



Addressing Loneliness Among NEET Young People: Insights from Youth Work Practice & Academia

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HUB

Campaign to
End Loneliness



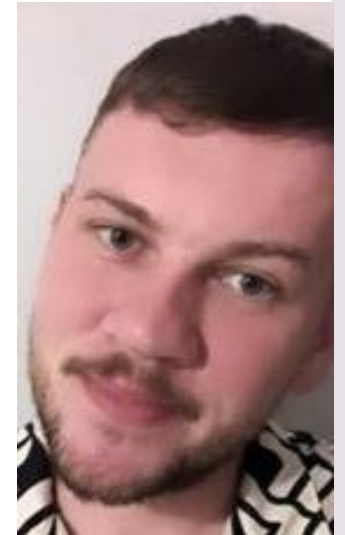
UNIVERSITY OF
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**Centre For
Loneliness Studies**

**Sheffield
Hallam
University**
Knowledge Applied

Who we are/ what we do



Context



- The value of youth work in addressing loneliness of young people (Duggan and Batsleer, 2021)
- Loneliness is defined as 'a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship' (Perlman and Peplau, 1981).
- It refers to a mismatch of perceived quality of relationships between those which individuals have, and those which they desire. It should not be confused with social isolation, which is 'an objective measurable state of having minimal contact with other people, such as family, friends or the wider community' (Cattan, 2002; Wigfield et al., 2025)
- Almost one in 10 young people aged 16-29 report feeling lonely often or all the time, while 82 per cent of youth workers have said loneliness affects young people they work with (UK Youth, 2024; Campaign to End Loneliness, 2024)
- Neoliberalism (Ball, 2012; de St Croix, 2016)
 - Lack of freedom and choice away from market forces
 - Youth work and informal education – intervention measurement
 - Competition between youth workers and service providers
 - 'Collaboration' with police, welfare agents and other agents of the state

Children with SEND faced a higher exclusion rate than their non-SEN peers. The data shows that those with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) were excluded at a rate of 0.7, compared with a rate of 0.2 for pupils without SEND (CYP Now, 2024)

Young people without a SEND statement or EHCP plan were twice as more likely to have period of being 'NEET' in early adulthood (Wrigley, 2024)

Young people who experience being NEET are twice as more likely to go repeatedly missing from home or care settings

Press release

Biggest shake up to welfare system in a generation to get Britain working

Largest welfare reforms for a generation to help sick and disabled people who can and have the potential to work into jobs - backed by a £1 billion investment, unveiled by the Work & Pensions Secretary today [Tuesday 18 March].

14 March 2024

Lonely secondary school students less likely to gain employment in adulthood

New research has found that there is a direct socioeconomic impact of loneliness in early adolescence.

UK faces youth jobs crisis as number of 'neets' rises to almost 1m

Estimated 987,000 people aged 16 to 24 were not in education, employment or training in October to December



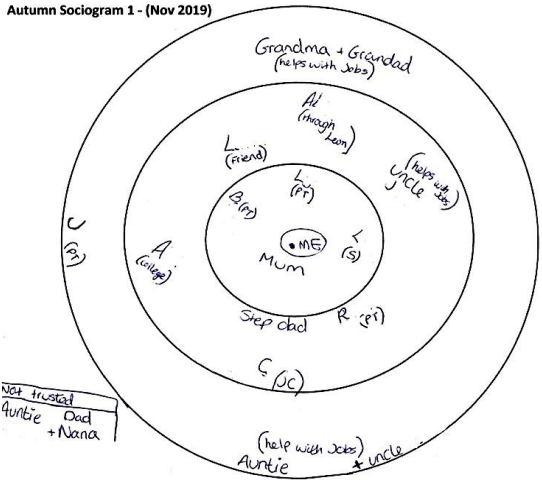
The researcher and research context

- About me: Youth work, NEET experienced
- The context of the research:
 - 'A narrative study of NEET young people's social networks' (Funded by ESRC)
 - The research explored intersectionality of care, welfare stigma and social support and how these were classed, gendered and racialized (Wrigley, 2022, 2024).
 - Follow up research exploring loneliness, NEET experienced young people (Wigfield, Wrigley and Martin - forthcoming) and global policy issues (Wrigley and Weston, 2025).



