness

From the themes discussed above, a number of practical steps are suggested by youth workers to support local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness.

At a strategic level, we recommend:
1. Support for further research and consultation with youth workers, young people and experts to develop a youth sector-wide strategy for youth loneliness;
2. A commitment from government and other major stakeholders to fund the involvement of young people in the co-design of specific solutions and resources to ensure they are realistic and fit for purpose;
3. An increase in core funding to enable existing local youth organisations to provide support to young people at risk of loneliness;
4. An increase in funding for detached work to allow youth organisations to better engage those young people who can't access, or aren't accessing, youth services.

At a delivery level, we recommend:
1. Development of tools and resources to help youth workers raise awareness of loneliness, appropriately and effectively among all young people;
2. Development of activities and resources to help youth workers identify young people at risk of loneliness, and young people to identify themselves and their peers as at risk and in need of support;
3. Development of activities and funded programmes that build resilience and strong support networks – two key protective factors in reducing the risk of loneliness;
4. Development of an organisational 'diagnostic' to allow local youth organisations to self-assess and improve their ability and capacity to address youth loneliness;
5. Development of an appropriate measurement framework and indicators to enable organisations to identify, support and demonstrate success in supporting young people into positive relationships and belonging;
6. Development of better links between local youth organisations and local educational, health and social services to both 'refer-in' and 'refer-out' young people to provide better holistic support.

Conclusion

Youth workers agree that loneliness is a problem for young people with many drivers and consequences. It is simultaneously a 'common experience' yet complex, subjective and difficult to pin down at an individual level. Although there is not a consistent understanding, there is clearly a wealth of insight amongst youth workers, as this report has drawn out.

Youth workers are clear that the core work of youth organisations is ideally placed to be a key part of the solution to addressing youth loneliness. They offer young people safe spaces to engage, a sense of belonging, opportunities to build social networks, and have someone to talk to about their experiences. Local youth organisations provide opportunities to develop skills to empower young people to address their own loneliness and support young people to access more specialised help when necessary.

However, whilst local youth organisations are well-placed to address youth loneliness, youth workers require further support to be as effective as they could be. Youth organisations require strategic and tactical guidance on how to address youth loneliness, renewed funding and more collaborative working between local services.

Overall, local youth organisations are – and have always been – well placed to be part of the solution to the growing challenge of youth loneliness. What they need now is additional support to both continue and improve what they offer young people. If the recommendations in this report were taken forward, local youth organisations could make a substantial positive difference in the fight against youth loneliness.

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Methodology

Research context

The situation of local youth organisations
This report focuses on the perspectives of youth workers from local youth organisations across the UK.

Youth organisations are diverse, they can vary between:

| Regional infrastructure organisations | Local authority-led youth services | National charities for young people | Statutory and voluntary local youth clubs and groups |

Local youth organisations are significantly affected by recent cuts in government spending:

£750 million
cut from youth services in England and Wales by local authorities in the last six years
(YMCA, 2018)

600 youth centres
closed and the loss of 139,000 places for young people in youth services between 2012 and 2016
(Unison, 2016)

The young people that attend local youth organisations
When 'young people' are referenced within this report, it refers to young people that access youth services in their local community. For those served by UK Youth's members, the majority of young people are 8 to 24 years old and come from some of the most deprived communities in the UK. In 2016/17, 52% of young people who took part in a UK Youth programme came from the 30% most deprived areas of the UK (according to Indices of Multiple Deprivation), and 77% of young people on UK Youth's programmes face at least one personal barrier.

The most common personal barriers are:

Low income family

Not in employment, education or training (NEET)

Special educational needs (SEN)

Young carer

Mental health challenges

What youth services are offered by local youth organisations
The services offered to young people are diverse, but three common types include centre-based open access, targeted programmes, and detached youth work:
» Many local youth organisations deliver centre-based open access youth services. These services are available to any young person looking for positive activities, peer networks, advice and guidance;
» Youth workers delivering targeted programmes work with specific groups of young people to support them to gain specific life skills or support, for example employability programmes and counselling services;
» Detached youth work enables youth workers to go out and engage with young people that don't or can't access centre-based youth work. This includes visiting them in schools, parks, hospitals, housing estates and the streets.

Definition, research themes and data collection

For the purpose of the research, the definition of loneliness used was: *"Loneliness is the negative emotions that accompany a discrepancy between one's desired and achieved levels of social relations"* (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). This was communicated to youth workers as part of the qualitative work.

We used four themes about local youth organisations and youth loneliness as the basis of the methodologies designed:

» Awareness - What is the current level of understanding and awareness of youth loneliness among youth organisations?
» Capability - What is the current level of capability among youth organisations to address youth loneliness?
» Barriers - What are the current barriers to youth organisations addressing youth loneliness?
» Support - What additional support and capacity building do youth organisations require to address youth loneliness?

Evidence was collected on these four themes using three methodologies: a quantitative online survey, focus groups with youth workers, and in-depth interviews with youth workers.

Quantitative online survey

Youth workers completed an online survey between April and May 2018. The survey was shared via UK Youth's and Co-op Foundation's UK networks through newsletters, blog posts and media platforms. In total the survey received 152 responses.

The survey successfully reached a diverse range of people working in the youth sector in terms of location, types of role, and type of youth work. A more detailed breakdown of the survey participants can be found in Appendix 1.

Focus groups

We recruited three member organisations from UK Youth's network to take part in detailed qualitative work through a focus group with their youth workers. The members reflected a range of geographical locations: one in the North West, one in the Midlands, and one in the South West.

The three focus groups were facilitated in May 2018, one with each member organisation. A total of 33 youth workers, from a range of specialisms, took part across the three focus groups.

Telephone interviews

Twelve in-depth, one-on-one telephone interviews were conducted after the focus groups to further investigate any topics which arose from the discussion. Half of the interviewees had participated in the focus groups and half of them had not.

The evidence from each methodology is presented together, and the results of the research questions are split into four sections:
1. Youth loneliness from the perspective of youth workers
2. How youth organisations currently address youth loneliness
3. The support needed by youth organisations to more effectively tackle youth loneliness
4. Recommendations to support youth organisations to play their role in addressing youth loneliness more effectively

> **"** It's not just about finding them help and sending them off. We are there for them throughout their transition to ensure they feel supported."

Youth loneliness from the perspective of youth workers

The first results focus on youth loneliness from the perspective of youth workers. Overall, we found six key insights:

1. Youth workers agree that loneliness is a problem they observe in young people;
2. Youth workers think the problem is made worse by the cuts to youth services;
3. Youth workers are aware of the complexity of youth loneliness, especially around when it occurs, and how it can be both a cause of problems and an effect;
4. Youth workers identify four key risk factors to loneliness in young people: going through difficult situations; having weak social networks; having high expectations of their social networks; and not having the skills to cope with difficulty;
5. Although most youth workers feel able to identify loneliness generally, doing this on an individual level with young people is still challenging due to its sensitivity and complexity;
6. Youth workers report that young people don't generally actively seek help for loneliness, either through not identifying it themselves or not wanting to admit it.

1. Youth workers agree that loneliness is a problem they observe in young people

Overall, 82% of youth workers agree that youth loneliness is an issue for the young people they work with. Of these, 50% agree and 32% strongly agree with the statement.

> **Youth worker** **"** *It absolutely is a huge issue for young people and one that cannot be ignored."*

Although most youth workers agreed that loneliness is an issue, those who deliver detached and targeted work are the most likely to 'strongly agree'. This could be for a number of reasons. First, it could be that young people who participate in targeted work are likely to be experiencing difficult situations which youth workers see as increasing the risk of feeling lonely. Second, young people who are targeted by detached services may have weaker overall social support networks. Third, those who work with young people one-to-one or in smaller groups in detached and targeted support may be more aware of the problem than those who work with larger groups.

Overall, youth workers believe that young people of all ages experience loneliness, with over one third (36%) stating young people of all ages are equally affected. However, many do think there is a specific age group most affected. 12 to 15 year olds are most commonly thought to be at higher risk (25% of respondents), followed by 16 to 18 year olds (20%). These results were consistent regardless of the age range youth workers work with.

This is perhaps a significant finding as other research (e.g. Community Life Survey) has not explored the prevalence of loneliness amongst those under 16. Therefore this suggests that intervention and support should begin earlier than 16 to be most effective.

