

YOUNG SCOT

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CO-DESIGN

Youth Loneliness Toolkit



Foundation



Using this Toolkit



What's this toolkit all about?

This toolkit is here to inspire others to take action on youth loneliness in their local community. It's a youth-led toolkit that's been co-designed with young people who've already trialled local activities to support youth loneliness.

It can be hard to know where to start when it comes to tricky issues like loneliness but this resource will help steer you in the right direction. Hear what others have done, steal some ideas and get going with some top tips.

Who created it?

Between summer 2023 and spring 2024, Young Scot ran a project in partnership with the Co-op Foundation and three youth groups. Each youth group was invited to become a Local Action Group on youth loneliness. Using Young Scot's co-design process, YSHive, they were tasked with developing a possible solution to youth loneliness in their local community. The Local Action Group's explored loneliness through a local lens, creating ideas on what could be done locally before testing out one of their ideas. This toolkit is the result of their learning on this project, and they hope it will inspire others to take action on youth loneliness.

Who's it for?

Whether you work with young people, volunteer at youth clubs, you're a young person yourself or want to create more positive spaces for young people, this toolkit is here for you. We hope a wide variety of people across Scotland can use this resource in their communities including youth workers, teachers, group leaders, community leaders, sessional workers and volunteers young and old.

Putting Youth Loneliness in Perspective

Loneliness is a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when there is a mismatch between the quantity and quality of the social relationships that we have, and those that we want.

Those aged between 16-29 are over two times as likely to report feeling lonely often or always than those over 70 according to new analysis of the latest UK-wide Office for National Statistics (ONS) data. Higher levels of loneliness have been reported during and since lockdown. Overall levels of chronic levels of loneliness, where young people feel lonely often or always, continue to be at higher levels since they grew during the pandemic.

According to the UK government's Tackling Loneliness strategy review, reported loneliness is higher for people who:

- are 16-24 years old
- are female
- live with a limiting mental health condition
- are renting
- have lower neighbourhood belonging
- have lower local social trust

In 2020 Young Scot's Youth Loneliness Panel ran an online survey on youth loneliness which received almost **250** responses from young people across Scotland aged between 11 and 25 years old.

84% of young people who took part in the survey said that they had experienced loneliness. When asked to identify what factors may have increased their feelings of loneliness, **54%** of the respondents identified school; **51%** of respondents identified relationships with family and friends; **49%** identified mental health; and **47%** identified social media. Some of the other factors identified included: where you live, bullying, peer pressure and health.

When asked to identify factors that may have decreased their feelings of loneliness, **64%** identified relationships with family and friends; **40%** identified social media; and **34%** identified school. Other factors identified by respondents included: online chats, gaming, sport and youth groups.

When asked if they were aware of any information or support that related to youth loneliness, **71.5%** said that they weren't. The survey also showed that **66%** of respondents did not feel that the support available to young people helped to reduce youth loneliness. When asked if they felt that there is enough awareness and resources surrounding youth loneliness, **18.6%** agreed or strongly agreed that there was, but **53%** disagreed or strongly disagreed that there was. The respondents were asked to rate how comfortable they felt talking about youth loneliness, with **12%** being very comfortable, **40%** being comfortable, **36%** being uncomfortable and **11%** being very uncomfortable.

When asked what they associate with youth loneliness, the young people who responded identified issues around mental health and wellbeing, bullying and feelings of not fitting in.

84% of young people who took part in the survey said that they had experienced loneliness.

Case Studies

Take a look at the youth-led activities and events the Local Action Groups across Scotland implemented to combat youth loneliness in their communities.

Pop-up Boba Tea Cafes on Orkney



A group of young people from both the West and East Mainland Youth Achievement groups on Orkney, supported by CLD Youth Services, were passionate about offering fun events across the islands to allow young people in more isolated locations enjoy social, youth friendly events.

Boba tea (also known as bubble tea) has become an increasingly popular drink with young people and the group thought this could be a big draw for different kinds of young people. They decided to create Pop-up Boba Tea Cafes across the Orkney islands, allowing young people to socialise and have fun together. The group created videos showcasing local support services for young people and linked these to a QR code stuck on the boba tea cups and free highlighter giveaways on the night. They learned how to craft boba tea, how to market their cafes, waited on tables at each event and created delicious boba tea drinks for all attendees. The group provided games, fidgets and craft activities on the café tables.

