

# Co-op Young Researchers

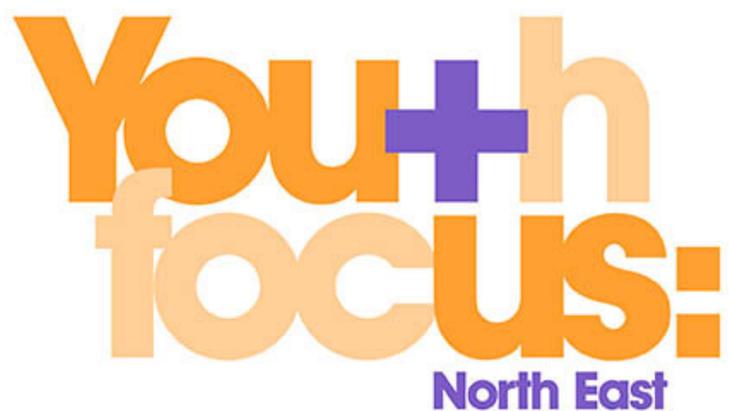
Research Report:

Understanding the correlation between undertaking social action projects and its ability to tackle youth loneliness



---

Foundation



This report analyses and presents findings on research that was conducted with 10 – 17 year olds from the North East who had undertaken social action projects. Exploring their views and opinions of their involvement in social action and the impact on feelings of loneliness.

**Researched and delivered by the Co-op Young Researchers**

**Youth Focus North East, 2019**

## **Contents**

Introduction - Page 3

Methodology - Page 4

Key Findings - Page 6

Participants' responses in relation to the five key areas explored - Page 8

Does engagement in social action projects impact on loneliness in young people? - Page 14

What did the research tell us? - Page 16

Recommendations - Page 17

A reflection - Page 18

Statistics - Page 19

Appendix - Page 21

# Introduction

A group of young people were recruited, trained and supported to become Co-op Foundation Young Researchers. The role of the Young Researchers was to develop and co-research sessions with a range of young people, aged 10 – 17 years, across the North East region who had undertaken social action projects.

The research that was undertaken to inform this report is intended to provide data and evidence that will help to understand the correlation of young people's interactions with social action projects and their feelings linked to loneliness and to what degree does taking part in social action help to tackle this issue.

This research was specifically focused upon 10 – 17 year olds, as it has been indicated that there is a lack of data around this age group in relation to this topic.

We hope that this perspective will inform strategies and services that are striving to combat youth loneliness and empower young people to take a lead on exploring these opportunities themselves.

From July to September 2019 the Co-op Young Researchers delivered a number of interactive workshops across the North East covering areas from Middlesbrough to Consett.

They also created surveys to be shared to capture young people's views within the region that they were unable to run workshops with.

Five key areas were focused upon during the research to allow a reflective process for young people to use to identify any connections between the way they felt and being part of their social action project. Evidence for each of these key areas is presented within the main body of the report.

The Co-op Young Researchers would like to thank everyone who supported and contributed to this research, including the dedicated staff of support workers that work directly with young people and in particular to the young people themselves who gave their time, views and honest opinions.

# Methodology

Throughout the project the Co-op Young Researchers undertook a robust structure of activities to support the research process.

These included:

## Training of Co-op Young Researchers

The Co-op Young Researchers undertook a two-day training course exploring different research methods, how to collate data, best practice and how to engage and work with young people to support their own learning, development and abilities to become Young Researchers.

## Research Method Development

Different methods were developed, tried and tested by the group themselves and adapted to fit the need of the project. An interactive workshop and survey was produced.

## Collection of Data

Organisations linked to young people who had undertaken social action projects within the North East were contacted. The Co-op Young Researchers ran a number of workshops with those they could visit but also shared their survey with those they could not.

## Collation of Data

Information from workshops and surveys were brought together and the group analysed each area under the criteria they were focusing upon. They drew upon key themes that came through to link the connection between young people's involvement in social action and their feelings of loneliness.

