

youthunited



Our Voices Heard

A youth led research report on young people, loneliness and mental health in uniformed youth organisations

Produced by the Youth United Foundation Youth Panel

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Thanks

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1 Introduction

Who We Are

This report has been produced by members of the Youth United Foundation (YUF) Youth Panel 2018/19. All of us are young people involved in uniformed youth organisations. We are aged from 14–23 and are a mix of men and women.

Most of us have some leadership role or a senior rank in our organisations. Some are in the process or have become adult volunteers' leaders. This has led us to have an understanding of our organisations as a whole and reflect on what they do. Some of us have studied research methods before but for some us this was brand new.

We were recruited from each of the uniformed youth organisations that are members of the YUF network:

- ▶ Army Cadet Force
- ▶ The Boys' Brigade
- ▶ Fire Cadets
- ▶ The Girls' Brigade England and Wales
- ▶ Girlguiding
- ▶ Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade
- ▶ RAF Air Cadets
- ▶ Scout Association
- ▶ Sea Cadets
- ▶ St John Ambulance
- ▶ Volunteer Police Cadets

All of us applied to participate on the Youth Panel through an application form to YUF and we were interviewed by their staff. Some organisations invited one young person to apply but others shared it on social media, and it was open to all. The decision about who should be on the panel was taken by YUF staff. One person decided not to join the group and was replaced at the start of the project.

What We Researched and Why

We were asked to get involved in research into loneliness, mental health and wellbeing in the context of uniformed youth organisations.

We received some training on these issues and then decided on two key topics to look into.

About the topic

- ▶ Loneliness is an unwelcome feeling of loss of companionship. It is subjective – it is how you feel.
- ▶ Feeling lonely is different to being isolated or not with people. You can have friends and contact with others but feel lonely. You can have few friends or not a lot of contact and not feel lonely.
- ▶ Some loneliness is 'normal' and is probably good for you.
- ▶ Some groups of young people are more likely to feel unwelcome loneliness and a cycle of loneliness which can have a bad impact on their mental health.

We wanted to know about adult volunteers and their understanding of loneliness, mental health and wellbeing. We chose this issue because many of us are moving into these roles ourselves and often know lots of adult volunteers. We know how important they are within the groups; many of us have had lots of support from adults in our groups and they have been key in our own social and personal development. We

wanted to look into the changing needs of young people as perceived by those taking on the adult volunteering role and how the organisations were helping the volunteers to take on this new challenge. We wanted to evaluate how confident adult volunteers feel about providing that level of support to a new generation of young people.

We also wanted to know the impact on young people of the organisations being hierarchical or rank-based; in particular, we wanted to know if this impacted upon loneliness, mental health and wellbeing.

In our discussion, we thought there was a split in terms of our experiences – some organisations had a very clear rank-based system and some had leadership roles and hierarchy but less formally. For many of us from a uniformed youth group with formal rank-based structures, we assumed that all were like that. When we saw that there was this split, we were really interested in seeing what that experience was like.

What is the Aim of this Report?

This report aims to ensure that the young people and volunteers we spoke to know that what they said has been heard. We want it to make a difference to how uniformed youth organisations run. We have written a report that we want people involved in uniformed youth organisations and other youth organisations to see but especially the decision makers.

This report is not about us being heard as “the young people” but to ensure that all the young people we spoke to are heard too. We want to educate decision makers on the needs of young people as seen by us as young people themselves.

More generally we want to show that young people can be proactive and can bring about change. **This report is not just** intended to communicate **what we are saying**, but we feel it is important **that we are saying** it too. It is our research and our report in our words but based on the evidence we collected.

Limitations and Issues

There have been some limitations and issues which have affected what we have done that you need to be aware of.

- ▶ **We are all volunteers:** this was not a job for everyone. People are in school or work and have other commitments which have affected how much we could do or write. We worked with the staff to help write the report but we always reviewed the drafts.
- ▶ **There was not a lot of time:** this affected how many and which groups we could visit. The sample is not as representative as we would have liked and not all organisations involved were met with as many times as we would have hoped.
- ▶ **We have often been involved in organisations for a long time:** we may have a bias about our groups and what they are good at or the best things that they do. We have tried to be very aware of this and hopefully the way we worked has reduced this since everyone checked everyone else’s transcripts and agreed on the content of the report together.
- ▶ **We know some of the participants:** sometimes we knew or had met the people who participated in the interviews or focus groups. That may mean that they were less likely to open up as they didn’t want someone they knew hearing something difficult or challenging. However, we also think that potentially some will have been more open as they know us. It would have felt less like an ‘official interview’ and more like an informal chat. We don’t know what the impact on the data collected may have been.

- ▶ **Regional spread:** we are from across the country which reduced the potential for this report to be London centric; some people were involved in activities near their homes but also near their universities too.
- ▶ **Different people participated at different times:** the nature of the group meant that some people came to some events. There was no one event which everyone could attend. Everyone was on WhatsApp groups and during the data collection period there were fortnightly phone meetings but not everyone came every time.
- ▶ **Sections were shaped by different people:** as different people were involved at different times and at different levels, different sections were shaped by different people! Sections are not representative or reflective of our own personal experience or of those in our individual units/groups but of the evidence we found. Some people wrote some more than others.



2 Methodology

Our First Meeting

In January 2019, we met as a group for the first time at a one-day meeting in London. We learnt a bit more about one another and were introduced to the project. We learnt some basics about loneliness and mental health.

Our Training

In February 2019 we had a four-day residential where we had an introduction to social research. We learnt about current research on loneliness and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Our training was mainly on qualitative data collection methods. We learnt how to run a good interview, how to run a focus group and how to collect case studies about someone using pictures. We also learnt about ethics and how to gain and record consent for people to take part. At the training we also did team building by going rock climbing.

Our Training

- ▶ Introduction to research methods, mental health and loneliness
- ▶ Setting a research question
- ▶ Ethics
- ▶ Methods of data collection: interviews, focus groups, case studies
- ▶ How to analyse data through thematic analysis

Choosing our Research Questions

At the training we shared our experiences of uniformed youth groups and offered ideas about how uniformed youth groups support or cause good or poor mental health and wellbeing and the other issues which affect young people's mental health and wellbeing. Loneliness was also in our thoughts whilst looking at these issues.

