



National Youth
Partnership

Youth Homelessness: Discussions about isolation and loneliness

Resource pack



HM Government




Foundation



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Introduction

This resource pack has been designed for those workers who either have little or no experience of working with young people that are experiencing feelings of loneliness or isolation, or those professionals who may be at the early stages of working with young people on these kinds of issues. Funded by the Co-operative Foundation, the resource pack has been developed by youth workers who have experience of delivering projects specifically focused on tackling youth loneliness and isolation and young people who have experienced homelessness to give insight on how these feelings manifest, linked to their situations.

Youth loneliness and isolation is a complex subject. This resource pack does not provide a set of answers; it instead provides an avenue to begin to explore, debate and discuss some of the core themes associated with youth homelessness and feelings, thoughts and experiences of being, or becoming, lonely or isolated.

Through research in recent years, we are beginning to get an insight into the scale of youth loneliness and isolation, and the impact being lonely or isolated can have on individuals. Young people feel loneliness more intensely and more frequently than any other age group. Two-fifths (40 per cent) of people aged 16-24 say they feel lonely often or very often.” (*BBC Loneliness Experiment, 2018*).

Loneliness and isolation can be difficult and sensitive subjects; subjects that can feel overwhelming at times, but we can help young people begin to explore the issues, to start taking positive steps in their own lives, and even build the confidence and motivation to help others.

Definitions of isolation and loneliness

Loneliness and isolation is an increasing issue for young people. There are a range of definitions for loneliness and isolation, but the following are ones we find helpful to use.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is the difference between desired and actual social relations (*Perlman & Peplau, 1981*) - either in quantity or quality of relationships (or both).

What is social isolation?

A state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships (*Nicholson, 2009, p. 1346*).

Why and how the resource pack was developed

We have been working for the last 4 years specifically around youth isolation and loneliness, we know it's a difficult and sensitive subject but we have found that the majority of young people will start talking about it when given the right environments and safe and supportive space to do so.

Sometimes it's hard to have these discussions especially face to face but by using certain resources / tools it can create a gateway to initiating these conversations.

81% of young people fear the reactions of others when talking about their own feelings of loneliness. Young people are four times as likely to feel comfortable reaching out to a friend who seems lonely, then admitting they often feel lonely themselves.

We have also worked closely with young people who have had experience of or are currently homeless and have seen and heard about how these feelings manifest within these complex circumstances. Due to the challenges, assumptions and difficulties they are up against the glaring issue of isolation and loneliness is right there in front of us but often gets hidden because we are dealing with the more obvious need for food, shelter and warmth.

This resource has been informed and shaped by a wide range of young people who have had experience of this.

They have worked with a local artist to produce 4 images which are linked to 4 distinct questions we asked them.

The following section contains a set of images, developed with young people, that we have used to help start the conversation. You may want to use these yourself or develop your own. If you do develop your own resources, we would love to add them to the Tackling Youth Loneliness website, so please contact steve@youthfocusne.org.uk.

The young people were asked the following 4 questions.

Each image portrays their responses.

Q1. What causes feelings of isolation and loneliness for young people experiencing homelessness?

Image 1.



Why this question is important and why we have included it?

We wanted real views from young people who have been homeless. Many assumptions can be made by others, but hearing directly from those who have been through it can bring to light the realities of their situation. This subject matter in comparison to other key areas linked to homelessness (eg. shelter/ housing; providing clothes and food) can sometimes be overlooked but plays a crucial part in homeless young people's lives and their experiences.

Q2. What has helped you/others in these situations to overcome those feelings of isolation and loneliness or what do you feel could have helped to prevent these feelings?

Image 2



Why this question is important and why we have included it.

Hearing from those who have been in this situation before can give insight and learning to those who may be faced with similar circumstances and also to those supporting them. It allows for people to explore different viewpoints, situations, what they feel themselves would be needed and also how they could support others.

Q3. If you could give advice to a young person facing homelessness on how to help overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness what would it be?

Image 3



Why this question is important and why we have included it.

It can help to show that there are ways to overcome these feelings and things individuals can do themselves instead of solely relying on others. It can also give hope that they do have some control of their situation and that things can improve. It allows for people to explore personal needs and expectations of others.