## Reporting

This report was created to identify the main key findings highlighted throughout the research. A short film was also produced to showcase the journey the Co-op Young Researchers had embarked on to undertake this research project.

Find this film on Youth Focus North East YouTube channel: Film title "[Youth Focus NE Co-op Young Researchers](#)".



Training: Exploring research methods



Creating researchers workshop



Training: Testing research methods



Collating data



Training: Testing research methods



Training for film production



Planning researchers workshop



Post film production

# Key findings

To introduce the subject matter of loneliness a number of questions were asked at the beginning of each consultation.

Within the planning stage the Co-op Young Researchers felt there were 5 specific areas they would like to explore to identify any links between the social action projects themselves and whether people felt less lonely from being involved. Did social action provide solutions to tackle loneliness?

They also felt that there was a strong link between isolation and feeling of loneliness which they also wanted to explore within these themes.

The group discussed the likelihood of people understanding the topic, the sensitivity and how much people would automatically make the links between what they had done and their feelings.

The focus upon these themes was to get young people thinking about their experiences before, throughout and after the social action project so they could reflect in a more effective way. When asked if they thought being involved in a social action project had an impact on feelings of isolation and loneliness they were able to truly reflect upon their experience of being lonely in order to answer the question.

*"I thought if I told people they might have thought I was daft"*

*"Didn't want people to worry about me"*

*"Being told by my parents that everyone is dangerous and since we come from another country we are foreigners so we shouldn't put trust in people so easily. This caused me to be isolated to people as my parents don't let me have strong connections with friends of different backgrounds of race or religion."*

*"I wanted to let people enjoy their time, didn't want to seem selfish"*

*"I lied about how I felt because I didn't want people to question"*

*"I want to tell someone I always feel alone. I sometimes watch videos and listen to music"*

*"I used to tell people so they didn't feel like they were going through it alone and we talked about our problems together that made us feel better. Now nobody really wants to talk about it so I keep things like that to myself."*

## Key findings

Those who had felt relief from the feelings of loneliness identified talking about it, distractions and being included in activities had helped.

*"I didn't tell anyone but I felt better when my friends started including me in more"*

*"Joining groups helped but I still experienced feelings of isolation."*

*"I told someone and it helped"*

*"Talked to worker who helped me go to the community centre before that I just stayed in the house"*

*"I told people that I was friends with and they let me come and be involved in their friendship"*

*"Yes very close friends and they calmed me down and distracted me"*

Five areas were focused upon to support the reflective process to identify links between the participants' feelings and their involvement within social action projects.

The Co-op Young Researchers felt these were key areas to look into to be able to unpick the finer details of why being part of a social action project may or may not have an impact on specific feelings. These areas were: fun, inclusion, sustained engagement, learning, and connections.

# Participants' responses in relation to the five key areas explored:

## Fun

96.15% of young people said they had fun while undertaking their project. Things they identified as enjoying most were spending time with friends, having an opportunity to try new activities and learn new things. Playing an active role whilst working as a team, giving support, helping others and having a sense of purpose.

*"Being able to do something that will make a difference"*

*"It was fun planning what activities there were"*

*"I enjoyed learning things I wouldn't learn in school"*

*"Being all in a team together. Who we were working with and learning about other people"*

*"The chats and fun we have together"*

*"I enjoyed the fact that I could express myself and be creative and talk to people"*

*"The fact that it had a purpose and not just for fun"*

*"I enjoyed the fact how we got to meet the people we were helping. The trip visiting the people and delivering the stuff and being a team"*

# Participants' responses in relation to the five key areas explored:

## Inclusion

97.92% of young people said they felt included when taking part in social action. Working as part of a team where everyone had a role, turn taking and opportunities to share opinions and be listened to were key elements to making people feel this way.