We grouped all our ideas together. In the end we had over ten ideas of potential research topics (also called lines of enquiry). We prioritised them and debated what would be most interesting but also what we would realistically be able to answer in the time we had. We decided on two key research questions; these were chosen democratically by the group.

We split into two groups with each group focusing on one question. We looked at all our ideas and then regrouped them and used them to write further questions which would help answer our main questions.

Recruiting Adult Volunteers and Young People

After our training residential, each of us went back to our local areas and contacted uniformed youth groups in our area. We all committed to try, at a minimum, to collect data from our organisations, but we also tried to get in touch with other groups.

Collecting and Recording Data

Each member of the team visited uniformed youth organisation groups for our data collection sessions. We had a Dictaphone which we used to record the interviews or focus groups. In the end none of us decided to collect a case study using drawings and pictures.

We had to tell a member of staff working with us where and when we were meeting

any group. If we were under 18, then we needed to make sure that the local group we visited knew this and then the staff would check we were OK after.

Sometimes we paid for the youth groups we visited to have pizzas and drinks. All of our travel was booked for us or we were reimbursed for any costs.

Everyone who took part in our research had to complete a consent form. These forms have now been given to the staff supporting us in case there are any questions from people taking part in the future.

Keeping in Touch

While we were recruiting and collecting data, we had fortnightly team phone calls including with staff working with us. We had a WhatsApp group where we shared updates and ideas of what worked. This was really helpful as we got to hear how people were getting on.

Common Challenges

We found some common problems in trying to recruit groups and collect data:

- ▶ **Short research period:** we only had a few weeks to collect data. Some groups already had plans so even though they were interested, they couldn't host us.
- ▶ **It took time to get permission to come to groups:** some groups were slow to respond to us; some were hierarchical and it was difficult to know who to ask. Some said they were worried about safeguarding issues and whether we needed DBS checks. Some of us felt that the group leaders didn't really respect us as researchers and were not keen to have us there. Some had not heard of YUF before. This meant we had to give them more information or ask them to speak to staff working with us.
- ▶ **Balancing research with other commitments:** different members of the team were able to do different numbers of interviews or focus groups. This depended on where they lived and what groups were close by. It also depended on how busy they were at school, college or in their own uniformed youth group.
- ▶ **Time of meetings:** most groups meet in the evening. This caused issues with travel time which needed to be considered, especially for our younger members where it was not as safe to be travelling alone at night after meeting groups.
- ▶ **Nervous:** most of us had never done this before. We were a bit nervous about meeting groups and trying to introduce the project. We tried to stay calm and focused.
- ▶ **Location of groups:** some of the groups were difficult for us to get to.
- ▶ **Being of rank:** some of us were of higher rank than those we were interviewing. Sometimes we were a lot older than them or much younger. One of us did our interviews at a camp and ended up sharing a dorm room with people we were interviewing.
- ▶ **People talking too much:** in some focus groups we had to try and make sure everyone was heard. We would use a 'talking stick' so only one person spoke at a time or pass the Dictaphone around so everyone could be recorded. Sometimes we had to be quite firm to stick to time or skip a question.
- ▶ **Staff interrupting us:** sometimes staff would interrupt our session which distracted the group.

Transcripts

After conducting an interview or focus group we download the audio file and then sent it to the staff who worked with us. This was more difficult than we expected as the files were very big, and it was very time consuming.

The staff we were working with organised for all of the recordings to be turned into transcripts. These were very detailed and included everything that someone said. The staff also put a code on each transcript, so we knew who did the interview, with what group and where.

Analysis Residential

In April 2019, many of us met up for a four-day residential to analyse the data. We did some evaluation of how the data collection had gone. We then looked at the transcripts we had done and checked that they seemed accurate. Sometimes the transcripts had got the number of people recorded wrong or the genders of the people wrong – we corrected this.



We then started to ‘code’ the transcripts. We split the transcripts between us and looked at each of the answers to the questions and the key things people had said. We would use a highlighter to pick out the key ideas and sometimes we would write on the side. We would also record the key ideas on a yellow card. For each question or topic on each transcript we would write one yellow card with the key answers. We tried to summarise the themes of all of the majority and minority views and also any good and illustrative quotes from people. This took us nearly two days. Some people found this quite difficult as it was a lot of reading and writing but we took lots of breaks and did team activities including some high ropes, bowling and swimming, to keep up motivation and support each other.

We then looked at all of the yellow cards and started to move them into piles of similar ideas. This was when we started to see the most common ideas from all of the transcripts. We summarised this again on flipchart paper. At times we moved the yellow cards around between different topics so that they fitted together well. We also double checked the transcripts in case anything was confusing.

After reviewing each other's work, we came up with lots of ideas for recommendations.

Double Checking our Ideas

After the residential, staff supporting us typed up all of the flipcharts. They met with two people who were unable to come to the analysis residential. Together they looked through the notes and spot checked them against the yellow cards and transcripts. They spotted a few things that they thought could be clearer and corrected the relevant summary.

Drafting this Report

Using the flipcharts as a basis, the staff supporting us wrote a first draft of this report. They have told us that the report sticks very closely to what we wrote but that it has been turned into sentences. They also typed up our ideas for recommendations and looked for any overlap and interviewed people about their experiences and took detailed notes of what people said. These notes, as well as records from our analysis weekend, were the basis of the report.

In May 2019 we then met again and read the draft and changed some of it. We cut some of the quotes as they were too long and we tried to remove things like “urm” and “like” as that made quotations difficult to read. We usually added “...” to show this. Throughout the report in quotes "AV" stands for Adult Volunteer and "YP" stands for Young Person. We also tried to find different/better quotes which better showed what we found from our yellow cards. A final version was then sent to the group over email.



3 Findings on Mental Health

We primarily asked adult volunteers questions relating to how they understand issues around mental health and loneliness and identifying and responding to mental health problems.

