

# Loneliness and social isolation among young people

September 2021

# LINKS



# Aims of the workshop

- Explore the issue of loneliness and social isolation in general
- Examine the impact of loneliness on health and wellbeing
- Discuss why and how loneliness and social isolation affects young people in Northern Ireland
- Ascertain how LINKS grant holders are addressing this issue
- Explore what we can learn from elsewhere about addressing loneliness and social isolation among young people

"Loneliness is as prevalent in the young as it is in the old, it just manifests itself differently. Loneliness places no distinction on location – when I worked as a general practitioner in Finglas, the exact same issues of loneliness and isolation existed in the heart of a busy community as they do in rural Ireland. Loneliness never discriminates between young and old, rich and poor or urban and rural"

(Dr Keith Swanick, Chairperson, Loneliness Task Force & Senator in Rol)

# What do loneliness & social isolation mean?

How does loneliness manifest itself in young people?

<https://padlet.com/tgeraghty/fnmxfq3cckpnyuvr>

# Definitions & explanations

- Loneliness: an individual's personal sense of lacking connection & contact with social interactions to the extent that they are wanted or needed. Chronic loneliness describes a situation where the person feels lonely some or all of the time (Loneliness Taskforce, 2018)
- Loneliness is a subjective negative experience resulting from inadequate, meaningful social or emotional connections – a discrepancy between an individual's preferred and actual experience (Institute of Public Health, 2021)
- Loneliness is a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want (Perlman and Peplau, 1981, cited in The Red Cross, 2020)

# Definitions & explanations

- Social isolation is objective. It describes the quantity of social connections and relationships that someone has – such as whether someone has met a friend in the last week (Campaign to End Loneliness, 2020)
- Social isolation: an absence of social interactions, social support structures and engagement with broader community activities or structures (Loneliness Taskforce, 2018)
- Solitude/alone: being by oneself
- Loneliness is often associated with older people but can occur across all age groups
- Can have different symptoms for different people

# Definitions & explanations

## THREE TYPES OF LONELINESS



### SOCIAL

Absence of social connection, the perception of social isolation and dissatisfaction with the quality of relationships.

*Adams et al. 2016*



### EMOTIONAL

Absence or loss of meaningful relationships that meet a deeply felt need to be recognised and 'belong' to someone or to a group such as at work, or in a family.

*Dong et al. 2011*



### EXISTENTIAL

An aspect of the human condition which expresses the separateness of the person from others.

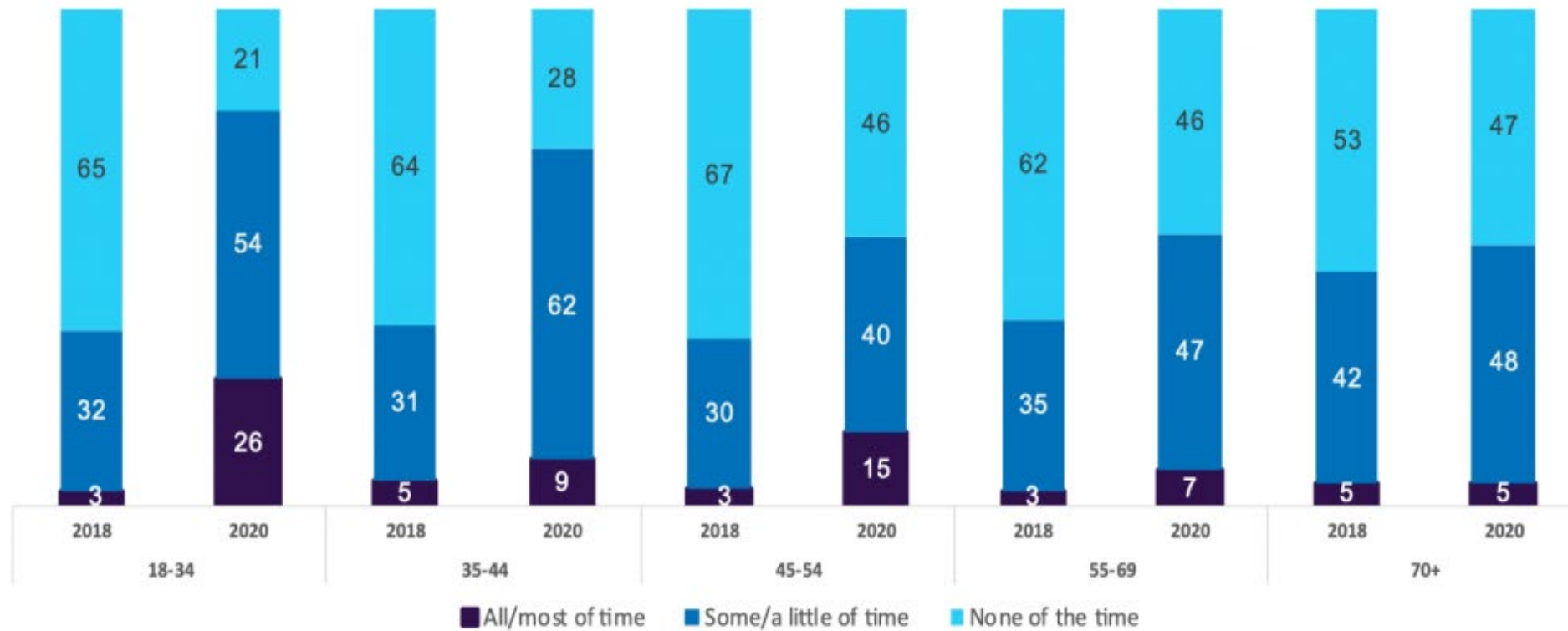
*Moustakas, 1961, Cherry et al. 1993, Hauge et al. 2010*

