

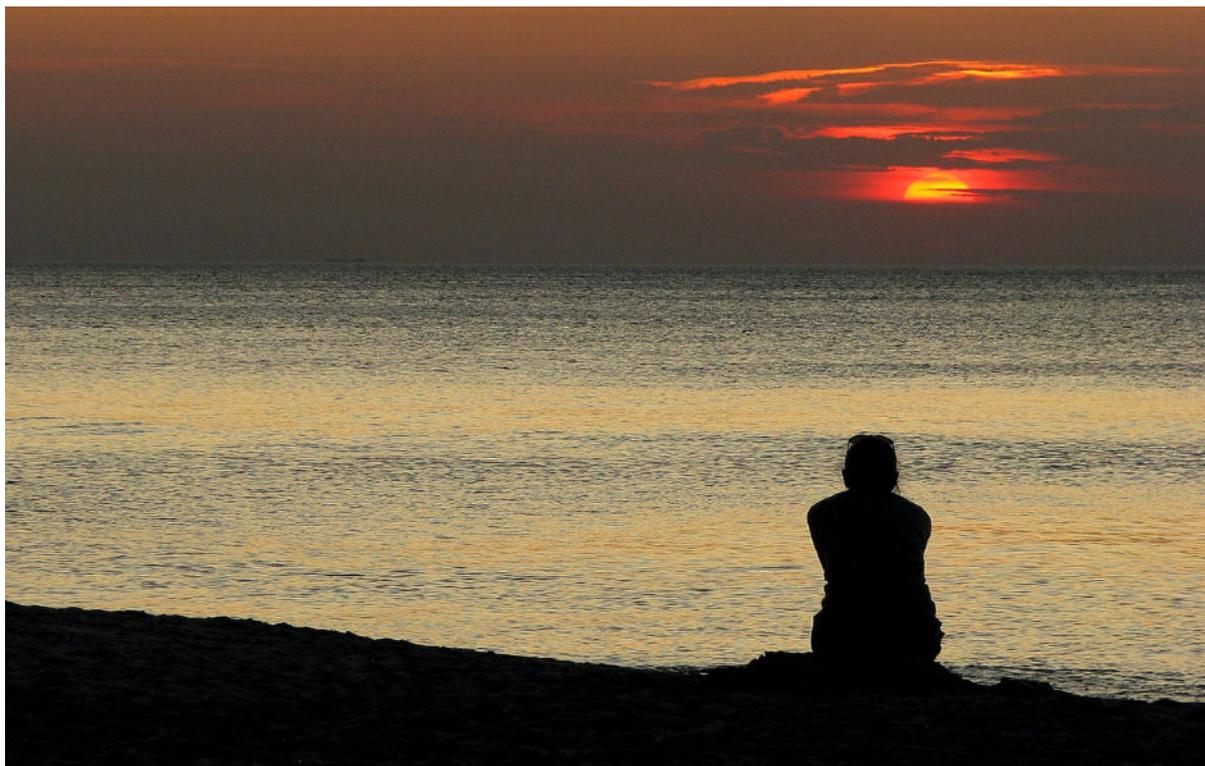
**Stop
Loneliness Start
Volunteering**

Good practice Compendium



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What is the Stop Loneliness, Start Volunteering project?

The project was developed as a response to the increasing hardship caused by isolation and loneliness experienced by youths across Europe, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19. The main aim of the *Stop Loneliness Start Volunteering* (SLSV) project is to raise awareness about how volunteering can be used as a means of preventing and alleviating social isolation of young people, and to provide empowerment for youth organisations and organisations involving young volunteers.

Supported and informed by our extensive research into in the field of youth volunteering and how this prevents loneliness and isolation in 10 European countries, this compendium presents to you information on Best Practices to help develop and establish quality volunteer programmes that are geared towards combating the isolation of young people.

Who were a part of the SLSV project?



Slovene Philanthropy is an independent, non-governmental, non-political, non-profit, humanitarian organisation working in the public interest since 1992. Its programmes are aimed at improving the quality of life in the community and advocating for the vulnerable groups in society. Slovene Philanthropy's central activity is the promotion of volunteering, training and advocacy for various stakeholders.

Website: <https://www.filantropija.org/>



Volunteer Ireland is the national volunteer development organisation and a support body for 29 local Volunteer Centres in Ireland. Their work includes also supporting national volunteer involving organisations by offering bespoke training, consultancy and an extensive range of online guides and resources on engaging volunteers as well as supporting large scale corporate volunteering projects.

Website: <http://www.volunteer.ie>



FriSe is the national umbrella organisation for 69 local volunteer centres and 10 self-help organisations across all of Denmark. FriSe works to support, develop and promote volunteering and to improve the framework and conditions for volunteer organisations, in addition to run a number of projects and initiatives which aim to make it easier to become and be a volunteer and easier to be a voluntary association.

Website: <https://www.frise.dk/>



DKolektiv is a social development organisation built on the 15 years' experience of the Volunteer Centre Osijek in the fields of development of volunteering, civil society and democratic culture. The organisation's mission is to inspire and support democratic culture, the development of civil society and volunteerism, the creation of equal opportunities and active participation of citizens. DKolektiv cooperates with civil society organisations and initiatives, citizens, public

institutions, public and private institutions, media, the economy as well as European and international organisations.

Website: <https://www.dkolektiv.hr/public/hr>



The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), previously the European Volunteer Centre, was established in 1992. It is a European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to the promotion and support of volunteers and volunteering in Europe at the European, national or regional level. Their aim to be the leading voice in the values-based volunteering debate in Europe, to influence and share current trends and challenges, develop and provide policy advice and expertise for European policymakers.

Website: <https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/>



e.p.a. is an independent, International Youth NGO based in Hamburg. e.p.a. has been active within a network of partners in 40 countries over 4 continents, involved in Youth Exchanges, Training Courses, Seminars and Voluntary Service. e.p.a. works especially with young people with fewer opportunities (labelled 'Neets', young migrant and refugees) from disadvantaged communities by creating access to non-formal learning and supporting European youth projects.

Website: www.go-epa.org



What can I find in this Compendium?

With this collection of information and best practices from the 10 member states of the Stop Loneliness Start Volunteering project we hope to provide valuable insights into how volunteering can be a way out of isolation and loneliness for young people. By providing these examples we hope to empower civil society organisations and volunteer involving organisations to adjust their programmes to include those at risk of being lonely and to reach those already lonely.

What is Loneliness?

There are many definitions of the word but here are some examples that we have come across.