Methodology

Autumn Sociogram 1 - (Nov 2019)



One year (2019-2020) applied qualitative research with 16 young people and youth workers, careers advisors and support organizations 43 Interviews.

16 initial F2F interviews with young people (October 2019 - March 2020)

10 follow-up interviews with young people (June - July 2020)

7 further follow up interviews with young people (August-October 2020)



Working with 4 organisations

Youth work professionals, Careers advice workers, programme managers

7 F2F (September-March 2020)

4 follow up interviews (May-July 2020)

NEET Experienced Young People and Youth Work

Several young people care leavers – transitioning from Local Authority Care into independent living. Key networks of support with social services, aftercare workers and support organisations.



Of these young people, half had experiences of employment in the precarious care workforce [work programme placement, paid home care, providing care for relatives in ill-health].



Longstanding reciprocal 'care relationships' with youth work professionals and organisations (de St Croix, 2016).

Social Support, young people and loneliness

- *'If you've got someone that's living a chaotic life, that's got problems with housing, family, maybe alcohol, drug-related activities, they're not going to be ready to settle down and engage in education and then that's a knock on effect [...] it costs more money in the long term if [we] don't invest at the early stages, you'll get more people drawing the DWP benefits when they hit eighteen'* (**Jenny, Careers Advisor**).
- *"So my mum and dad would be like the first two people I'd go to as like support but then also my boyfriend. [...] [He is] very supportive [...]"* (**Autumn, young woman, Greater Manchester**).
- *"I have tried speaking to my mum, as I love my mum. But she just thinks I'm crazy, like. I did like used to self-harm etc, and I did try and open up to her..."* (**Waliyah, young woman, Greater Manchester**).

COVID-19

Youth support services

- NYA (2021) has identified that since 2010, youth services (both targeted and grassroots) have experienced funding cuts by 73% across England, with yearly spending having dropped by £1 billion and the loss of 4,500 frontline qualified youth workers. Concerns that NEET experienced young people become further marginalised in terms of criminal exploitation (country lines), school exclusion etc.

Wrigley (2024)

- Stigma a top-down process – mediated by government policy, sanctioning, agents of the state, support workers and young people's friends and families.
- Pandemic and cost of living crisis as an ongoing amplification of stigma and social abjection
- ["With the Pandemic Everything Changes!": Examining Welfare Reform and Conditionality Prior to and During the COVID-19 Pandemic Amongst NEET Experienced Young People | Journal of Applied Youth Studies](#)



"With the Pandemic Everything Changes!": Examining Welfare Reform and Conditionality *Prior to* and *During* the COVID-19 Pandemic Amongst NEET Experienced Young People

Liam Wrigley^{1,2} 

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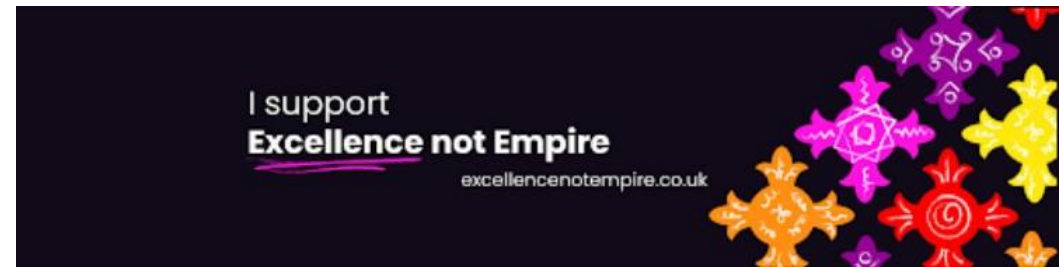
Abstract

The purpose of this article is to critically explore pre-existing and continuing welfare conditionality of NEET (not in education, employment, or training) experienced young people in the UK. The article traces the policy history of NEET over the last 25 years, to demonstrate the enduring nature of benefit sanctioning that NEET experienced young people have faced throughout a decade of austerity, Brexit, and now the COVID-19 pandemic. The article engages with key narratives from 43 interviews of NEET experienced young people and youth work professionals, undertaken prior and during the pandemic. Overall, the article argues that government actors and policy makers alike have not gone far enough to support NEET experienced young people. The article found that more structural and institutional levels of support from central government are needed to meaningfully engage NEET experienced young people in their education, employment, and training trajectories throughout periods of crisis.

