

# Co-op Loneliness



April 2019



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# Introduction

Young Scot delivered a series of workshops with two Loneliness Action Teams on behalf of the Co-operative Foundation to engage young people on the topic of Youth Loneliness. Throughout these workshops Young Scot and the Loneliness Action Teams explored young people's experience of loneliness, what support is available and what relevant support needs to be provided to young people across Scotland to tackle it.

Using Young Scot's innovative Co-design process (see appendix), Young Scot worked with two pre-established groups of young people to explore their experience, opinions and ideas, as well as developing and creating new content.

The key aims of the project were to better understand the personal experience of young people and the impact Youth Loneliness has had on them and their peers. Following on from this, Young Scot worked collaboratively with both groups to ensure there was relevant, young-person friendly and insightful content readily available to young people in Scotland.

Throughout the project Young Scot engaged with 30 young people in total from two local authorities in Scotland. The young people involved have contributed over 330 volunteer hours to the project through workshops alone.

## What we did

Two groups were recruited using Young Scot's partner network, local authority Youth Work Managers and by sharing the opportunity through Young Scot's social media channels. From this the two groups identified to take part in this project were RASAC Youth Ambassadors based in Perth and Kinross and S6 high school students at Brannock High School based in North Lanarkshire.

### **RASAC Youth Ambassadors**

RASAC (the Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre), established ten years ago, is an organisation committed to challenging gender-based violence, offering free and confidential support to anyone who has experienced sexual violence at any time in their lives. RASAC Youth Ambassadors are the voice of young people challenging inequality and its effects on society. The Ambassadors meet regularly and work alongside the

prevention team to deliver workshops to community groups, help campaign and raise awareness. The group is open to any young person, regardless of gender, aged 14-18 who wants to make a difference.

During the Youth Loneliness project Young Scot engaged with 11 young people from the RASAC Youth Ambassadors. Of this, nine identified as female and two identified as male. The group were aged between 14 years old and 17 years old from a range of backgrounds.

## Brannock High School

Brannock High School is a six-year comprehensive high school based in Newarthill, North Lanarkshire.

Young Scot worked with a group of 56 pupils within the high school on the Youth Loneliness project. There were 19 young people as part of the group and of these, six identified as male and 13 as female. The group were aged between 16 and 17 years old from a range of backgrounds and experiences.

## Exploring the Topic

To understand the young people's knowledge and experience of Youth Loneliness each group was asked to depict the words, thoughts and opinions they would use to describe Youth Loneliness. Below shows the most commonly identified responses from both groups:

- |                              |                               |                     |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| » Depressed                  | » A pressing issue            | » Invisible         |
| » Isolated                   | » Can worsen other conditions | » Common in elderly |
| » Paranoid                   | » Upsetting                   | » Affects all ages  |
| » Anxiety                    | » No friends                  | » Bullying          |
| » Trapped                    | » Worthless                   | » Loss              |
| » Can lead to further issues | » Numb                        | » Bored             |

It was clear from both group's responses and conversations that they felt Youth Loneliness can be linked to mental health. If young people were experiencing loneliness this could have a negative impact on their mental health and vice versa. The young people did however feel that loneliness is not something they would necessarily admit to as they felt it was more commonly associated with older people.

Both groups were asked to develop the persona of a young person that has or is currently experiencing loneliness. This could include perceptions, stereotypes or their own experiences. The groups were asked to

consider how this person would be feeling on the inside, and, on the outside, they were asked to describe how this person may appear physically, how they might act and how others might perceive them.

## Brannock High

### Inside:

- |             |                                    |                   |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| » Annoyed   | » Ugly                             | » Paranoid        |
| » Jealous   | » Sad                              | » Scared          |
| » Alone     | » Bitter                           | » Self-harm       |
| » Lonely    | » Pointless                        | » Angry           |
| » Unhappy   | » Too trusting/not trusting enough | » Suicidal        |
| » Want help |                                    | » Not good enough |

The young people felt the person would be feeling a mixture of emotions on the inside, from feeling lonely and unhappy to feeling that they were not good enough. The group also said that the young person might be feeling bitterness towards others who have a strong friendship network and that may make them jealous that they didn't have this. The group felt that these feeling could have a negative impact on someone's mental health and that this may begin to translate into negative thoughts and feelings such as self-harm or suicide.