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' (The Campaign to End Loneliness)

Loneliness is a perceived mismatch between the quality or quantity of social connections that a person has and what they would like to have. (The Marmalade Trust)

Loneliness is not the same as being alone. While loneliness is associated with social isolation, the two terms are not interchangeable. Isolation is a measurable objective state, determined by the number of social contacts a person has, while loneliness is a subjective experience (EU Science Hub: Defining Loneliness)

The feeling of loneliness has a signalling function for people, including young people : it is part of human innate biological warning systems and it motivates to (re)connect with other people. (JRS Workshop and Conference Report: Interventions to reduce loneliness among youth, July 2022)

'The first step in combating loneliness is to accept that it is normal and that at some point in one's life everyone will experience/has experienced this feeling. Loneliness is a life process, so it cannot be fixed, but when people begin to realise this and break down this taboo there will be a greater connection with those who suffer from it.' (Judith Merkies, Loneliness Europe)

Are there different types of Loneliness?



Yes there are! Please see the following breakdown borrowed from the Campaign to End Loneliness. These three are the most commonly identified in evidence and literature on loneliness:

- **Emotional** loneliness – ‘the absence of meaningful relationships’
- **Social** loneliness – a ‘perceived deficit in the quality of social connections’
- **Existential** loneliness – a ‘feeling of fundamental separateness from others and the wider world’

Other types of loneliness can include:

- **Transient** loneliness – a feeling that comes and goes
- **Situational** loneliness – only occurring at certain times like Sundays, bank holidays or Christmas
- **Chronic** loneliness – feeling lonely all or most of the time

*People don't want to go into activities as a 'Victim of Loneliness'. But they want to engage in activities to get rid of the loneliness.
(Timor, Community Worker - Elegast)*

Is Loneliness a problem?

Yes absolutely! The findings from the SLSV project highlighted what many other research on this topic have found – that feeling of Loneliness and Social Isolation have increased significantly in the past couple of year. Loneliness and isolation can lead to social exclusion and severe distress in young people but chronic or persistent loneliness is proved to lead to further unhealthy behaviours, decrease in mental health, more pessimistic outlook on life, as well as increased distrust of the wider community (EU Science Hub – Loneliness – Risk factors and consequences). To help combat this, civil society plays an extremely important role.

Who is at risk at being Lonely?



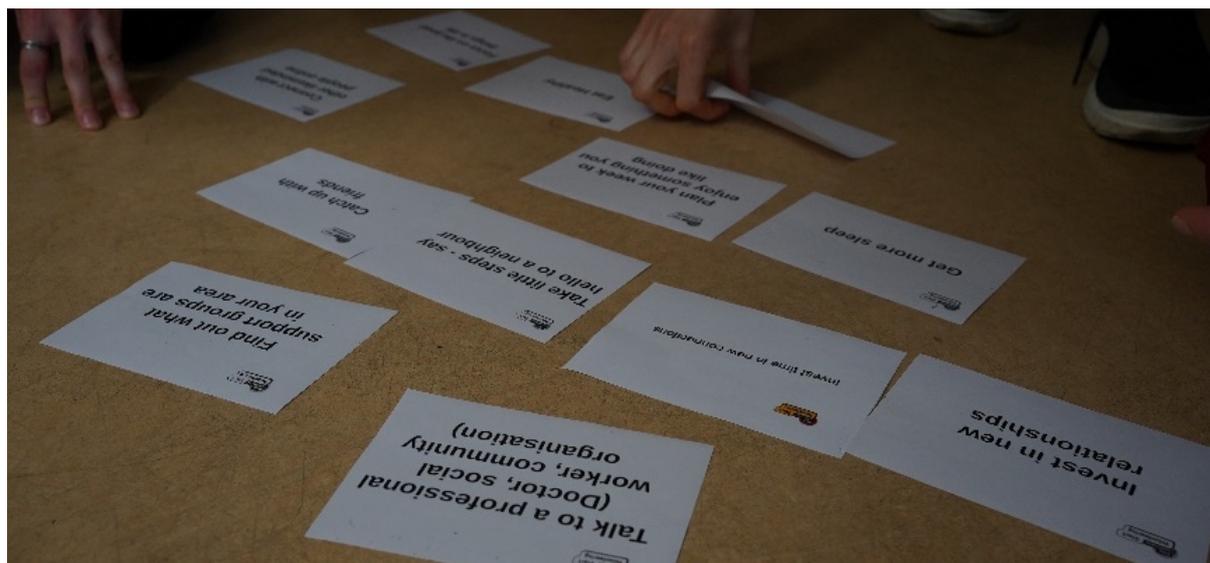
One could say that everyone is at risk of feeling lonely, as most people at some point in their lives experience the feeling of loneliness one way or other. However certain factors have been found to be associated with higher rates of loneliness such as poor health, unfavourable economic circumstances and living alone. (Science for Policy Brief: Loneliness – an unequally shared burden in Europe?) Other factors that contribute to loneliness would be age, sex, race, location,

education, employment, personality and access to social network/social activities.

Voluntary social years and volunteering in general are a privilege. Maybe there should be more incentives and more advantages.

(Matthis, Volunteer - Play Mobile)

Is Volunteering the answer to Loneliness?



In 2017 Volunteer Ireland conducted research on *The Impact of Volunteering on Health and Wellbeing of the Volunteer*. The results showed 67% of those under the age of 22 experienced an increase in their mental health and well-being after participating in volunteering activities. In addition to this the SLSV project looked at what would be the value of volunteering for young people that were or had been dealing with loneliness or social isolation:

- Volunteering had positive effects on their mental health or overall personal well-being – on average over 72%.
- Volunteering was a good way to connect with others and helped expand their social network– on average over 72%
- Volunteering helped to build self-esteem and self-confidence – over 67%.
- Volunteering helped them overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation – over 65%.

We think we can safely say that Volunteering can be one of the antidotes to Loneliness, in addition to other supports needed. As well as using this Compendium to help raise awareness on Loneliness, it is our hope that it will inspire you to look at what we can do to specifically develop ways to encourage and support youths affected by loneliness and social isolation to volunteer.

I saw a huge change in my view of people. I no longer think 'people are just annoying, or people are just bad. I gained a more positive outlook because here, people smile and are happy to see you. It is wonderful to feel like, it's okay for me to be here and that people like me.
 (Cille, Service User, Billund Youth Network)

What can we do?



