A newsletter for people interested in overcoming loneliness, particularly in South Australia

Not Alone

EDITION 3

Welcome to the third edition of the Not Alone newsletter – bringing together information about the efforts to overcome loneliness in South Australia, nationally and internationally. This occasional update is shared with a network of people interested in overcoming loneliness. Contact us to receive future newsletters, share updates or provide feedback.

Don't leave loneliness alone.

www.unitingcommunities.org/loneliness
Contact: advocacyunit@unitingcommunities.org

UNITING COMMUNITIES

What's happening in South Australia?

Second Overcoming Loneliness workshop a big success

Together with Community Centres SA, we hosted our second Overcoming Loneliness workshop in March 2022. The workshop welcomed over 100 practitioners and policy-makers and kicked off with a keynote speech from Swinburne University's Professor Jane Farmer, on the topic of connectors and social connection. The workshop included a panel of SA political candidates, Hon Michelle Lensink MLC from the Liberal party, Hon Nat Cook from the Australian Labor Party, Connie Bonaros MLC from SA Best and Robert Simms from the Greens Party, discussing ways to respond to loneliness in the community.

All political parties agreed that a 'State Strategy to Respond to Loneliness' was a good idea and could be implemented by the SA Parliament.

During the workshop, participants heard presentations about the role of connectors (those who reach out to lonely people and help them reconnect with society), and about young people and loneliness. Joining us virtually from Canada, Laura Sniderman, talked about 'rehumanising social media' to build meaningful connection. Laura is the director of Kinnd, a Toronto-based organisation helping people create meaningful social connection using online technologies.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly was joined by Jess and Josiah from the Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) Youth Connections Project. Jess and Josiah Proposals which arose in the 'young people and loneliness' stream included:

- investment in affordable public transport – lack of transport is a huge barrier to participation for young people, particularly in rural areas
- de-stigmatising loneliness
- creation of safe spaces for young people to connect
- invest in and broaden programs like 'Mental health first aid' to be widely available to young people to support their peers. Young people listen to their peers about their problems

Watch the workshop recordings.

South Australian Greens call for a Minister for Loneliness

Greens MLC Robert Simms recently proposed the establishment of a Ministry dedicated to loneliness, saying that this would make the issue of loneliness a priority. Referring to a recent national survey that shows that 1 in 4 people experience loneliness 3 or more times a week, he says it's a serious issue made worse during the pandemic.

Listen to Robert talking

COTA Social Connections program

The Council on the Ageing (COTA-SA) released their **2021 report about the success of their Social Connections Program.** COTA SA recruited and supported a team of dynamic peer volunteers who supported older people to 'get back out after COVID' and connect or reconnect with social activities of their choice. Peer volunteers were matched with participants and worked with them for up to six weeks to listen, discuss and understand the participant's needs, strengths, barriers, and goals to help reconnect them with their community.

Uniting Communities Advocacy Unit to launch an online campaign about young people and loneliness

Data shows consistently that 18–24-year-olds feel the most lonely, isolated, and left out with 88% of 18–24-year old's reporting that they 'often' or 'sometimes' feel lonely.

The goal of the campaign is to spread awareness of the extent to which young people feel lonely in SA and to help reduce the stigma surrounding it.

Keep an eye on our social media accounts over the coming weeks and share the content to help spread awareness and reduce the stigma. We have a range of resources available to share via your organisation's channels – please contact us to access these.

Follow us   **f Facebook**   **in LinkedIn**

State Government reviews Community Centre funding

The State Government is reviewing funding for Community Centres to improve service delivery and social isolation.

"

Community Centres are the beating heart of communities and the services provided are significant in terms of the needs of many community members with complexities and challenges in their lives, **"**

says Minister for Human Services Hon Nat Cook.

"If COVID has taught us anything it's that many people in our community are one step away from crushing loneliness. Community Centre's are vital as we navigate our way out of the pandemic."