Understanding of Mental Health and Loneliness

A large number of adult volunteers stated that mental health is a feeling and that this can be either positive or negative. Most of the participants associated mental health with negative feelings though and this was what they mainly discussed. They associated it with being emotional, or feeling anxiety and depression. The majority stated that mental health varies in different people.

Some of the adult volunteers stated that mental health can be overlooked and stigmatised: it's the *"invisible feeling"* and you *"feel you're the odd one out"*.

Many contrasted it with physical health; another side of a coin. However, a few said that physical health dominates:

[we] get a bit obsessed with physical health..[and]... overlook how important mental health is.

Some really struggled to explain mental health – *"I just can't explain"*. Some thought that mental health related to issues of learning difficulties – *"it stops you doing things and affects your brain"*.

Loneliness was usually described around issues of isolation and linked to *"feeling alone in a group"*. Adult volunteers described it as being *"isolated"*, *"feeling withdrawn"*, *"cutting yourself off"*, *"[being] on your own, no one to talk to"* and *"[when you] feel you have no one"*. One said it was linked to *"a lack of social skills"*.

Some thought that loneliness was a bigger issue than just mental health:

[it's] more dangerous being mentally lonely because you can't escape your mind, [you] can't escape your feelings inside.

A few did describe it more as a subjective feeling, for example:

You can be lonely in a room full of people but feel the opposite when alone with one person.

Some did say that they were unfamiliar with the idea of loneliness amongst participants:

I have to be honest and say that at this present time I don't think we've really considered loneliness in young people as being an issue. And I think it's only just now being brought to our attention. As we talk about it... we're becoming more and more aware of the possibility that young people can be lonely. You expect young people not to be familiar with loneliness because they're at school. And you expect them to have circles of friends but more and more you realise that the way our boys and girls interact with each other means that there are going to be some lonely, lonely young people.

Discussing Mental Health with Young People

Most volunteers indicated there is some kind of space or structure to allow young people to talk about themselves within their groups, but this was not specifically about

mental health. They said they focused more on encouraging young people to talk generally and how “*we are a family, we are very protective of each other*” and about the need to “*[make] a community friendly environment*”.

I think the policy is the door is always open. We have lengthy conversations, not that we start, that our girls start, and we listen and where it's appropriate to feedback we do. If it's appropriate, we flag something to the [leader] or beyond, we would. But we just, we are here to listen, we're here to support, we're here to care.

I think you do it all the time and don't even realise were doing it but just support our girls in everything we are automatically supporting their mental health by being just.... Just listening and talking to them.

We tend to [with] the lads, or the young people... you get the warning signs that things aren't right. So then you could take them to one side and try and broach the subject. it's just being aware that it's there. It can happen to anyone.

The focus was more on listening and talking in general. There was more discomfort talking about mental health and a general consensus that they are only able to signpost the young person to other services and that there is a limit in terms of what a volunteer can do to help. Given this concern, some adult volunteers look to more experienced adult volunteers for support and guidance on sensitive issues.

I don't think we are in a position to address [concerns about MH], as such. Because we are not professionals. We are the volunteers...We can give advice. We can't give a definitive answer...But we can certainly point people in the right direction.

Confidence in Talking about Mental Health Issues

There was a big variety in terms of how adult volunteers described their confidence in discussing mental health issues with young people. Many felt confident in discussing mental health concerns with young people and linked this to their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding and taking part in safeguarding training.

Other people were more cautious. They said that they wouldn't want to say the wrong thing to a young person or give the wrong information. However, they would listen to what the young person tells them. Often those interviewees also discussed that even if they didn't feel confident there was a good bond with other adult volunteers and that they would be able to support each other.

There was a general consensus amongst adult volunteers that it was easier to talk to older young people than younger age groups. Many noted that from a young person's perspective they felt more comfortable talking to younger adult volunteers and this was also raised by some young people too:

Is easier for them [younger AVs] to understand what we are going through

We've had leader in like their early 20s and I feel like they get it, they get like our friends, our things we do nowadays. They get social media and everything so I feel they understand it because like of the age gap whereas one of the other leaders,

I don't think she would understand [mental health] because she wouldn't have Instagram...

People who are in their 30s, no offence, their heads are stuck in the past if I'm being honest. Like they're stuck with the old everything. Like they don't actually understand what's on nowadays and its like if you were , if someone gave me an option to speak to a 35 year-old or a 22 year-old, I'd rather speak to a 22 year-old.

Some adult volunteers mentioned that programme activities such as badge work could be tailored to meet the specific needs of a group and this kind of activity could be focused on mental health. They stated that it was easier to have these discussions when they had included mental health awareness as part of their programme of activities, for example, when they have “run a badge with the older girls about mental health and loneliness”.

What to Do if Worried about Someone

Some volunteers were unsure of whether there was a specific policy on dealing with mental health issues or how to report them or whether they would use safeguarding policies.

IV: Can you describe a procedure for responding to someone who you are concerned is lonely or has poor mental health?

AV: I'm not sure, apart from certainly I think, I think in terms of mental health, if we were, if we were overly concerned about the behaviour of any of the boys in our company, I think we would first approach the parents. That would be my first..

AV2: Yeah, first answer to that. Because I think it's different to safeguarding where there might be a difficulty at home. So you've got to be careful and you've got to go through the right safeguarding procedures. I'm not aware of any specific procedures that you should go through if you're concerned about the mental health of a young person.

Probably not overly confident [on what our procedure is]. Doesn't mean that we wouldn't do it. 'Cause, you know, it's something that doesn't happen on a daily basis. So we... You take it in your stride sort of thing.

Many said that they felt that if they looked online or contacted their organisation that they would be told where to look in the existing policies and procedures. For example:

IV: Are you aware of policies and procedures to address mental health concerns within your group?

AV: No. There probably is some and I know I could go on the website to look. But no, I don't... I think if I had a child that presented themselves with those difficulties then there are advisors I can go to for support.

With exact procedures, I think, I would just first of all google it and check the [organisations] website to see exactly what they would do and then take it from there.

I think, when it comes to the procedure of it all I wouldn't be 100%, but I do think that if I was ever in that situation where a young child did come to me I would follow it up to, say, someone senior. But I think, I'd probably, to be honest, google it before I took it anywhere.