Youth workers' view on what age a young person will most likely experience loneliness

Under 12	12-15	16-18	19-21	22 & over	All ages	Not sure
1%	25%	20%	9%	2%	36%	7%
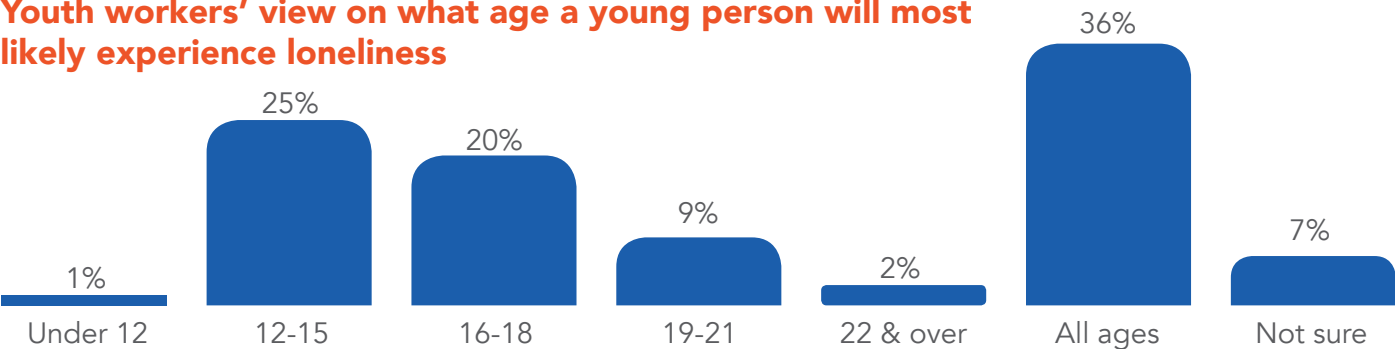
Youth workers were clear that loneliness is a common feeling that everyone may experience at some point in their life. However, they think that loneliness becomes a problem when it is experienced frequently or a young person cannot escape a negative cycle of feeling lonely. One youth worker said:

> *Loneliness becomes a problem when it stops a young person from doing what they want to do next."*

2. Youth workers think the problem is made worse by the cuts to youth services

Overall, youth workers think there has been an increase in youth loneliness, alongside an increase in other challenges as well. Significant declines and pressures in social care, health and advice services have had a negative impact on young people's experience of life. The following quotes illustrate this clearly:

> *"We've always been there, we just can't do as much since the cuts. There's so much to do but we don't have the capacity to do it."*
>
> *"Services are really struggling to be around all [the lonely young people] to the extent they need – the capacity is really stretched, something is always going to get missed."*
>
> *"Every age group goes through [loneliness] but there's been a decline in support services and now, where there would have been help in the past, it's only available to [young people] when they're at a crisis point."*

Some youth workers even pointed to the possible wider consequences of youth loneliness in recent times:

> *When you think about it, the two biggest issues of recent times – safeguarding and anti-radicalisation – are closely linked to this issue of loneliness and lack of belonging."*

Whilst another explained

> *Gang culture is the first point of call for people who are new to this area."*

Although this research did not directly ask about the role of cuts in youth loneliness, it is clear that youth workers see a link between the two. They also see that while funding has been put into addressing these symptomatic issues – safeguarding and radicalisation - there has been only limited response to restoring funding to provide the services that play a preventative role in youth loneliness.

£750 million cut from youth services in England and Wales by local authorities in the last six years

> **You could write a load of issues that affect young people and what they experience on a flipchart paper and anything on there could contribute to loneliness."**

3. Youth workers are aware of the complexity around 'loneliness'

There is consistent awareness of the complexity of 'loneliness' among youth workers, with a wide range of opinions on what it is, and where it comes from. This was partly due to a lack of opportunity to discuss the issue before, and many youth workers' perception of loneliness actually developed throughout the focus groups as a result of discussion. They are aware of the wide range of causes and 'symptoms' of loneliness, and debated the subtle differences between being content on your own, being isolated and being lonely. One youth worker explained:

> *I've been working with a young man who prefers being alone and he's happy that way, he doesn't need many friends."*

The current lack of clarity within the sector is also founded in the absence of a universally accepted definition of loneliness that makes sense to the lay-person, and one that effectively separates it from other words like 'alone', 'solitude', and 'isolation'. The definition offered in the research: *"Loneliness is the negative emotions that accompany a discrepancy between one's desired and achieved levels of social relations"* – was mostly understood when explained, however the academic nature of the language made it a definition that some youth workers wouldn't use when talking about it.

Without a definition around which to draw clarity, it will be hard to ensure all youth workers understand exactly what is being targeted, and therefore have a consistent approach to addressing all aspects of youth loneliness.

4. Youth workers identify four key risk factors to loneliness in young people

Whilst there is a lack of consistent clarity around youth loneliness, across the research youth workers did consistently describe four risks factors to loneliness in young people.

The four risk factors, shown in the diagram below, are:
1. Going through a significant or difficult situation(s)
2. Weak social networks
3. High expectation of social networks
4. Limited ability to cope with difficult situations (i.e. low emotional and social capabilities, especially resilience and confidence)

The risk factors of youth loneliness

1. Going through a significant or difficult situation(s)

Greatest level of risk

4. Low ability to cope with difficulty

2. Weak social networks

3. High expectation of social networks
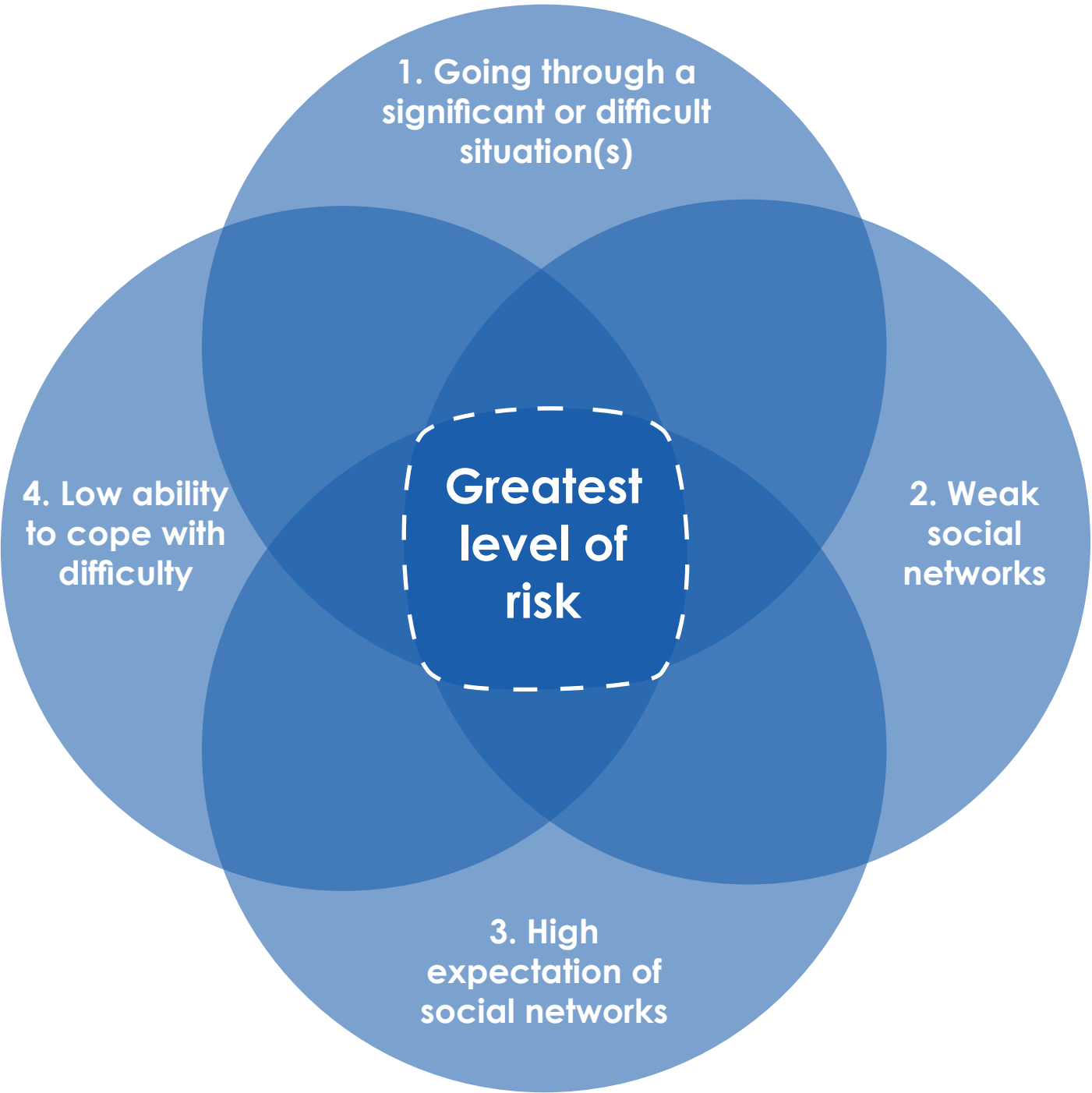
Each of these risk indicators can change throughout a young person's life and are interrelated. Although a young person doesn't need to have high risk on all four of the scales to feel lonely, the model helps understand who is most at risk. The next section explores these four risk factors in detail.

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Risk indicator 1: Going through a significant or difficult situation(s) increases the risk of youth loneliness
Youth workers recognise that most lonely young people are also experiencing difficult situations in their lives. This was referenced as a risk to youth loneliness more often than any other factor. Youth workers identified numerous difficult situations that can increase the risk of youth loneliness. One youth worker said:

> " *You could write a load of issues that affect young people and what they experience on a flipchart paper and anything on there could contribute to loneliness.* "

The breadth of this list identified by youth workers includes:

- » Poor mental/physical health or disability
- » Feeling different or not fitting in
- » Not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- » Identifying as LGBTQ
- » Living in a rural area

- » Being a young carer
- » Being a young parent
- » Being homeless or living in temporary accommodation
- » Bullying
- » Experiencing negative effects of social media
- » Leaving care

- » Puberty
- » Exam pressures
- » Relationship breakdown
- » Parental divorce or separation
- » Bereavement
- » Residential moves
- » Moving to the UK from abroad

When asked to identify 'the major causes of youth loneliness' in the online survey, the top three answers provided by youth workers were feeling different or not fitting in (86%), bullying (83%) and problems with mental health (79%). These scenarios may be the most common because, as well as occurring in isolation, they can occur as a result of many other events.