Read more

Grants released to help build community connections

Grants of up to $10,000 are now available for South Australian not-for-profit organisations looking to increase community participation, connection and resilience. The grants aim to help community organisations grow their programs, projects, and facilities to reduce social isolation and build community wellbeing. Minister for Human Services, Nat Cook expresses the importance of cultivating relationships within the community to get a richer understanding of its needs.

We are pleased to hear the state government is investing in local community connection projects, having proposed this type of funding in our SA election **'Call to the Parties'.**

SA data update

The results are in from the Uniting Communities March 2022 loneliness survey. The survey asked 4 key questions measuring loneliness, feeling left out, isolated, and lacking companionship.

Key insights from the survey:
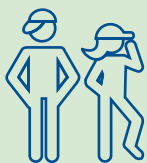
since tracking began, those **aged 18 – 24** and **45 – 54** tend to experience feelings of loneliness most often

females indicate 'often' feeling 'left out' 'isolated' and 'lacking companionship', at a higher rate than males

regional residents reported feeling more lonely, isolated and left out compared to metropolitan South Australians

continuing the trend from previous surveys, **experiencing loneliness, feeling left out, isolated,** and **lacking companionship** 'often' is greater amongst those in the **lowest income bracket**

What's happening in Australia?

Ending Loneliness Together campaign

**Endling Loneliness Together** has recently partnered with Medibank Australia. Medibank is working on a long-term approach to help address loneliness as one of the most critical social, health, and economic concerns here in Australia and around the world.

Ending Loneliness Togethers' recent **publication**, is designed to help community organisations tackling loneliness to report on their service evaluation outcomes – to help ensure that evidence on 'what works' is easily shared and fully used by others.

A Guide to **Reporting** Service Evaluations for Community Organisations

Problematic levels of loneliness widespread in many countries

A recent **study by the University of Sydney** of 113 countries found that loneliness is at a 'problematic level' and is widespread in many countries. The lowest prevalence of loneliness was consistently seen in northern European countries and the highest in eastern European countries.
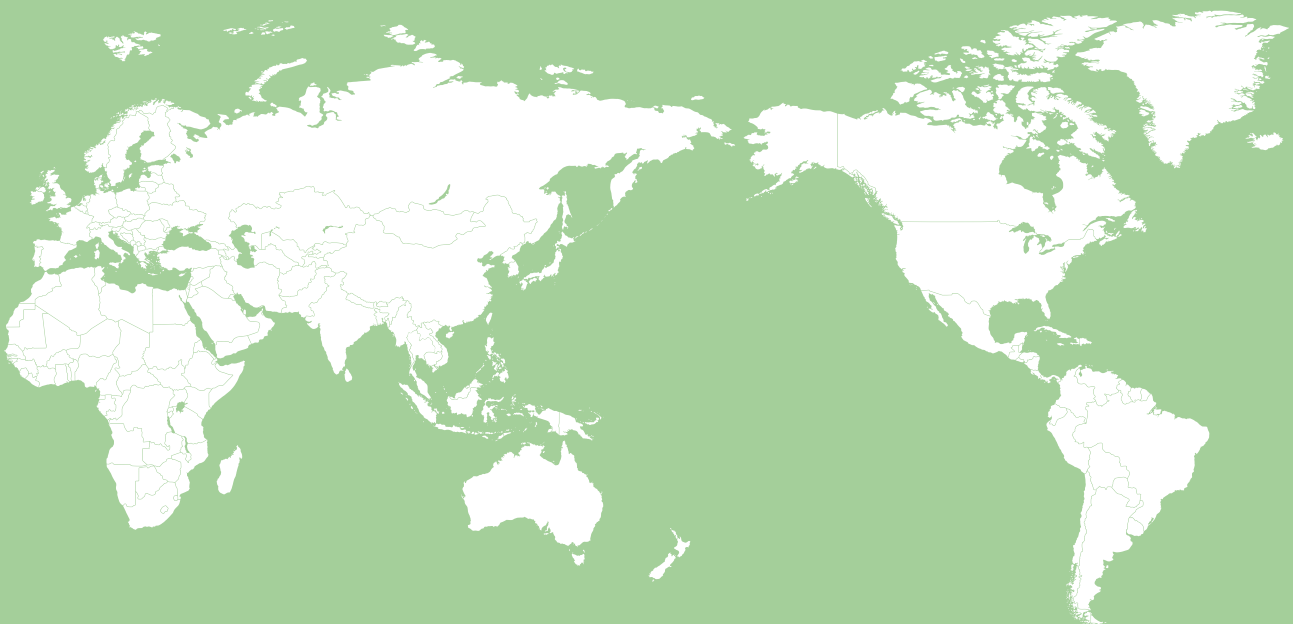
The Letterbox Project