# Some statistics & facts

- Almost half (**46.3%**) of respondents aged 16-24 felt "**more often lonely**" (NISRA, Dec 2020: Loneliness in NI – Cont Household Survey)
- **40%** of 11-16 year olds reported feeling lonely "**most of the time**". **6% chronically lonely**. Higher rates for girls: over half vs one-third of boys (Cooke et al, 2019 cited by the End Loneliness Campaign, 2020 – YP's Attitudes & Behaviours Survey 2019)
- **53%** of 16 year olds indicating they feel lonely "**most of the time**" (NISRA, 2019, cited by the End Loneliness Campaign, 2020)
- Loneliness and isolation were some of the most frequent issues raised by people who contacted Samaritans last year (Samaritans, 2021)
- **82%** of youth workers feel that loneliness is "**a problem**" for young people (UK Youth, 2018)



# Loneliness by age group in ROI, 2018 & Nov 2020



Source: CSO 2020

# Some statistics & facts

- More than **half of all young people** (16-24 years) reported feeling lonely during lockdown (ONS, 2020, cited in Barnardos 2020)
- Prevalence of loneliness decreased with age: **41%** of 18-24-year olds having the highest frequency of loneliness (Groake et al, 2020 – UK study)
- Parents mentioning their children being lonely (Derry & Strabane Healthy City and District, Communities, 2020)

# Some statistics & facts

- **Loneliness is now one of the main reasons children cite for contacting Childline (RoI)**

"Often social media is their only form of communication with their peers so they are not making the same physical or emotional connections as we would have in the past.

Also, the way they describe it, it is not that there isn't anyone to talk to. A lot can be self-imposed loneliness and a lot of loneliness is coming from their relationships with their peers.