Any kind of change was also identified as another significant event and risk. Although key 'transition' points were mentioned - such as from school to university, or education to work - other changes were also thought to be just as influential e.g. personal relationship breakdown. One youth worker stated that:

> " *Anything to do with change contributes to loneliness, whether that's in their body as they're going through puberty or it's a new school or a new place.* "

In these difficult events, situations or changes, young people are likely to need a new, greater level of specific support from their relationships. They also cause young people to feel different to those around them, and become more physically, socially, or emotionally isolated.

The range and variety of events, situations and changes demonstrates why loneliness is something that can arise from everyday life situations in any young person, not just the minority.

> " **We need to bring young people to the forefront of the debate. They need to be involved in this discussion.** "

Risk indicator 2: A weak social network

Youth workers believe that all young people require access to a reliable group of peers and adults that accept them and with whom they feel comfortable speaking about their lives. Conversely, the weaker this network is for an individual, the greater the risk of becoming lonely.

One particular challenge is that many young people heavily prioritise and invest in the number of connections on online social networks, and the number of 'likes' for what they post and share online. Although this can give a young person the experience of a strong network around them, youth workers know this is not the same thing as meaningful connections and friendships offline. If these aren't built as well then it leaves young people without the support they need when difficult situations arise.

More generally, youth workers' descriptions of the barriers young people face to strong social networks can be mapped in four ways:

Loneliness caused by a lack of support during a life event or situation	Loneliness caused by rejection or denial of support	Loneliness caused by refusal or inability to share with others	Loneliness caused by practical or geographical barriers
"I've tried to share but no one understands what I'm going through"	*"I feel rejected or not accepted by those around me"*	*"I can't or won't share what I'm going through"*	*"I can't connect with the people I want to"*
Young people experience that they don't have the right support around them to cope with a specific life situation, even though they may have tried	Young people experience rejection from those around them, whether family, friends or 'society' through media/social media	Young people refuse to share what they're going through with others, even if people are around them	Young people experience barriers to socialising with their friends or family or building new relationships, either through ongoing circumstances or major events

Risk indicator 3: High expectations of social networks

Youth workers were clear that a young person's high expectations of their social network – online and in person - increases their risk of becoming lonely.

Those with high and potentially unrealistic social expectations – especially around popularity - are more at risk of feeling lonely as they are more likely to experience a gap between expectation and reality. Expectations include the number of individuals in their friendship group, regularity of contact, the quality of contact, and the ability to relate to others. These expectations are most dangerous when they come from peers or society and not from a young person themselves.

As part of this, youth workers are clear on the challenging role of social media. Young people can equate social connection and support with social media 'likes' and 'follows'. This is publicly available information which can set young people's expectations of social response online very high – and have them dashed just as quickly if they are not met.

Whether online or offline, high and unrealistic expectations of social networks can drive feelings of loneliness, especially around the complex and often-changing social worlds of young people.

Risk indicator 4: Low ability to cope with difficult situations

Youth workers frequently refer to the role of emotional and social capabilities, in coping with and addressing youth loneliness – specifically resilience, communication and self-awareness. Youth workers state that the more capable a young person is in these areas, the greater their ability to cope with or support themselves out of a difficult situation.

Conversely, those with low ability to cope with difficult situations are at greater risk of becoming lonely. One youth worker explained:

> *It's about supporting young people to be resilient, confident and able to communicate and put themselves out there – the softer skills. So they can deal with life."*

Whilst another stated:

> *You're never going to eradicate [loneliness] because life isn't linear, it's a rollercoaster with challenges. Things happen in life so I think it's about building personal resilience."*

5. Youth workers use relationships to identify loneliness - but it can still be a challenge

Two thirds of youth workers (66%) claim that they know how to identify whether a young person is feeling lonely – of which 52% agree and 14% strongly agree. Only 10% think they don't know how to identify it. This suggests that youth workers do often feel they can identify it, but that not many are extremely confident.

The extent that youth workers agree or disagree that 'I know how to identify if a young person is feeling lonely'

0% strongly disagree   **10%** disagree   **24%** not sure   **52%** agree   **14%** strongly agree

This balanced level of confidence was articulated in the focus groups as youth workers knew how they'd identify loneliness – through relationships and individual communication – but said even within this identification of loneliness in a young person could still be challenging because of its complexity.

The symptoms of loneliness that youth workers might look out for - e.g. substance misuse, self-harm, and self-imposed isolation – are both similar to those of other problems, and yet these will also differ depending on the young person. For example, some young people may become reserved and disengaged, whereas others may be aggressive or exhibit behavioural issues.

For this reason, youth workers are not sure if youth loneliness will have its own set of 'methods' that they would use. Instead, in order to identify any role loneliness may be playing, a youth worker would aim to build a positive relationship with a young person and facilitate conversations to find out what is going on and try to support them accordingly.

Youth worker

> *[A youth worker's] response to youth loneliness must be holistic – it can't just be focused on isolation."*

Another youth worker said:

> *[Our work on] engagement, connections and signposting…all of it contributes to a young person feeling connected in and making relationships."*

6. Youth workers report that young people don't actively seek help for loneliness

Youth workers believe that young people know when something isn't right and that they are experiencing negative emotions, however most don't realise that they are or may be feeling lonely. Youth workers report that many don't use the words 'lonely' and 'loneliness'. One youth worker said:

> " *Loneliness isn't a word they'd use, it's something we see.* "

49% of youth workers disagree or strongly disagree that young people 'often admit they feel lonely', whilst only 35% agree or strongly agree. This suggests that it is something that varies significantly across different young people.

The extent that youth workers agree or disagree that "young people often admit they feel lonely"

42% disagree

7% strongly disagree

27% agree

16% not sure
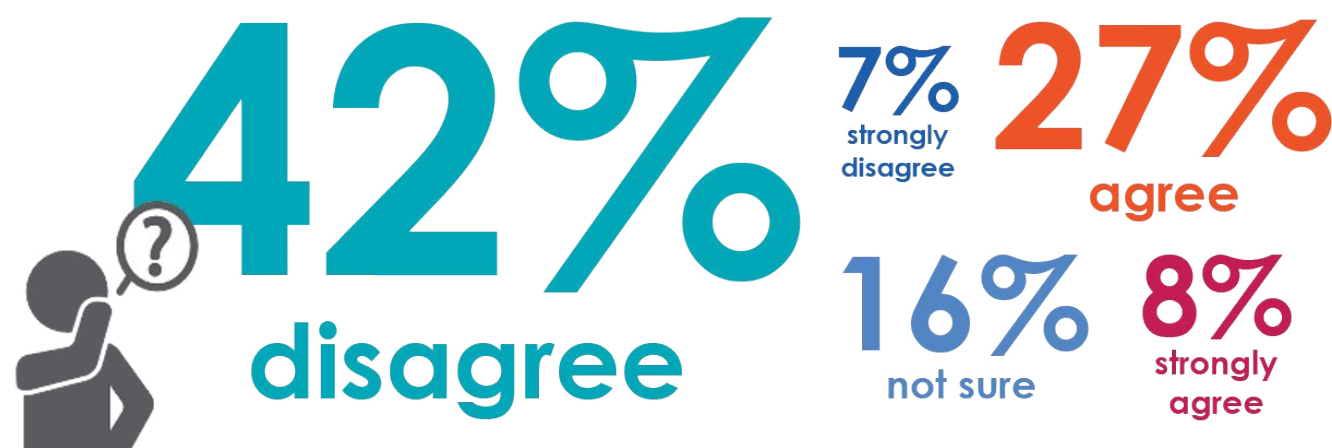
8% strongly agree

Even if some do admit to being lonely, **the majority (73%) of youth workers disagree or strongly disagree that young people actively seek help for loneliness.** Youth workers state that the stigma around loneliness, in addition to the challenges around self-identification and communication, are what stop young people from seeking help.

Young people can often feel pressured to be perceived as perfect and may not want to tell someone they feel lonely due to embarrassment. This may make them unable to speak to their parents or other family members as they don't want to disappoint them or cause concern – this stigma and pressure can then reinforce the isolation and loneliness the young person is facing.

This reluctance or inability to seek help for loneliness means that young people need a strong relationship with a trusted adult before they feel comfortable to talk freely about their feelings and experiences.

Youth workers believe that due to increased emotional intelligence, communication skills and self-awareness as young people get older, they are more able to identify and communicate when they're lonely.

Section summary

The research has uncovered a variety of themes in terms of youth workers' understanding of youth loneliness reflecting both the complexity of the issue and the level of experience and understanding that youth workers do have around it already.

Youth workers agree that loneliness is a problem for young people and believe that cuts and closures of support and enabling services have exacerbated it. Youth workers are aware of four factors that increase the risk of youth loneliness. They include going through a wide range of difficult situations, weak social networks, high expectations of social networks, and low ability to cope with challenging situations. However, this diversity means that although youth workers say they can generally identify loneliness in young people through relationships, it can still be challenging to pinpoint due to the complexity and individual nature of feeling lonely. This is made more difficult by young people's reluctance or inability to communicate their loneliness.

From the insight of this section, appendix two proposes a model that offers clarity to the stages of loneliness that young people experience and highlights that support can be provided at various stages, not just when loneliness becomes a significant problem.

Does social media affect youth loneliness?

Youth workers were unsure of the role of social media in youth loneliness

Although youth workers consistently reported that social media plays a major role in young people's lives, they were unsure whether it plays a positive or negative role in loneliness among young people.