*"Everyone helped each other"*

*"Because my words are being read and known of by other people"*

*"Asking me questions and my opinions on the topic we talk about"*

*"Because I finally had a place to fit in and make a change"*

*"Because it felt welcoming unlike other places like school"*

*"We were a team and we got assigned roles"*

*"Everyone in the group (including adults) are incredibly inclusive and kind"*

*"I felt included because people weren't ignoring me and I felt happy around them. I felt included because my group made me feel involved in everything. I felt included because we all had different parts and things to do"*

*"Everyone had a go at doing stuff. Took turns on camera. Let us take pictures"*

*"Just doing it made me feel happy"*

*"All ideas were involved and debated"*

# Participants' responses in relation to the five key areas explored:

## Sustained Engagement

Over half of the participants had not engaged in any other similar activities since undertaking their social action project. When asked why they had not continued to do more things like this it was clear that there was a reliability on others to approach them with opportunities.

*"Because there has been nothing on"*

*"Nothing has been organised"*

*"Because nothing has come up yet"*

*"There should be more opportunities for young people"*

*"If we weren't asked I would not have done anything like this because there isn't enough advertisement about it. Charity work isn't very accessible unless you know where to look"*

Many said they would not know how to access these opportunities otherwise. Lack of knowing where to go, how to access information or the ability to understand they can take a lead on their own social action contributed towards this. Some mentioned they would never have even known engaging in social action was possible if people hadn't brought it to their attention.

Those who had undertaken other similar projects mainly focused upon helping the elderly, fundraising or local community clean ups. These were still undertaken with the support and guidance from organisations offering these opportunities.

# Participants' responses in relation to the five key areas explored:

## Sustained Engagement

When participants were asked if they would like to do more projects like social action 95.65% said they would.

Things they indicated they would like to do included the following:

*"Meet new people, work in a team and come up with innovative ideas in order to make the world a better place"*

*"Work with more young people"*

*"Art, music sessions, trips, things that are interesting and perhaps good things for the community (litter-picking, helping the homeless, ext.)"*

*"Social action with other people in the community"*

*"Just to in general do stuff to help the community like maybe we could raise money for a tree planting organisation to help out the environment mainly I would prefer to do things to help out our problems today maybe a litter pick at the beach or something like that"*

*"I feel like it would impact on achievements and help others. I would like to do more with the elderly. Help the less able / e.g. disabled or children with learning disabilities feel like they can do it"*

*"Lots of fun and challenging things"*

# Participants' responses in relation to the five key areas explored:

## Learning

76.09% of participants said they had learnt something new whilst undertaking their social action project. Areas of learning included soft skills such as communication, leadership and teamwork, but the majority spoke about the learning of others and their communities covering areas such as their history, needs, issues faced, positive perceptions and how to be empathetic.

*"That it's good to be doing something"*

*"About others and how to run these types of activities."*

*"How to work well together."*

*"That things can be hard and get tough and not everyone will agree but it will work out"*

*"I learnt about the history of the area"*

*"I learnt that there are good people who would do anything for anyone"*

*"I learnt how to adapt and change plans when doing something is not possible at that moment in time."*

*"I learnt about the holocaust"*

*"How to make friends. I learnt new facts about people and how difficult young people's lives are."*

*"I learnt that there are loads of people that have been through loads more things. How you can be safe around people"*

*"Our community is nice."*

*"To listen and understand others"*

# Participants' responses in relation to the five key areas explored:

## Connections

Many of the participants already knew the other young people within their social action group. However, 89.13% of participants had met new people whilst undertaking their project.

*"I met lots of different people that did projects before. They were all so lovely"*

*"I met community members, organisers and other youth groups"*

*"We met people from different backgrounds. Elderly. People with difficulty. Cadets from all over UK"*

*"I met the man at the community centre, friends and their families"*

These mainly consisted of the people/communities their projects were aimed at helping and workers connected to the project or these groups, however new friendships had also been formed. 67.39 % stayed in touch with people once project was finished.