### Outside:

- |              |                |             |
|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| » Happy      | » Nice person  | » Friendly  |
| » No friends | » Weird        | » Confident |
| » Pretty     | » Approachable |             |
| » Unsociable | » Kind         |             |

The group felt that on the outside the young person would appear vastly different, putting on a front that everything was ok, appearing happy and confident. They also felt the young person would be approachable. However, they did say that there might also be a negative appearance reflecting how you are feeling. The group said that the young person would likely be very unsociable and would have no peer group or friends and may come across as weird.

## RASAC

### Inside:

- » Upset
- » Sad
- » Isolated
- » Suicidal
- » Being different
- » Lonely
- » Misunderstood
- » Alone
- » Scared
- » Depressed
- » Lost
- » Trapped

The young people at RASAC had very similar views and responses to the group at Brannock High. The group felt the young person would be very upset and sad that they had no one they could talk to or confide in and this would make them feel isolated from their peer group. They also suggested that this could lead them to feeling depressed and trapped. The group felt that loneliness could lead to the young person experiencing poor mental health.

**Outside:**

- » Inclusive
- » Kind
- » Clingy
- » Happy
- » Introverted / extroverted depending
- » Change look to be noticed (or to blend in)
- » Withdrawn
- » Pretending it is all ok
- » Tired
- » Enthusiastic
- » Clingy
- » Spends a lot of time alone
- » Shaken
- » Eyes always facing to the ground
- » Shy

The group felt that the young person may make up for the negative way they feel on the inside by coming across as though everything was alright and would appear enthusiastic and extroverted. They also said that the young person would appear happy and would be kind to others portraying that they were ok. The group did say that the young person may be very dependant and will look to stay within groups even if they are not included in conversations or plans. The group also said that on the flip side the young person may be very shy and spend a lot of time on their own and come across very introverted.

Both groups were asked to consider who and where they would go to seek information and support on Youth Loneliness if they or anyone they knew was experiencing this. This was split into people; services and organisations; and websites. Both groups again had very similar responses, below show the most common responses across both groups.

**People**

- » Parents
- » Mentors
- » Employer – employees
- » Relatives

- » Youth workers
- » Teachers

- » Friends
- » Guardians

### Services

- » Doctor
- » School
- » Counsellor
- » Work
- » Volunteering facility
- » Charities

- » Youth workers
- » Care
- » Social services
- » CAMHS
- » NHS

### Organisations and Websites

- » Young Scot
- » Mindspace
- » NHS
- » SAMH
- » Childline

- » Cool2talk
- » CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre)
- » Samaritans

To gather further insights on the technology the young people use, services they access, what they do on these sites and where they access information the groups were asked the following questions.

1. What technology do you use/interact with on a daily/weekly basis?
2. What are the services/platforms you use the most? (Email, Facebook, Snapchat, Online Forums etc.)
3. How do you use these platforms? – (Connect with friend, Information etc.)
4. Where do you access information?

The information below shows the most common responses across both groups.

### What technology do you use/interact with on a daily/weekly basis?

- |              |                     |              |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| » iPhone     | » Playstation       | » Chromecast |
| » Samsung    | » Normal TV         | » Apple TV   |
| » Blackberry | » Kindle/fire stick | » Smartboard |
| » iPad       | » Sony Xperia       | » Laptop     |
| » tablet     | » Macbook           | » Smart TV   |
| » Xbox       | » PC                | » DS         |

