

PROJECT CONNECT



What Young Adults in Norfolk say
about Loneliness, Isolation and
feeling Socially Connected



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FOREWORD

Project Connect is a group of four public sector and civil organisations in Norfolk aimed at tackling their shared policy challenge: youth loneliness and isolation.

Founded in early 2024, Project Connect came to fruition following the increasing rates of social isolation among youth in recent years. For example, a recent survey conducted in 2024 – which was taken by more than 9,300 pupils – reflects a significant decline in young people's ability to build friendships, express their thoughts and trust people. This downward trend highlights the social disconnect that young people feel and experience in Norfolk among a prominently ageing population. This is important, as youth isolation has links to poor health and wellbeing. As a young person I notice the signs among my peers.

The project's first step in addressing this policy challenge was to run a workshop with young people, Norfolk Youth Advisory Board representatives and professionals with youth engagement experience. Following this workshop Project Connect took these insights as the foundation to design a survey that could reach a broader sample of Norfolk's youth. The aim of the survey was to further explore themes that affect, influence and aggravate youth isolation.

In total, 105 young people took the survey. Based on the data gathered during the process, some prominent themes identified were social anxiety, the cost of living, technology, poor public transport, loss of the third space and lack of parental trust. The Innovation Programme I am taking part in was the result of this survey, with four young people among 105 entrants selected to assist in tackling this policy challenge in three monthly workshops alongside Norfolk youth engagement organisations.

Halaa Tafiki, 19, New Costessey

The issue of youth loneliness is more pressing than ever, driven by economic struggles, declining mental health, and reduced access to youth services.

Off the back of this research, a group of us met in February 2025 for our first Project Connect Innovation meeting. This initial meeting underlined the importance of our work to build greater social connection amongst young adults in Norfolk.

We discussed the causes and underlying issues driving youth loneliness and isolation. We explored how structural barriers, such as the loss of youth-friendly spaces and economic inequalities intensifies isolation amongst young people.

One of our key discussions focused on pushing boundaries - considering what could be achieved with no financial or logistical constraints. We challenged ourselves to reimagine youth engagement: what interventions would we create if we had unlimited resources, influence, and the power to make a difference? These brainstorming sessions encouraged us to think beyond traditional frameworks and explore fresh, innovative, youth-led solutions.

The findings from our research and discussions align with reports like The Social Action & Youth Loneliness Report and The Prince's Trust Youth Index 2024. They reveal that while social action can help young people feel less alone through encouraging connection and purpose, young people need more - they need safe, inclusive spaces where they can build relationships naturally. The research also highlights the crossover between loneliness, economic instability, and mental health challenges, reinforcing the need for a holistic approach.

For Norfolk, addressing youth loneliness is essential for building a stronger, happier and more engaged generation. Ensuring young people have opportunities to participate in shaping their communities, while also having the support and space to connect informally, can create lasting social change.

Whilst this research outlines the challenges for young people in Norfolk, we're not stopping here. Over the next few months, we'll be working as a group of four innovators to propose practical, meaningful solutions that empower young people and ensure their voices are heard. We'll be sharing more of our story as things progress.

Ellie Rabone, 25, Fakenham

THE BACKSTORY

In early 2024, a group of public sector and civil society organisations in Norfolk were invited by the Institute of Community Studies (part of the Young Foundation) to take part in a participatory policy making learning journey joining Lincoln and Teesside as the two other places in England on this programme.

This report shares what we did and what our findings were around the key policy challenge we focused our energy on - Social Isolation and Loneliness in Norfolk's younger generations.

Our first step was bringing together our local team, a good mix of people and organisations committed to the journey and willing to share unique contributions.

Together we became Project Connect!

**Norfolk Community Foundation
Lily, West Norfolk Borough Council
Community Action Norfolk
Norfolk County Council**

Over the year this learning journey has offered the structure, time, space and resource to step out of usual organisational, political and contextual constraints and into a place of peer-to-peer learning.

The project was structured around:

1) The Learning Phase: Refining our chosen policy topic, exploring the context and parameters of the challenge, unpacking assumptions and coming up with new ideas.

2) The Mini Project Phase: Testing out ideas in practice, experimenting with new methodologies and developing new capabilities to drive the policy topic forward.