*"I stayed in touch with quite a lot of the people that helped and came"*

*"James my new friend, we stay in touch and see each other now"*

*"We stayed in touch with each other from the group and the cadet leader"*

*"People at the community centre and Lyn the worker"*

# Does engagement in social action projects impact on loneliness in young people?

Participants were asked if they thought undertaking social action projects could help other people feel less isolated and lonely? 95.45% of the young people participating in the research believed that it could.

*"Because people feel like they're battling with something themselves and to know that there are people like them out there I think it would mean a lot to them"*

*"It helped me and my friends, so it would also help others"*

*"You're part of a team and you can help each other. It makes people feel like they can contribute and that their ideas are valuable to other people"*

*"Because it's a space where everyone is included no matter who they are"*

*"You feel safe and get to meet people"*

*"Forces you to get out of the house and do something and you usually have to talk to people so it adds something extra to an otherwise uneventful day"*

*"Brings people out of their shells. Helps people communicate"*

*"So they can get involved with something and make them feel special"*

*"Children probably feel more confident and less lonely knowing there are people the same as them"*

*"It's something fun that people can do together to help each other"*

*"It helps to overcome things like social anxiety"*

*"Because you get used to seeing new people and you get to have fun with the new people"*

# Does engagement in social action projects impact on loneliness in young people?

They were then asked if they felt being involved in their social action project had helped them feel less lonely, 59.46% said it had. Reasons for this were significantly based upon the social aspects of the projects, allowing them space to be with others, working together, being listened to and having something to be part of. Many talked about a change in mind set and feelings about themselves becoming more positive. This included improvement of mental health issues, feelings of social anxiety and connection to others.

To note, those who responded 'no' to the question had expressed at the time of undertaking the social action project they had not felt lonely.

*"I have been in situations before when I've felt left out for example in school in PE but you don't feel left out here"*

*"Yeah because it helped us work as a team and bring us closer together"*

*"I really enjoy being around people so don't tend to feel lonely"*

*"It gets me out the house and communicating"*

*"They have made me feel more important and made me more improve my friendships"*

*"It has made me feel like there's more of a reason not to commit suicide"*

*"I got to do my project with people I liked and knew. It came at a time where I felt a lot of pressure and school work was piling up so I isolated myself to get it done. So when the opportunity arose I was quite eager to participate"*

*"I used to just play on Minecraft. Before the project I didn't socialise I was just on my phone; I didn't know anyone. Now I have more friends and see people. I even ask people "do you want to be my friend" and they say "yes". Then they said they wanted to be my best friend"*

# What did the research tell us?

For young people aged between 10 – 17 years of age being involved in social action does help to tackle loneliness.

These types of projects open up opportunities, learning and connections to others in a number of ways. Not only do they learn about themselves but they learn about others and their communities too.

Resilience, empathy, understanding, achievement and a space to be valued are important to give the young people a springboard of hope, self-worth, and belonging.

Having an opportunity to engage with others, undertaking a project with a purpose and outcome while having fun enhances their experiences.

Young people want to do social action but don't know how to access opportunities effectively. Many young people still struggle with the term social action and what it means and only when having it explained to them may recognise they have done something like this.

Discussions with young people and organisations supporting them highlighted that the majority heavily relied on others approaching them to undertake social action projects rather than them taking the initiative themselves. This was preventing next steps and a continuum of involvement from young people.