Children and young people who are lonely or isolated definitely turn to us. How do we notice this? We notice that they often have the feeling that they have no one to turn to, that they have no confidants, they might feel no one cares about them, or come from families where they do not feel they can confide in their parents. (Neža, Tom Telefon Organisation)

The success of civil society interventions and programmes depends partly on the kind of volunteering activities offered to support youths affected by loneliness and isolation and depends also on those that may be suitable for involvement and active engagement. Success is as well dependent on the support and conditions that governments, volunteer development agencies and volunteer-involving organisations can provide.

The Stop Loneliness, Start Volunteering suggests 4 areas of improvements to facilitate further developments in this area:

- 1. Advocating for more enabling environment to combat loneliness, isolation and social exclusion**

The research results have demonstrated that there is a lack of local, national and European recommendations, plans or programmes tackling the problem of loneliness and isolation.

European statistics prove that there is an increase in the feelings of loneliness and isolation, and that youths are becoming more and more affected. Even though there are existing practices of civil society in the area, there are no sufficient policies, mechanisms and measures that support the development of programmes geared towards combating loneliness and isolation that support or actively involve youths in volunteering. Such measures will create a more enabling environment and thus contribute to the improvement of quality civil society interventions and existing practices.

2. Networking and partnership on local/national/European level

One of the main research results states that there is a need for more exchanges of good practice to support organisations and stimulate cooperation between civil society organisations in the development of programmes combating loneliness and isolation. We need to go beyond local and national efforts and promote transnational dialogue and knowledge exchange to create more European-wide practices and an improved infrastructure for sustainable volunteering opportunities for youths affected by loneliness and isolation.

3. Strengthening capacities of Civil society organisations

Volunteering and quality volunteering programmes can play a key role in supporting young people that face loneliness or poor living conditions. This is achieved by involving them in the community as volunteers and thus reducing the feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Civil society organisations dealing with loneliness and isolation, youth organisations, national volunteer development agencies, and volunteer centres have been recognised as relevant stakeholders for providing support. Therefore, they should be supported to invest more in the motivation, education and mentorship of volunteer involving organisations so that they have a greater understanding of, and capacity to deliver, volunteer programmes that support and involve youths affected by loneliness and isolation.

4. Raising public awareness

The social changes that the COVID-19 crisis created, should not be underestimated. We need to build better connected societies, identify and break down the barriers that make some young people feel excluded, isolated, and lonely. To recognise loneliness and isolation as a source of distress in young

people is not enough. Combating loneliness and isolation should be high on the list of priorities on the social agenda. Sufficient resources must be allocated for awareness raising campaigns aimed to reach and motivate young people to use volunteering as a tool for combating loneliness, isolation and thus social exclusion. These could include narratives that challenge stereotypes, dissolve stigma surrounding loneliness and address consequences on personal well-being.

Do you have any online content?

As a part of the SLSV project we compiled interviews on best practices from volunteers, volunteer leaders, service users and representatives of organisations involved in youth work. Many of the quotes in this compendium are from these interviews. You can view the collection [here](#).

For some people, coming here is the one day of the week they feel that they can get out. Right now we have someone who stopped going to school around age 15 because of his anxiety. From then and until he started coming here, he did not see anyone at all. He was too anxious to go out and felt very lonely all the time. Then someone convinced him to come here. And at first, he was only here for around 5 minutes at a time but then he began to stay for 15 minutes, then 30 minutes, and soon he came here all the time. And stayed for 2-3 hours. Then I brought him along to a volunteer event, where he also conquered his fear of heights because I got him up into a tree and yelled encouragements from below. He came down with a grin and it was the best thing he had ever experienced.

(Daniel, Volunteer Head of Youth Network)

Best Practices Case Studies



As a part of the SLSV project we compiled case studies of best practices in Volunteering Youth Engagement from 10 different European Countries. We hope reading about the wonderful programmes here below will inspire you to think about ways volunteering can help tackle Loneliness.

The following case studies show projects and organisations from all SLSV partner countries, that provide support to young people feeling lonely, isolated and thus socially excluded. However, when it comes to involving these youth through volunteering, we can say that in most of the countries there is not a specific focus on how to engage youths feeling lonely and isolated in volunteering. Most of the best practices come from individual projects implemented by non-profit organisations with the general focus on loneliness, with the inclusion of excluded youth. The existing practice shows that we still lack volunteer programmes that strategically and deliberately involve lonely young people as volunteers.

Denmark

Denmark has a long tradition of national strategies and policies that support voluntary activities and the social inclusion of disadvantaged people in civil society through volunteering in non-profit organisations.

The latest recommendations, for a new civil society strategy, were developed by a working group in 2021 which consisted of; the Voluntary Council, Voluntary Centres & Self-Help Denmark (FriSe), the Civil Society's Industry Association, the Danish Disabled Organisations and the Council for the Socially Vulnerable. The creation of the new recommendations and the working group was decided by the government and a broad majority of parties. The recommendations focused, among other things, on how to ensure more sustainable funding of civil society's social work, how to ensure greater inclusion of citizens in vulnerable positions in voluntary work, and how to combat loneliness through increased cooperation and a national strategy.

In 2021, a recommendation for a national strategy to combat loneliness was also developed. Red Cross and the Elderly Cause, together with 88 other organisations, prepared an inspirational presentation for a national loneliness strategy, which was sent to the government and parliament. The presentation contained recommendations to reduce loneliness in five areas; home and housing, school and education, leisure and communities, working life and employment, and health and care.

The result of the two documents / recommendations is that a broad political majority in November 2021 decided on a new civil society strategy for 2022–2025. Here, among other things, it was decided that Denmark should have the first national loneliness strategy. Therefore, a national partnership, led by the Red Cross and the Elderly Cause, was formed to:

- Gather scientific and practical knowledge about loneliness from Danish and foreign initiatives, as well as action plans and strategies and including knowledge about effective tools and initiatives that prevent and remedy loneliness.
- Initiate a national conversation about loneliness.
- Prepare a proposal for a national strategy against loneliness that sets a common direction for combating loneliness nationally and across sectors.
- Prepare a proposal for an action plan that points to concrete solutions.

Based on the recommendations for a new civil society strategy, the political majority also decided to set aside a pool of DKK 23.5 million to support Voluntary Centres & Self-Help Denmark, along with The National Board of Social Affairs and five local partners to test a new model designed to increase the participation of

people in a vulnerable position, including people with disabilities, in social communities through volunteering in a bid to reduce loneliness. The first two local projects run by two volunteer centres are starting in December 2022 and both projects are targeting vulnerable and lonely people from 16–32 years old. The projects run for a four-year period and in 2024 three more projects are planned.

Our SLSV partner FriSe also conducted this lovely interview with members and coordinators of *Youth Network* about their set up and effects on young people volunteering with them and attending activities. [Click here](#) to watch the interview on Volunteer Ireland’s Vimeo channel.