Acknowledgements:

It's with a great many thanks to The Institute for Community Studies and their sponsors, the Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement team, for inviting us to be part of this unique experience and ambition to bridge the gap between communities, evidence, and policymaking.

We are also incredibly grateful to the young people who have offered their time and insight and the youth focused Norfolk based organisations who have given advice and guidance along the way.

Thanks also goes to Jamie Kowalyk from the Norfolk Community Foundation for his design work for the project, to the Norfolk based Influencer Marketing organisation Flunential for their willingness to advise and experiment with us using social media as part of this project, as well as our UEA partners acting as critical friends to the research.



SO WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH YOUTH LONELINESS?

After considering some different ideas, we chose to focus our policy challenge on social isolation and loneliness among younger age groups. Why? Because it's on the rise and we don't know enough about its impact on people, services and society.

In a local government context, social isolation has often been presented as an older person's issue, with commissioning efforts focused on those in older age groups. But this may partly be due to skewed public perceptions of who in our society is lonely. The Mental Health Foundation found that the public overestimate levels of loneliness in older adults, and underestimate it in young people. Only 12% of people identified being in a younger age bracket as a risk for loneliness, compared to 63% who identified being in an older age bracket as a risk.¹

But in recent years, the opposite has been statistically true, with rates of loneliness among young people

sharply increasing, and even surpassing that of older generations. At present, 16-24 year olds report the highest levels of loneliness of any age group in the UK, with the Princes Trust reporting up to 36%.² UK think tank Onward reports that "around one in five 18-34 year-olds say that they have one or fewer close friends, three times the level in 2011/12". They argue that "younger generations appear to be suffering from what can only be described as a collapse in community, and this crisis of belonging is getting worse over time".³

We began by looking at loneliness as it is usually defined: as "a subjective feeling about the gap between an individual's desired and actual levels of social contact".⁴ But ultimately we came away thinking about community and connectivity more broadly. How do young people form communities today? Is it supported by the world they are living in? What is the impact of not supporting our young people socially?

¹ Mental Health Foundation, 2022, All the Lonely People, [MHAW22-Loneliness-UK-Report.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/all-the-lonely-people) ([mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)). Accessed 23rd April 2024, p.32

² The Princes Trust, The Princes' Trust Natwest Youth Index 2024, 29th January 2024, p.8-9 https://assets.ctfassets.net/gqo9dypnpo9/1dwzhtDnnoc2fMyH7AGZTC/d7466a75712c8333545d79e6b6e0880e/DSN6204_Princes_Trust_Youth_Index_2024_Final.pdf

³ Blagden, J et al, Age of Alienation: the collapse of community and belonging among young people, and how we should respond, UK Onward, [Age-of-Alienation-Onward.pdf](https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Age-of-Alienation-Onward.pdf) ([ukonward.com](https://www.ukonward.com)). Accessed 3rd April 2024

⁴ Norfolk County Council, Norfolk JSNA Briefing Document: Loneliness and Social Isolation, internal document, undated, p.1

Why is it important?

Whilst we don't know what impact a socially disconnected generation could have on our society and our services in the future, we know it's possible that:

- Loneliness and lack of community are associated with poor health and wellbeing outcomes
- Mental health services for young people are already overwhelmed, with demand outstripping supply
- Deterioration of the social fabric can contribute to economic decline
- Social isolation can worsen the outlook for young people who are out of education and employment
- Those with poor community support are more likely to need support from services

How about in Norfolk?

The most recent Flourish survey also reflects some of these national trends.

The Flourish survey is a 7 yearly survey carried out by Public Health on the health and wellbeing of Norfolk's young people. It was taken by more than 9,300 pupils (2,519 from primary and 6,827 from secondary schools).

Our 2024 flourish survey indicates that, since the last survey in 2017:

- Young people are finding it harder to make friends
 - 49% of young people "always" or "usually" find it easy to make friends. This is down from 57% in 2017. 16% "never" find it easy to make friends, up from 12% in 2017⁵
- Young people don't like to talk about their feelings as much
 - 57% always, usually or sometimes like to talk about their feelings – down from 66% in 2017 and 2015. Between 2017 and 2023, the proportion of respondents who never like to talk about their feelings increased from 34% to 43%⁶

⁵ Norfolk County Council, Flourish Survey 2024, February 2025, p.7

⁶ Norfolk County Council, Flourish Survey 2024, February 2025, p.10

WHAT DID WE DO?

