

YOUTH LONELINESS IN SOUTHAMPTON:

**NO
LiMiTs**

Helping Young People
Help Themselves

A YOUNG PEOPLE LED REVIEW AND
REFLECTION ON THE FREQUENCY
AND CAUSES OF YOUTH
LONELINESS WITHIN
SOUTHAMPTON



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CHARITY NO. 1088835 | COMPANY NO. 4183173

About No Limits

No Limits is a charity offering free and confidential information, advice, counselling, advocacy and support to children and young people under the age of 26 in Southampton and Hampshire. Young people can come to No Limits for free support on a wide range of issues including housing, homelessness, debt, employment, relationships, sexual health, mental health and substance misuse. Support is offered at the No Limits Advice Centre in Central Southampton and through outreach work delivered in schools and colleges across Hampshire.

Youth Ambassadors

Youth Ambassadors are a group of young people aged 13-25 year who are interested in creating change and taking action to make life better for all young people in Southampton. They meet once a week to develop and deliver their own campaigns, engage with regional and national consultations and input into the improvement and evaluation of all of No Limits Services.

Currently the group is delivering a Youth Loneliness Project, exploring the issues that impact on young people in Southampton feeling lonely, through their campaign they aim to:

- Raise awareness with professionals, young people and families about the signs, impacts and support available for young people suffering from loneliness
- Work with young people and professionals to develop a toolkit for professionals to help them support young people suffering from mental ill health and loneliness
- Promote the idea of a Youth Loneliness Charter for Southampton that brings together a city wide commitment to tackling Youth Loneliness

Youth Loneliness in Southampton: A young people led review and reflection on the frequency and causes of youth loneliness within Southampton

No Limits

Introduction to the theme

Recent research and guidance highlights the impacts of loneliness on people's health and well-being and the prevalence of loneliness among young people.

Most people will feel lonely at some point, however experiencing long-term loneliness can have a negative impact on a young person's social connectivity, wellbeing and future life chances.

'Loneliness is the negative emotion that accompanies a discrepancy between one's desired and achieved levels of social relations'

UK Youth's 2018 report¹ identified four risk factors associated with youth loneliness:

1. Going through a significant or difficult situation
'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 new place'
2. Weak social networks
This can include; lack of support during a life event or situation, rejection or denial of support, refusal or inability to share with others, practical or geographical barriers
3. High expectations of social networks
Expectations of peers or society regarding individuals in friendship group; regularity of contact; quality of contact and ability to relate to others vs the reality.
4. Low ability to cope with difficulty
Individual resilience, communication and self-awareness

Recent national research has highlighted the prevalence of youth loneliness in wider society. The National Office of Statistics² and The Children's Society (2018) recently undertook the

¹ UK Youth (2018) A Place to Belong: the role of local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness.

² Office of National Statistics (2018) Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: Analysis of children's and young people's views, experiences and suggestions to overcome loneliness, using in-depth interviews, the Community Life Survey 2016 to 2017 and Good Childhood Index Survey, 2018.

first national data analysis to determine the extent of youth loneliness and the factors that have an impact on it.

They found that 11.3% of children said they were often lonely (10-15 years old) and 9.8% of 16-24 year olds felt the same, they also identified that high levels of loneliness were reported in young people in the below groups:

- Those in younger age group of 10-12 year olds (14%)
- Have a long-term illness or disability (only 19.3% reported 'hardly ever' feeling lonely compared to 44.8% of those without a long-term illness or disability), or are unsatisfied with their health (28% of those reported low satisfaction with health 'often' felt lonely, compared with about 10% in those with 'medium to very high' satisfaction with their health.
- Accessing free school meals (27.5% compared to 5.5% for those not)
- 19.5% of young people living in a city reported often feeling lonely, compared to about 5% of those in towns or rural areas.
- Those reporting 'low' satisfaction with relationships with friends (41.1%) and families (34.8%)

Design of collection

No Limits is an information, advice, advocacy, counselling and support charity for children and young people in Southampton under the age of 26. The charity supports, advises and educates young people, helping them to gain the skills and knowledge needed to manage their lives, grow in confidence and build brighter futures.