As transport and location can be a challenging barrier for young people on Orkney, the group hosted their cafes in harder to access places including Finstown, Burray, Hoy and Westray.

The youth group overcame challenges with boat timetables, their ordering system, cold venues, lack of background music and one unexpectedly busy cafe. They grew their confidence, worked hard as a team and learned more about how isolation affects loneliness on Orkney. The group would love to continue running boba tea cafes across the islands and see more events like theirs available in different communities across Orkney.

Case Studies

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Art Workshops and a Youth Art Exhibition in Perth



Youth Voice, based in YMCA Tayside, knew that art was a great way for young people to explore their feelings and express themselves. The group chose to help young people both explore their experiences with loneliness through art, while coming together to create art and connect with others through art. Over regular weekly art sessions, run from YMCA Tayside’s youth centre, the group supported young people to create multiple art works using paint, pencil and sound mediums.

Using their own experiences as young people and their new skills in youth work settings as young adults, they welcomed new faces to their youth centre. The group supported over 25 young people to create multiple art works using paint, pencil, digital and sound mediums.

Youth Voice then showcased the young artists’ work in a Youth Art Exhibition at the brand-new YMCA Tayside centre, The Y Centre, on Atholl Street in Perth. The exhibition celebrated the diversity of young people’s experience, creativity, emotion and expression.

The group found it challenging to balance project work with their studies, volunteer and work schedules but they continued to support one another throughout to achieve success and have an impact on lonely young people. When their art exhibition was unexpectedly delayed due to venue issues, they drew on their resilience as a team, close friendship and problem-solving attitudes to overcome this. The group hopes more activities and resources can be become widely available in Perth, Kinross and Tayside to prevent youth loneliness and give young people spaces they’re excited to engage with.

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Themed Youth Nights in Hawick



The Young Leaders team from Escape Youth Services in Hawick wanted to develop themed nights of activity at their youth centre to encourage new young people to attend. They knew that Escape, with its resourceful, welcoming staff and well-equipped venue, was the most cost effective and convenient place to host their events. However, the group were keen to explore what local young people experiencing loneliness wanted to get involved in, so they created an online survey to find out.

The group promoted the survey on social media and by word of mouth – they received over **100** responses from local young people. Feedback from the survey gave them insights into loneliness locally and helped them pick their themes – Sports Night, Bingo Night and Quiz Night.

The Young Leaders chose to hold their events on Friday evenings, offering free food and free booking via their website using Eventbrite. Feedback from young people who attended their events said that they felt less lonely, more confident and excited to attend future events. Just as vitally, the Young Leaders grew closer as group, demonstrated strong teamwork, improved their evaluation skills and learnt how to communicate better with each other after each event.

Get Inspired

Struggling to know where to start and need some inspiration? The Local Action Groups have got you covered. Check out their ideas below and start creating events, workshops and spaces young people are interested in. This will encourage lonely young people in your community to reach out and start connecting with others.

Top-rated Ideas

Create Youth Cafes and Drop-In Sessions

The young people from the Local Action Groups highly recommend establishing Youth Cafes and Drop-in sessions for young people for a variety of ages, allowing young people to socialise, have fun with others and find new, safe places to go regularly. Accessibility is key, so try to make these spaces queer friendly, with free food available and sensory, quiet spaces for neurodiverse young people.

Host Gaming Sessions

Young people from the Local Action Groups recommend trips to the arcade, creating Dungeons and Dragons clubs, Fortnite and Mario Kart gaming sessions as well as board and card game nights. Gaming helps young people meet new people, de-stress and have fun together.