# Recommendations

- Young people who had taken part in the research were extremely keen to be involved in other things. They had identified areas of interest, with this in mind it would help to shape new projects to incorporate things young people have said they want to do.
- Increase the opportunity for young people to co-design social action projects and also provide ways for peer to peer research to be undertaken, which provides a different kind of dialogue, insight, and evidence base to traditional research approaches.
- Provide support to link young people to other opportunities available to them. Whether that is within your own organisation or external networks. Organisations should be encouraged to find ways of sharing these opportunities more effectively and in a more coherent manner.
- Some organisations need to gain support and advice from those who know how to run these types of projects. These organisations need to understand and feel like they can look for their own funding to run their own social action projects instead of relying on people coming back to them to do more. Links need to be made effectively, information sharing is crucial to embedding this mind set.
- Support needs to be given to young people to ensure they are aware of social action opportunities and how to link to them. They also need advice on how they can initiate activities like social action themselves so they don't feel the need to rely on others. This will empower them to take their own lead. This could be done through information sessions, leaflets, and social media outlets. Having young people who have undertaken social action projects could also share their learning and experience via these methods to encourage others to take part and see how possible it can be.
- Linking up other opportunities and support networks during and after projects have been completed with young people will help to increase the continuum of engagement.
- More information / education is needed around what social action is and what it isn't for young people.

## A reflection

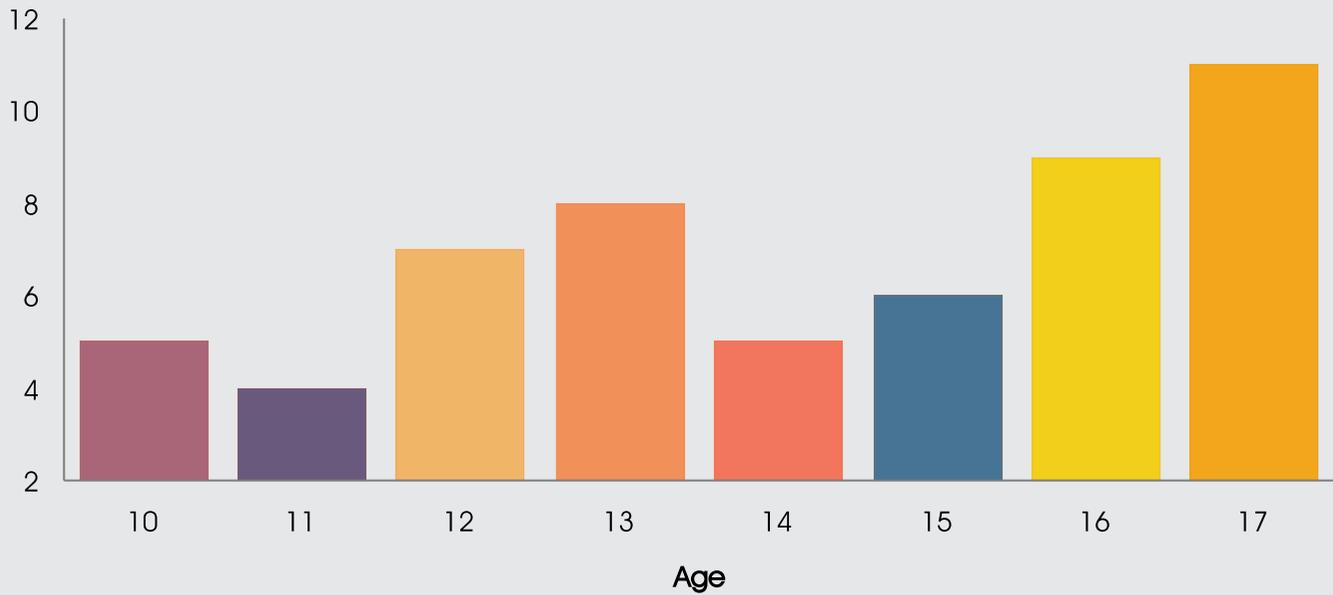
This has been an important piece of work for Youth Focus North East. We have been given the opportunity to support young people to not only gain research skills, but to then utilise these with their peers. We strongly feel that a peer to peer approach creates a different dynamic and insight to research than that which is obtained through more academic and/or professional-led approaches.

We spend a lot of time thinking about strategies and effective processes around supporting young people to take part in social action which adds value, and we must continue to do this. There is, however, a simple aspect that we could overlook - being involved in social action makes young people feel included, and feeling included is a very positive first step for young people to take.