Keywords NEET · COVID-19 · Youth · Welfare · Education · Employment



Sally Carr MBE
Place Director North West
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Research links declining youth mental health with rise in Neet young people

15 July ⌚ 2 mins read [Youth Work](#) [Education](#)

Declining levels of mental health exacerbated by cuts to early help services is being blamed for the rise in young people not in education, employment or training (Neet).

Financial insecurity, deteriorating sleep quality, social media harms, and “drastic cuts to children’s and youth services” are the key drivers for the three-fold increase in mental health issues over nearly two decades, according to a report, ‘Understanding drivers of recent trends in young people’s mental health’, commissioned by Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) – the government-funded what works centre for youth employment.

“

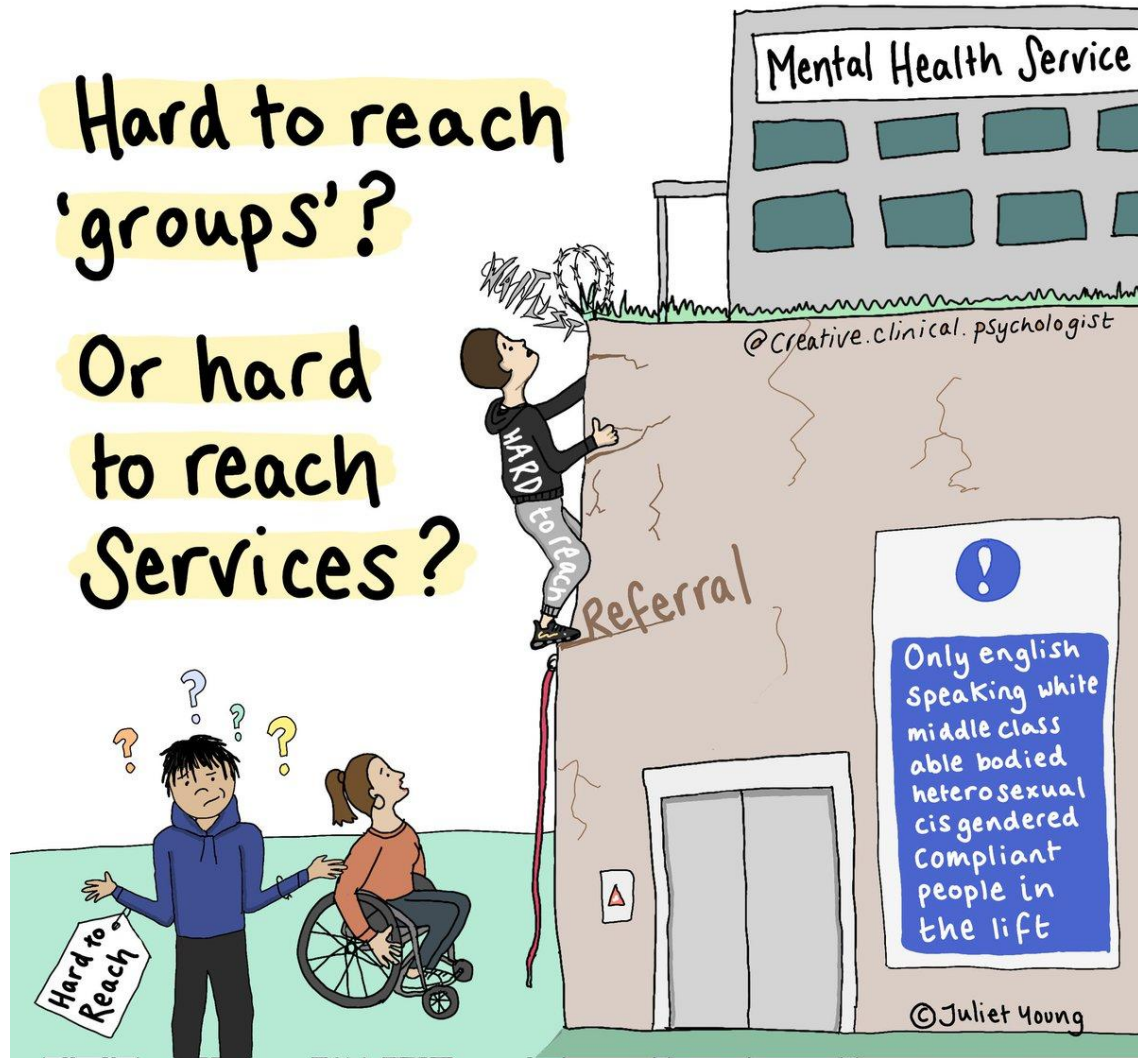
Because of the relational nature of youth work, it is vital for **youth workers** to share risks and concerns from a young person's perspective.