Q4. If you could give advice to workers supporting young people (who are about to become /or are homeless) on how to prevent the young people feeling isolated or lonely what would it be?

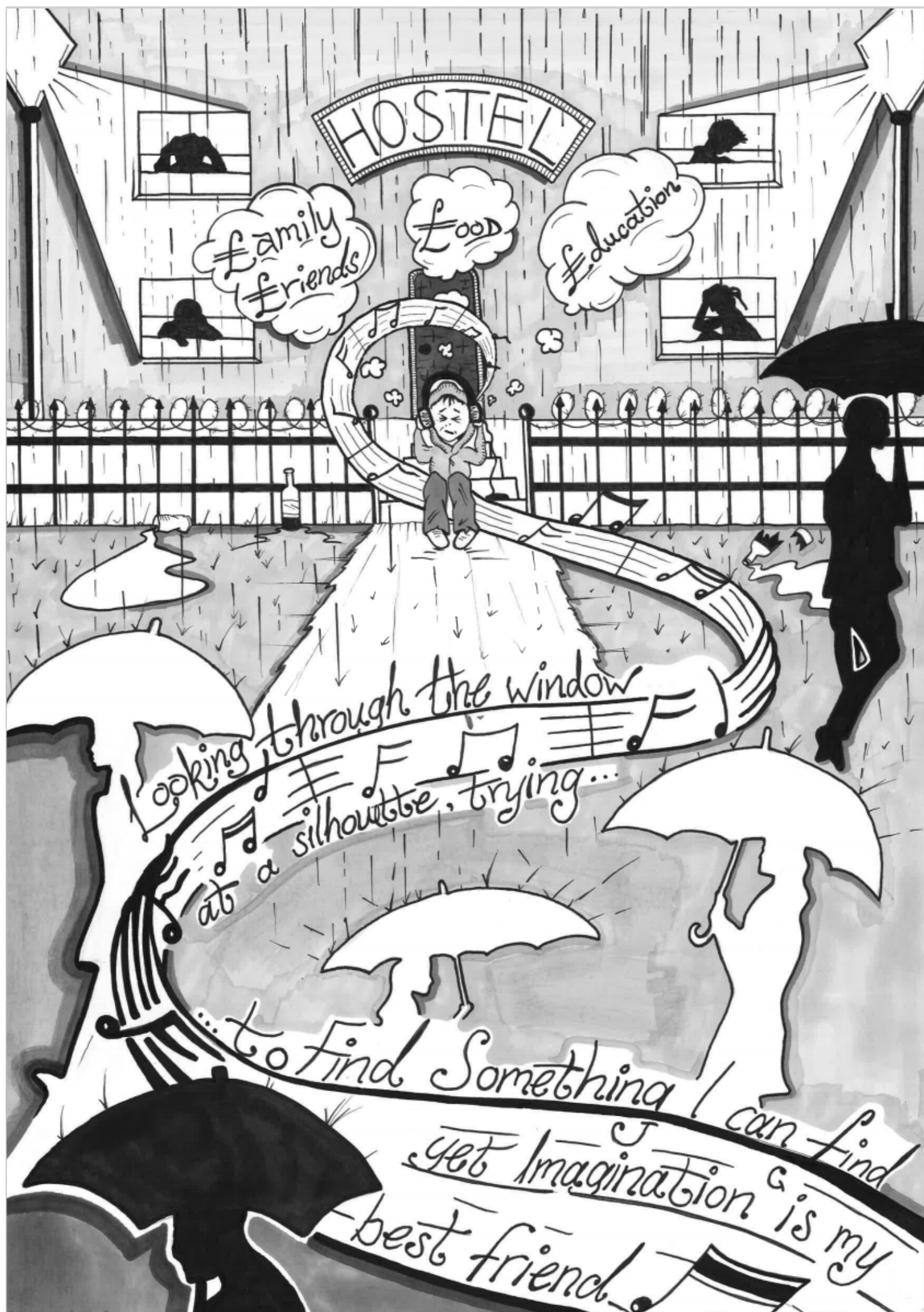
Image 4



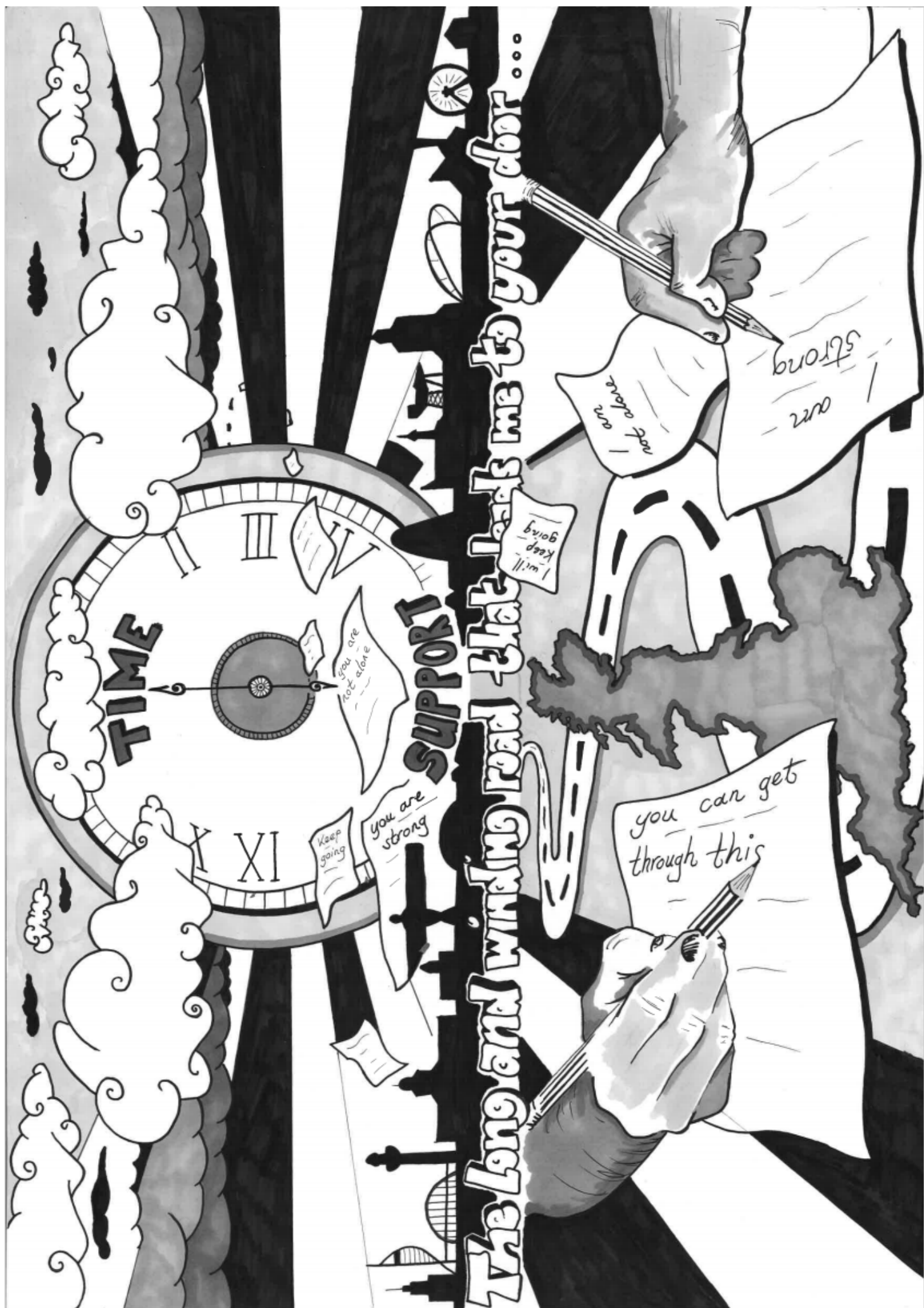
Why this question is important and why we have included it?