Young people can come to the No Limits for free support on a wide range of issues including housing, homelessness, debt, employment, relationships, sexual health, mental health and substance misuse. Support is offered at the No Limits Advice Centre in Central Southampton and through outreach work delivered in schools and colleges across Southampton and Hampshire.

In order to explore the prevalence of youth loneliness, and to explore the impacts of this on young people within Southampton, we undertook a range of explorative activities.

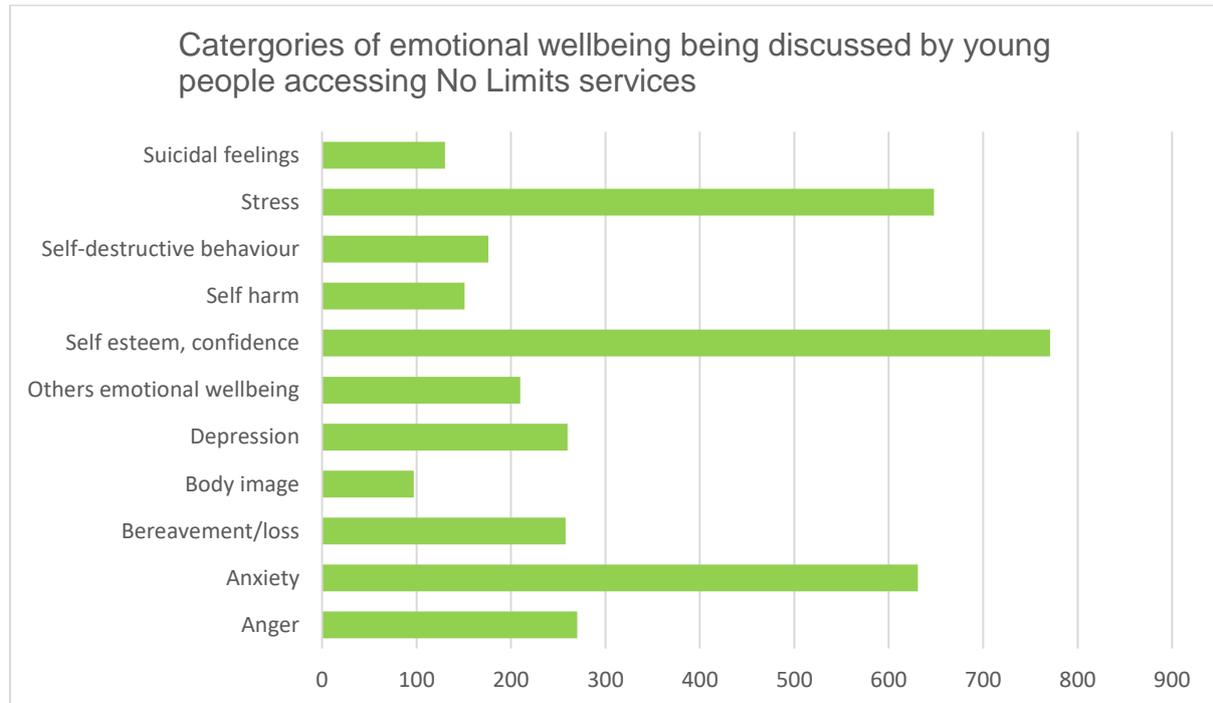
1. Reviewing Current Data: Exploring the data currently on our database regarding young people that have accessed our service over a three month period for issues relating to wellbeing and social isolation.
2. Survey: Over a two-week period we engaged with young people accessing our services and asked them to complete a short survey about social isolation and support
3. Young People's Focus Group: Bringing together an introduction to the theme, along with all of the data and information gathered in points 1 and 2 and taking this to a group of young people to explore the underlying drivers and reflect on the findings.

Findings

1. Reviewing the current data

1,144 young people accessed No Limits services for emotional wellbeing support between October and December 2018.

The primary emotional wellbeing reason for contact was around confidence and self-esteem, followed by anxiety and stress.