The Workshop

Our first step was to run a workshop with some of our partners who work regularly with young people, and with some young people themselves.

Who took part: As well as Norfolk Youth Advisory Board representatives, we had professionals with experience of youth engagement, working with those who are homeschooled, young carers, young people out of employment, education and training to name a few.

We wanted to understand:

- The trends impacting young people's futures
- The kind of society young people are growing up in today
- How their experience compares to that of other generations
- How we can meaningfully engage young people in this topic

The Survey

We used the insights from the workshop to design a survey, so we could gather insights from a larger sample of Norfolk's young people.

What did we ask?

The survey started out with a series of quantitative questions. For example, we asked participants to select any barriers they experienced in their social lives, and to rank the most common ways they like to socialise.

We also asked them a set of likert scale questions (strongly agree to strongly disagree) which would allow us to see how young people relate to different statements about social connection.

These questions built on learning from the workshop, to reflect the themes we know are impacting the younger generation. These were:

- Their feelings about technology and online life
- Their feelings about being themselves and sharing their thoughts with others
- Their safety when out in public
- The availability of transport and places to meet
- The cost of socialising
- The impact of school and work on their social lives

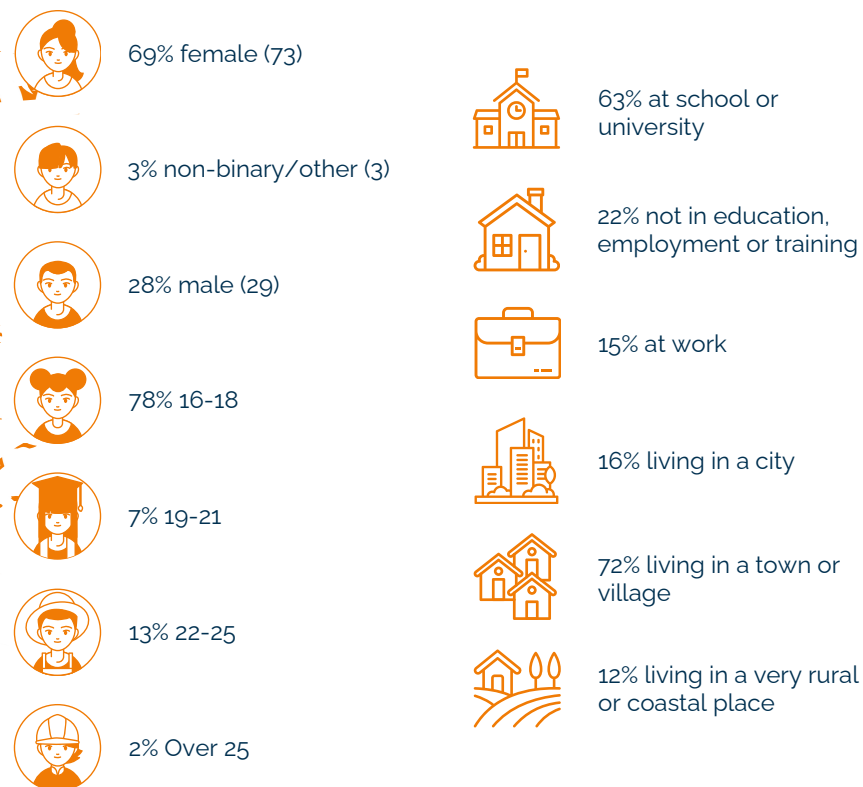
We also asked them two big questions, each with an open text box. These were:

- What is it like to be young in Norfolk, and why do you think social life is declining for young people?
- What is your big idea to change it?



Who took the survey?