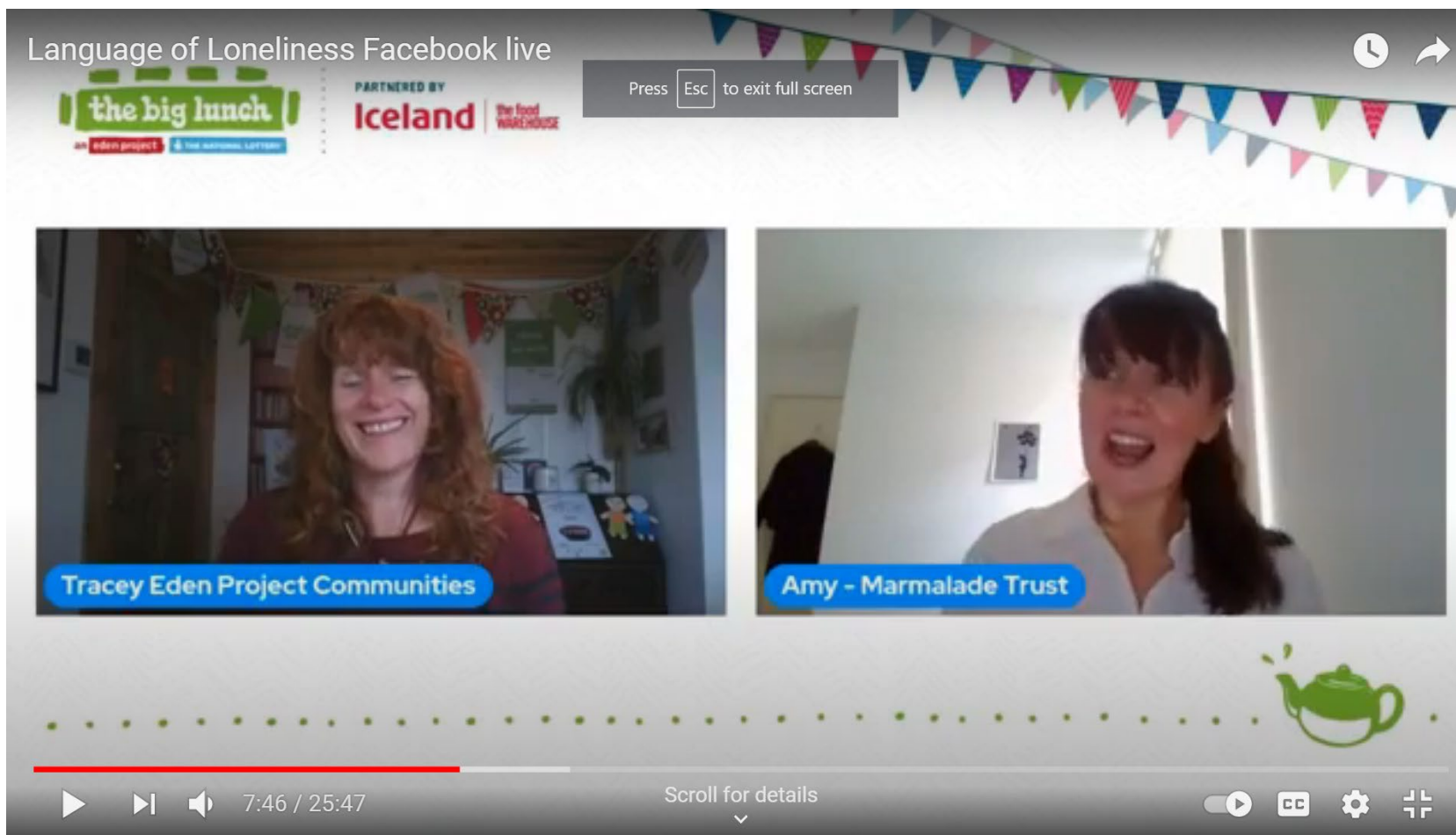
They are putting up a 'perfect' image on social media so everyone is under pressure to present the best sides of themselves and they don't feel that so they feel that they are not as worthy." (Caroline O'Sullivan, Director of Services at the ISPC, Irish Independent, Jan 28, 2018)

# The language of loneliness

"I'm in college in Queen's, Belfast and I'm finding it very hard. Not from an academic point of view, but just meeting people and that. It's Monday afternoon and I realise I've spoken to nobody since last Thursday and I interact with the world via Twitter and Instagram. I train every day and run 4 times a week but...I'm lonely, there you go – I've finally said it" (The Loneliness Taskforce, 2018)

# The Language of Loneliness

- [https://youtu.be/1tWXV-t5\\_KY](https://youtu.be/1tWXV-t5_KY)



Language of Loneliness Facebook live

Press Esc to exit full screen

the big lunch PARTNERED BY Iceland the food WAREHOUSE

Tracey Eden Project Communities

Amy - Marmalade Trust

7:46 / 25:47

Scroll for details

ncb.org.uk

The screenshot shows a YouTube video player in full-screen mode. At the top, the title 'Language of Loneliness Facebook live' is displayed. Below the title are logos for 'the big lunch', 'PARTNERED BY Iceland', and 'the food WAREHOUSE'. A grey box with the text 'Press Esc to exit full screen' is overlaid on the video. The video content shows two women in separate video feeds. The woman on the left is Tracey Eden Project Communities, and the woman on the right is Amy - Marmalade Trust. Both are smiling. At the bottom of the video player, there is a progress bar showing 7:46 / 25:47, a 'Scroll for details' button, and standard video controls (play, volume, settings, full screen). A green teapot icon is visible in the bottom right corner of the video frame.

