

# Third Sector Staff Perspectives on the Strategies and Barriers to Reducing Loneliness in Young People with Mental Health Problems: A Qualitative study

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## Study background

- Loneliness intervention research for people with mental health (MH) problems currently lacks strong evidence (Ma et al., 2019)
- Explored third sector perspectives on reducing loneliness in young people (YP) with MH problems and barriers faced
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with staff from third sector organisations and analysed thematically



# Sample

## Staff demographics:

- 14 staff members from 7 organisations around London
- All female
- Most aged between 25-34 yrs
- Range of job seniority (CEO-Youth workers) and a range of time working at organisation from under a year to over 6 years



## Characteristics of the young people supported by staff:

- Low socio-economic background
- Had experienced family breakdown or separated from their family
- Experiencing MH problems including anxiety, depression, personality disorders, psychosis as well as some YP being diagnosed with learning disabilities or difficulties



## Strategies offered by organisations to support young people with MH problems



1:1 support



Group trips outside the centre



Encouraging external social inclusion activities



Group sessions at the centre



Outreach to trusted spaces



Involving wider networks

# Theme 1: 'Providing a Safe Space'

*"...the language is 'I feel safe here, this is like my second home'..."*

A Sense of Home

*"it's the consistency of being open, having a place for people to go to."*

Consistency

*"so you'll see that our office door is always open; anyone could come and make a cup of tea or coffee..."*

Being Available

Building trust and security were seen as important in improving opportunities for open communication and self-disclosure

## Theme 2: 'Seeing the Person'

*"I think you will deal with it on each individual case, because what works for one young person may not work for another."*

Person-Centred

*"It's that whole process of being part of something"*

Sense of Belonging

*"once you start to work with that young person on a one-to-one, you will know, hmm, that's not right, she doesn't usually do that..."*

Noticing Changes

Fostering a sense of ownership, group identity and feeling valued were seen as important in improving engagement with the organisations

# Themes related to barriers to engagement

*"I think there's external stigma, but there's also your own internal attitude towards your own illness."*

Stigma

*"...a lot of people don't actually know who to contact if they are feeling lonely..."*

Awareness of services

*"...The closing of youth centres is one of the most destructive things that we can do to youth"*

Strain on the third sector

All related to reducing engagement and support offered by the organisations

## Summary

- Organisations used a mixture of strategies including 1:1 support and encouraging social inclusion
- Results endorsed the importance of improving social connectedness in YP experiencing MH problems
- Important to consider how barriers can interact with strategies when investigating loneliness interventions
- **Most importantly...future research should work collaboratively with young people in reducing loneliness**



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