In total, 105 young people took the survey. Of those 105, the demographic breakdown was:



There were also a very diverse range of young people responding with different life experiences. This was likely due to the way we distributed the survey primarily via youth support services and is therefore not a representative sample. We do, however, know that the experiences below of many respondents makes them more at risk of experiencing loneliness and isolation. **Out of 105 respondents:**



WHAT WE LEARNED

We learned a huge amount from both the workshop and the survey. Young people today are growing up in a post pandemic environment that is very different to the one we knew even 15 years ago. For example, technology is now a pervasive aspect of their lives; the cost of living continues to rise; and it is easier than ever before to fall out of work and education.

- Climate change
- Social movements
- Economic insecurity & wealth divide
- Industry changes and job market

Over the next few pages are some of the major themes that young people said are impacting on their social lives today.

Some of the modern social changes we heard about were:

- Digital advancement
- Information access
- Political tension

'Scary to meet new people in the first place'

In the survey, social anxiety was by far the most selected barrier to social activity, and was something we heard about from young people in the workshop as well. Even where young people cited other barriers such as transport or cost, they sometimes said that these things could give you a good reason to stay in, if you already lacked the confidence and the motivation to go out.

Some young people thought this was a direct consequence of life online. They felt they had gotten used to socialising via a phone or computer –

where they could control their interactions more easily in the safety of their home – so that meeting in person could seem scary or like a lot of effort.

When they [young people] are feeling jittery about something and use it as an excuse to put off meeting in person or asking to go out with someone.



“We have gotten so comfortable being online, to the point that most younger people are scared/anxious to interact in the real world.”



43%

of participants said social anxiety was a barrier to social activity



28%

of participants said a mental health condition was a barrier



#1

Social anxiety was the most common barrier that young people said was stopping them from seeing their friends or making new ones

“ So many people have so many expectations for how you look, feel, behave, act etc. and this is a huge obstacle to feeling comfortable around people in general, let alone people you may not know. ”

“ Sometimes doing new things alone is also scary to meet new people in the first place so you don't go out to a sports club or after school club as you feel too afraid to go alone. ”

The Mental Health Foundation reports that “89% of people aged 16-24 said anxiety interfered with their day to day life to some extent”. They also found that “loneliness was stated as a cause of anxiety among young people by almost a third (31%) – higher than any other age group”.⁷ As such, we are seeing a mental health trap where social isolation causes anxiety, and anxiety causes social isolation in turn.

Research also shows that mental health for young people generally is in decline, with demand for support services outstripping supply. According to the NHS survey of young people's mental health, in 2022, 18% of children aged 7 to 16 years and 22.0% of young people aged 17 to 24 years had a probable mental disorder.⁸ But Rethink reports that the average wait time for a CAMHS service is 108 days.⁹

⁷ Mental Health Foundation, Young people aged 18 to 24 are the age group most likely to feel anxious in the UK, according to our recent survey, 17th May 2023, <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/about-us/news/young-people-most-likely-feel-anxious-according-to-our-recent-survey>, Accessed 19th February 2025

⁸ NHS England, Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey, 29th November 2022 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2022-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

⁹ Rethink Mental Illness, The hidden toll of CAMHS waiting lists on young people's mental health, 6th November 2024, <https://rethink.org/news-and-stories/news-and-views/2024/the-hidden-toll-of-camhs-waiting-lists-on-young-people-s-mental-health/#:~:text=For%20the%20305%2C000%20children%20who,years%20before%20finally%20receiving%20treatment>

'Everything is getting expensive'

Cost of living was a consistent concern for the young people we heard from. After social anxiety, it was the most common reported barrier to socialising. This reflects research being carried out elsewhere, with The Princes Trust reporting that over half (53%) of young people worry that the cost of living means they will never be financially secure.¹⁰

With many free public spaces dwindling, young people felt that it was difficult for them to socialise without spending money getting there and staying there: for example, buying coffee or food; buying a cinema or bowling ticket; paying for the bus or the car park.