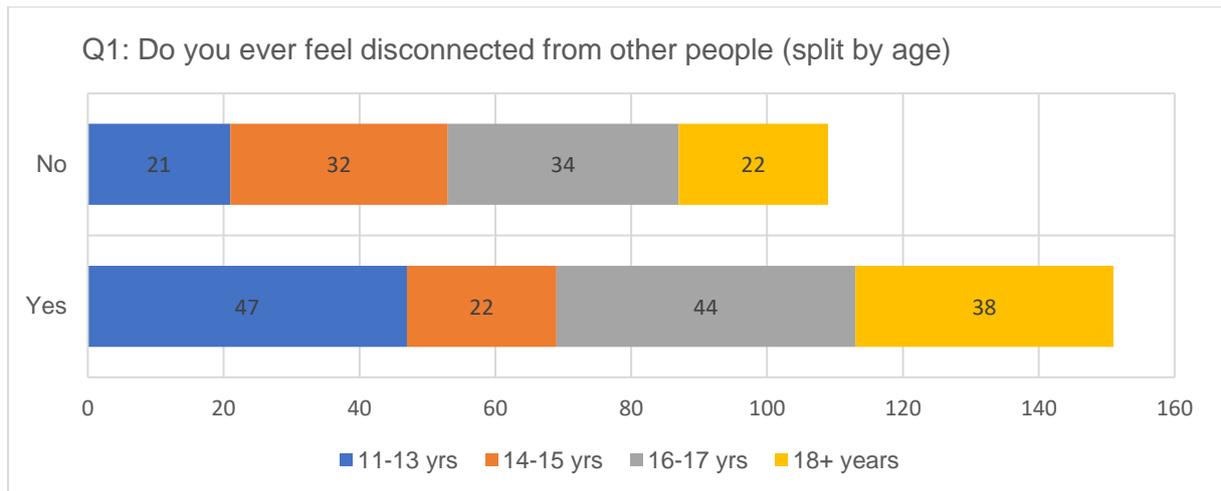


These factors link in with the internal ability for a young person to cope with difficulty (their individual resilience), which, as discussed above, is outlined as one of the risk factors associated with loneliness.

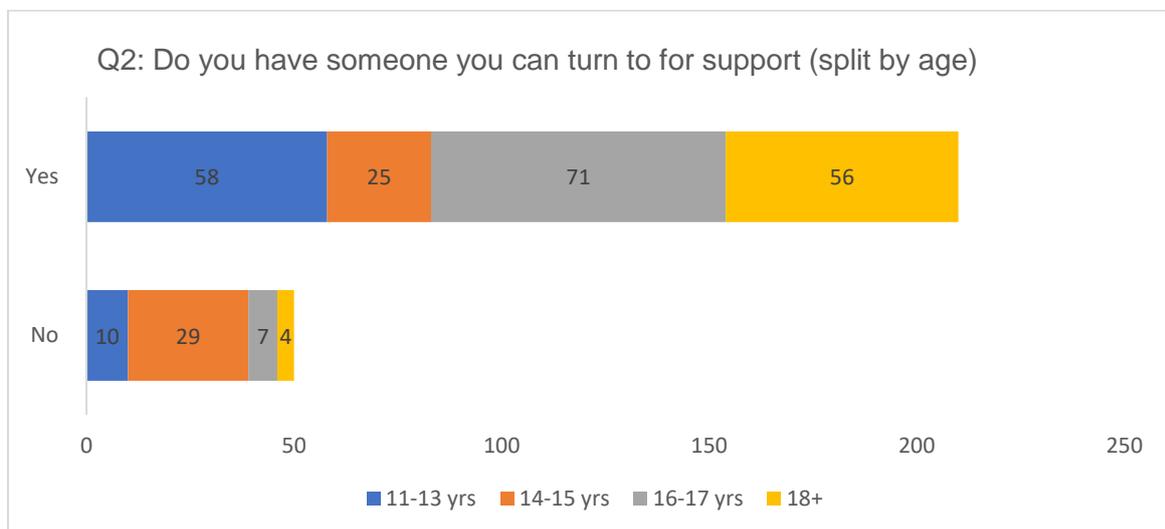
This might mean that a young person is suffering from loneliness. Alternatively, it could be an indicator that if a change in circumstance, internally or externally, occurs for one of these young people it could result in them suffering from loneliness in the future.