- » Wii/Wii U
- » PSP
- » Apple watch

- » Apple Mac
- » iPad mini
- » MSN

- » Bebo

### What are the services/platforms you use the most?

- » Instagram
- » Snapchat
- » Facebook
- » Twitter
- » YouTube
- » Pinterest
- » Google
- » Netflix
- » Soundcloud
- » Tumblr

- » Yahoo
- » Snapchat
- » Gmail
- » Hotmail
- » Outlook
- » Google chrome
- » Whatsapp
- » Movie star planet
- » Amazon prime
- » Edmodo

- » Safari
- » Spotify
- » Apple music
- » Tinder
- » Just eat
- » App store
- » Oovoo
- » Napster
- » Itunes

### How do you use these platforms?

- » Connect with friends
- » Keep up to date with friends
- » Find out what's happening in the world

- » Make plans with friends
- » To order food
- » Access vouchers
- » Meet new people
- » Online shopping

- » Quote people
- » Pursue people
- » Long distance
- » Text people
- » Share pictures
- » Family chat

### Where do you access information?

- » Uni
- » YouTube
- » Websites
- » School
- » Snapchat
- » Google
- » Askfm

- » Netflix
- » Twitter
- » GP/doctors/NHS facilities
- » Instagram
- » Newspaper
- » Leaflets

- » STV
- » BBC news
- » ITV
- » Library/books
- » Skype
- » Amazon
- » Work

## Young Scot Website Audit

To gain an understanding of what was required in terms of information and content, Young Scot asked both groups to audit the Young Scot website (young.scot) to give feedback on what they felt was useful on the site and what was missing. This could be anything from content, to ways of searching from content. Both groups were given time to explore the website and delivered feedback based on this.

### Brannock High School

- » Certain pages straight to the point & easy to understand
- » Offer related articles
- » Wide range of results/activities from specific searches
- » Gives examples of things to search for
- » Designs/appearance specific to young people
- » Main page too busy & clustered
- » Information section not very specific & information hard to find
- » More variety of information needed
- » Information not clear – need to search for it
- » Easy to find info
- » Easy enough for younger children to understand
- » Info for all different age groups
- » Clear to see opportunities
- » There could be more info available
- » Aimed more at older young people or adults as website can come across quite formal

The group felt that it was easy to find info you were looking for and that that info was relatable to them, they also felt that the way the articles were written made it easy for young people new to Young Scot to understand. The young people said that it was clear to see opportunities that were available at the time and the design and appearance of the website was specific to young people. The group liked that certain pages were straight to the point and were easy to understand. They did however feel that there needed to be more variety of information and that certain topics had a lack of useful content and some info was hard to find. The young people also felt that the website could do with brightening up in terms of colour as they

felt it was too plain and that some of the info that was on the website wasn't relevant to all ages so making this clearer would be good.

## RASAC

- » Pages too specific
- » No external sources
- » Possible external sources - NHS Tayside  
Cool2talk – this is region specific
- » Search engine needs improving – results not relevant
- » Layout is appealing
- » Hard to navigate to specific subject
- » Subheadings under main titles
- » More pages covering broader topics
- » More definition – possibly index or glossary
- » Suggestion box
- » Good descriptive sub-titles
- » Use of language and graphics to suit different age ranges
- » Use of case studies in web pages
- » Highlight how useful talking to other people
- » More links to support groups – possibly page listing national and local resources

The young people felt the layout of the website was appealing and this made it easier to use, they also felt the use of language and graphics used suited the age range that Young Scot cover. The group also like the descriptive sub-titles and tiles within the website as this gave them an idea of what the specific article or page was covering. The group however felt that some pages were too specific, and that the website could do with more pages covering broader topics. They also felt that the website may benefit from a glossary or index page that makes finding topics easier. The young people would like to see more links to external sources. The group also recommended having a “suggestion box” that young people can leave feedback in terms of topics they would like to see information on or ways to improve the website.

## Resources

Both groups were asked to research websites and resources that they and other young people can currently access that explain what loneliness is and gives them helpful and relevant information on what to do if they are experiencing youth loneliness. From this, both groups created a list of websites that they found relevant. The list below shows these websites and resources.