# Factors

- Changing demographics & family types (e.g. more people living alone, more single parent families, more families with only one child)
- Immigration (by both Irish/UK nationals returning & newcomers)
- Major life events (e.g. starting a new job/school/university, moving house, bereavement, retirement, parenthood, becoming a carer, leaving care)
- The resources available to the individual (financial and material, such as a car)

# Risk factors for children and young people

- Being a carer
- Victim of child abuse or neglect
- Care experienced or leaving care
- Living with disabilities, complex needs or both
- Refugee, asylum-seekers, unaccompanied or separated
- Experiencing homelessness
- New young parents
- Students
- Not in employment, education or training (Campaign to End Loneliness, 2020)

# Groups at risk of loneliness

- Members of the LGBTQ+ community
- Individuals living with dementia or cognitive impairment
- Those with a physical disability, mobility issues, or intellectual disability
- Carers
- Care experienced young people/care leavers
- Individuals from ethnic minorities (especially asylum seekers and migrants)
- Poorer people and those without access to transport



# The impact of loneliness on health & wellbeing

- Considered to be a major public health risk
- Negative impacts on health similar to smoking, obesity
- Associated with psychological conditions (e.g. anxiety, depression, substance abuse)
- Increase risk of heart disease & impede recovery from stroke
- Lonely people suffer disproportionately with mental health issues, hypertension, cognitive decline & more likely to be hospitalised, admitted to residential care or associated with more GP visits

# The impact of loneliness on the economy

- Estimated over 1M workers are lonely in the UK
- Impacts on wellbeing, productivity & turnover
- Costs businesses £2.5billion per year:
  - £20M ill-health and absenteeism
  - £220M for carers of those whose health is impacted by loneliness (estimated)
  - £665M due to a reduction in productivity
  - £1.62M impact on wellbeing & voluntary turnover
- £1,700 per person cost to the health service over 10 years (>£6K for severely lonely)
- Impacts negatively on educational attainment

# The impact of loneliness on the economy

- Economic investment in addressing loneliness could result in saving money
- Signposting initiatives could provide a return on investment of £2-3 for every £1 spent
- Community café: >£8 return for every £1 spent

# Break



# Loneliness & social isolation among young people

"In full time education in Cork (don't want to name it because I have no problem with college) and it is lonely. I have a feeling of emptiness that is hard to describe - kinda like you ran out of petrol in the car. I'm surrounded by hundreds of people every day but nobody really bothers with me. I see lots of other students that are in the same boat, lots of them just end up drinking themselves stupid but I'm such a light weight when it comes to drinking, it's easier to stay off it. You wanted recommendations according to your website, here's one - every canteen in schools or colleges should be mobile phone or headphone free to force people to make human contact..."

# How loneliness & social isolation affect young people in NI

Discussion from grant holders on how loneliness and social isolation manifest themselves with the young people they work with

"a feeling of like isolation that like...you have no one there for you, that there's no one to rely on, and just like you're alone in this world" (ELSIE newsletter, Sept 2021)

# How LINKS grant holders are addressing loneliness & social isolation

The YEAR Project within CRUN (Causeway Rural & Urban Network)