When I came down here for the first time I got the impression that it was actually what I needed at the time. To have a place where you could go once or twice a week just to talk without any prejudice and without having any labels put on you. You could just come here and help build a community. (...) Before this I was quite lonely myself. I was mostly at home, with few friends, Then I started down here and its only gotten better since. Now I can easily go out and I have friends all over and have no problem with public speaking anymore.
(Daniel, Volunteer – Head of Youth Network)

Ireland

Loneliness Taskforce

In 2021 a Loneliness Taskforce was created in Ireland combined of a large number of organisations working together to address loneliness in Ireland. Whilst it was initiated by a charity focused on older people, youth organisations in Ireland such as Jigsaw and community organisations such as Muintir Na Tire are also involved. As such the Loneliness Taskforce is a coalition of organisations and individuals who work to address loneliness. The purpose of the Taskforce is to increase awareness of loneliness and to continually advocate for policy change to address loneliness at local and national level.

Youthreach Programme

The Youthreach programme provides two years integrated education, training and work experience for unemployed early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age. In these types of programmes, volunteering is used and encouraged as a path to develop the young person’s ongoing personal development.

There are almost 6,000 places available nationwide under the Youthreach umbrella and learners on the Youthreach programme are entitled to receive training allowances.

The programme usually provides two years integrated education, training and work experience. Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme, and the application of new technology is integrated into all aspects of programme content. There is a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills of literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options and volunteering.

SpunOut

Established in 2005, SpunOut helps to create an Ireland where young people aged between 16 and 25 are empowered with the information they need to live active, happy, and healthy lives.

They aim to educate and inform young people about the importance of holistic wellbeing and how good health can be maintained, both physically and mentally. They believe young people should have easy access to relevant, reliable, and non-judgemental information and provide a dynamic, responsive website full of up-to-date, factual information, free of any shame or bias. spunout is led by a reader community and young volunteers. A group of 130 young people from around the country forms the spunout Youth Action Panels which provide leadership to the organisation.

Hundreds of young people volunteer their time to the work of the organisation through writing articles, proofreading content, making videos and giving feedback.

As a part of their services, they support young people who may be experiencing loneliness and advocate on the benefits of volunteering for young people as a form of social inclusion.

Jigsaw

Jigsaw's mission is to make sure that every young person's mental health is valued and supported. They understand that mental health can affect every aspect of a young person's life and believe every young person must have the support that's right for them, whatever they are going through.

Jigsaw Youth Advocates are volunteers who support the organisations' goal of achieving better mental health outcomes for young people. Youth advocates create understanding, raise awareness of and promote youth mental health within their own community. They are also a key element of the youth voice and engagement approach within Jigsaw in the battle against loneliness and isolation in young people.

*How and why did you get involved as a volunteer with Jigsaw?
When I first started volunteering, I had just completed the peer education program so that programme is a Transition Year program and basically still runs to this day in Jigsaw. A group of schools in the hub service will come together and they will learn a presentation and then they will bring it back into the schools, so the TY students will(..) so it is a way to explaining what Jigsaw is in a youth friendly way by your peers. So it is not a teacher or a guidance counsellor or someone coming in to talk about mental health, and you dont want to hear about it, it's your friends or your school peers coming in to explain it.
(Niamh, Volunteer – Jigsaw Mental Health Youth Service)*

Germany

Yoldaş'- Tandem

In this project, a volunteer adult and a child from a Turkish-speaking family come together as companions who meet regularly, discover Hamburg, play, talk and open new perspectives for each other.

During the long period of lockdown, volunteers provided orientation and helped with homeschooling. This prevents children from deprived areas from isolation and loneliness and supports them in integration activities.

You:ful

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and lockdown, many schools and initiatives closed. Several schools however decided to continue albeit with limitations but were convinced of the need for their commitment to young people at that time. Through this new project campaigns emerged such as a to make senior citizens aware of the rapidly developing assistance services in their neighbourhood, an exchange of letters with isolated residents of senior citizens' homes and other environmental and digital engagement projects.

BürgerStiftung Hamburg

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, BürgerStiftung Hamburg, one of the biggest local organisations with more than 400 volunteers, initiated a row of successful projects dedicated to initiatives that were already active in their district. The focus was on cultural, educational, and physical activity projects for children and young people from difficult socioeconomic conditions, affected by the pandemic crises. The purpose was to strengthen civil society and the sense of togetherness of young people in their local area. These projects range from promoting reading and mentoring, to the involvement of school classes that develop their own community projects. In addition to this operational project work, BürgerStiftung Hamburg supported local initiatives that were already successfully active in local neighbourhoods where the focus was on cultural, educational and exercise projects for children and young people from difficult

socio-economic backgrounds. With the community fund 'Hamburger Spielräume' (Hamburg Play Spaces), selective and one-off activities that create balance and free space in COVID-19 were able to be created.

MITmachers

This project helps and accompany people into voluntary work. Many refugees or migrants would like to do something, they are looking for orientation and participation. So we don't need to encourage them, but we do need to show them ways. The *'People come to us who want to volunteer - and we look for a project that fits. This strengthens them because they can feel part of society. It's about respect and appreciation. We have a database of about 300 places that we can contact. The volunteer position is then limited to three months. After that, many volunteers receive training in the area that interests and in many cases they have gained a very important experience in their voluntary work.'*(MITmachers website)

I don't think it is enough just to be with people to not feel lonely. I think you also have to have quality time with people.
(Marius, Volunteer - Die Falken Hamburg)

Slovenia

Creatively against COVID-19

The project 'Ustvarjalno proti covidu' ('Creatively against COVID-19') was formed by a non-governmental organisation in response to the increase in mental distress among young people, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Their aim was to implement a project where they can offer young people a safe space to talk, to offer informative content about mental health and to raise awareness of how to deal with difficulties. It also provided information on where to turn to if they need help, and through workshops, develop and discover topics that young people see as a challenge and can focus on together with a therapist on solving problems and sharing experiences. Another part of the project is dedicated to creative practice, where young people can creatively express their feelings.

Phone companionship and Intergenerational Cooperation

Non-governmental organisations are connecting volunteer high school students with elderly people via phone calls to help decrease feelings of loneliness, isolation, and exclusion. In some organisations, this practice has evolved into visitations and spending quality time together.

Actually, parents or other people in the child's environment are often not their first choice or someone they would want to talk to. This might be due to some sort of lack of understanding, poor relationship, or, as I said, feeling that they do not care. (Neža, Tom Telefon Organisation)

Croatia

Association How are you?