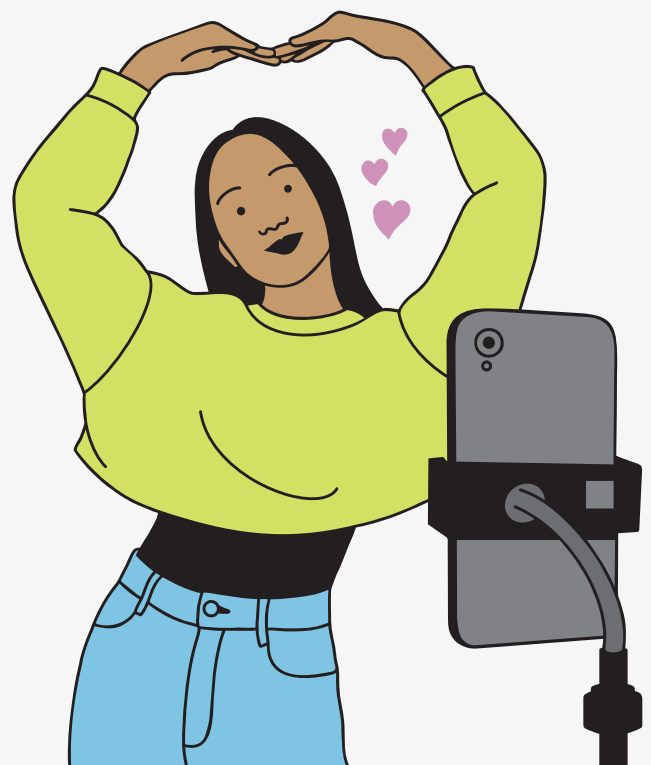
Offer Music Activities

Whether it's offering music workshops, access to instruments, silent discos or trips to concerts and musicals, the Local Action Groups think music is a great way to improve connectedness.

Use TikTok with Young People

The Local Action Groups think TikTok can be a great way to encourage lonely young people to socialise and connect with others in-person as well as online. Encourage groups to try out trends together, including learning new dances and having fun with trending sounds. Don't shy away from being silly in these videos with them too!

Recipe videos on TikTok could be used to inspire cooking nights and make-up or hair tutorials could inspire pamper nights. The young people believe TikTok can boost your self-esteem, whether you're making content with others or just on your own, so encourage creativity with the app when you can.



Get Inspired

Check out ideas from the Local Action Groups below and start creating events, workshops and spaces young people are interested in.



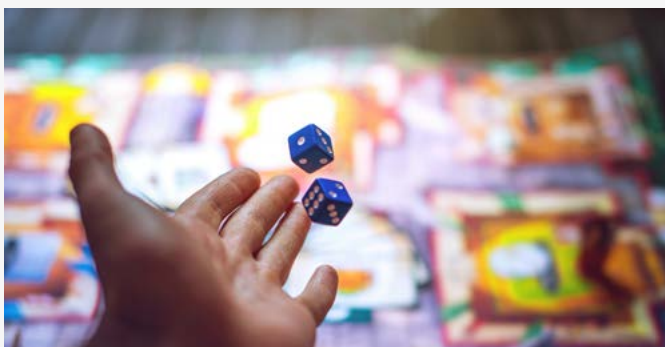
Fun Days & Nights Out

- Cinema trips
- Arcade visits
- Photography workshops
- Escape Room trips
- Theatre and musical trips



Sports Activities for Days In

- Basketball
- Badminton
- Dodgeball
- Karate
- Dancing
- Swimming



Fun Days & Nights In

- Art workshops
- Board game sessions
- Cooking workshops
- Make-up & hair tutorials
- Book clubs
- Quiz nights
- Bingo nights
- Craft sessions
- Free food nights



Sports Activities for Days Out

- Bowling
- Go Karting
- Water sports
- Ice skating
- Ziplining

Get Inspired

Check out ideas from the Local Action Groups below and start creating events, workshops and spaces young people are interested in.