[I] would Google it or go to a higher leader than myself.

[The organisations website] have various files and, like, PDFs and stuff. It's less about if they have more information. More that making sure that every leader does know where to go to. There is a helpline—a hotline, I mean — that you could call someone within the [organisation].

Yes, the [organisation] does have a website with various links to do with safeguarding and mental health, so I think, I'd go to that first.

However, most volunteers felt that if they were not sure, their first escalation would be to a more senior leader within their group. Reporting issues is not a daily occurrence but when they do report them, they report to their best ability. About half said that they would pass the issue onto someone senior whether that was their line manager or church minister. (in some groups the local Church deal with safeguarding issues). A couple of groups had a book in which incidents would be recorded.

We just notify a senior officer

I could speak to [name of leader]. If I've got problems, and I can go speak to [name of leader], so I can go to other people.

We can only raise concerns, we can't act on them...You would speak to a, a senior person. Whether that be a senior leader or a senior member of the church. Just kinda having a quiet word, just to kind of raise your worries that something could be not quite right."

[If someone came to me] I'd follow safeguarding. And then I would have a conversation with them to say, so, this is how we can support but ultimately you need to speak to your GP about it. Depending on the age, if they're young, I'd probably ask more questions like "have you spoken to Mum? Have you spoken to Daddy?"

AV1: I think if child starts talking to you, I'm going to listen [laugh]. But I would say that we would need to... Have to... write down what you say. Then see what we feel we have to...

AV2: No, I think something like that [mental health] you've got to go through the safeguarding.

AV1: Yeah. 'Cause it could become a safeguarding... Even if you take a safeguarding officer and they say, yeah, well I'll refer it on or, you know, that's fine. And you don't have to deal with it. You just pass it along the line and...

Signposting and Escalating Worries about Mental Health

We asked adult volunteers about their awareness of support structures or organisations for young people experiencing distress. Some volunteers had a good knowledge of 'external' organisations that leaders can signpost people to:

MIND, YMCA... all those sorts of places, they deal with all these people day in, day out and even then... if they can't help us, they can sign post us

It depends on your networks. Because we [adult volunteers] are from all very different walks of life's through our jobs, so I think, between us, we've probably got most areas covered

Some adult volunteers felt they would benefit from training and support so they were able to support their young people without simply escalating the issue.

Training

The majority of adult volunteers said that they had received safeguarding training whether it was from their districts, online/face-to-face or through their churches (where the uniformed youth organisation is delivered through a church). Some said that they had not received such training through their uniformed youth group but had through other means.

I have [done training]... So, every leader does it at level one and two. Unit leaders go on to do a level three. You'd complete online courses. And with the level two you have to have a face-to-face chat with somebody to ensure you understand, the [organisation] procedures and policies. And level three training is a day training. I've done the level four training as well... That helps me deal with other volunteers that have had allegations made to them, or children have disclosed to [inaudible] in order to support those.

Well I've been on two training courses, but they are connected to the Methodist church. As well as the [organisations course]. So I've done a foundation training course, and... I've done a leadership training for safeguarding.

There were some comments though that more training was needed. This quote is typical:

But we do need to put more focus on safeguarding. I think because with the rise of mental health for most young people, and sort of the feelings they have that sometimes they find difficult to express... But you can just do refresher. Because, I mean, I've had my safeguarding training in a while; a couple of years ago. Then you've got people that've been in [inaudible] for 20/30 years but never had a

refresher. And things can literally change in a couple of years. So I think sometimes we're lacking in that department.

A small number said they had done training on mental health issues; generally not with the uniformed youth organisation or had been through links to videos online:

They've sent links for online training to... I can't think. But they sent us online training links to a charity that had set them up for community groups to be able to use. I can't think of the name of it right now.

The majority of adult volunteers had not had any specific training on the issue. They believed that there was a lack of specific training in mental health and loneliness. Often personal experience made up for the lack of training. There was also a suggestion that training in mental health for young people would be helpful so people could know how to approach someone with mental health problems and the symptoms.

IV: What training or information, if any, have you received from your group about loneliness or mental health issues?

AV1: I don't think we've actually received anything regarding that. But I do have personal experience of those. So I know what to look out for.

AV2: Yeah, I, I don't think I've had any, any information. But, again, I've experienced it personally. So no...

AV1: We'd know what to watch out for.

AV2: Yeah. The, know, know the warning signs.



4 Findings on Rank

We primarily asked young people questions relating to their experiences of rank and hierarchy in uniformed youth organisations and its impact on issues around loneliness, mental health and wellbeing.

Motivations and Aspirations

Significant motivating factors for joining a uniformed youth organisation were related to previous/current family involvement; having friends within the organisation or with a career focus – this was specific (e.g. to join the RAF/Navy) or for general CV building.

I joined because, uh, the [military service] is part of my family. I've always wanted to join Cadets, and I've always wanted to join the [service]. I thought that if I joined Cadets, it gives me something to do [and] gives me experience prior to going into [it].

IV: What attracted you to [organisation]? Who wants to answer?

YP1: My brothers who are [in the organisation].

...

YP2: My Mom signed me up so I had to go.

YP3: Well, my Dad was like, ooh, good cadet, so it was pretty much influenced me.

...

YP4: Yeah. I want to be in the navy when I'm older.

I heard of it from my brother, who used to go, and he just told me what it was about, and I was interested to join them after. So, it was like a stepping stone to get there.

Some motivating factors were specific to organisations. For Cadet-based organisations many of the young people we spoke to had a special interest in specific skills, e.g. policing, flying or first aid. For religious organisations there was a way that involvement formed part of the person's religious identity and allowed them to meet others from a similar background.

I wanted to be a pilot, so I figured that joining the Air Cadets would show me both the military side to it as well as the commercial side and I could just go flying and gain some experience and learn more about it to help me in future.

I'm not really bothered about being higher than cadet. I just want to like learn first aid.

I suppose as a child it was a, a place to meet other Jewish young people coming from a school where it was not Jewish. It was a non-Jewish area. It enabled me to connect with my faith and formed a part of my identity.