On one hand, social media allows young people to have many online and digital conversations, building their online communication skills. On the other hand it may also be limiting development of face-to-face social, communication and relationship-building skills, which are key when seeking support.

For some young people, social media also encourages them to compare themselves to unrealistic and unattainable ideals. Youth workers express concern that this can cause young people to feel pressured or inadequate and consequently isolate themselves.

Overall, social media is seen as amplifying existing situations and experiences. One youth worker said: "I think it has exacerbated issues that were already there. It's easier to hide away. You can look on at what you're missing and that adds to anxieties you already have about where you're at." And another said: "Social media is not a cause but an 'enabler'; if you're prone to loneliness then social media will provide additional triggers for you to feel it."

However, youth workers were aware that young people can easily access a social network online. This removes barriers for young people to connect with like-minded people that enjoy the same things or can relate to the problems a young person is experiencing. Youth workers consider this to be particularly important for those experiencing uncommon problems or that are physically isolated, such as those that live in rural areas, those without access to transport or those with disabilities that limit accessibility.

Finally, youth workers recognise the 'masking' effect that digital technology and social media play in helping them identify loneliness. A young person always on their phone and not connecting with others in person may either be extremely lonely or not lonely at all. One youth worker explained: "Who are we to judge that they've got a loneliness problem if they've just got their phone? It's a different generation. They've got different lives to what we had." Another youth worker said "social media is changing relationships in ways we don't understand."
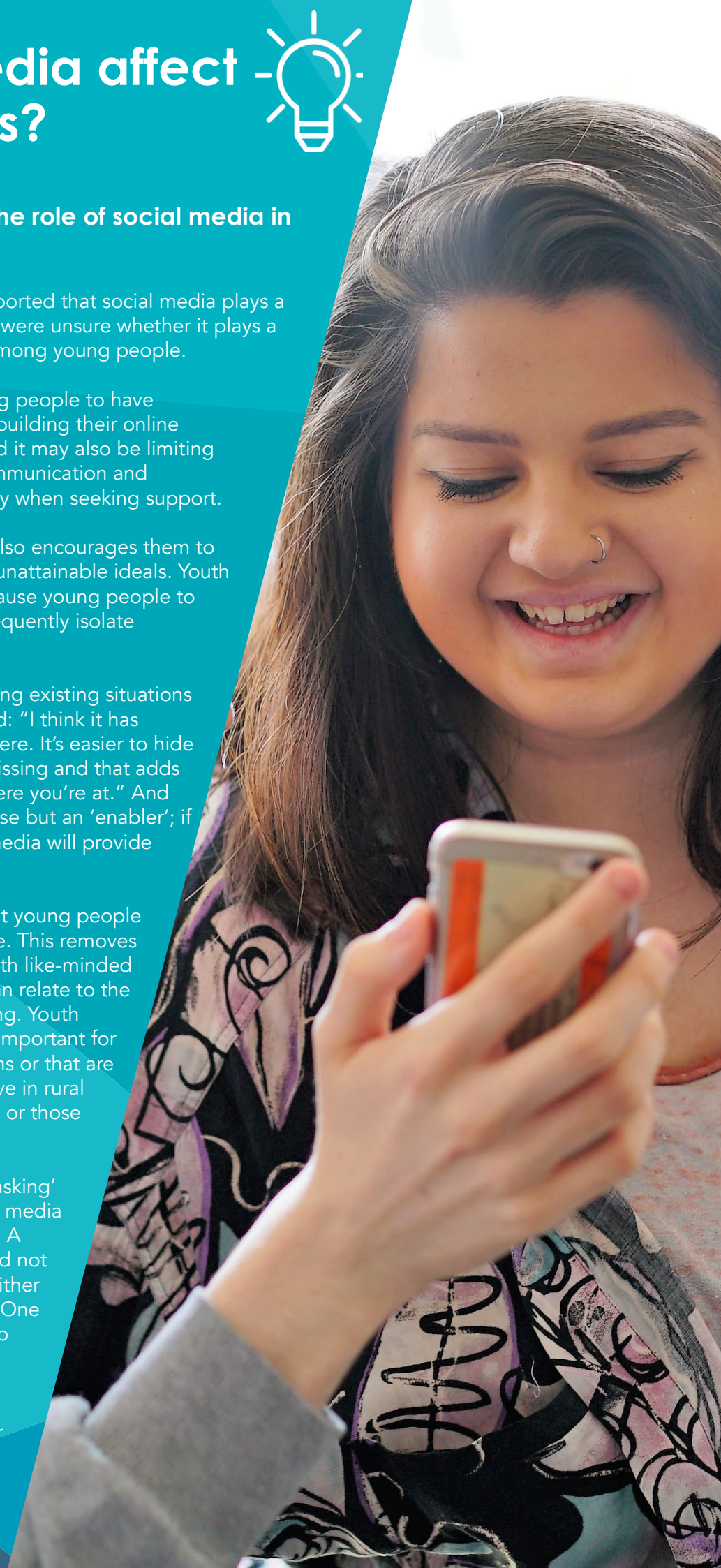
How youth organisations currently address youth loneliness

This section of the report explores the current capability and role of local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness. Overall, we found that:

1. Youth workers believe they are already addressing youth loneliness, even if it isn't always a stated goal or made the explicit purpose of their activity;
2. Local youth organisations provide safe spaces for young people;
3. Local youth organisations foster a sense of belonging for young people;
4. Local youth organisations provide positive relationships with other young people and trusted adults;
5. Local youth organisations support young people to gain the skills to respond to difficulty;
6. Local youth organisations refer young people to specialist support in health, social care and advice;
7. Local organisations deliver this support through the consistent delivery of three major types of youth work: centre-based open access provision, targeted programmes, and detached youth work.

Youth organisations already address youth loneliness

67% of youth workers state that their youth organisation currently has support for young people who feel lonely. However, only 15% of youth workers claim that they run programmes to specifically address youth loneliness. Those that state they run programmes that specifically address youth loneliness are generally delivering wider-reaching programmes on topics such as mental health, wellbeing and self-esteem, and building positive relationships.

Youth workers report that, upon reflection, reducing or preventing youth loneliness has always been one of the outcomes of youth work. One youth worker said

> " *Tackling isolation and loneliness should and does run through everything we do.* "

And another said

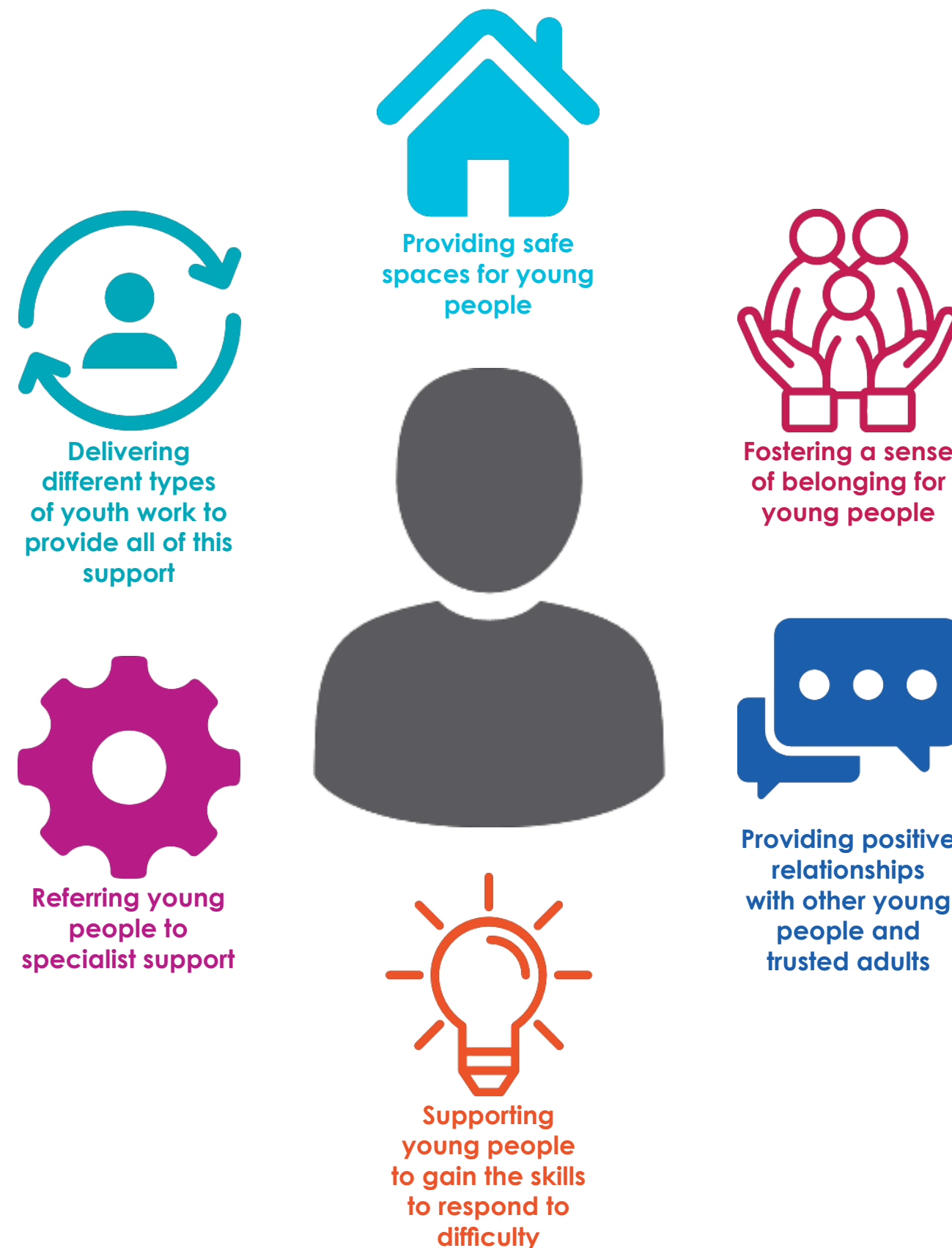> " *We've always been working to reduce loneliness, we've just not been calling it that.* "

However, because this perspective is not widely seen or articulated, the sector hasn't traditionally used the term 'youth loneliness' or placed a significant focus on the problem. The lack of clarity around youth loneliness means that there isn't a single approach in how it is being addressed within the sector, and it isn't an explicit priority for all youth organisations. 31% of youth workers disagreed that it was an explicit goal of their youth organisations, and a further 41% weren't sure - only 28% agreed addressing youth loneliness was a priority.