Develop an app or website for showcasing local events, activities, resources and services for young people to get involved in

Establish Queer Support Groups

Signpost young people to local and national support resources that could help them such as Young Minds and Young Scot

Plan a camping weekend

Schedule Family Fun Days to support positive relationships in the wider community around young people

Create themed weeks of activity focused on wellbeing such as Make a Friend week or No Negative Thoughts week

Support young people to take part in the Youth Achievement Award

Help them join a Duke of Edinburgh open group

Invite them to get involved with one of The Prince's Trust programmes

Take Action

Between August 2019 and May 2021 Young Scot led a co-design youth panel, funded by the Co-op Foundation, aimed at raising awareness and tackling youth loneliness. The Youth Loneliness Panel published a report setting out their recommendations for addressing youth loneliness at a strategic level, ensuring consistency and sustainability locally and nationally. You can read their report [here](#).

Their work provided the context for information campaigns on youth loneliness since 2021 and the work of the Local Action Groups between 2023-24. We want their recommendations to continue to have impact today so why not try taking action on one of them in your local community?

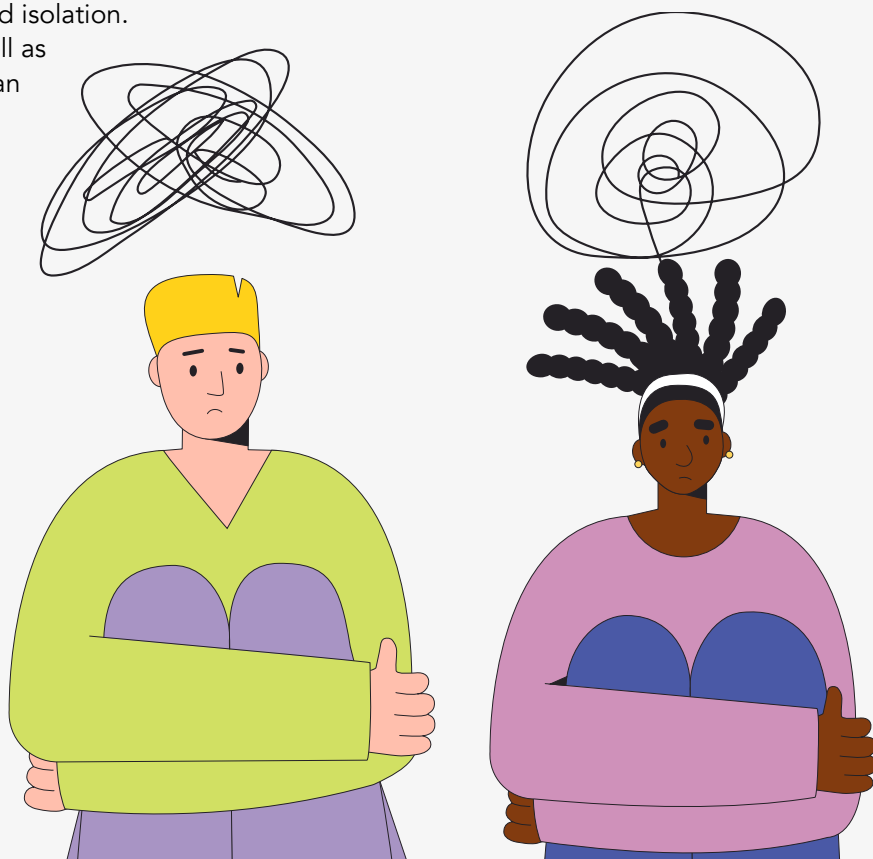
Here are some actions you could take locally to tackle the wider issues that cause youth loneliness. Each action is based on recommendations on the Youth Loneliness Panel's final report.

Design a youth-led anti-bullying campaign in your local community.

Bullying behaviour heavily affects young people who are experiencing loneliness, having wider impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. Efforts to address this issue would positively affect young people who are impacted by feelings of loneliness and isolation. By creating awareness of the issue, as well as providing support and information, we can help tackle youth loneliness in Scotland.

Create local support groups and resources tailored to the needs of young people in collaboration with your Local Authority.

Communities are more vital than ever in making young people feel supported and understood. They can often offer a sense of belonging, whether online or in person. Try to create groups or resources that are supported by professionals, openly accessible and allow young people to express themselves. Run groups in different locations, at a variety of times and at affordable costs. Encourage young people to express their experiences, positive or negative, on their physical and mental wellbeing. This will empower them, foster connections with others and help link them into wider support. Offer resources in alternative forms including audio, text-to-speak, large fonts and braille. Remember to advertise in youth spaces online and in the community to get the word out.