- » [www.campaigntoendloneliness.org](http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org)
- » [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

»» [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

»» [www.iriss.org.uk](http://www.iriss.org.uk)

»» [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

»» [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

»» [www.lonelinesshelpline.com](http://www.lonelinesshelpline.com)

»» [www.webofloneliness.com](http://www.webofloneliness.com)

»» [www.selfgrowth.com](http://www.selfgrowth.com)

The young people felt that some of these websites were a good source of information and gave relevant advice in terms of what to do and services you can access if you are experiencing youth loneliness. Almost all the young people felt that Campaign to End Loneliness was the best resource for young people as it features some informative articles and tips however the site is mostly directed towards older people so many of the information and resources are not fit for purpose. Both groups were in agreement that many of the websites and resources were beneficial to young people but the information was very basic and that the more detailed information was aimed at older people. The young people said that to receive more detailed information you had to phone up helplines and this can be very off putting for someone that is experiencing loneliness.

## Accessing Information

The young people formed a list of places they and other young people would go to access information, this could be anything from websites, services, social media and trusted individuals such as parents, carers, youth workers etc. From this the groups developed the top priorities.

»» Online – social media, websites

»» Friends

»» School – guidance teachers

»» Youth Clubs

»» Doctors – NHS

»» News

Both groups felt that young people would rather access information online as they could search information at their own leisure without anyone making comment or assumptions about them. They also felt that being able to access information online gives young people the opportunity to understand if they are experiencing loneliness and the best way to support themselves through that. The groups did say that if they were to speak to anyone it would be with those who they are closest with such as family and

friends. If they did have to speak to someone outside of that group it would be with a trusted adult such as a doctor, youth worker or guidance teacher as they would have a relationship with that person and would feel confident that they would help them to access the relevant support.

## Support Missing

Both groups considered what support was available and what wasn't, and from this each came up with a list of support they would like to see that can be rolled out locally and nationally to their peers.

- » Talk /chat lines with people of similar ages who have gone through similar experiences
- » Content on what loneliness is
- » How to spot signs of loneliness and how to help
- » Helplines/websites specific to youth loneliness and not just mental health in general
- » More support in schools – young people don't have enough knowledge or understanding on how to deal with it
- » More apps that people of any age can download and talk to people anonymously and interact with other who feel the same

The groups felt the information that is currently available was not really suited for young people and is primarily aimed at older people who are experiencing loneliness. They also said the information that is available is very general and doesn't explain what loneliness actually is. The young people felt that there should be content readily available that explains what loneliness is and the signs to look out for so that you could properly support someone who is experiencing loneliness. It was felt that there should be more awareness of this in school and that this could be introduced within PSE classes. They felt that by having this awareness at an earlier age would help young people become more aware of what support was out there. The young people also said that they would like to see more websites and helplines that are specific to youth loneliness and that it's not just bolted onto mental health. The groups were strongly in favour of making sure that the support came from professionals or people who have experienced first hand the effects of loneliness but did say that these should be anonymous as many people would be put off engaging in this support if you had to openly declare you were experiencing loneliness as there may be negative stigma around this.

# Creating Concepts

Both groups created concepts and ideas based on the information, support and services they had researched and explored throughout the process. From the support they felt was missing they began developing concepts that tackled these issues. Using 'Concept' templates and tools the young people explored who, what, where, why, when and how the concept could be realised, encouraging them to think about different aspects of the solution.

## Brannock High School

### Anonymous Online Chat Service

This concept is for an anonymous online chat service that young people can access to chat with other young people that have or are currently experiencing loneliness. This service would be available to young people aged 11 – 25 years old and would be accessed online through a trusted organisations website such as Young Scot. This resource would enable young people to post online safely and securely to chat to fellow young people about how they are feeling and seek advice and support from their peers. All of this would be done anonymously so not to add to any anxiety that young people may be feeling, it would also give young people peace of mind that no one would be able to judge them as their names wouldn't be known. This resource would hopefully encourage young people to talk openly and honestly about the way they are feeling without anyone treating them differently.