For me, I think, it's given me an advantage, like, school in, like, biology and stuff like that. I can use stuff that I've learnt from here in, like, yeah, like, basically in, like, exams and stuff like that.

Less common motivating factors for getting involved included helping them to learn or improve behaviour in a non-school/teaching environment; having an opportunity to socialise outside the school year group i.e. across different ages; gaining recognised qualifications or keeping in touch with old friends/making new ones.

I was a bit naughty in school so [laughing]. So, I'm [inaudible] like a lot of stuff went down and then so I joined this.

I came to [organisation] because I wanted to keep in touch with a lot of my, like, close primary friends because I went to a different secondary school to a lot. Of my primary friends, I'd say, yeah. So I wanted to stay in touch with them.

I mainly joined to, like, make new friends, like, outside of my usual, like, friendship group.

The most common response around aspirations for rank within a uniformed youth organisation was with regard to the opportunities that the rank brings. This related to being able to take on certain roles/responsibilities only available for those of certain ranks (e.g. Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade (JLGB), Sergeants' Mess).

Uh, the higher rank you are, the more respected you are, and the more respected you are, the more you get to do.

In addition, some participants mentioned qualities such as respect, leadership and confidence. Promotion was seen by some as a 'reward' for work put in (i.e. reflection of skills gained) or saw it as a motivation for doing more (i.e. self-motivated progression).

So you reach a certain rank because you're a certain age, but the roles you get are because of who and what you've done within [organisation]. So I within [organisation] aspire to get a certain role because that is a reflection of how much I've given back to the organisation.

Some noted the reward brought by leading and supporting others:

But there are definitely times where you can feel rewarded... If you ever have to teach, sort of, the basics to the one-stars. And you can then see them sort of grow, especially the ones who are really determined, you may feel a bit of achievement coz you've then inspired them to sort of build their way through.

I have to say the reward of seeing cadets develop is massive...it is massively rewarding to see younger cadets progress and develop. As well as yourself.

There were a range of aspirations within uniformed youth organisations which were not linked to rank. Often young people we spoke to were focused on the core activities

of that organisation; for example, St John Ambulance cadets aspire to learn more advanced first aid. Many highlighted a focus on 'soft skills', e.g. leadership, teamwork, volunteering and more general aspirations such as pushing yourself out of your comfort zone. There were some organisation-specific aspirations; for example, engagement in JLGB being linked to a faith-friendly Duke of Edinburgh Award expedition. Less common (but still reported) was a sole focus on achieving various ranks.

My aspirations were [banging sound] just to progressive as far as they were. So that included getting to the highest rank that I could...[the] highest first aid training level and doing as much as I can in the leadership structures. Mine was to push myself and get out of my current rank.

I want to get PO cadet and I want to get Gold Duke of Edinburgh award.

Well it is because, like, the higher ranks can sort of, like, take leadership, and like get a good role. Tell you what to do.

Value and Worth

There were a number of common responses about the value of rank and hierarchical structures in uniformed youth organisations. Many noted that the structure helps to build respect with most seeing non-commissioned officers as 'role models' for younger cadets. In addition, the role of the rank can provide opportunities for new responsibilities, opportunities to build relationships with staff as you get promoted and to help build confidence and pride.

There is a general consensus that possessing a rank means that you have increasing respect the higher the person of rank is. It was certainly the case that those of higher rank were seen as being more admirable than those of lower rank due to their dedication and what they bring to that group.

Before, when I was a lower rank and I saw other higher ranks, I didn't really feel intimidated by them. I did feel, to some degree, inspired by them... We aim to get to that rank.

As I joined, there were quite a few seniors who had already achieved quite high ranks, and seeing them and what they have achieved, I sort of wanted to get to that point and sort of...experience what they've experienced.

You really wanna push yourself coz you see family members with high ranks and older seniors that are kind of your inspiration. You kind of wanna work to that.

I would feel proud of them. I love seeing a [promotion]. And I'll try to be on the same level as them.

My idea of hierarchy in the force makes you feel very good because cadet's ego, should have that knowledge, confidence and to inspire other cadets.

I don't think it's supposed to have an impact on your worth and we're all equal as human beings but when you have more responsibility and more power over your peers, your worth automatically increases everywhere.

Yeah, I feel like it's less to do with higher ranks and more to do with having a rank or not having a rank.

Some young people thought that the higher your rank; the higher standard you're held to:

I think NCOs should have certain things slightly harder on them because obviously we're the ones that the cadets look up to. If we're supposed to be delivering something like an inspection, our uniform has to be one of the best. It has to be better than the cadets, and we can't really be seen to be inspecting them if they're better than us. I think it's not... Like, I don't... Better than is not the best word, but it's not a case of we're above them, but I think we just have to show why we've been given that promotion.

The majority saw rank as a necessary way to teach and organise evenings for the benefit of all. This was a highly regarded vital part of organisations' ethos and culture.

Rank does open doors for young people. An increased rank will increase opportunity for young people. This varies according to the organisation but can include being given more adventurous or challenging activities; chances to compete in national competitions or to access leadership courses. In some, rank is also linked to great opportunities for being with friends through having a later bedtime or access to reserved social spaces.

...the higher rank you are, the more respected you are, and the more respected you are, the more you get to do.

I think there is because the higher rank you are, the more legitimate your thoughts and ideas and opinions seem [to adult volunteers].

As you get a higher rank, you learn to have more opportunities... and that helps you gain confidence. And you're able to go on more different courses.

I think it does because it gives you more opportunities for the future.

It was also noted, however, that higher ranking participants may miss out on some opportunities; for example, where there are limited spaces to go flying or go shooting they get dominated by those with the least experience which is often junior cadets (to ensure everyone has a chance to try the activities). At times, this also meant that higher ranking participants would get treated different, for example waiting to eat until everyone else had.

I don't think that's fair on the NCOs, in a way...because they've done their work as well, like what they need to do. Whatever rank they're in, they shouldn't need to be pulled back from eating, just because they've got a rank. Because, in the end, everyone's human, they all eat food.