”

- Youth Work practitioner are often in young people's lives on a **voluntary rather than mandatory basis**-opening up trusted relationships, in informal spaces and posing informal learning opportunities, understanding **the context of young people's lives**.
- Youth workers have a **unique role to play** within these processes. Their frontline engagement makes them key contributors to safeguarding practices, highlighting the importance of involving them in local safeguarding arrangements.
- Youth Workers act as a **bridge and translator** proactively advocating the voice of young people across relevant agencies, underpinned by the Lundy model of youth participation.
- Youth Workers often hold a position of **privileged witness** in young people's lives-seeing, hearing, and feeling what young people experience.

Hard to reach
'groups'?

Or hard
to reach
Services?



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Article: And Someone to Talk To: The Role Of Therapeutic Youth Work

First Published: 6th November 2022 | Author: Sally Carr MBE | Tags: [mental health](#), [therapeutic youth work](#)

Sally Carr MBE explores the therapeutic youth work, and its significance to practice and introduces the models she has developed for practitioners. This poignant article outlines how this approach fits in with current challenges and demonstrates how youth work works effectively alongside other services such as CAHMS and Youth Justice.

We are increasingly aware of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people's well-being and mental health (Young Minds,

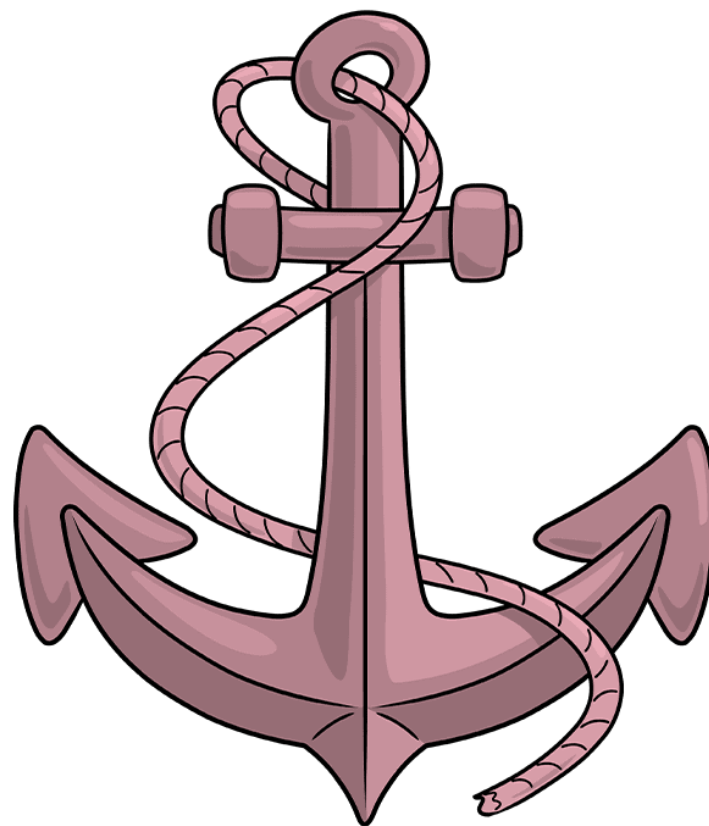
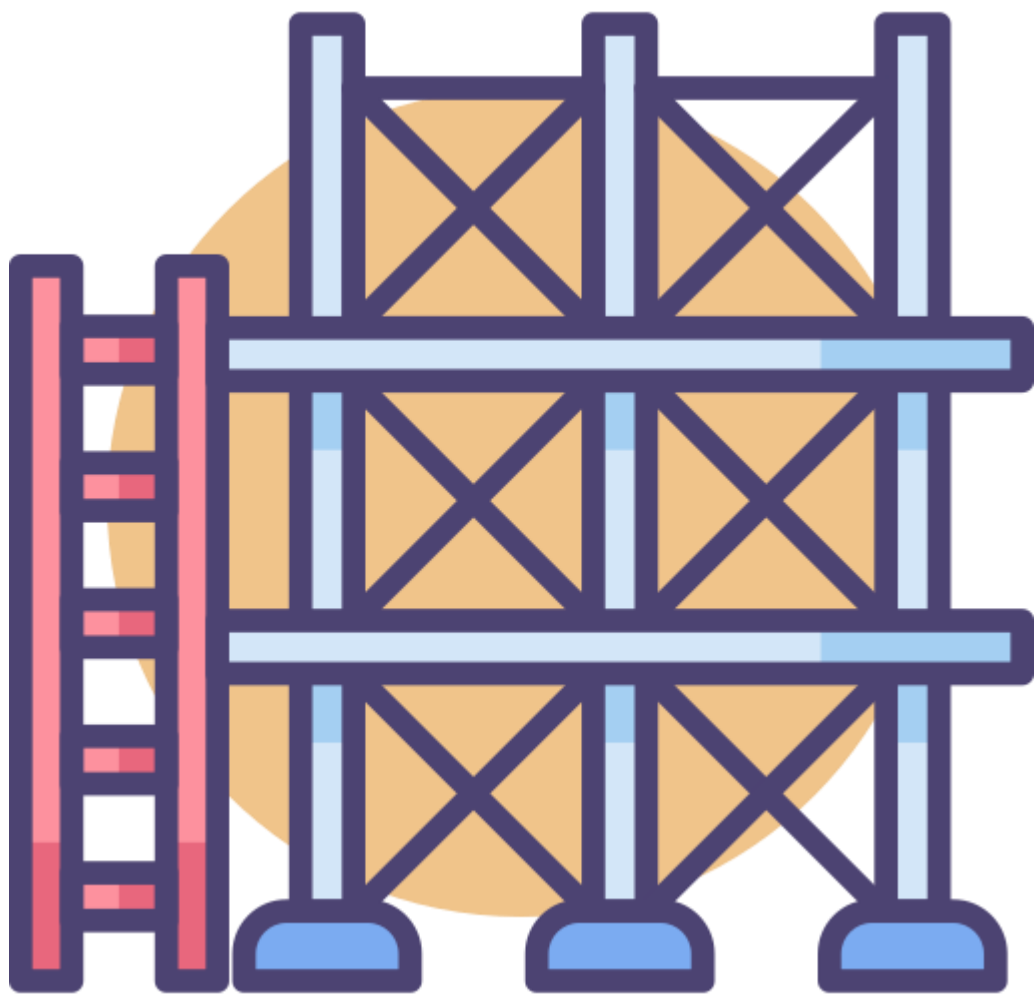


Healing requires justice not just therapy-

Dr Ron Dodzro, Psychology The Streets
Deserve (PTSD)

Safety is something we build together, not just something we manage – Jade Barnett.





Suicide for Traveller men is **7 times higher** and most common in young Traveller men **aged 15-25**- All Ireland- AITHS, 2010.

Risk of suicide-Lesbian ,Gay and Bisexual young people **aged 16-25** is **2.2 times higher** than heterosexual young people, whilst the risk of international self harm was **2.5 times higher** than heterosexual young people- ONS 2025.