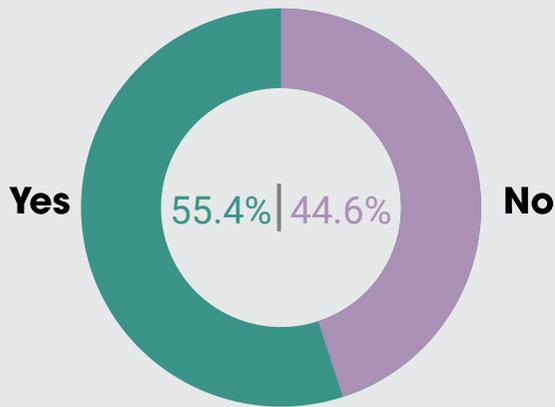


# Statistics

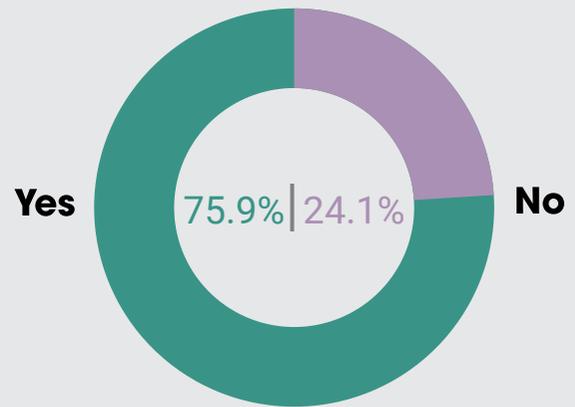
**What is your age ?**  
(Total reponses from each age)



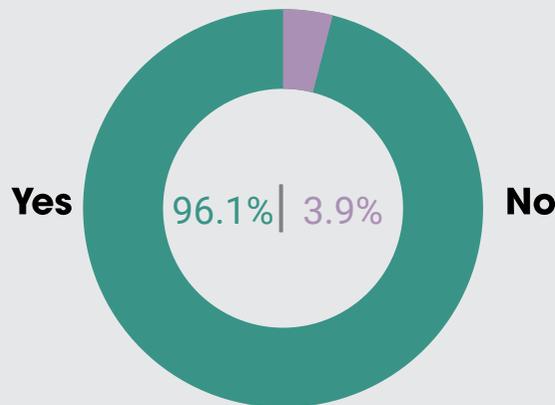
**Have you had anyone say they feel lonely or isolated to you ?**



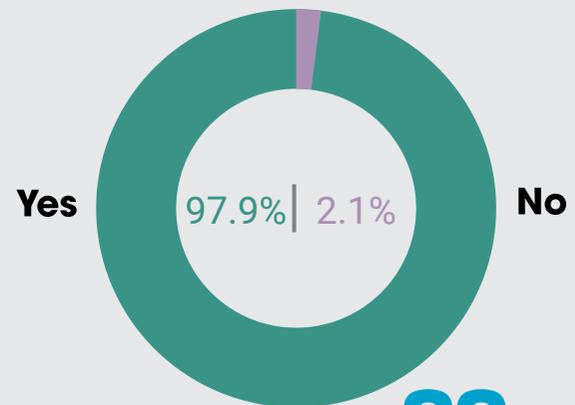
**Have you ever felt lonely or isolated?**



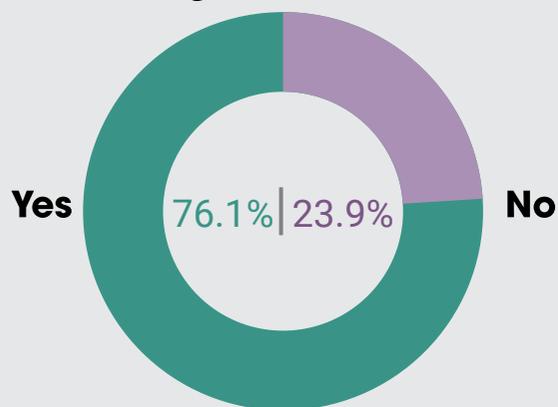
**Whilst doing the project did you have fun?**