The Letterbox Project is a national pen pal program fostering connection and community, with handwritten letters being sent across Australia. Connected AU created The Letterbox Project back in 2020 and has since had success with thousands of letters being sent around Australia. In the digital age, a handwritten letter is a beautiful reminder of the power of real connection. Something seemingly simple can have a profound and lasting impact - for both the recipient and the writer. Every letter makes a difference.

Visit their **website** to join their program and start writing to someone today.

'Village hubs' to help combat loneliness among older Australians

As part of the Commonwealth Government's Seniors Connected Program, 12 communities across Australia have **received funding to create a 'village hub'** in their area to try to alleviate loneliness and social isolation for older Australians.

Friends for Good

Friends for Good is an organisation helping to free people from loneliness. They have **implemented an online chat and 'Friendline'**, which is a national support phoneline for those "ready for a cuppa and a conversation." Last year, Friends for Good conducted research on social prescribing in Australia which is a practice whereby general practitioners and other primary care workers link clients to community support services and social activities as part of their treatment plan. Their research found that 83% of respondents reported that they would be comfortable or very comfortable with a health professional 'prescribing' social activities; and

85%

of respondents felt that social prescribing would positively or very positively impact them.

Their recent online event, **The Australian Loneliness Dialogue** explored the impacts of loneliness for different age groups, specific cohorts, and intersectionality- how loneliness impacts people at the intersection of marginalised groups.

In the media

Why do we find making new friends so hard as adults?

Women were more likely than men to say they don't make new friends easily because they struggle to trust others.

People found it harder to put their trust in someone new and fully invest in them as a friend compared to when they were younger.

After the trust issue comes the issue of not having enough time. "Lack of time" was the second-most common reason people gave after "lack of trust" when asked why they found it hard to make friends as adults.

....

COVID lockdowns left me wondering: will socialising ever feel the same again?

"COVID is a natural social experiment and COVID lockdowns made people more acutely aware of how critical meaningful social connection actually is," says Dr Michelle H Lim.

"Perhaps unsurprisingly, loneliness reduced as the restrictions started to ease and levels of depression also marginally decreased. But our less expected finding was that people had become used to not interacting with others in person during lockdowns and as the social restrictions reduced people reported feeling more socially anxious."

....

Can loneliness lead to unemployment?

Researchers found that people who were defined as lonely near the beginning of the study were 17.5% more likely to become unemployed by the end of the study. Past research generally focuses on establishing that unemployment leads to loneliness, this research is the first to point out that the relationship between loneliness and unemployment works in both directions.

What's Happening beyond Australia?

Kinnd - Canada

Laura Sniderman from Toronto-based, **Kinnd** joined us virtually at our recent Overcoming Loneliness Workshop, speaking on the topic of young people and loneliness. Kinnd helps make it easy to find, initiate, and nurture meaningful friendships using online technologies. Kinnd is soon to launch their new friendship making app, which helps create meaningful connections online, through the exchange of knowledge, skills, and time and using tools such as 'ice-breakers.' This is an international app that can be used in South Australia.

Foundation for Social Connection - United States

The Foundation for Social Connection recently released their report, **Creating the Conditions for Social Well-Being.** The report summarises key takeaways, shares resources, and spotlights innovations from the eight-part 'Connect+Conversations' series. The report includes tangible ways to improve social well-being and influence social well-being through policies.

The organisation releases a weekly report on research in the area of loneliness and isolation. The reports are produced to spark general discourse on the topic of social isolation and loneliness via a research and scholarly lens. **Visit their website** to sign up for their reports.