Even where the organisation has a rank-based structure, this may not always be filled in a unit. Some don't have many non-commissioned officers. In St John Ambulance, for example, there is an official rank structure but many commented that it is less relevant than the specific duty you will be doing during that specific shift.

...in our cadet unit we don't have juniors and seniors... when we're all together, and there's not really, like, segregation. Which I think could be a good thing, could be a bad thing. I don't know.

It was seen that sometimes adults will have a bias towards people in higher ranks and that they value them more:

[There is] definitely a bias. I'm sure many cadets think that. Well, I'm sure many cadets know that. I saw it at this camp already. They would ask an NCO over cadet. See, you become an NCO because a staff member... want you... they like you, they favour you. Or you actually went through the process like some companies do and you actually showed courage and all the rest of those criteria... And, you actually do stuff better than some cadets ... From what I know, staff members would always count NCOs over cadets, which I think is quite unfair considering, they say we need to respect each other and equal opportunities. That's my opinion.

Adults are more likely to trust NCOs, I think cadets are less likely to trust NCOs because there's like points that have been made before about how they feel like they have a duty towards the staff above about almost everything. I think cadets are more likely to keep things to themselves because they don't want it to get to a member of staff. So, there is a bias, but I think it's negative towards the NCOs.

Promotion

The process of promotion is not forced on people. Many thought that the opportunity for being promoted and gaining rank was positive. However, getting a rank was not the primary aim of the uniformed groups.

I guess, also that incentive for people, so that if you want... Like, it's kind of a driving force behind it. So if you want the promotion [rattling], then you know how to go about achieving that, and... Rather than just turning up and thinking, oh, what's the point of being here, you've got all that drive behind you to know why you're here.

It's not something that you're there to do and that you feel pressured into. It's, like, something that if you want to do it, then you just need to do the stuff you need to do for it.

A common theme was that many participants felt people are well supported through the process of promotion. However, a number just said they didn't get much support or the process of promotion was unclear anyway:

[I received] support not only to achieve a promotion, but it's also kind of to become, as I said, more independent coz you are that role model now for those younger cadets.

[For promotion] you are sort of nominated... your leaders will look out for ya, and think, they may need it for confidence boosted, or because they've done so much commitment [and have] naturally become invested in the program... everyone is given the equal opportunity.

When you go to training weekends, especially, you have everyone around you supporting you and, like, trying to help you get your promotion. And if you ever feel like you need help, there's, [bangs table] there's always people to talk to.

Most of those we spoke to said that promotion is merit-based and requires a lot of hard work; quite a few said it is given out based on factors such as age and favouritism. Some young people felt that the way promotion was run was unfair in some units and that there could be bias.

Being 'popular' is a relevant factor when attempting to rank up and go further. This could be because such individuals are more recognised and generally more confident and louder or they have a better relationship with the adults. Indeed, a minority thought that having a friendship with an adult volunteer clouded volunteers' vision and that the young people could dominate their attention, making themselves more eligible for promotion.

Sometimes there is a parent-child relationship and they may get extra help and aids but this can also be negative as they are perceived to have an advantage in the group.

Some did think though that this bias from adults proved to be mostly positive and the bias can be towards the people they see as being good or having the potential for training and personal experience.

Generally, those in non-military groups were unaware of a strict promotion process whereas those in military groups have a set path/process. Promotion in non-military groups is based on age/skill set/confidence or sometimes a qualification or training. This is different in military groups where there is a set programme. Some appear to have no official promotions policy or at least the people we spoke with were unaware of it. Most said there is not a clear/informative process for changing rank.

I do think the process is fair once you take into account the fact that it's always gonna based, to a certain extent, on what the adults already think. I think what adults tend to think tends to be justified, and also you learn a lot more about someone from their behaviour over six months at unit rather than from one interview.

Yeah. So I feel that there are some adults in the organisation that... you'll have people say uncle or mum who obviously might be unit manager or youth leader, and that can affect the promotion process. especially in my district I found that. Whereas at bigger units, say [place], there's less of the kind of community base. It's more, right, I'm here to teach you, I'm the boss. It's more kind of standardised rather than, oh, I'm your auntie, here's, here's three stripes on your shoulder.

Yeah, there is a bias towards there if you, if you're working in the same way then you automatically get a promotion.

If you're the same gender, sometimes, you automatically get a promotion. If there's two of you going for it and one is favoured more, then that one will, the favoured one will obviously get it and often not for reasons that rank should be awarded.

YP1: ...favouritism can influence which cadets get promoted over others, disregarding hard work and experience.

YP2:...Favouritism can be apparent in some promotions as if like you form a bond with some members of staff. They are more eager to recommend you for rank.

YP3: I think bias is present because ...if you form a certain bond with a member of staff, they do seem to like you more than people who just stay quiet, but actually know what they're doing. As you know how to take control of some people.

I swear that the staff just put forward who they want and... who they like because since when we started, staff had their favourites and then they could then [unclear] the promotion. Yes, there are good NCOs, but I feel like if the staff are actually like giving all the cadets the same opportunity then the ranks would... might be different.

Some noted the ways that not being promoted can be a challenge or lead to people holding a grudge against others which can be really difficult:

When someone gets promoted that's a lot...Some people get promoting more than others. It's unfair, it can kind of make you feel as if you're not good enough. Even if you do the same things together. And you feel like you're putting in the same amount of effort. So you kind of [thumping] go into a cycle of disbelief really.

YP1: I've not been promoted, this is me just talking from watching but people who want to get promoted seem to be very, I don't even know if it's jealousy, but they kind of take out a grudge against the person who's been promoted..

YP2: It's just like, when you get a rank, like you don't want it to really. Like before you get a rank they are alright with you but like, when you get a rank they just change and don't really have the same, like talk to you and be with you the same as they was before.

YP3:Well, I did find as soon as I got promoted that that a certain cadet started just really hating me because of it, because he'd been there for longer and wanted a rank. Which is kind of annoying and it can affect your mental health. But you just kind of have to deal with it because you've got good mates in the [organisation] which will support you...