2. Survey

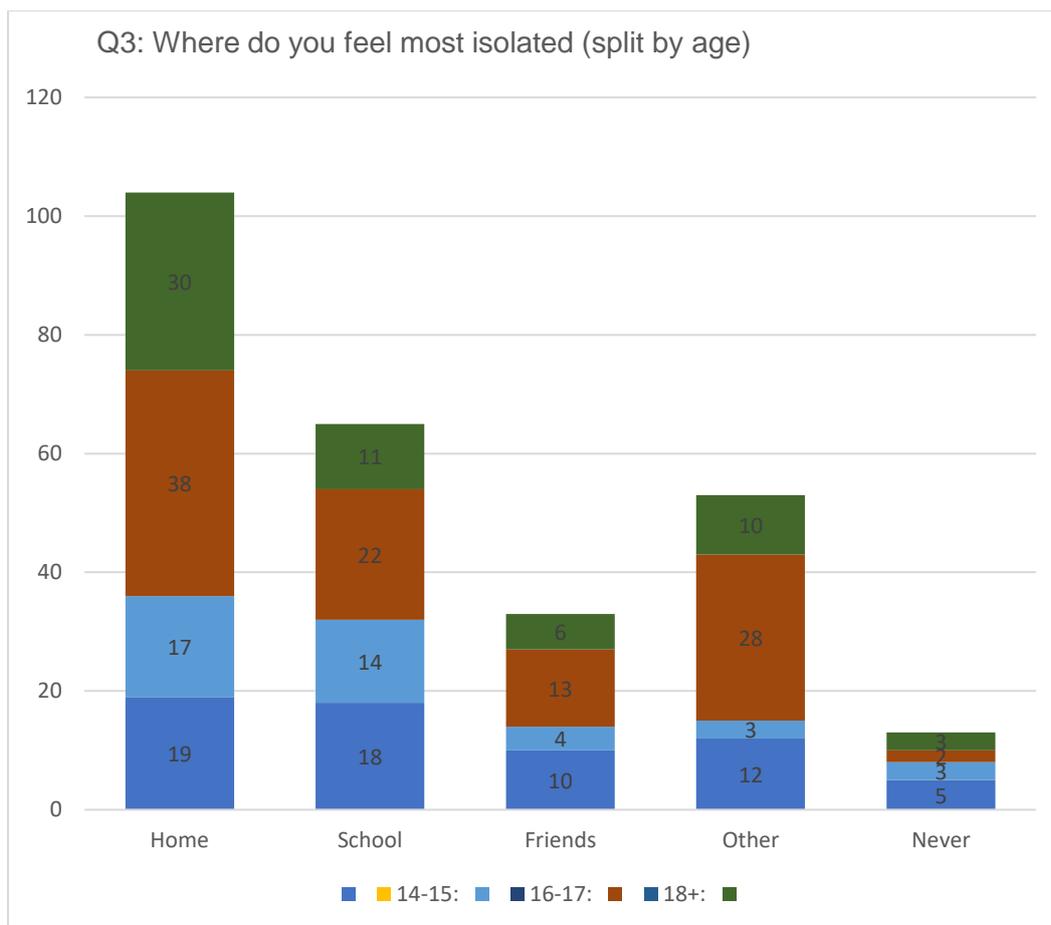
Over a 2-week period in February 2019 approximately 300 young people engaged in a short survey about Youth Loneliness. We asked three key questions that have been shown to be associated with youth loneliness and social connectivity:



58% said they have felt disconnected from people, this was highest in the 11-13 year old cohort (67%)



However only 19% said they did not have someone to turn to for support, this could be due to talking to young people who are accessing our services. However, the highest rate was 54% of the 14-15 cohort stating that they had no one to turn to.



When asked where they feel most isolated, 38% said at home, and 24% said at school. However within the 18+ group 50% felt isolated at home, and within the 14-15 age group 34% felt isolated at school.

3. Young People's Focus Group

We took the results from the two data collection points, along with an overview of the current national research and learning, to a group of our Youth Ambassadors³ who explored some potential reasoning and actions to support.