Take Action

Provide support for young people and their families around healthy relationships.

Healthy relationships are vital for young people to feel supported and able to connect with others. They allow young people to maintain good mental health, creating a feeling of support so they can take part in opportunities and direct their own paths. By ensuring there is local support to create and maintain the relationships, we can help both young people and their families to tackle youth loneliness and isolation in their own lives.

Ensure your local services are available online too.

It is vital to meet young people where they are, both physically and digitally, to ensure they have access to the right support and information. This is key to providing services locally, especially when young people cannot access services due to their circumstances or restrictions set upon them. By ensuring that services are accessible both digitally and in varied formats, it will ensure that all young people will be able to engage and feel supported on their own terms.

We asked the Local Action Groups what changes they would like to see in their communities. They would love there to be:

- More accessible activities available
- More events happening more often
- A variety of clubs available locally
- Help young people develop the tools and skills they need to feel comfortable taking part
- Places for young people to go every night of the week
- Better local transport available on evenings and weekends
- Events or activities that help young people make new friends
- Have lots of different clubs available to young people



Top Tips

Based on their experiences, the young people and the youth workers from the Local Action Groups have some pearls of wisdom for you. Here are their top tips for success!

Consider Your Resources

- Utilise staff, volunteers and the community workers
- Invite young people to take on leadership roles
- Remember to have backups for your backups
- You can still do something on limited budget, just get creative!
- Think about what's already available to keep costs down
- Ask for discounts, freebies, food, venues and volunteers from local networks
- Get to know who and what is in your local community
- Have fidget and sensory toys available during activities
- Social media is your best friend for advertising but word of mouth always helps
- Use online surveys or polls if you need ideas
- Youth cafés and youth centres are an ideal venue

Get Others Involved

- Schools: particularly head teachers, guidance teachers & office staff
- Local community groups, businesses and support groups
- Local mental health and wellbeing services
- Community service officers
- Local MPs and Council Members
- Young Scot and other national organisations for young people
- Invite anyone who's interested to get involved and support

Plan Ahead

- Plan events local young people are excited by
- Get ideas from young people or use online surveys or polls
- Different groups of young people might want different activities and need different kinds of support
- Plan age-appropriate activities
- Free food will always attract young people
- Research what's needed to make it work
- Meet regularly and use group chats to communicate
- Plan ahead of time and think it through
- Use schedule sheets, timelines and SMART planning
- Try out the 'Structured' app to help you plan
- Plan for delays or mistakes if you're buying resources
- Check you have the right amount of time for your activities
- Consider how much prep time you need
- Create event plans with clear roles for everyone involved
- Discuss your plans and roles beforehand
- Delegate!
- Make advertising clear so everyone knows what to expect and what's available
- Make sure the activities are different than what's currently offered
- Use different spaces at your venue for different activities
- Create time and space for young people to socialise
- Provide snacks, fidget toys and crafts like loom bands during activities
- Continue to plan, review, plan and review

Top Tips

Budget Wisely

- Try out a mind map for budgeting
- Keep track of your budget in one place – Excel always helps
- Research costs for resources, activities and venue
- Check what resources the venue already has
- Utilise your networks to borrow things or get discounts
- Give room in the budget for mistakes and delays
- Budget over to yourself wiggle room

After Activities & Events

- Debrief with staff, young people and volunteers involved
- Review the successes and the challenges together
- Take the feedback from young people on-board
- Welcome advice and constructive criticism – it'll make your next activity even better!
- Put things in place to improve for next time

During Activities & Events

- Attendees might be nervous so chat to them, explain where everything is and what's going to happen to reassure them
- Provide snacks, fidget toys and crafts like loom bands during activities
- Communicate clearly throughout so everyone knows what's happening
- Use microphones for large or busy spaces
- Keep the pace up so people don't get bored
- Don't panic when things don't go as you thought they would
- Be prepared to think on your feet and change things up
- Get feedback from those who came along

Words of Wisdom

- Meet regularly
- Don't give up!
- Overprepare
- Give others encouragement and positive feedback
- Keep your momentum going
- Plan for the worst and hope for the best
- Keep trying even if it doesn't go well at the beginning – it gets easier!
- Take your time
- Don't overthink the process

Tips for Young leaders

The young people who took part in the Local Action Groups developed lots of new skills and gained loads of new experiences during their time running activities and events to tackle youth loneliness.