The extent to which youth workers agree or disagree that *"an explicit goal of the youth organisation is to address youth loneliness"*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
9%	22%	41%	19%	9%
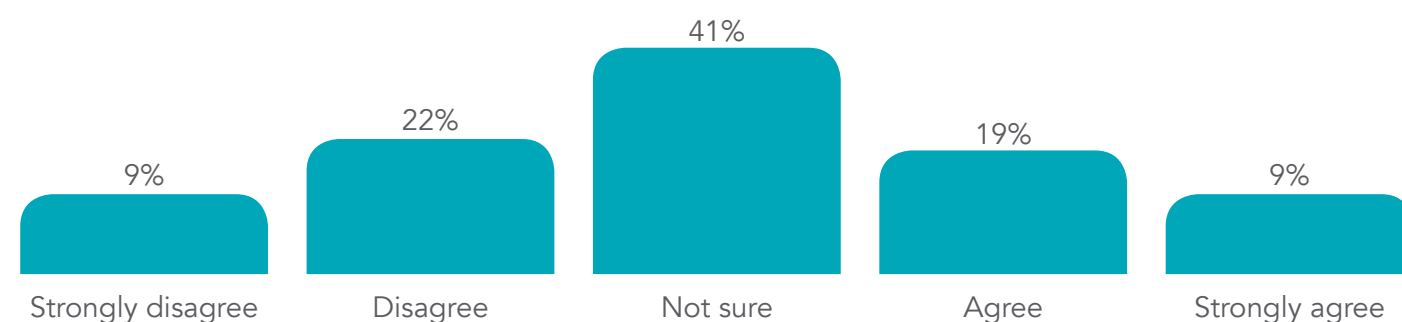
However youth workers are clear on the ways in which they do address youth loneliness, whether explicitly stated or otherwise.

Youth organisations currently address youth loneliness through six key activities:

Providing safe spaces for young people

Fostering a sense of belonging for young people

Delivering different types of youth work to provide all of this support

Referring young people to specialist support

Supporting young people to gain the skills to respond to difficulty

Providing positive relationships with other young people and trusted adults

Youth organisations provide safe spaces for young people

In the first instance, local youth organisations provide safe spaces for young people to go and spend time – therefore youth workers are able to engage them and build relationships. These safe spaces are primary enablers, providing young people with a place to reduce their risk of loneliness and reconnect when they are feeling disconnected. However, **youth workers recognise that these safe spaces are quickly reducing due to public sector cuts** (YMCA, 2018). Youth workers know that this disproportionately affects those that can't access extra-curricular activities elsewhere, such as low income families that can't afford paid alternatives.

Cuts to the sector have shut down many youth centres and young people are increasingly being moved on from public spaces over concerns for the safety of them and other members of the public. One youth worker said:

> *Parents don't feel as comfortable about young people going out. There are less social spaces for young people. If there's no meeting place that parents are happy for you to go to then this adds to that social isolation."*

Youth organisations foster a sense of belonging for young people

Offering a sense of belonging has always been a key goal of youth organisations; providing young people with access to an accepting and diverse 'community' where they live, especially for those without other support. One youth worker said:

> *For some young people without family and friends, the youth group is their substitute family."*

A sense of belonging is likely to be generated by different types of engagement with a local youth organisation. For some, it may stem from regular attendance at the youth organisation and the networks that young people create as they visit. For others it may be specifically generated when they engage with specific activities or groups, such as groups for those with special educational needs or disabilities or that identify as LGBTQ. A sense of belonging can also develop when young people participate in group activities with a common aim e.g. skill development, or long-term volunteering and social action opportunities.

Youth organisations provide positive relationships with other young people and trusted adults

Loneliness can develop when young people don't have a strong social network or someone to talk to when problems arise. This could be another young person or a trusted adult. Youth workers believe that local youth organisations create opportunities for young people to build relationships, allowing them to share their experiences with people that understand. This consequently strengthens young people's social networks and reduces their risk of feeling lonely.

Youth organisations provide young people with access to people they can connect with when they feel lonely. This network can also identify a young person at risk and play an important preventative role in addressing loneliness.

Unlike teachers or doctors, youth workers are able to **build professional yet informal relationships with young people.** Local youth organisations therefore enable young people to build positive relationships with trusted adults which provide young people with an accessible and safe way of seeking help.

Youth organisations help young people gain the skills to respond to difficulty

Many services and activities provided by local youth organisations – like regular open access activities, targeted programmes and specialised one-to-one support – already aim to build young people's emotional and social capabilities, as well as improve a wide range of skills, attitudes and behaviours. Targeted programmes and support groups are also available for young people experiencing particular life events and difficult situations. Existing provision therefore has the capability to play a large role in providing young people with the skills needed to address loneliness.

Youth workers also believe that young people can increase their emotional and social capabilities by participating in activities such as social action, volunteering, mentoring and youth-led projects. Local youth organisations provide opportunities to participate in these activities and signpost and encourage young people to participate in opportunities provided by other organisations.

Youth organisations can refer young people to specialist support

Whilst youth organisations play a role in providing support to many young people at risk or experiencing loneliness, the involvement from a number of services and organisations is necessary.

Young people can speak to youth workers about their problems and, in some youth organisations, access help from specialist members of staff such as counsellors or those with specialised training. For the youth organisations that don't have this expertise available in house, youth workers can support young people to access health, social care and advice services elsewhere.

Youth organisations deliver different types of youth work to provide all of this support

The support delivered by youth organisations is done most effectively when the three major types of youth work are all present and available in a local community: centre-based open access provision, targeted programmes, and detached youth work. Each play a role that shouldn't be underestimated.

Centre-based open access provision

Youth workers see that local centre-based open access provision plays an essential role in addressing loneliness. It is a clear and essential entry point for many young people. Young people are able to connect with others, build their social networks in a safe space, and begin to take part in positive activities.

Young people can seek support by speaking to youth workers who can either offer the necessary support themselves or guide individuals to access specialised help. One youth worker explained: "open access is the fish net that catches people to identify the issues before you need the emergency nets of things like social services."

Targeted programmes

Targeted programmes can focus on young people experiencing specific challenges in their lives, whether mental health issues, special educational needs, or around education and employment. The support and skills provided often improve young people's ability to cope with, manage or solve their challenges through building their emotional and social skills, and reducing the risk of these young people becoming lonely.

Targeted provision gives young people frequent, structured, and possibly individual contact with a youth worker, which allows for stronger relationships to develop. This allows youth workers to be well-positioned to support these young people to reconnect.
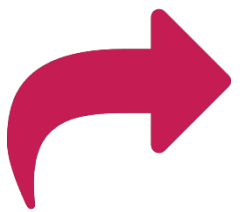
Detached youth work

Detached youth work reaches those who can't or don't access youth services. This includes those that are geographically isolated, those without family support to attend youth services, those unaware of the services available, and those who may not feel comfortable attending a youth centre or structured programme. One youth worker explained: "young people won't break their barriers to come to us, we need to go out to them and make the initial interaction."

However, youth workers highlight that funding for these services is at highest risk and that it is likely that those that are most at risk of loneliness may become even harder to reach.

Section summary

Overall, youth workers are clear that local youth organisations are already effective at addressing loneliness in young people. Local youth organisations reach and engage young people as they offer safe spaces, provide a sense of belonging, provide access to trusted adult relationships, develop personal skills in young people to cope with life events and loneliness, and refer or provide at-risk young people with the support they need. Importantly, these five dynamics are delivered through the mix of all three types of youth work: centred-based open access, targeted provision, and detached youth work.

However, despite this clear capability, youth workers also report a number of barriers and requests for support in order to maximise their potential to address youth loneliness. These are explored further in the next section.

The support needed by local youth organisations to more effectively address youth loneliness

This final results section explores the additional support youth workers requested to enable them to more effectively address youth loneliness. We found that:

» Overall, youth workers were clear that they would value more support around funding and further training to raise awareness and understanding of youth loneliness across the whole sector;
» Youth workers need clarity on what the accepted definition of youth loneliness is, and what the strategy and vision is to address it;
» Youth workers are clear that young people must be at the centre of developing solutions and responses to youth loneliness;
» Youth workers request renewed and specific funding to deliver more and better relationship-based work with young people;
» Youth workers think that more needs to be done to help them reach young people who aren't engaging with local youth organisations, both through detached youth work and better referral-in processes from other organisations working with young people;
» Youth workers would value advice, guidance and resources to help raise awareness of loneliness;
» Youth workers would value training, activities and resources specifically addressing youth loneliness;
» Youth workers would value better support and pathways to refer young people to health, social care and other specialist providers for young people who need it.