“ Whatever hangout areas we have are always extremely busy or expensive to get to. ”

“ The lack of third spaces which are free or low cost can be a barrier if every time you want to see a friend you had to pay £4 for a hot drink or £5 for a drink in a pub. How often can you hangout before spending too much? ”

¹⁰ The Princes Trust, The Princes' Trust Natwest Youth Index 2024, 29th January 2024, p.8-g https://assets.ctfassets.net/gqoroodynp09/1dwzhtDnnoc2fMyH7AGZTC/d7466a75712c8333545d79ebb6e0880e/DSN6204_Princes_Trust_Youth_Index_2024_Final.pdf



Some young people also reflected on the difficulty of finding work, or the decline in young people having jobs outside of school in recent years. In their report on 'the death of the Saturday job', the UK Commission for Employment and Skills reports that in 1997, 42% of young people had a job while studying at school. By 2014, that number had dropped to 18%. This means that, not only does socialising cost more, but young people have less disposable income to spend on it.¹¹







The older the young person within the 16-25 age bracket, the more they expressed concern over living costs, which could be due to them becoming more responsible for their own finances.

“People don't have the money to meet up and go do something. ...I have been planning to get a job to help with funds but that will impact my social life more.”

“It's hard to find a job even though I'm very qualified. It's especially hard to find a job without a driving license.”



¹¹ UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2015, p.5. The Death of the Saturday Job: the decline in earning and learning amongst young people in the UK. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8151b8ed915d74e33fd8d8/15_06_15_DOTJS_Report_design_final_EDIT.pdf. Accessed 19th February 2025

-  **62%** of young people felt that socialising cost them too much money
-  **#1** Cost of living was the most common topic cited by young people in the free text comments, alongside transport
-  **#2** It was also the second most common barrier, after social anxiety
-  **59%** of 16-18 year olds felt that socialising cost too much, compared to 74% of those 19 and above
-  **62%** of females thought socialising cost too much, compared to 55% of males
-  Those not in employment, education and training (NEET) and those who were (EET) felt roughly the same, with 61% and 62% respectively feeling that it cost too much

'Phones don't let you down'

In both the survey and the workshops, the young people we heard from were especially interested in the modern shift from in person interaction, to online socialising. Technology today is inescapable, with young people saying they connect via text message or online more than any other type of interaction.

This means they are exposed to more information, opinions and possibilities than before. Technology also makes things more convenient, making it possible for young people to learn, shop and socialise without leaving the house.

This was not necessarily seen as a bad thing: we saw an overwhelmingly positive attitude to technology, with young people strongly believing that their phone and computer helped them to feel more connected. Especially in a rural county, online interaction helped young people to stay socially engaged even when remote from each other.

"Your phone won't let you down or cancel plans, it won't judge you or make you feel bad."



"You can be who you choose online without judgement, you can find people who have similar interests with little to no effort, you can use it as a way of escape from life around you."

 **76%**

of young people said their phone and computer help them to feel more connected (18% were neutral and only 6% disagreed)

 **91%**

This rose to 91% for those who were 19 or over

 **54%**

of young people said they talk to people online or via text more than in person (29% were neutral and 17% disagreed)

 **#1**

Overall, texting or talking online was the most popular form of interaction when young people were asked to rank the ways they connect with others

 **22%**

of respondents said they feel exposed online

 **56%**

of 16-18 year olds said they talk to people more online, compared to 43% of those 19 or over

 **59%**

of males said they talk to people more online, compared to 52% of females

 **78%**

of young people who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) said they talk to people more online, compared to only 46% of those who were in employment, education or training (EET) young people

This also reflects international research on the issue, which suggests that the majority of young people don't feel that phones and computers are detrimental to their social wellbeing. In a study conducted by US think tank the Pew Research Centre, young people reported "feeling more connected to what is going on in their friends' lives (80%), like they have a place where they can show their creative side (71%), like they have people who can support them through tough times (67%), and that they are more accepted (58%)" because of the internet.¹² Ofcom UK and Action for Children found similar results.¹³

Some people genuinely don't know how to socialise because with technology on the rise young people are cooped up in their rooms on their phones/laptops/gaming consoles. When our parents were younger they could only socialise in person.

[With] factors like cost and transport, some just prefer to talk online or over face time as it's easier to access the Internet or your phone.