A minority of the interviewees noted that the process for getting promoted (ranked up) is not always open to everyone in the way that we thought it would be. This example is typical:

Ultimately, they are missing out by not going on the training weekends. They don't develop the skills, the leadership qualities, and everything like that, to make them

a better person. However, it's not our job to say, no, you shouldn't be doing that. You know? No, you can't come on this camp, etc. We should be open to all and we should try to include everyone because obviously people have different circumstances. Someone might be a young carer, for example, and they can't give up a weekend to come to a training weekend.

The process of promotion itself can be challenging and stressful. Some said that progressing to higher ranks causes stress, but, when promoted, it is highly rewarding and confidence building:

It sometimes feels like we're always trying like to fight for some sort of superiority whether through rank or age or whatever, so. It can be a bit difficult at times...

In the beginning stages all you have to really do is grow up. But as you get further on, like corporeal, sergeants, you have to put some effort in. And it, it, kind of, you have to go to training weekends and you have to do an OCN, which is necessary, but they can be annoying. It gets harder each time.

I think it's too... It seems too difficult to actually, in our company, to get your first rank.

Hierarchy and Perception

The vast majority of the participants expressed pride in holding a rank and felt that it gave them worth in their organisation. There was a strong theme that gaining rank is something to aim for and those with a rank are people to look up to. Most said that higher ranks demand respect:

Other than that, it's sort of just the, the, the way people sort of perceive you because if they see the rank, that you, you have had to then push to achieve. Then they may act differently towards you, have a little more respect.

Yeah, officers usually get more food and they usually get seconds and it's quite funny to watch sometimes, but, it's true. I've seen it on annual especially, yeah.

I feel like whatever rank they are I have a positive outlook on them 'cause they've deserved their rank and, like, they've earned to rank up to wherever they are.

This can, however, be challenging when there is a significant age difference, especially where younger people have a higher rank or level of responsibility than other participants or where others apply pressure to rank up:

I know someone who's about 12 years old and she's a corporal ...When she got her lance she started acting like she was better than me. And, I mean, she kind of acted like that anyway, but having the lance jack just amplified it and it made her act like she's better than me. And the fact that she's 12 and I'm 15, I was like... It didn't feel right and I didn't respect her, so...

It sometimes feels like we're always trying like to fight for some sort of superiority whether through rank or age or whatever, so. It can be a bit difficult at times, so.

I think outside of the unit... a lot of adults... they're, like, "[sighs] how does it feel having this person who's the same age as you at a higher level, a higher rank?" And it kinda does put you down 'cause it's like, well, you shouldn't be comparing me to other people.... I've just kinda [sighs] felt those kinda comments aren't really necessary.

A few of those we spoke with considered rank to be less important in their experience and felt that 'you're just another person' treated equally to everyone else. In addition, the approach to rank varies across the uniformed youth organisations. In those without a military ethos, the young people expressed that it is a signifier of respect coming from the person not their rank per se:

Ranks are kind of, I feel, a little bit artificial because I kind of say I look at people more like age or, kind of, what they do and how they act. So, like, if there's someone who's just become an adult, I would respect them because of their age and not because they might be some high rank out there.

In the past, a couple members of staff have demanded respect because of their rank rather than them... Yeah, they demanded respect, and I don't think that's, that's right. They shouldn't demand respect, but they should feel like they've earned respect, rather than demand respect because I am this; therefore, I demand respect from you.

In my opinion [hierarchy of your peers in the organisation] doesn't really affect you. 'Cause you all just kind of work together as a team. There's no, I mean, there are a few, but not a lot of people turn around and say, I'm leading cadet, sit down, shut up, do what I say. Whereas it's more kind of like team work, obviously. Working together to obviously get there, get the job done.

But every cadet that has put in effort in, the same as one stars, the same those two stars, one stars. They're all treated equal with equal respect.

A common theme was that, with rank, it is assumed a person will have knowledge and responsibilities.

Also some adults would expect too much of that cadet, specifically because they have that on their shoulder or whatever. When that cadet is also, had no experience in that, but just they kind of automatically assumed to be able to do it.

Well, at times you feel like you got it all under control. For example, in camps if you're DS-ing, you've got nothing to do, that's the problem.

Segregation and Hindrance

A large volume of participants believed that ranks cause difficulty within friendships and relationships as you have to 'separate yourself' causing some participants to feel isolated. Many young people think it is difficult to maintain the same relationship with someone who has been promoted as they have different responsibilities, power and freedoms and that, therefore, rank can split up friends:

It can get quite annoying if you might not be the same rank as your friends, and then there's a rank-based activity, and you're with younger people you might not necessarily get along with.

it does put on a strain on your relationship beforehand [their promotion], but it also doubts what the staff think of you. Like, are you equal to this person or are they better than you?

IV: So when you got your rank, how did that affect your friendships or... or the relationships with the cadets..

YP: Well, it feels like they've become a tiny [bit] less close because you have to be with others more compared to the others from before. And it's just the relationship between friends and cadets which is a greater distance compared [to before]...

I think it can cause conflicts a lot of the time because say if your friend got promoted and you didn't, you'd feel a bit awkward with them telling you what to do. And, I think it's a good idea, but I think it gets abused and I think people just kind of get given ranks when they don't really deserve it a lot of the time.

There are cases where sometimes it goes to people who's... just, like, get given the rank and expect a lot, and it goes to their heads. And they can become... In, in rare cases, they can become, like, not the easiest of people... When you go on camp sometimes you see it a lot. There'll be senior ranks, and they'll just dish all the bad jobs out coz they can't be bothered to do them. I think that there are... same rare cases where it can become a problem, but you still gotta kind of have that respect for them.

I don't see a need for them to be separated out. Because, actually I've got friends in the officers' mess. Although I know I want to be a warrant officer the separation is gonna be difficult because I can't go into their mess. There isn't necessarily a communal space where you can share and just chill out without kids watching you, without kids being around.

It's better off if you don't socialise with new cadets because you need to know where to draw the line between friendship and giving somebody an order.

Some did identify positive aspects of this segregation:

The segregation is good in some aspects because obviously you're doing that segregation where you're with people of your own rank and own abilities in Cadets. But at the same time, it's good to mix.