If you're a young person, you can do it too! Here's their advice, tips and experiences to inspire you to lead events locally.

- Just be yourself
- Be aware that the young people coming along might be as nervous as you are!
- Have a go at talking to people you don't know to build both your confidence and theirs
- Get involved in the activity and have fun too
- Things might go wrong but that's ok, just try to stay calm and try to think on your feet

'The biggest stand out moment has been the response from the young people. They've been coming to us and they've been saying our art workshops have been the most exciting thing about the YMCA'

- Lily, 20, Perth

'I learnt that I don't need people telling me what to do all the time. I learnt to take initiative and use common sense so I know what to do next'

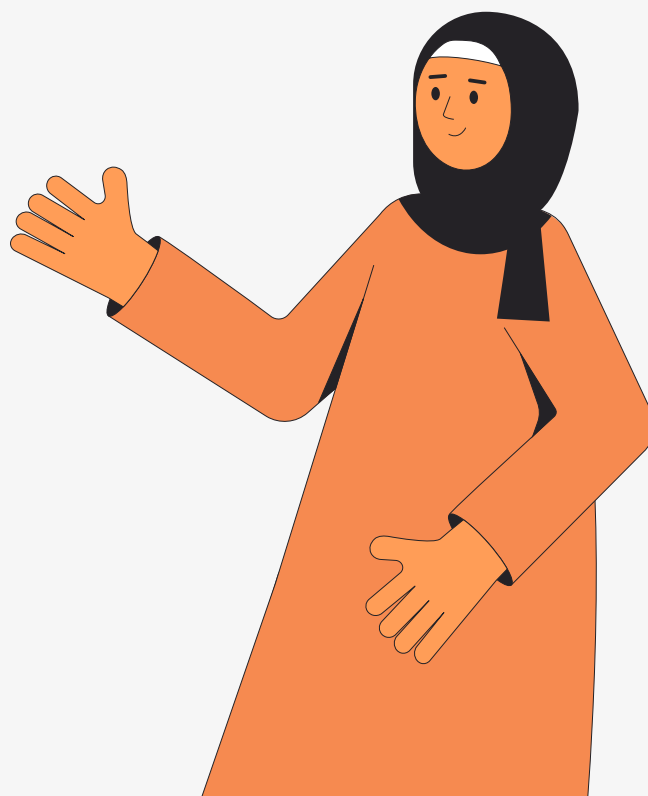
- Rhea, 15, Hawick

'It was hard talking to people I didn't know but I enjoyed travelling and helping people'

- Taylor, 16, Stromness

'The best thing about the project was how good the Boba tea was, it was great to meet new people and we had a nice tour of Westray'

- Sean, 14, Stromness



Tips for Young leaders

'I love how it's helped form connections and a community with those who are struggling with loneliness. Just having the art workshops has opened up discussions from and between young people about their shared experiences and created links between those who may not connect otherwise.'

- Vicky, 23, Perth

'The best thing was travelling to new places and making new friends. I found a relative in Westray and managed to speak to people.'

- Erin, 15, Stromness

I gained skills in working in a team, talking to big groups of people and keeping check on everything. The events' success was the best thing.'

- Joey, 17, Hawick

'One of my highlights was seeing the art workshops expanding week in week out. We started out with 2 one week which expanded to 15 young people engaging in our sessions who probably would never have engaged with us before'

- Jack, 20, Perth

'I learnt that if I just focus on what I'm doing instead of focus on the negatives that it gets easier and better' or 'I liked running the bingo and quiz night and I learned how to speak to bigger crowds than I'm used to'

- Asha, 14, Hawick

'It's been a challenge to be able to talk to young people more confidently but I learned that I can have fun no matter what I'm doing'

- Thomas, 15, Hawick

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