However, young people also said they were worried about technology taking over from real life, where their interactions were deeper and more fulfilling. They said:

- Online interaction is easy, cost free and convenient, where in-person interaction is not
- People who are socially anxious can more easily share things online, where they can stay anonymous or invisible
- They can more easily find people who have common interests, but this discourages them from spending time with those different from themselves

¹² Vogels, E. A & Gelles Watnick, R. 2023. Teens and Social Media: key findings from Pew Research Centre surveys. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/24/teens-and-social-media-key-findings-from-pew-research-center-surveys/#:~:text=Some%2039%25%20of%20teens%20say,explicit%20content%20on%20social%20media>. Accessed 20th April 2024

¹³ Ofcom UK, March 2023. Children and Parents: media use and attitudes. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/255852/childrens-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2023.pdf. Accessed 19th April 2024



'Rubbish public transport'

While only 28% of respondents disagreed that it was easy to get around in Norfolk, transport in Norfolk was ranked as the 3rd largest barrier to social activity. This suggests that while most young people are reasonably happy with their transport options, they also felt that their social life was affected by the transport they could access, and what time it runs.

The comments indicated that:

- Transport is infrequent, especially from remote areas
- The schedules are not consistent or accessible
- It takes a very long time to get anywhere
- It costs a lot of money, despite the lack of efficiency
- Transport doesn't run late enough to get them home

Transport could be especially difficult for those with disabilities, with individual taxis making social outings expensive and impractical and wheelchair friendly taxis few and far between with a premium price attached.

Older participants also felt less happy with their options for getting around, which may mean that it gets harder for young people to travel as they become more responsible for arranging and funding their own transport.

If you aren't able/can't afford to drive, you have to rely on public transport that is unreliable and often stops running at 10pm (if you're lucky).



of young people thought it was easy to get around in Norfolk (28% were neutral and 28% disagreed)



of young people said their friends live too far away (37% were neutral and 17% disagreed)



A lack of transport options was the third most common barrier to social activity, after social anxiety and money, and alongside mental health



of 16-18 year olds thought it was easy to get around, compared to only 35% of those 19 or over



of males thought it was easy to get around, compared to 42% of females



of those who lived in a town or city thought it was easy to get around, compared to 39% who lived in a village, coastal or very rural area

“ Without a car, travelling around Norfolk takes literally hours. ”

“ I've been to locations where only a QR code is posted next to the bus stop and there has been no service to be able to access the bus times. ”

“ The buses are a massive part of the problem, that are known to not show up half the time, can at times leave early and most importantly often not run until very late at all. This is restricting for all young people as it means if they can't access another means of transport ... young people are left anxious about a bus system that is difficult even for adults to use at times. ”

'More places to go'

Young people indicated that they are feeling the loss of the 'third space' – that is, communal space that is distinct from work or home. They said there is very little free or low cost public space, and they often have to pay to get out of the house – for example to a café, pub or club.

The options where available are parks, skate parks and town centres. But the amount of free and accessible public spaces has declined in recent years. And there was also a feeling that attitudes to young people in public space have changed.

Young people said that:

- They feel more watched and protected from risk than ever before
- They are sometimes discouraged from 'hanging around' in public spaces
- They are more aware of 'stranger danger' and may not feel safe in public spaces after dark

"In my town there is nothing to do at all, unless you count hanging out at a park or outside of Asda as fun."

"There aren't enough free places to hang out; like you can go to a café but you have to buy something - I want an indoor space where I can just hang out or read."

In the Flourish survey, 80% of young people rated their safety in the local area as good or very good. But only 44% felt that way at night.¹⁴

This section has clear links with what our participants said about technology. Alongside the cost of travel and the inconvenience, the lack of places to go adds an extra burden which can tip young people in favour of staying at home on their phones. As such, some young people said that the 'third space' has been replaced by an online space that is safer and easier for them to access.

"It's important for us young people to feel safe and I know a lot of people don't."

¹⁴ Norfolk County Council, Flourish Survey 2024, February 2025, p.13

 **#2**

Meeting in a public space like a park, pub or café was the second most common way for young people to socialise, after texting and talking online

 **38%**

of young people thought that there were enough public spaces for young people to meet and hang out

 **45%**

of males thought there were enough public spaces, compared to 35% of females

 **50%**

of those in a town or city thought there were enough public spaces, compared to 30% who lived in a village, rural or coastal place

 **32%**

of female respondents said they felt safe when they go out, compared to 48% of male respondents

"I think it's declining for young people and adults due to all the shops closing, the town becoming very violent and dangerous, becoming more expensive to get in and out of town."