Youth workers would strongly value further support

87% of youth workers agree that they would value additional support to help their youth organisation address youth loneliness, and they are clear on the barriers that they would value help to overcome.

The most common reported barrier is a lack of funding to addressing youth loneliness. 63% of youth workers say that there isn't enough money to run a specific activity on loneliness. As well as this, 39% state that there isn't enough funding to run a youth centre in general, 36% of youth workers believe that a barrier to addressing youth loneliness is the need to address other priorities, and 16% believe there are other barriers including lack of paid staff. All of these point to youth workers feeling under-resourced and stretched to do their roles effectively – including their role in addressing youth loneliness.

The second most common barrier was around addressing youth loneliness specifically. 50% said that a lack of training related to youth loneliness, 46% a lack of understanding about youth loneliness, and 48% that young people avoid talking about loneliness. Taken alongside the findings already discussed in this report, it is again clear that whilst there is a level of understanding and awareness of the issue among youth workers, it is not thought to be universal and there is still opportunity to support the youth sector further.

During the focus groups, youth workers identified a number of areas in which they require support to most effectively address youth loneliness.

Key findings

87%
of youth workers value additional support

£ 63%
of youth workers say there isn't enough money to run a specific activity on loneliness

🏠 39%
state there isn't enough funding to run a youth centre in general

Clarity on the role of youth organisations in an overall youth loneliness strategy

This research has made clear that although youth workers have an understanding of youth loneliness, there is a lack of consistency of this understanding. Therefore despite knowing they have a key role to play, youth workers need a widely-agreed definition of what youth loneliness is and a sector-wide strategy to address it. One youth worker said:

> " *If it's going to be a government focus and initiative, there needs to be absolute clarity in the strategy - in the aim, objectives and vision, and we must be given realistic outcomes.*"

This overall lack of clarity also makes loneliness extremely difficult to measure or identify 'what success looks like'. A definition of youth loneliness and realistic 'success criteria' would enable youth workers to assess and improve their services based on insight, and generate recognition and funding to continue or grow effective services. One youth worker explained:

> " *It's impossible to show the good stuff we're doing when there's no way of measuring it.*"

Support and resources developed with a youth-led ethos

Youth workers place huge importance on the role of young people in leading how they address youth loneliness.

Youth worker " *We need to bring young people to the forefront of the debate – they need to be involved in this discussion.*"

They call for research with young people on the topic of loneliness and what can be done to address it, and that any recommended approach, programme or service that addresses youth loneliness should be co-created with young people in local communities. One youth worker said:

> " *What might work well in Bolton may not work well in Oxford, or Penzance.*"

Increased core funding to continue delivering relationship-based work to existing and new young people

Youth workers highlighted the current lack of resources that limits the number of young people they can reach. However, this was not just a call for more money. Instead youth workers were specific about the additional resources they need to better address youth loneliness. These included:

» Enable more open-access spaces for young people to attend regularly and build supportive relationships;
» Provide and/or improve transport capacity to and from youth centres in order to reach geographically isolated young people;
» Employ a greater number of skilled staff to build strong relationships with more young people.

These specific areas would have a significant positive impact on youth organisations' core activities that enhance their ability to address loneliness in young people.

> " *The two biggest issues of recent times – safeguarding and anti-radicalisation – are closely linked to loneliness and lack of belonging.*"

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Increased support to reach individuals not engaging with local youth organisations

Youth workers state that more needs to be done to reach young people who are not engaging with local youth organisations, whether through barriers or lack of awareness. These may often be those who are at greater risk of feeling lonely. Additional support would include renewing funding for detached youth work so that youth workers can go out to where these young people are and engage them positively.

Youth workers also want more support from other education, health and social services providers through improved "referral-in" processes. Some youth workers are already trying to build partnerships with such organisations, but can experience barriers to doing so. One youth worker said "some services don't want to do partnership working or even share what their plans are."

As part of this, youth workers believe that all organisations involved in engaging young people need a greater awareness of the value of youth organisations in supporting young people at risk of loneliness.

Supporting youth organisations to raise awareness responsibly

Youth workers state that improved awareness can reduce the stigma associated with being lonely and encourage young people to recognise it in themselves, as well as others. One youth worker said:

> " I think it's an awareness issue in the first instance."

However, youth workers are cautious about introducing the concept of loneliness without an explanation of what it means. As one youth worker explained

> " We probably need to be careful about introducing it to [young people] because they haven't identified it as something that's a problem in their life."

Some youth workers are anxious that if awareness is not raised in a responsible, sensitive and clear way, some young people may be quick to self-diagnose and use 'loneliness' to mask other problems. This is something they've seen happen around mental health language.

Therefore youth workers would value guidance and resources to responsibly and effectively talk about loneliness with young people and encourage them to seek support. This is a particular area where young people need to be consulted in how this can be done.

Training, activities and resources to support youth workers to identify and address youth loneliness

The complexity of youth loneliness can make it feel overwhelming and some youth workers may feel unprepared to support a young person that requires significant expertise and emotional support. As one youth worker explained:

> " [Some youth workers] might realise that they're raising something they don't feel able to deal with. You don't know what you're going to unleash and if you're not confident in what that will look like and how you'd deal with it, maybe you're better leaving it alone."

Half of youth workers said a lack of training is a barrier to tackling youth loneliness

As such, some youth workers would value further training and resources in how to listen to and encourage young people to open up. One youth worker said:

> " Training would be great and although I feel I am very emotionally intelligent, it is difficult to address loneliness. I have worked with members of staff who feel "awkward" to approach such a topic with a young person."

As part of this, youth workers need to be confident in identifying which scenario they are dealing with, so they are able to take the correct course of action. One youth worker said:

> " When people are experiencing it acutely, where therapeutic help is needed, I'd say that's where it steps outside of what I can offer as a youth worker."

In addition to support for individual youth workers, youth workers suggest that the programmes and activities they already run could be developed and adapted to more explicitly address youth loneliness. Specifically, the most valuable activities and resources would be those that:

» Build awareness and understanding of loneliness amongst young people;
» Break down the stigma surrounding loneliness amongst young people;
» Provide opportunities for young people to improve their emotional and social capabilities e.g. resilience;
» Provide young people with skills and knowledge regarding how to build and use positive and supportive relationships online and offline;
» Are available and tiered to all types of youth worker: voluntary or paid, experienced or new.

Support to refer young people to specialist provision and expertise

Youth workers need access to specialists in the form of counsellors, social workers or medical experts – either internally or externally to their youth organisation – who are able to support young people that require specialised support. Therefore better "referral-out" systems which youth workers can use to ensure young people get local specialist services when needed to fully address the underlying causes of youth loneliness.

However, youth workers see their role as sitting alongside these specialist providers. One youth worker explained:

> " It's not just about finding them help and sending them off. We are there for them in that transition and ensure they feel supported."

Therefore this is about providing holistic support for young people, not moving them from one support to another.

Section summary

Overall, to enhance their existing ability to address the issue, this section has shown that youth workers would value more support to raise awareness and understanding of youth loneliness across the whole sector. This includes clarity on what the accepted definitions and strategies around youth loneliness are, ensuring that young people must be at the centre of developing these responses. They also request renewed and specific funding to deliver the primarily relationship-based work they are experts in, as well as additional support to help them play their role in engaging and supporting hard-to-reach young people at risk of loneliness.

On top of those wider levels of support, youth workers would value more guidance on how to raise awareness of the issues of loneliness effectively, and specific training to address it. Finally, youth workers would value better pathways to refer young people to specialist providers for those who need it.

These findings are distilled into a set of specific recommendations in the following and final section.

Recommendations to support youth organisations to better address youth loneliness

From the themes discussed in this report, a number of practical steps are suggested by youth workers to support local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness. These have been separated into 'strategic-level' and 'delivery-level' recommendations. Whilst not a clear cut split, we see strategic-level recommendations as changes to the wider system in which youth organisations operate and therefore delivered by national and local government and major funders. On the other hand, delivery-level recommendations are changes to how individual youth organisations are able to address youth loneliness and therefore, possibly delivered by specific youth sector funders and support organisations.

Strategic-level recommendations

Youth workers were clear that in order to help them maximise their role in addressing youth loneliness there were larger changes and improvements that they would value that are outside of their control.

These included:

Support further research and consultation
with the youth workers, young people and experts to develop a youth sector-wide strategy for youth loneliness. This would include a standardised and clear definition of youth loneliness, a coherent and long-term strategy on the sector's role in addressing it, and clarity on what "success" looks like.

A long-term commitment from government and other major stakeholders
to fund the involvement of young people in the co-design of specific solutions and resources to ensure they are realistic, fit for purpose and work for all young people rather than just those previously understood as 'at-risk'.

Increased core funding
to enable existing local youth organisations to provide more support to young people at risk of loneliness.

Increased funding for detached work
to allow youth organisations to better engage those young people who can't access, or aren't accessing, youth centres.