Many people in Croatia, either because of the pandemic or because of the earthquake, feel lonely, anxious and depressed in the last 2 years. Therefore, psychology students from the Faculty of Philosophy, wanted to raise awareness with the project of psycho walks in the metropolis. The project runs with the cooperation of tourist guides and activities include walks around the city with local stories which helps with motivating the participants to develop psychological resistance, optimism, openness and acceptance. By meeting new people, loneliness can be reduced which many people experience.

As well as this, the association also organises other activities such as individual and group counselling, provides individual support and organises workshops on different topics, etc.

Helpline for youth during the pandemic

The Central State Office for Demography and Youth and the Croatian Psychological Chamber launched telephone lines for psychological counselling of young people and for support during the pandemic. At this time, young people faced frustration due to the limitation of social contacts and not being able to go out. They also experienced feelings of loneliness, they were concerned about the end of the school year and graduation, experienced an excessive degree of criticism from adults in relation to the responsibility of young people and also were afraid of infection for their family members. The helpline was initiated in all the 20 Croatian counties and the City of Zagreb.

It is also worth mentioning that various festivals (such as Mentalist) and public discussion on the topic of loneliness as well as dialogues, symposiums and conferences can now be found, especially during the last two years.

Well, as far as this volunteering is concerned, I think I got a lot of benefits here in terms of communication, in terms of access to children, talking with children, working with children in general. Before, it was so strange for me to approach someone I don't know who is much younger than me, what to talk to him about, how to talk to him! But I learned all that here and now everything goes naturally and it's much easier for me when it comes to talking with adults and employees. (...) I realise how good these things are, when someone tells you what you did well and gives advice and in general that certain feeling, satisfaction, and sense of usefulness. I am not at home, I am not on my cell phone, but I come here, I do something specific, I help the group, but at the same time it helps me too.
(Zlatana, Volunteer - Centre for Missing and Exploited Children)

Bulgaria

The social exclusion of a large part of young people in Bulgaria is a problem at a national level, which affects all spheres of social and economic life. In response to this, the research project, 'Children – authors of their lives', run by the Association for Pedagogical and Social Assistance for Children 'FICE Bulgaria', and the Foundation 'Hope for us' identified factors to support the process of inclusion of young people. These included; state policies, economic conditions of the target group, the opportunities for participation in the creation of youth policies and the opportunities of the labour market in the European Union. Recommendations were made to reduce the negative factors influencing the conditions of youth social exclusion to help stakeholders find workable solutions to the problem.

The factors that lead to social exclusion of young people are heterogeneous. Their identification is essential for understanding the problems with youth participation in Bulgaria. On the one hand, there are personal factors that are associated with the individual attitude and low motivation for active participation in the political and economic life, and on the other – they are related to the lack of opportunities for this type of participation.

Portugal

There are no specific programmes in place to tackle loneliness and exclusion in Portugal. The Institute of Sport and Youth has a web page on mental health, isolation and loneliness but does not present a project in which young people can participate to mitigate these problems, instead, it refers youths to the website of youth health and mental health.

This is not the case for exclusion, where a few projects can be found. For example, “ Bora Jovens” promotes inclusion for employability for young people at risk of social exclusion. It provides training and development of skills to help this group to achieve their potential. Their website can be accessed [here](#).

Another project, 'INCORPORA', helps young people at risk of social exclusion by promoting work inclusion. It targets victims of domestic violence, people who have been to jail, young NEET (young people who are not engaged in studies or employment) or long-term unemployed people. Their website can be accessed [here](#).

YouTube mini-series about loneliness in Portugal

Composed of six episodes, the '*Luzes com Presença*' mini web series documentary available on YouTube, shows the testimonies of those who suffer from loneliness and social isolation in Portugal, and the work done by the

institutions and volunteers who support them. From a village with 19 inhabitants, all the way to Greater Porto, the episodes that run at about three and a half minutes each, show that this phenomenon is not contained by geography, age or social status. The series also demonstrates that there are those who are attentive and dedicated to helping with the fight against loneliness. Available [here](#).

France

Parrainage solidaire

In Grenoble, this Programme is a 'solidarity mentorship'. This is an initiative to fight the isolation students and young people may experience. Its aim is to create reciprocity and solidarity by connecting students/young people with families and people of Grenoble who want to spend time together, go on walks, outings, talk on the phone etc. in a friendly atmosphere. The goal is to break the isolation of students and young people who were, and still are, specifically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Astrée Association

Recognised as the association of public utility by decree 4/06/2015, the project fights against isolation by helping to restore social ties and the well-being of people in situations of social and/or personal fragility. The Association created the programme 'Attentive to Others' consisting of two highlights:

- Raising awareness of the need to listen and pay attention to others
- Setting up a system of support for young people in difficulty and under risk of isolation

Vulnerable students are supported by other student volunteers (the 'Bénévoles') who help with challenging situations such as breakups and loneliness whilst also helping to prevent harassment, restore self-confidence, and improve relationships with others and ultimately, the prevention of dropping out of school.

The Fondation de France

The Project fights against isolation and engages in revitalising social channels. It does so by addressing the main factors that can exacerbate isolation such as housing, mobility, integration for people with foreign origins, the creation of meeting hubs, inequalities in the access of digital technology. In doing so they are also avoiding young people dropping out of school.

Out of 10,000 projects, 3,500 are focused on young people, in the following areas:

- LISTENING: Association 'Héka (Chinon)' offers support to young people suffering from psychiatric problems, related to lack of family or social ties, using art as a therapeutic tool.
- LINK and GATHER: 'K-fé (Nord Isère)' offers a space for vulnerable young and elderly people to meet, exchange and share knowledge.
- JOIN: The 'Association 4,3,2 (Hautes-Alpes)' supports young people living in rural areas. Volunteers from the Association visit the most remote areas, not usually covered by social assistance to prevent isolation and juvenile delinquency. Around 150 young people are supported at this time.
- PARTICIPATE: Action across the Country to fight against school dropouts. In Les and Lille there are schools welcoming young people who are unable to integrate in the usual school system and are under risk of isolation.

Spain

Barcelona contra la soledad: Consejo Asesor Científico contra la Soledad (CACCS)/Scientific Advisory Council against Loneliness

The 'Scientific Advisory Council against Loneliness (CACCS)' is made up of experts from various disciplines in the academic and scientific fields. This allows the issue of loneliness to be addressed from a variety of aspects and at all stages of the life cycle with constant innovation and research. The objective of the 'Scientific Advisory Council against Loneliness (CACCS)' is to become a space for debate, reflection, advice and monitoring of the 'Municipal Strategy against Loneliness 2020-2030'.