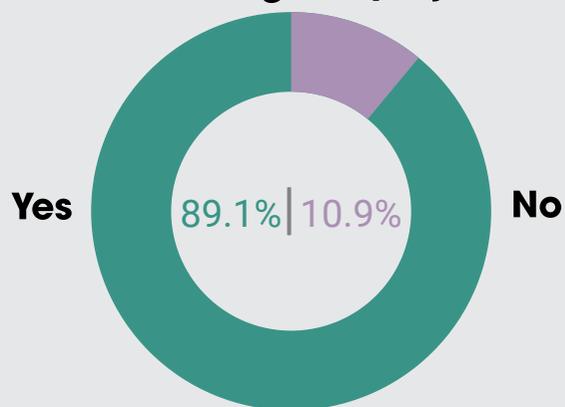
**Did you feel included ?**



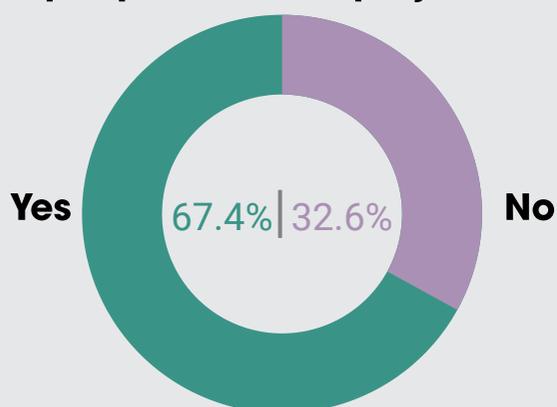
**Did you learn new things whilst doing this project ?**



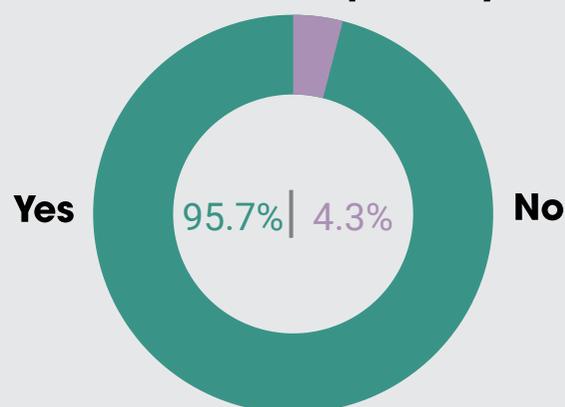
**Did you meet new people whilst doing this project ?**



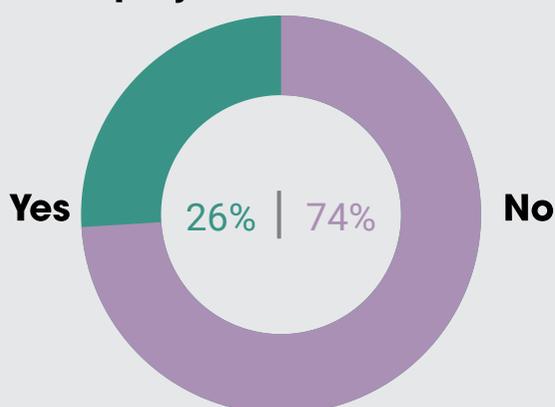
**Did you stay in touch with people after the project ?**