Delivery-level recommendations

The youth workers also made some more specific recommendations to enable their youth organisations to better address youth loneliness.
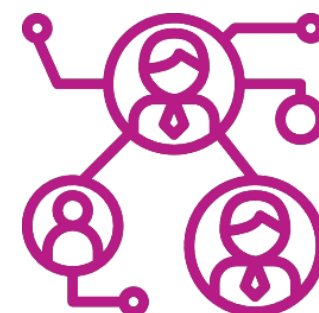
These included:

Development of training
to upskill youth workers in the area of youth loneliness, specifically:
»How to define and understand the causes of youth loneliness;
»How to identify types of loneliness in young people;
»How to raise awareness of youth loneliness appropriately;
»How to confidently discuss loneliness through empathetic listening.

Development of activities and resources
to help youth workers address loneliness with young people, specifically by:
»Building resilience, communication and other emotional and social capabilities;
»Building strong supportive relationships and social networks;
»Addressing the positive and negative role of social media.

Ongoing support for a network of youth workers
to share advice, experience and ideas on addressing youth loneliness

Development of an organisational 'diagnostic'
to allow local youth organisations to self-assess and improve their ability and capacity to address youth loneliness.

Development of an appropriate measurement framework and indicators
to enable organisations to identify, support and demonstrate success in supporting young people into positive relationships and belonging.

Development of better links
between local youth organisations and local educational, health and social services to both 'refer-in' and 'refer-out' young people to provide better holistic support.

Conclusion

Youth workers agree that loneliness is a problem for young people, with many drivers and consequences. It is a 'common experience' that any young person can face – not just those in extreme situations - and therefore can be difficult to pin down. This can make it challenging to identify and respond to, both for youth workers and for young people themselves. However, as this report has drawn out, youth workers demonstrate a wealth of insight from their experience of working with young people.

This explains why youth workers are clear that the core work of youth organisations is ideally placed to be a key part of the solution to addressing youth loneliness. They offer young people safe spaces to socialise, a sense of belonging, opportunities to build social networks, and have someone to talk to about their experiences.

Local youth organisations provide opportunities to develop skills to empower young people to address their own loneliness and support young people to access more specialised help when necessary. Local youth organisations build on-going and trusted relationships with young people who are experiencing those situations that raise the risks of loneliness.

However, whilst local youth organisations are well-placed to address youth loneliness, youth workers require further support to be as effective as they could be.

Strategically, if local youth organisations are to play their full role in addressing youth loneliness there needs to be a clear overall strategy of what loneliness is, how it is going to be addressed and what 'success' looks like. This is not a 'quick fix'. As part of this, local youth organisations need a reversal in the significant reduction in funding available to continue to deliver open-access, targeted and detached youth work for all young people, and especially those at risk of loneliness.

At a delivery level, youth workers would value clear and consistent tools to identify young people at risk of loneliness, and resources and activities to both raise awareness of the value of social support and develop the personal abilities of young people to adapt and become more resilient.

Local youth organisations would also benefit from better 'refer-in' links from educational, health and social services to engage and support young people, and 'refer-out' links to specialist services for young people whose drivers and effects of loneliness require additional help.

Overall, local youth organisations are – and have always been – well placed to be part of the solution to the growing challenge of youth loneliness. What they need now is additional support to both continue and improve what they offer young people. Were the recommendations in this report to be taken forward, local youth organisations could make a substantial positive difference in the fight against youth loneliness.

Local youth organisations can make a substantial difference in the fight against youth loneliness, if these recommendations are taken forward

" **Local youth organisations are – and have always been – well placed to be part of the solution to the growing challenge of youth loneliness.** "
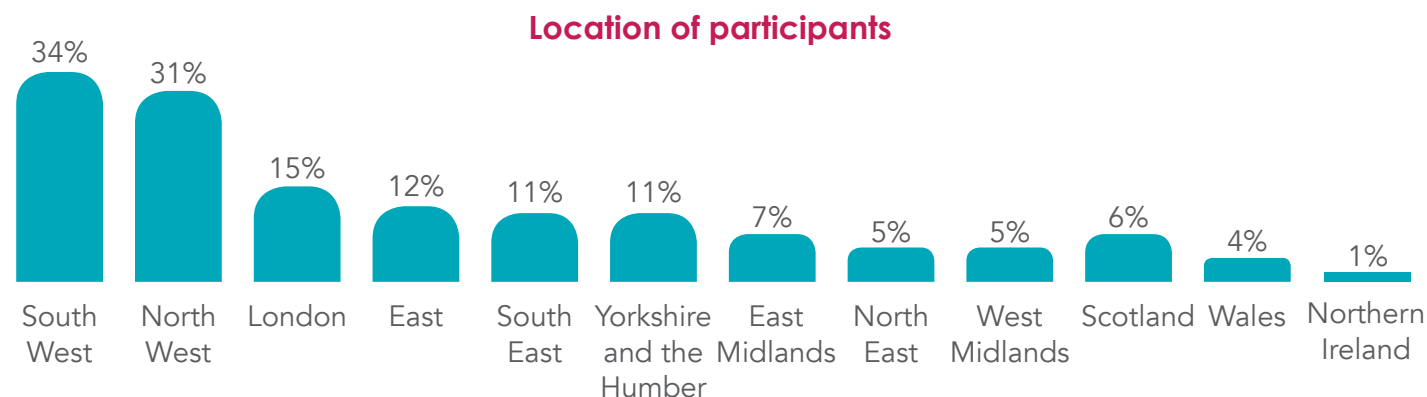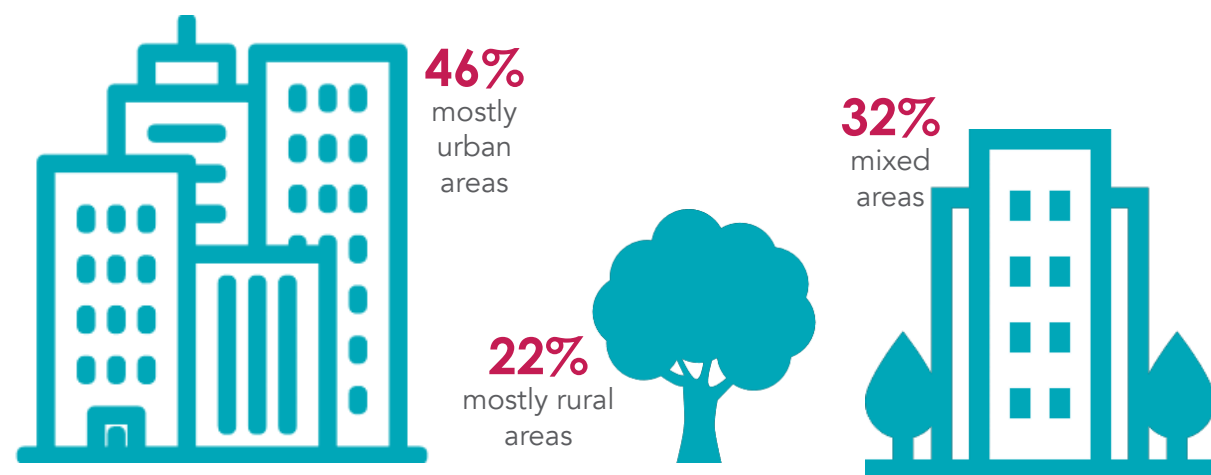
Appendix 1: Breakdown of survey participants

Location

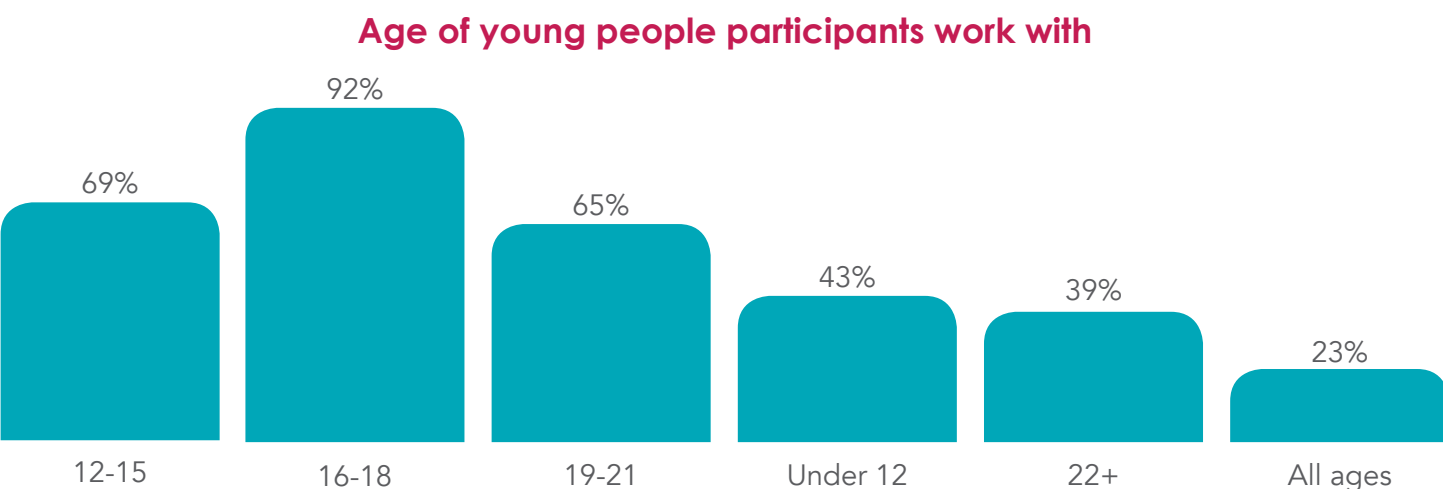The majority of participants delivered youth work in England, with many selecting more than one region.