Solidarity for Development

The 'Solidarity for Development' programme provides company at home to elderly people who are experiencing loneliness. It also carries out an intergenerational coexistence program, an intergenerational and supportive initiative, based on the coexistence of lonely elderly people and students from public universities. The student, while progressing in his studies, shares his life, whilst living, in the home of the elderly person. This is not only a companionship and human support program, but also implies an experience of mutual enrichment, shared learning and openness to new relationships for both parties and as such the growing issue of loneliness within younger generations can also be tackled. Web site: [**Solidarity for Development**](#)

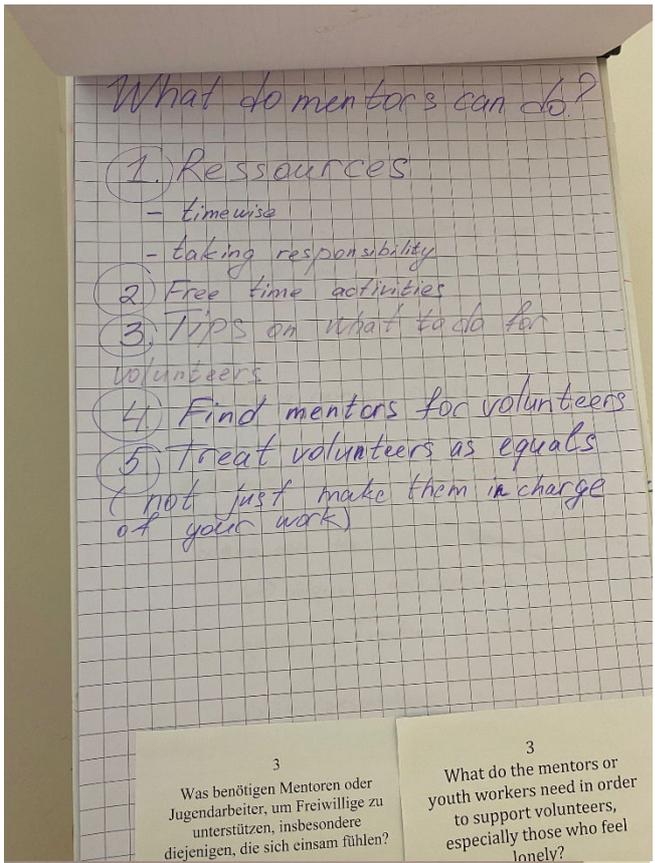
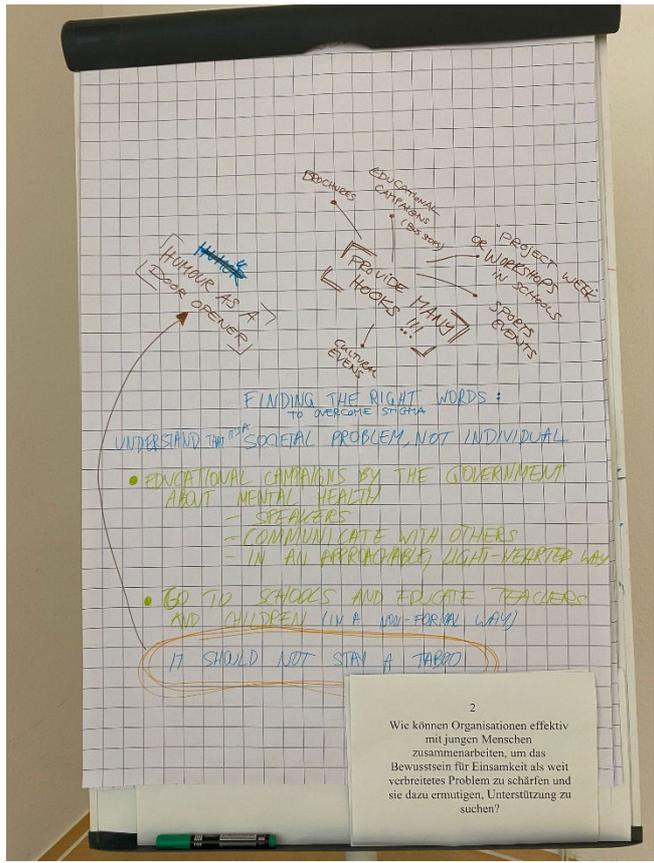
Italy

'Charlie Friend Telephone' and 'Charlie Planet'

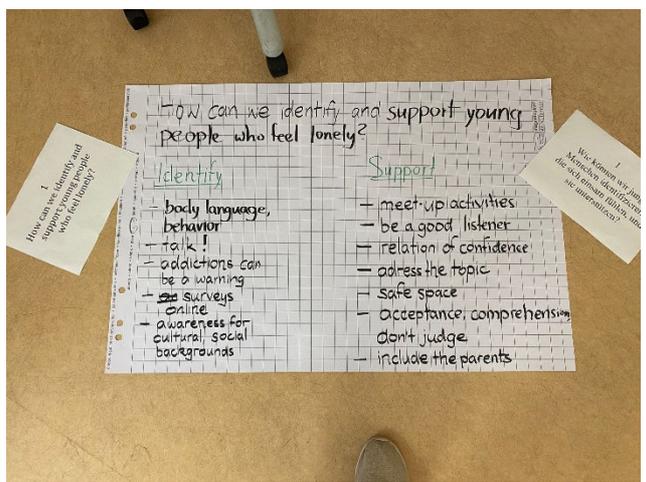
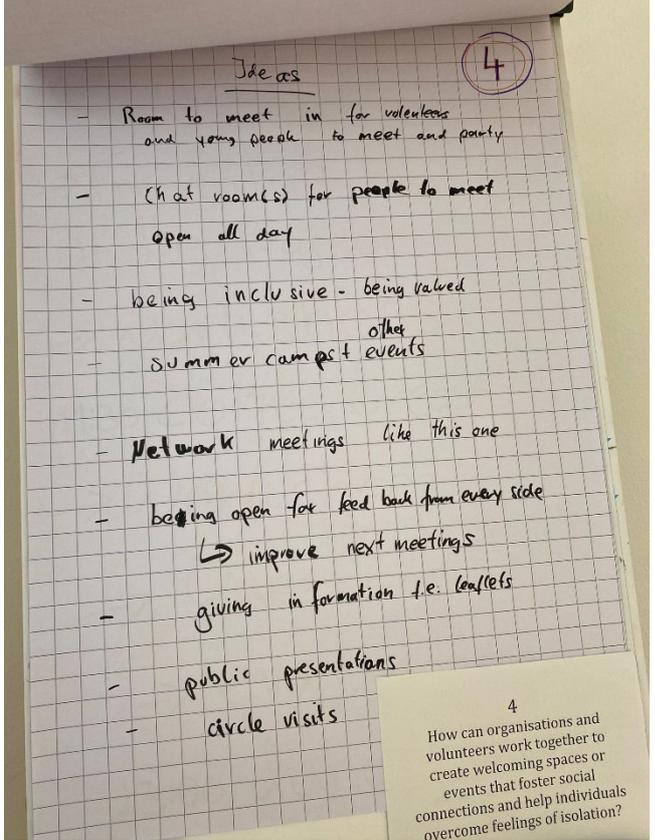
These are services offered by the Charlie Foundation Onlus, founded in 1997 in Pisa to help young people deal with loneliness and anxiety. 'Charlie Friend Telephone' is an anonymous telephone helpline while 'Charlie Planet' is an online platform where young people can chat with mental health specialists and receive advice. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these services were proved to be useful for the Italian teenagers who suffered from mental disorders.