# How this work is linked into EYP aims

## **Aim of EYP:**

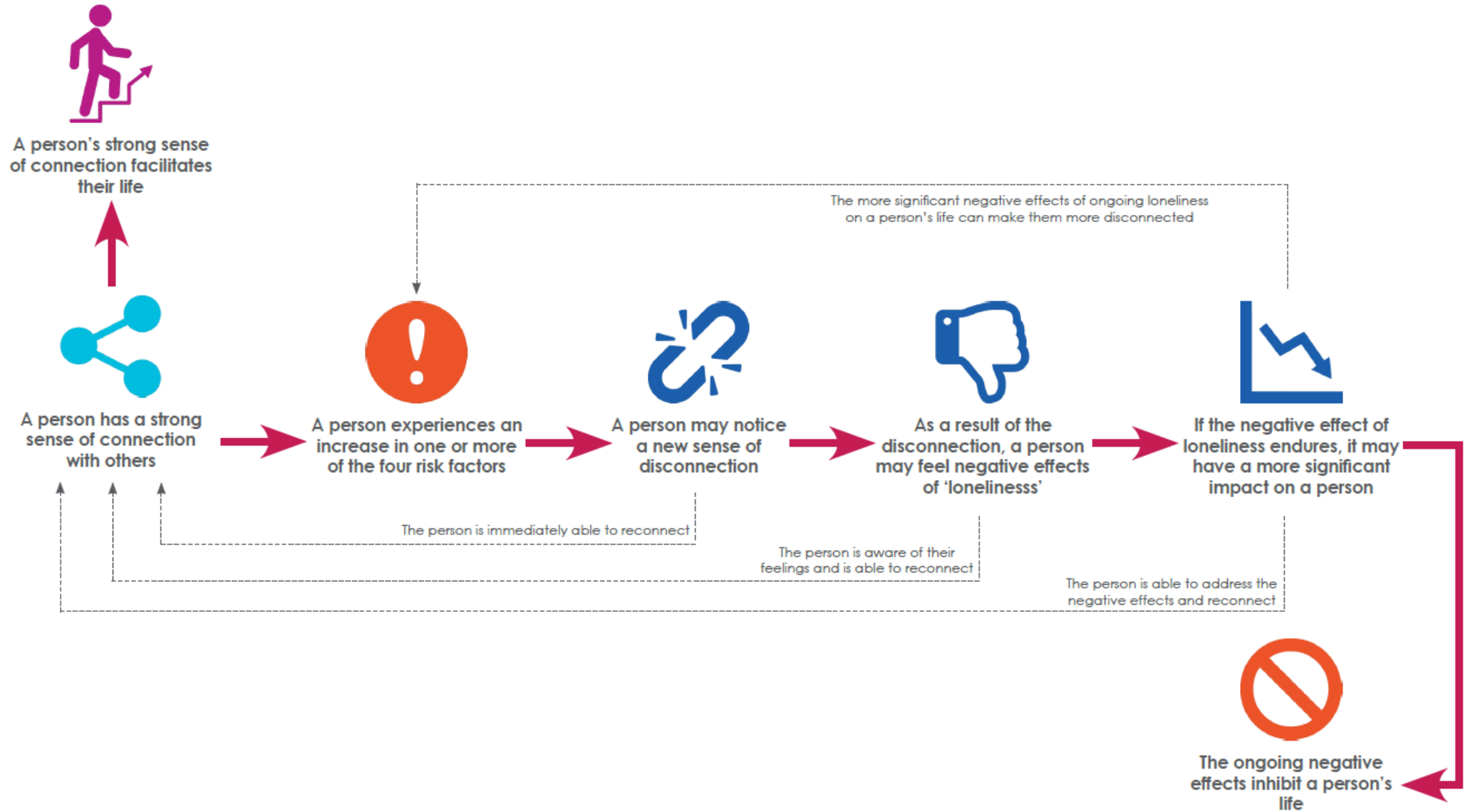
Young people have better relationships with their support networks and communities.

## **All EYP grant holders share a common project outcome:**

Young people, their support networks and communities are involved in the planning and delivery of the project



# Learning from elsewhere: Model of Youth Loneliness



# Addressing Loneliness Among Young People: Learning from elsewhere (UK Youth)

- Provide safe spaces for young people
- Foster a sense of belonging for young people
- Provide positive relationships with other young people and trusted adults
- Support young people to gain the skills to respond to difficulty (resilience)
- Refer young people to specialist support in health, social care and advice
- Provide this support through consistent delivery of three major types of youth work: centre-based open access provision, targeted programmes, and detached youth work.

# Learning from elsewhere

- The Loneliness Taskforce: established to coordinate a response to the growing issue of loneliness in Ireland.
- Aims to increase awareness of the problem and to produce a set of recommendations for Government, state agencies and all policy makers.
- From March 26<sup>th</sup> to April 9<sup>th</sup> 2018, sought submissions from the general public, elected reps, NGOs & statutory bodies, north & south. 310 submissions

# England, Scotland & Wales



# ELSIE Project (Exploring Loneliness & Social Isolation in Emerging Adulthood)

- "I think that you mostly feel lonely when you don't really have a connection with other people" (ELSIE newsletter, Sept 2021)
- "You can feel alone while being surrounded by people. And even if you have a great, huge support system, I still think there can be times when you feel like you can't turn to someone about something (ELSIE newsletter, Sept 2021)

# Summary & key messages

- Loneliness, while not pleasant, is a totally natural emotion
- Young people can experience significant levels of loneliness but it may manifest itself differently to that of adults
- Loneliness can negatively impact health, education and the economy
- COVID-19 has exacerbated the experience of loneliness – but has also provided greater opportunities to talk openly about it
- Grant holders and adults can help young people feel more connected, find their roles in community/society (give them their place) and build resilience

# Summing up & evaluation

Please complete the evaluation now by copying and pasting this link into your browser (link in chat)

<https://iasp.tfaforms.net/15>

Put "Loneliness & Social Isolation" in the first box:  
Title of Activity



**Many thanks for your participation in today's workshop**