Location of participants

Region	%
South West	34%
North West	31%
London	15%
East	12%
South East	11%
Yorkshire and the Humber	11%
East Midlands	7%
North East	5%
West Midlands	5%
Scotland	6%
Wales	4%
Northern Ireland	1%

Rural/urban

46% mostly urban areas

22% mostly rural areas

32% mixed areas

Age of the young people worked with

Those taking part in the survey most commonly work with young people aged 16-18 (92%).

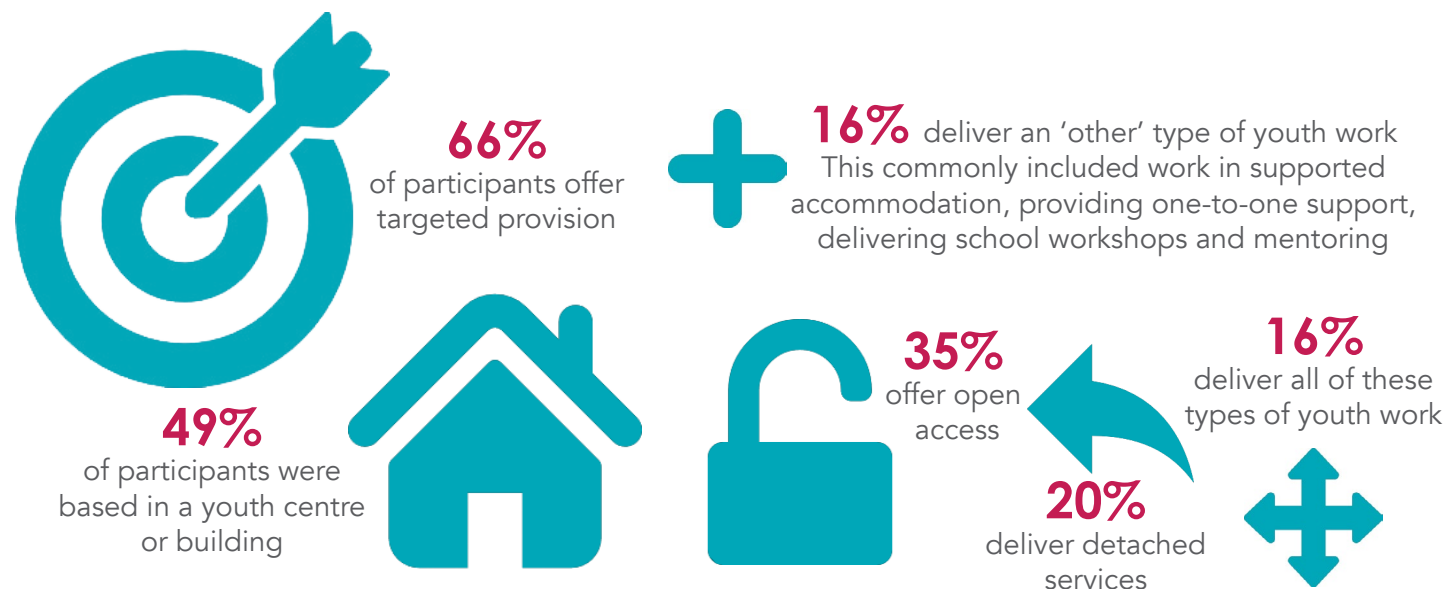### Age of young people participants work with

Age	%
12-15	69%
16-18	92%
19-21	65%
Under 12	43%
22+	39%
All ages	23%

Job role

Those that completed the survey are involved in a broad range of roles within youth organisations.

45% direct delivery

20% managerial

35% mix of both

Type of youth work

The most common type of youth work delivered by those participating in the survey is targeted provision (66%).

66% of participants offer targeted provision

16% deliver an 'other' type of youth work This commonly included work in supported accommodation, providing one-to-one support, delivering school workshops and mentoring

49% of participants were based in a youth centre or building

35% offer open access

16% deliver all of these types of youth work

20% deliver detached services

Challenges faced by young people

Youth workers stated that the three most common challenges that the young people they work with face are: poor mental health (67%), low income families (59%) and a lack of education, employment or training (41%).
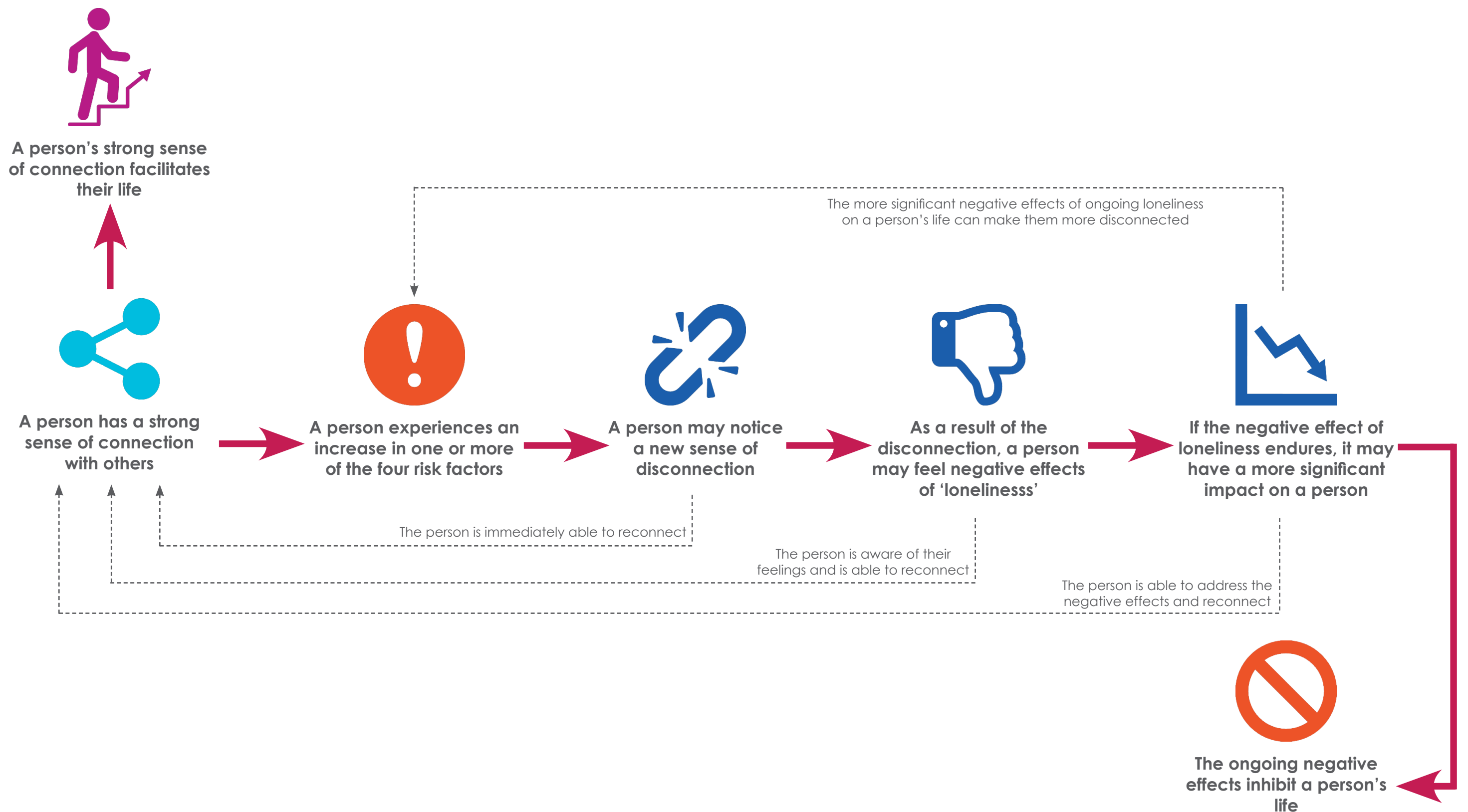
67% poor mental health

59% low income family

41% lack of education, employment or training

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Appendix 2: A model of youth loneliness

One by-product of this research was an attempt to visually display the 'process' of loneliness generally and when it has negative effects. Although it was not part of the main research, it is presented here as a useful visual model to be built upon should it prove helpful. In particular, the purpose of the model is to answer three things:

1. Given the same life experiences, why do some experience loneliness but others do not? Because some young people have the ability or support to 'break' the chain earlier than others;
2. Is loneliness the cause of other problems, or do other problems cause loneliness? Both. It can become a downward spiral unless the cause of disconnection is resolved;
3. How do you address loneliness? At various stages: before risk factors occur (primary), immediately after a disconnection is felt (primary), when the emotions attached to disconnection are experienced (secondary), or when significant impacts of on-going loneliness occur (tertiary).

A person's strong sense of connection facilitates their life

A person has a strong sense of connection with others

A person experiences an increase in one or more of the four risk factors

A person may notice a new sense of disconnection

As a result of the disconnection, a person may feel negative effects of 'loneliness'

If the negative effect of loneliness endures, it may have a more significant impact on a person

The more significant negative effects of ongoing loneliness on a person's life can make them more disconnected

The person is immediately able to reconnect

The person is aware of their feelings and is able to reconnect

The person is able to address the negative effects and reconnect

The ongoing negative effects inhibit a person's life

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