YOUZ Regional Forum

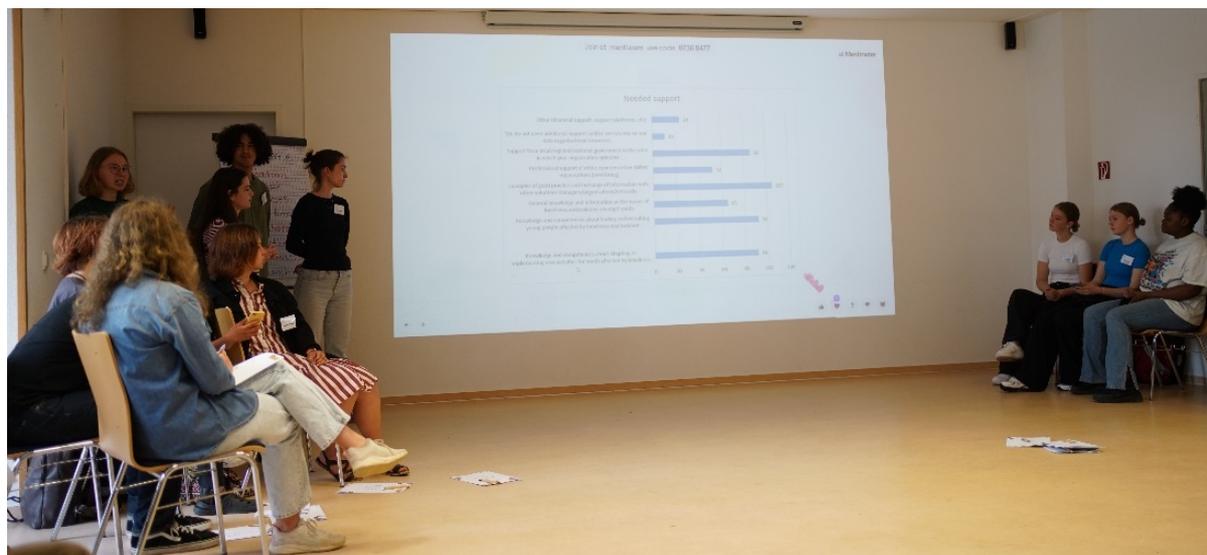
A participatory survey was conducted among more than 2,000 people aged under 35 living in the Emilia-Romagna region between June and November 2021. The respondents were asked to identify the strategic priorities on which the regional administration should implement significant political changes. The proposals put forward by the young participants have been grouped into four strategic areas of intervention, one of which has been named 'psychological support'. This includes recommendations related to tackling the effect of lockdown and social distancing measures on young people. As of the end of 2022, it is important to note that the regional administration decided to allocate an initial amount of 2.2 million euros in public expenditure to create and run specific public policies in this field. This was followed by a promise to increase this amount to 3.6 million euros by 2024.



These Pictures are from the SLSV multiplier event in Hamburg June 2023 where young volunteers and organisations came together to work on ideas and solutions to Loneliness.



Conclusion on Best Practices



When it comes to the type of interventions, programmes/activities or actions that are implemented in partner countries, they can be summarised as follows:

- Support groups (peer-to-peer or with the professionals), Facebook groups
- Awareness raising through public dialogues, presentations, forums, seminars, social events, etc.
- Creative work (arts, crafts, knitting, etc.)
- Social activities (walks, visits, board games, card games, going to the cinema, museums, eating together and shared dining, etc.)
- Practical and individual support
- Workshops and education geared towards personal empowerment (improvement of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-image)
- Social cafes, social centres and social gatherings
- Youth centres and youth networks (meeting place and platform where young people meet civil society organisations in order to start volunteering)
- Big brother, big sister friendship programmes, B-Friending programmes
- Music groups and music events
- Outdoor sports activities (soccer, hill walking, swimming, residential weekend aways, etc.)

Looking at the result and information gathered from the SLSV partner countries there were three things that really stood out in terms of good practice when it comes to managing volunteer programmes for young people at risk or suffering from Loneliness.

Peer to Peer support

One of the most important things we can do to help young people is to listen to

them and learn from them in terms of their needs and wants. Giving young people agency and control of their own projects and involving them in as many stages of the decision making process brings incredible benefits in terms of self-worth and accomplishments. Allowing young people to lead projects aimed at young people can assure inclusion and volunteering culture that would be hard to replicate otherwise. Asking a young person how they would like to be involved, when they would like to volunteer, what they would like to be doing, what do they need in order to volunteer – should be the start to make your volunteer programme more accessible and inclusive.

And even when we make these smaller groups within the Network, it is still inclusive. I am part of the monthly cooking, but it's not just that group deciding what to eat. We speak to everyone beforehand. It's the same when we do excursions. And then everyone has an opportunity to be heard and included. I think it is amazing that even though some people are in charge, everyone gets a say.

(Cille, Service user – The Youth Network)

Facilitating Spaces

Young people need a space where they can meet. But what came out of our conversations with organisations about good practice was that there is not enough just to provide a space where young people can meet, but more importantly to facilitate activities that create purpose, fulfilment and connection between participants. Especially thinking about the young lonely volunteer who might not be confident enough to show up at an event to chat to everyone. Having an activity that one can engage in but also allows for a little alone time if needed, like cooking a dinner together, can be a haven for a person who is uncomfortable to fully participate all the time. Volunteering can be incredibly valuable here as it facilitates practical tasks, purpose and teamwork.