### How to spot the signs of Loneliness and how to help

This concept involves using social media, namely Instagram, to promote and post useful information, articles, videos etc. that help to show the effect of loneliness and how you can support someone through this or access support if you are the one experiencing this. As Instagram is linked to Facebook you would have to be 13 years old to access this and so the age range for this resource would be 13 – 25 years old. There would be daily/weekly posts in innovative and young person friendly ways that helped deliver the message of youth loneliness, what this is, how it can affect you, what the signs are and where you can access support. This content would be developed by young people therefore making it more understandable and using language and terminology they understand. Using Instagram stories, you would be able to post interviews with professionals, medical experts and young people who are experiencing or have experienced loneliness. By doing this young people will have better knowledge and understanding of loneliness and will be able to find the relevant support or direct their peers to this.

## RASAC

### Online Support Group

This concept is for an online support group that young people aged between 11 – 25 years old can access. There would be specific age-related pages that gave varying types of information from basic updates to more in-depth support depending on the level of information you required. The main focus would be for the resource to have information on what loneliness is, what support you could access and what are the main causes of loneliness. The group would look to roll this out through specific targeted local authorities with the ambition of it being rolled out nationally. The resource would link to social media and there would be frequent posts promoting this service and the information it covers. The hope is that this online resource would encourage community support groups to form so that young people had others to talk to face to face which would in turn help alleviate youth loneliness.

### Youth Loneliness Logo Hub

This concept is based on the click safety CEOP logo that you find on websites. This logo when clicked takes you to the CEOP website where you can report online abuse. The idea is similar to the CEOP logo, but it instead takes you directly to a hub or resources on youth loneliness. This online resource would allow you to access inspirational and uplifting quotes; specific YouTube videos that aimed at supporting young people experiencing loneliness; information articles and case studies from people who have experienced or are currently experiencing loneliness and advice on how to overcome and support you through these feelings. The hub would be available to all young people aged 11 – 25 years old and would be rolled out nationally across Scotland. The resource would be available 24/7 and would be promoted through social media. There would also be amplified promotion of the resource on specific themed days and weeks such as Anti-Bullying week, Mental Health Awareness Week and Loneliness Awareness Week.