Having information about the causes of isolation and loneliness for young people facing homelessness and what they feel they need in means of support can help people / organisations / services to put preventative measures in place instead of responding as a reaction to a situation. It also allows for workers to explore gaps in their knowledge or skills set to deal with certain situations and be able to put measures in place to bridge these gaps.

This in itself can support the process of reducing the causes of isolation and loneliness as they are being recognised and dealt with at an earlier stage or even before they begin.









Using the images within sessions with young people

Initiating conversations around homelessness, isolation and loneliness can be difficult. You can use these images as a light touch way to start exploring these subject matters.

For each image you may want to talk about what that particular image means to them?

What sort of things are going on in the image?

How does it make them feel?

You could point out certain aspects of the image and unpick further, what are peoples' thoughts about that part of the image and what got them to that conclusion?

This will open up different avenues to discuss for example different peoples' perspectives, where these have come from and how these can be of influence to certain situations.

You could go through all 4 pictures in one session, choose to focus upon certain ones or split them up and run sessions over a few weeks.

Each image may also present you with an opportunity to explore specific aspects related to the question asked.

For example: -

Image 1 –

- You can use this image to start a discussion with young people.
- You may want to explore what isolation and loneliness means and look at definitions for these terms.
- You could explore what loneliness and isolation looks like and feels like.

E.g. You could ask the young people why is the character listening to music and sitting outside the hostel?

Image 2 –

- It is useful to explore with your group the things that they would find helpful if they found themselves in the position of being homeless and lonely.
- You could ask them how they usually react to someone who is homeless and explore the reasons why? This again could be unpicked further to explore how that may make the homeless person feel? How do their actions make them feel and why?
- Holding discussions around what they think they could do to help would develop a more positive mind-set as a first step to taking practical actions.

E.g. There are a range of suggestions in image 2 of things that may help – does the group agree with them, do they have ideas of their own?

Image 3 –

- You may want to explore with your group what they feel they would do / how they would react if faced with this situation.
- This could lead onto further discussions around coping mechanisms, how they could access support and what kind of support they would need.

E.g. You could use this image to get the young people to reflect on the strengths and qualities they already have, which they may have overlooked. They might not realise that they can get through this or that they are not alone even if they feel that way.

Image 4 –

- You could have discussions about services / organisations that you have in the local area that may be helpful.
- You may want to ask what they would expect from services / people working with young people who are faced with homelessness?

E.g. This image is based on reflections of young people who have experienced homelessness and feel that they are just seen as a number rather than as an individual. You could explore how young people would want to be treated if they were in a similar situation.

Some thoughts around your discussions: -

Within a session you could get young people to produce their own bits of art work to express their thoughts on the subject.

The way this could be expressed could also be open to preference for example art work using different materials, written pieces, song writing, music, role play, film etc.

You may want to explore how individuals would like to do this within your group, this allows for them to feel comfortable with exploring the subject matter in a manner that is fitting for them.

If individuals are happy to it may be an idea for them to present and talk through what they have produced and why.

Data and Statistics

- 65% of young people believe loneliness is a problem for people of their age.
- 81% cite fear of people's reactions as a barrier to speaking about loneliness.
- Young people are four times as likely to feel comfortable reaching out to a friend who seems lonely, than admitting they often feel lonely themselves.
- Less than one in five feel youth loneliness is taken seriously as a social issue.
- Less than one in ten think young people feel confident talking about loneliness.






(Co-op Foundation, 2018, All or emotions are important – Breaking the silence about youth loneliness report, ICM survey of 2000 young people across the UK)

- Loneliness can be as harmful for health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

(Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB. PLoS Med 2010;7)

- Loneliness and social isolation have been linked to a 30% increase in the risk of having a stroke or coronary artery disease, the two major causes of death and illness in wealthy societies. *(British Medical Journal, 2016)*

Other helpful resources

-  A range of useful resources can be found on the **Tackling Youth Loneliness** [website](#)
-  A video created by young people who have experienced homelessness
 - [Breaking the Silence – Youtube](#)
-  Shelter :- the housing and homelessness charity [website](#)
-  DePaul charity [website](#)
-  Centre Point [website](#)

You can also seek out local support services in your area you can do this by contacting your Local Authorities or Council for Voluntary Services.