“we make our young think there’s something wrong with them. There’s nothing wrong with them, they are just needing a little help. There is no shame in that, none at all. The stigma needs to go - too many of our young are dying. My beautiful boy has gone because he was too ashamed to seek help”-FFT 2023

“There are so many Travellers and Gypsies who are gay and can't come out... it's not our culture. But it's destroying our youth. [...] It needs to be addressed...”FFT 2023.



“It’s easy to feel like you don’t fit in with the traditional Traveller world because of your sexuality or gender, and that you don’t fit in with LGBT spaces because of discrimination.”

-Tyler Hewitt



Be
Present
Take
notice
Attune
Connect

Experiential story

- Young Gay Traveller Man
- Aged 24
- Walked into the LGBTQ+ youth group in Manchester and was about to walk right out again.

Scaffold
and
Anchor

Environment is
the hidden
hand that
shapes human
behaviour

Therapeutic REACH

Relationship

Environment

Activity

Conversation

Healing
Centred

Stuff you only
talk about when
you feels safe.

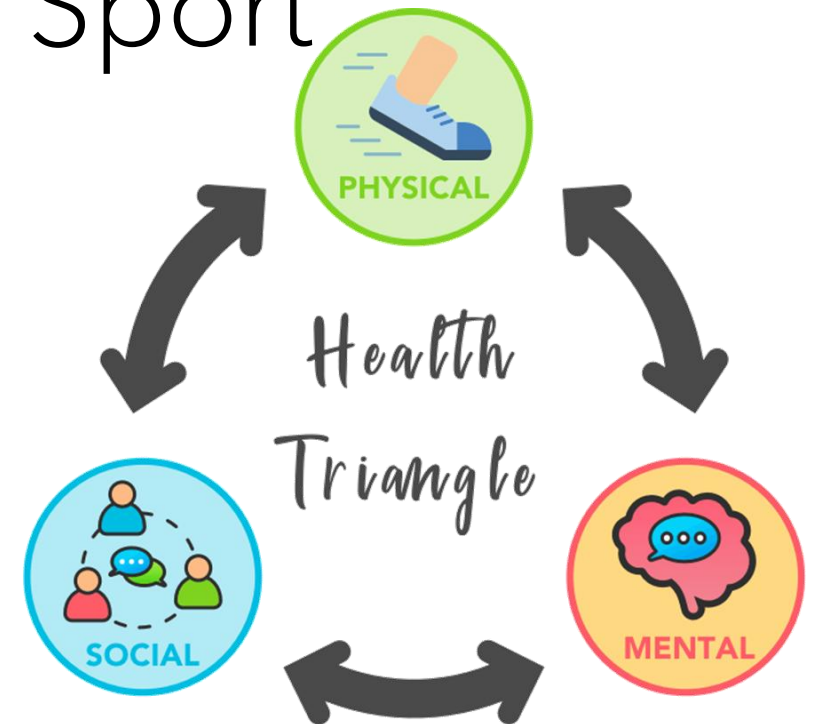
Social
Mental
Physical

Right Time,
Style, Price



- ✓ Right People
- ✓ Right Place
- ✓ Right Style
- ✓ Right Time
- ✓ Right Price

Queering Sport





Hi Sally, I've kept receiving interest for sports group throughout the last week and have 6 confirmed attendees + interest from other groups of people would it be possible to get an additional two racquets?

I could get hold of these and expense them if you're unable to, just let me know whether you have a preferred supplier if that's the case.

This is assuming we have the sports hall on Thursday otherwise it should be a none issue



Hi Sally, forgot I never sent you the receipt for the badminton racquets I bought for sports group

Ended up getting a kit of 4 as it was cheaper than just 2



Benefits of sport on mental health

Taking part in physical activity releases endorphins, which have a positive effect on our mental health and wellbeing. Being active can also give people a new focus, a sense of achievement, better sleep patterns and help build **new** relationships with others.

Concluding points

- The empirical research which informed this paper has revealed how key professionals, such as youth work and educational professionals, are acutely aware of the ongoing challenges faced by NEET experienced young people and had to adapt to the changing policy and work environment, during periods of rapid structural, institutional and economic challenge
- The importance of scaffolding
- Intersectional identities
- Needs, Hopes and Aspirations – complex, messy and intersectional.