## Developing Final Solutions

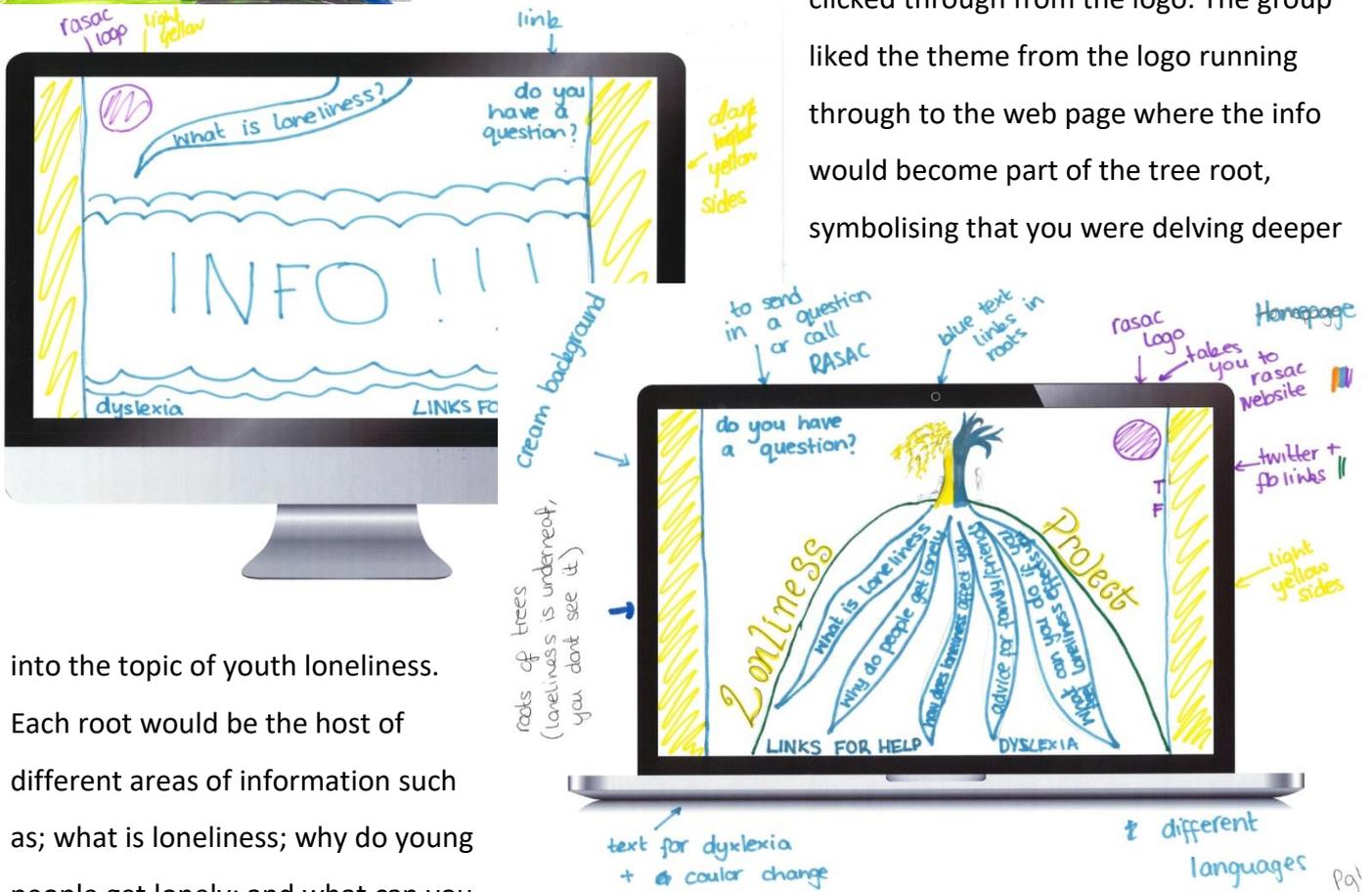
Both groups were then asked to select one concept and develop this further. RASAC chose to lead with the Youth Loneliness Logo Hub and Brannock High School selected their social media approach. Each group began to design how these would look and how the information would sit on each site. The groups looked at colour schemes, how information was delivered and the accessibility of the service.

# RASAC



The young people at RASAC developed the logo that would lead the site. This logo would work similar to the CEOP logo where if clicked it would take you through full page where you could access information on youth loneliness. The idea behind the logo was to depict loneliness and how this can make you feel.

The group then developed what the website would look like when you clicked through from the logo. The group liked the theme from the logo running through to the web page where the info would become part of the tree root, symbolising that you were delving deeper