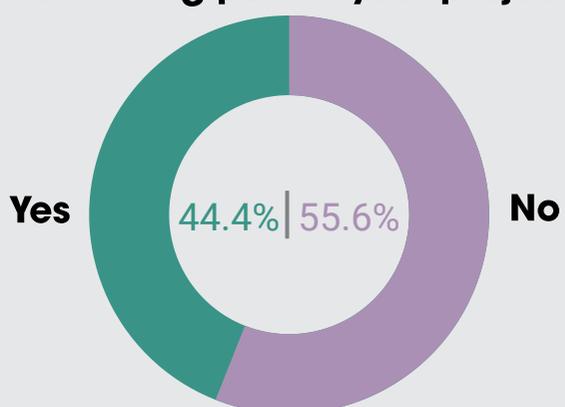
**Do you think the project made a difference or helped anyone ?**



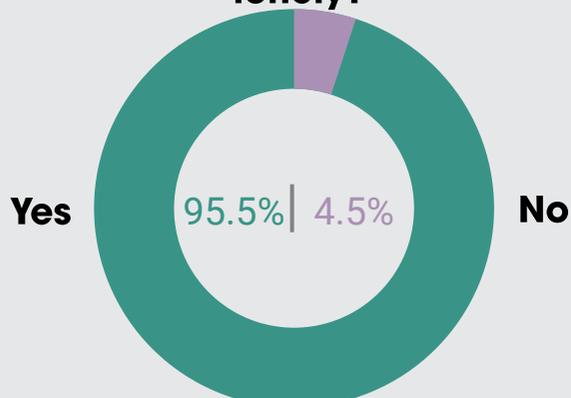
**Would you want to do more projects like this ?**



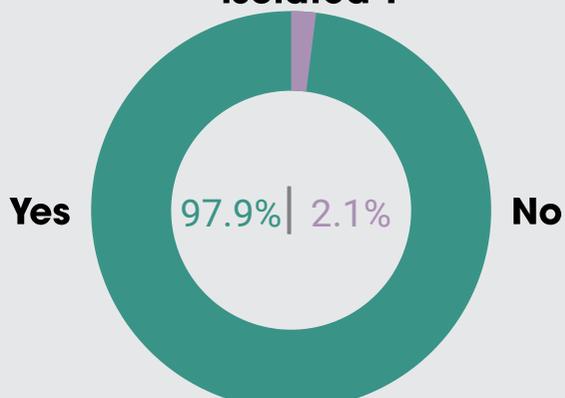
**Have you done anything else like this since taking part in your project ?**



**Do you think projects like this can help people feel less isolated and lonely?**



**Has being involved in the project helped you feel less lonely or isolated ?**



# Appendix



# AN EXAMPLE

## Response Form



Foundation

What is your age?

The Co-op Young Researchers are collecting information from young people who have undertaken social action projects. They would like to see if being involved in projects like these has an effect on feelings of isolation and loneliness in people. All information collected will be made anonymous.

Have you had anyone say they feel lonely or isolated to you?

Yes

No

If yes, what did you do when they told you and how did you feel ?

Have you ever felt lonely or isolated ?

Yes

No

If YES did you tell anyone or did anything happen that helped you feel less lonely / isolated ?

Whilst doing your project did you have fun ?

Yes

No

Why ?

What did you enjoy most about your project ?

Did you feel included ?

Yes

No

Why ?

Did you learn new things whilst doing the project ?

Yes

No

If yes, what did you learn ?

<b>Did you meet new people whilst doing the project ?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>If yes, who did you meet ?</b>		

<b>Did you stay in touch with people after the project ?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>If yes, who ?</b>		

<b>Did you think your project made a difference or helped anyone?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>If yes: How did it make a difference and who to ?</b>		

<b>Would you want to do more projects like this ?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>What kind of things would you like to do ?</b>		

<b>Have you done anything else like this since doing your project ?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>If YES what have you done? If NO, why not?</b>		

<b>Do you think doing projects like this can help people feel less isolated and lonely ?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Why do you think that ?</b>		

<b>By being involved in the project did it help you feel less lonely or isolated?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Please explain your answer</b>		

**Produced by Youth Focus North East  
Suite 6  
New Century House  
Gateshead  
NE8 1HR**



---

Foundation