Other trends



Overall, those who identified as female were more negative about the experience of social life in Norfolk. They were more likely to feel that they don't have enough people to talk to, that things were expensive, that getting around was difficult, and that they were not safe



Interestingly, participants who identified as male were more likely to say that romantic and sexual relationships were important to them. 55% of males said they were important, compared to 42% of females



Some young people commented that Norfolk feels very divided in its age demographic. They felt Norfolk was a place set up for older people, as there is a demographic skew in favour of older generations. This makes it especially difficult to find community as a young person

CONCLUSION

Overall, we found that there are a number of factors contributing to a decline in social life for young people. The inconvenience of living in a rural county, alongside the cost of living, the pressures of doing well at school and getting a job, and the rise in anxiety among our youth means they are more tempted than ever to stay in or simply text their friends.

'Very good, because internet'

One thing we can say for certain is that young people feel technology is mostly a positive force in their lives. But it's also clear that they need help with the motivation, the resources and the confidence to try other forms of interaction. The internet can be appealing and addictive due to its convenience, but it can prevent them from pursuing opportunities beyond it.

This data tells us that young people who are out of education and employment are significantly more likely to socialise online, and to say this is their most common form of interaction. Though we can't be certain of cause and effect, there is a risk that reliance on technology could prevent young people from feeling confident enough to enter real world social and work spaces.

As such, it's important to maintain incentives and initiatives that encourage young people to get out of their rooms and into the world.

'Getting out the house can be complicated'

Even without the pull of the internet, 'getting out' can be more difficult than it seems in Norfolk. Transport networks are sporadic, and public spaces are expensive.

As the cost of living continues to rise and the number of young people earning continues to decline, they need access to social activities that don't cost them too much. If socialising is seen as an expensive extra curricular, it could become something reserved for those whose parents can sponsor it. This could widen an already existing opportunity and skills gap for young people who have fewer advantages.

This means it would be beneficial to have robust, reliable transport networks and safe community spaces that don't cost too much, or discounts and deals for those in younger age groups to keep them socially mobile.

'Parents don't trust you'

Lastly, young people need to be trusted more to assess their own risks and to inhabit public space in groups. They said that they feel more protected than ever before, and more aware of risks to their safety. Some young people even commented that there were not many places for them to spend time, since they often felt unwelcome or unsafe in public spaces such as shopping centres and parks.

In the survey, respondents said that clubs and other organised events are the least common way for them to socialise. Instead, they described forming connections in spontaneous and informal ways that are facilitated by school, work and informal public 'hot spots' such as skate parks and town centres. As our high street declines, it's important to preserve these for our younger generations, and let them decide how to use them.



NEXT STEPS

The young people who took our survey came up with some interesting interventions that they thought would help to improve social life for young people in Norfolk.

A few examples are:

- Phone free days
- Interventions that encourage the transition from online socialising to in person
- Transport initiatives
- Driving licence schemes
- Schemes for cheaper events
- Lower cost public spaces where you can just 'be'
- Using spaces such as pubs during down times
- Alcohol free events that are health and wellbeing oriented
- Better advertisement and networks for events

The next phase of our project will be focused on helping to realise and test some small scale interventions that are designed by and for young people.

Four young entrepreneurs will be joining us in an Innovation Programme that looks that to address issues around youth loneliness and isolation in Norfolk. These young people were selected as winners for their bright ideas in helping create a more socially connected Norfolk...from the over 100 entrants to the Project Connect survey.

The Innovation Programme will be structured around 3 monthly workshops starting mid-February that will help our innovators unpack and develop ideas, design small scale experiments, testing them out in practice.

Norfolk youth engagement organisations will join us in this Innovation Programme shaping its direction by bringing expertise and experience around youth support.



Interested in what you've read?

Get in touch: If you have questions about Project Connect, please email Kirsten.haywood2@norfolk.gov.uk or Ella.firebrace@norfolk.gov.uk

Help and support: If you are struggling with social isolation and loneliness or feel you could use other mental health and wellbeing support, please get in touch with an organisation who can help, such as MAP, Ormiston Families or Norfolk and Waveney Mind.



Norfolk
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