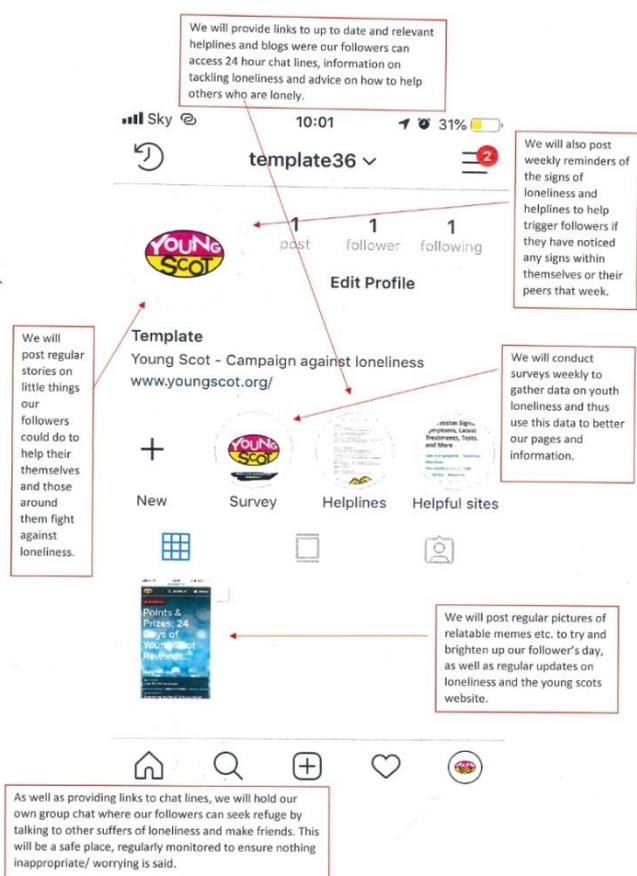


into the topic of youth loneliness. Each root would be the host of different areas of information such as; what is loneliness; why do young people get lonely; and what can you do if loneliness is affecting your life? The group wanted to make sure that the website was bright and welcoming so that it encouraged other young people to visit it. They also wanted to keep the colours from the logo throughout the website for continuity. The homepage would feature a section where you could anonymously send in a question about youth loneliness and have that answered on a Q&A section. The group were also particularly aware that young people with learning difficulties and disabilities would potentially be using the page and felt that this should be accessible for all. Therefore, the page would contain the ability to change the background colour, font and word size so that young people could read the information and interact with the page easily. The group also felt that young people should have the

ability to change the language that is used on the page to accommodate the diverse range of nationalities that live in Scotland.

## Brannock High School

The young people from Brannock High focused their idea around social media, more specifically Instagram.

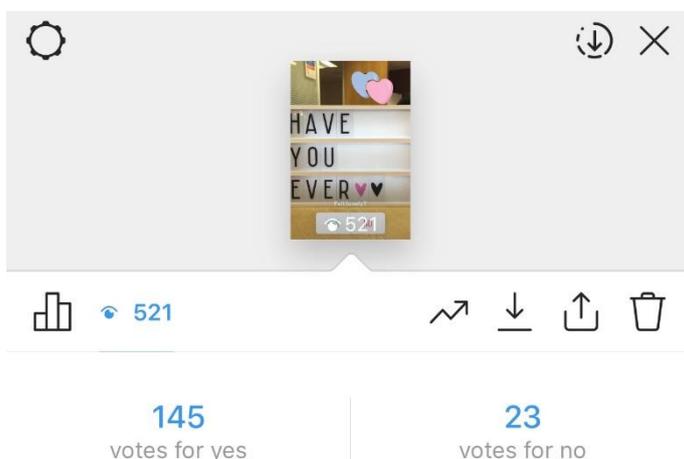


The reason for this is due to the high numbers of young people that use the social media platform. The group said that they use Instagram to find out info and research resources and felt that this would be the best

way to engage with young people. The group designed and mocked up an Instagram page to show what would be available on the channel. They would make use of Instagram Stories to produce short engaging videos that directed young people to information about youth loneliness. The group also said they would create short surveys to gather data on youth loneliness and would use this data to ensure the content that was being produced was relevant and was covering the needs of young people across Scotland. The group would also use photo's, GIFs, infographics etc. to ensure that the content that was being published was fresh, engaging and eye catching for other young people. The Instagram page would also link directly to the Young Scot Website where there would be more in-depth information on the content that had been shared from Instagram.

The group designed how the website would look when you linked to it through Instagram. The young people wanted to make sure the site was friendly and welcoming for any young person that went onto it so

decided that there should be lots of bright uplifting colours used and that the website was clear and clean. The group felt the information tabs should appear as apps as if on a phone and when selected it would take you through to the full information resource. The group also had a wall of emojis that you would select to depict how you were feeling that day and when clicked it would generate an uplifting quote or saying that would give young people a little pick me up. The group also wanted to incorporate music playlists that young people could listen to that would improve the way they were feeling. The page also features a Q&A section where young people can anonymously submit a question that is on their mind or are wanting more information on loneliness and this will be answered or will direct people in the right place.