I don't think you should underestimate the combinations of putting no obligations on the youths, but still pointing out that we have a lot of opportunities and that we would love them to come and help, so they feel like they are making a difference. That is my personal experience from watching our young people who at the beginning, thought 'I can't do anything', that are now volunteer scouts or volunteer in other ways. Because they have been allowed to take small steps and learn more about themselves. So yes, it should be a free space, but also with a gentle push once in a while either from other volunteers or from some of us who administer the Network. So, I think it is important that we also guide it to become more than just a club and make sure we also go out and do things together.

(Noemi, Head of Billund Volunteer Centre)

Education and awareness raising

There is a big piece that needs to be done to educate our young people and the community on the risk of Loneliness and social isolation. A lot of the SLSV partner countries have highlighted the need for governmental policies and campaigns on this subject, with Denmark being the only country who currently has a National Strategy combating the issue. An even bigger piece is to circulate and draw attention to the solutions and ways out of Loneliness. As Civic Organisations we can have real effect on the people and volunteers we engage with through our programmes. Including special attention and resources on Loneliness could help create ripple effect in our communities resulting in a more open and constructive dialog on the topic.

*Is it easier to talk about loneliness here, than with others around you?
I would say so because it is an open topic here. Every time you come here, there is always someone who asks how you are doing. So we always invite people to talk about it. You dont have to initiate yourself. It can be pretty difficult to start a conversation like that when you are down.
(Daniel, Volunteer Head of Youth Network)*



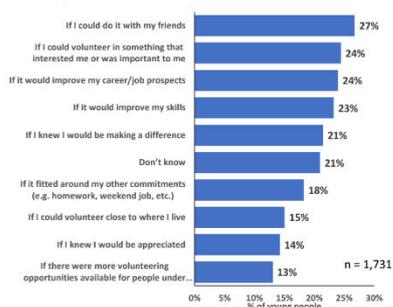
Questions of Concerns for Organisations



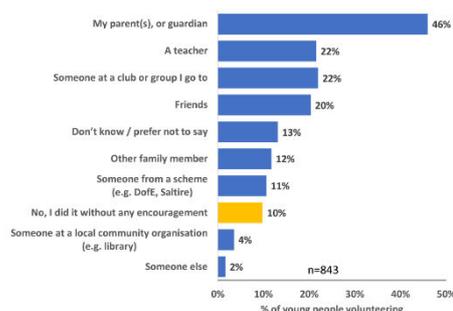
To develop or further improve programmes and activities towards combating loneliness and isolation amongst young people, organisations involved in SLSV stated several concerns and supports that were needed. It is our hope that the following questions and answers might help in this regard:

How to find and recruit young people affected by loneliness and isolation?

Formal Volunteering – ‘Influences’  (Top 10)



Routes into Formal volunteering: ‘Push factors’ 



Do your research on what supports are already available in the area you are looking to work in. Link in with other organisations, schools and projects that involve young people and take it from there. Look at the risk factors stated in ‘Who is at risk of being Lonely?’ here above and allow it to inform your search. Talk to young people, but most importantly, listen to what they are saying as now one knows better than them where they go and what they want to do. The pictures above are from ‘Young people in Scotland’ survey which was done in 2019 and show you figures on why young people might volunteer and what could be a good a good motivation.

At the local level we were mainly doing activities. So we had done things like fundraisers like Jog for Jigsaw and we also did an open day in our hub so we invited the local schools and it was a really fun day. But the purpose of it was that young people in the community could come to the hub and see what it looked like. And if they ever needed support, they could go in and feel comfortable because they had been there before. But this was something really fun to organise as a young person yourself, because you were thinking of mad activities that we could do with young people.
 (Niamh, Volunteer - Jigsaw Mental Health Youth Services)

How to adapt or implement new activities for youths affected by loneliness?

Have a brain storming session with the young people you already involve. They might be full of ideas on how, what and where. Bear in mind the attitude and behaviour of a person that might be lonely– what would they be comfortable with, what sort of support would they want. Don't just come up with your own answers, ask the questions to allow them to tell you. It might be best to start small and simple, making sure you have an activity or a task that can be finished on time, have tangible results and can facilitate conversations and teamwork, but also engagement for those who might want to work on their own for a bit of time.

A very unique thing with the Network is that the young people have been a part of defining what the project should be used for an what they want out of it. Before we started the project, when we held workshops, some young people said that they wanted to have their own community and they did not want to just volunteer at different associations. They wanted their own base. and because they chose to have that base, they have also taken responsibility for it. I think that is very unique. I also think its quite unique, that it sort of acts as a place where you can come as you are, and everyone understand that we are learning together, and taking small steps. We are all here to cooperate. Then we can go out into the world and apply what we have learned but we always have that base to return to, where eat is safe and people respect you. I think it is very important when life is challenging that you have a place where you're just accepted. And where you only have to go as far as you're comfortable going. There is no pre-made package or program you get forced through.
 (Noemi, Head of Billund Volunteer Centre regarding The Youth Network)

How to get support from local, regional or national government for Loneliness projects?

Do some research into what is happening on the ground in terms of young people. What are the statistics?

Are there other organisations you could link in with that could help you highlight the issues?

Do I need to spend more time to engage and motivate young volunteers affected by loneliness? Do I need to support volunteers affected by loneliness in a different way?

Although initially, a little more support might be required depending on the person, why not take the opportunity to learn about all the wonderful ways you could be supporting all your volunteers. Is there a way to adjust your volunteer programme to include these for all? Perhaps you have volunteers already who have been with you for a while, are personable and understand the issues of Loneliness and isolation, could you set up a little buddy program? Could this be the perfect way to include more information on Loneliness in your recruitment or orientation?

Resources:

[Young people in Scotland – Analysis of Volunteering: summary of results \(Volunteer Scotland\)](#)

[Research Analysis of CSO challenges and responses to tackle loneliness, isolation and social exclusion of youth \(Stop Loneliness Start Volunteering Research Report\)](#)

[The Impact of Volunteering on the health and Wellbeing of the volunteer \(Volunteer Ireland\)](#)

[The Campaign of Loneliness \(What Works Center for Wellbeing\)](#)

[The Marmalade Trust](#)

[EU Science Hub: Defining Loneliness](#)

[EU Science Hub: Loneliness – Risk Factors and Consequences](#)

[Science for Policy Brief: Loneliness – an unequally shared burden in Europe? \(European Commission\)](#)

[JRS Workshop and Conference Report: Interventions to reduce loneliness among youth, July 2022](#)

[Interview collection on Best Practice from Stop Loneliness Start Volunteering partner countries](#)



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