They highlighted aspects of the findings and discussed some of the reasoning behind this and area / ideas for ongoing work we could look at doing to support this work further.

Why do young people feel lonely?

- *Database showed a lot of young people experiencing mental health issues. The questionnaire showed a lot of young people thought loneliness felt like isolation, depression, sadness.*
- *Social media – young people are on social media far too much and compare their lives/looks to celebrities/social media bloggers.*

³ **Youth Ambassadors** are a youth participation group facilitated by No Limits that meets weekly and engages with internal and external opportunities, facilitating change, taking part in social action and supporting the development of young people's services.

- *Young people struggle with self-esteem and confidence to tackle loneliness*
- *Have no trust in friends/family*
- *Parents are unaware of their child's loneliness*
- *No education around loneliness*

11-13 year olds feel lonely and disconnected the most

- *More independence*
- *Home alone a lot more*
- *Hormones/changes in the brain*
- *Need a lot more sleep*

14-15 year olds feel most isolated at home

- *Game consoles are very popular with teenagers*
- *Men stereotyped to be the 'man of the house' and aren't going to talk*
- *Puberty*
- *Parents have different views on adolescence years and could be difficult to understand their feelings*
- *Easier to go on phones/watch tv/ use social media at home instead of interacting*

11-13 year olds think loneliness is physically being alone

- *Never experienced being alone a lot until this age*
- *When they are left alone, it's first time they're being left alone with their thoughts*

16-17 year olds think loneliness is having no friends

- *Just left school around this age*
- *Loose a lot of friendships*
- *Less friends around during the day*

Discussion

The aim of the research was to find out the extent to which young people within Southampton are suffering from loneliness, and how this compared with the national findings.

Based on these findings, it would appear that young people in Southampton are suffering high levels of loneliness. However, it is important to acknowledge some limitations as a far smaller, and arguably more homogeneous⁴ cohort was used within local collection in comparison to the national data.

UK Youth¹ highlighted six key activities for workers and professionals to address youth loneliness:

- Providing safe spaces for young people
- Fostering a sense of belonging for young people
- Providing positive relationships with other young people and trusted adults
- Supporting young people to gain the skills to respond to difficulty
- Referring young people to specialist support
- Delivering different types of youth work to provides all of this support.

⁴ Young people completing the survey were all engaging with No Limits over the two week period

As a Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Service within Southampton, our ethos and youth work fits within these key activities. We provide safe, healthy spaces and relationships for young people to access specialist support when needed through our open access drop in and range of specialist groups and projects.

We are working to further engage young people in this work and to address youth loneliness in Southampton through social action, direct support, signposting and community engagement. No Limits has several new projects of work currently being delivered to increase this offer.

Co-operative Building Connections Co-design Fund: Unlocking Loneliness

This three-month project, led by our Youth Ambassador³ Participation group, have focused on creating a suitable campaign to engage young people who may be facing loneliness.

The group have engaged to discover who is accessing No Limits, how many young people within our services consider themselves lonely and how we can support them better.

The resulting findings and outcomes from this report have supported the group to create a series of campaign messages and engagement activities to roll out across Southampton.

Co-operative Funded #Iwill fund

From 1st April No Limits will be commencing an exciting programme that places young people at the centre of addressing youth loneliness. We will recruit and work with young people to support their personal development through activities, skills training and campaign development to empower them to take the lead role in social action to address youth loneliness in all forms.

We will support the young people to develop key actions to address areas of youth loneliness and use their skills and knowledge to reach out to other young people to provide peer support within our services, hold events for members of the public and key stakeholders to support them to make change and to attend outreach events to engage with other young people.

Community Navigator, Young People's Social Prescribing project (StreetGames)

We are also currently delivering a local Young People's Social Prescribing service as part of a national partnership. This service encourages young people who may be suffering from low emotional wellbeing and social isolation to engage with support and community activities, working to connect young people with their communities and local support to improve their health and wellbeing.

If you interested in finding out more about our work at No Limits, please contact us enquiries@nolimitshelp.org.uk or phone 023 8022 4224.

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