The group then tested their idea by creating a short Instagram story using Young Scot’s Instagram account. This included a poll asking the questions of ‘Have you ever felt lonely?’, followed by five top tips

to support anyone who is experiencing loneliness. The story was live on Young Scot’s Instagram account for 24 hours. The story had good engagement with 521 people viewing it and 168 taking part in the poll. Of this 145 voted that they had experienced loneliness and 23 voted that they hadn’t experienced loneliness. The final result of the poll showed that 86% of young people have experienced loneliness which shows a real need for more young person friendly information.

## Conclusion

The focus of this project was to engage with young people on the topic of youth loneliness and how young people in Scotland can receive the help and support they need to tackle this issue. It was clear from both of the Loneliness Action Teams that youth loneliness can be directly related to mental health and the effect this has on young people, however there is no clear and concise information directly for young people on what youth loneliness is and steps you can take to combat this. From the engagement with both groups it

was clear that more needs to be done in terms of the information that is available. This means making sure information is fit for young people; in a format and language that young people understand; and on platforms or in ways that are appropriate for young people.

Through the group's research into the topic it was noted that there was support missing such as tips to alleviate loneliness, how to spot the signs of loneliness as well as useful websites and support groups. The groups felt that in order to support young people who are experiencing loneliness there should be dedicated young person friendly information that's not intimidating to read and digest and that there should be options for young people to have questions answered anonymously without the added pressure or fear of declaring how you are feeling.

Both groups felt that this should be done using channels that young people feel comfortable using such as trusted websites and social media as these are the most common places young people will go to for information. The groups felt that it was important that information was easily accessible and laid out in a way that makes sense. The young people also highlighted that Scotland as a country has a range of young people from various backgrounds and diversities and as such this information should be inclusive to them as well.

The young people felt that loneliness is often seen as an issue that effects older people and if society continues to think in this way young people will struggle to find meaningful and appropriate information and content that supports Scotland's young people to combat an ever-growing issue in youth loneliness.

Young Scot will build on this work following continued funding from the Co-operative Foundation. The two-year funding to March 2021, will see Young Scot recruit a dedicated team of 20 young people who will build on the findings from the Loneliness Action Teams to design and develop activities that will be rolled out nationally to tackle youth loneliness across Scotland.

# Get in touch...



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Young Scot Enterprise is a Scottish registered charity (SC029757) and is a company limited by guarantee (202687) with its registered office at:

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# Appendix - Young Scot's Co-design Experience & Approach

Young Scot has extensive experience in engaging with Scotland's young people to seek their views and input in the development of the services they use. Young people have a significant role to play in encouraging organisations and communities to adopt a more collaborative culture, focusing resources to effectively meet the needs of individuals and communities.

Our co-design service involves young people systematically creating, designing and delivering solutions in collaboration with organisations. Young people are involved much earlier in decision making process through a highly participative approach developing informed insights, ideas, recommendations and solutions for policy and practice.

Supporting people to co-design ideas has been shown to have a radical impact on service innovation. We know using a co-design approach enables a more distributed, decentralised approach to innovation that supports Scotland's ambitions to cede power and responsibility directly to young people.

This approach ties into key policy areas including:

- » United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child
- » Public Service Reform/Christie Commission
- » Community Empowerment Act
- » Getting It Right for Every Child

## Explore

Define by uncovering the issues through gathering insights and genuine experiences from/by young people

## Create

Generate ideas and co-produce solutions with/by young people

## Reflect

Consider the future impact and sustainability of the ideas produced

## Recommend

Produce influential ideas/solutions with young people

## Implement

Implementation of ideas/solutions with young people