There are the occasional times where some people in a friend group will get promotions more than others, and some may see that as unfair, and it may split off. But for the majority of people if you try to create strong bonds, then you can stay together and support each other, and then eventually you may all end up at the same rank.

For some there were other forms of segregation in units which had a stronger effect than rank in terms of isolating others, for example, where there is a strong friendship group amongst some participants:

Going back to segregation. I think the hardest part is people overcoming friend groups... I think the largest segregation in Cadets is friend groups sticking together. Because there's some people that come... that don't know anybody there, and, like, that makes them... That can make them feel quite isolated but if you stay for a while then you do integrate yourself.

A significant number but minority of participants believed that there can be abusive power and a theme of superiority among uniformed youth organisations. There were reports of occurrences where higher ranks had the ability to use their rank to their advantage and this led to lower ranks feeling vulnerable and less knowledgeable. At times, some older/higher ranking NCOs were reported to take advantage of lower/younger ranking people in a generally negative way. The power and responsibility change the NCOs and change them in a negative way as the promotion goes to their head.

Sometimes their bossiness lead to good things and sometimes it leads to bad things.

A lot of people with higher ranks think they own the lower ranks a lot of the time.

YP: Sometimes higher ranks make you feel a bit vulnerable.

IV: Why do they make you feel a bit vulnerable?

YP: Because they know a lot more than you. And it just makes you feel vulnerable.

YP1: Right, the other night they made us all stand in a horseshoe and rank by rank sit on the floor, and it was a massive belittling session, really. 'Cause they was like, if you're standing up you're a higher rank than the people, and it ended up with like a select like five people still stood up... It was a bit humiliating being sat on the floor and being told that... being made to sit on the floor and being told that someone's better than you.

YP2: I think, to clarify, it wasn't the staff who made us do that. There were two cadets who kind of engineered the whole thing. And I think they maybe enjoyed it more because they were the last people who had to sit down. Just saying.

I think [rank] can be quite negative in some ways because people use it in a way it probably where it wasn't intended originally. And that means that they don't make it a nice experience for other people... They've probably got a lot more to kind of give the organisation but they're not able to do that because they're so focused on their rank and getting a promotion and kind of sucking up to the youth leaders... I think there's just easier ways of doing it than rank.

One of the cadet leaders, she's, I think she's 18, and she's in [group]... She thinks she's like the whole unit leader and she likes to say what to do and what not to do and the rest of it. I spoke to my cadet leader about that, and I was like, look, she's done this. And then she had to take a step down and just realise what her actual position is and what she can do and what she can't do.

Some people, just after they get promoted get they get a bit power-hungry and some people get stressed after they get promoted and don't speak to their friends anymore.



5 Conclusions

Our research has found that on mental health and loneliness:

- ▶ Adult volunteers have a mixed understanding of mental health and loneliness
- ▶ They are keen to listen to children and young people and they want to help them get the support they need, especially if they are struggling with feeling lonely or their mental health.
- ▶ Some volunteers are more happy to talk about these issues with older teenagers, especially if they have had training.
- ▶ Even if they think they might struggle to talk about these issues, they often have other volunteers they could speak with or get help from.
- ▶ Many would like specific training in mental health and loneliness.

Our research has found that on the impact of rank on mental health, loneliness and wellbeing:

- ▶ Young people seem to join uniformed youth organisations for lots of different reasons not just to get a rank
- ▶ Rank was important to many young people and helped them gain a sense of respect and to try new things.
- ▶ Rank positions opens lots of opportunities for those we spoke to and that is really valuable.
- ▶ Sometimes the process of promotion is not always seen as fair and open to everyone.
- ▶ Sometimes going up a rank can separate people from friends, but this could be both good and challenging for them.
- ▶ Sometimes people misuse their rank and we need to make sure this was not common or gets out of hand.

This project has been really exciting for us all. As well as helping us to learn new skills, it has shown how young people can be really involved in getting evidence. We have been able to bring the views of volunteers and young people out and shown that young people can help find new ideas and solutions for tackling loneliness and improving mental health. This report is not just what we are saying; it's that we are saying it.



6 Recommendations and Future Research

Inform Young People about Loneliness and Mental Health Issues

Everyone in uniformed youth organisations needs information to increase their understanding of loneliness and mental health. This should include tips for spotting signs and symptoms of distress and mental health problems and how to get support. It could tackle issues of stigma and who you can speak to. This could include the 'bullying card' that is used in many uniformed youth groups.

Campaign for Young People to Speak Out

There should be a young person-led campaign which crosses all the uniformed youth organisations to encourage young people to talk about their mental health. We think that having other young people speaking out and encouraging others to chat would be really important so anyone can be heard. For example, there should be senior participant/cadet mental health champions who help to raise issues and provide information.

Have an Official Charter and Policy for Mental Health and Loneliness

There could be a common YUF charter for uniformed youth organisations on their commitment to good mental health. There should be an official mental health policy to work alongside existing policies such as safeguarding and inclusion. We know that in many organisations policies are important for guiding how things get done. All adult volunteers should know about these policies as mental health problems are more common now and more young people are suffering.

Have People who Understand Issues

There could be new roles/positions within groups to deal with mental health issues, especially where the problems involve a safeguarding issue. There needs to be a support team in each uniformed youth group for staff and cadets to talk to. Every organisation is different so how this works may vary but everyone should be able to get support and advice if they are worried about themselves or someone else. There could be a directory of helpful organisations that leaders can refer to if a young person approaches them with an issue.

Training for All Adult Volunteers

There should be training to help leaders understand loneliness and mental health as well as how to respond well to these issues. These mental health training days could be for everyone; they could involve training for adults in multiple uniformed youth groups at the same time. The training should be consistent across the country so that differences between different groups are reduced.

This training should be refreshed regularly – every 2-3 years – so that adult volunteers have a comprehensive and up to date (continually evolving) understanding of the issues that young people may face today.

Support for Adult Volunteers

There should be a focus on the mental health and wellbeing of adult volunteers too – prioritising their self-care rather than just expecting them to lead and give to the

organisation. We know that they have a vital role to play in young people's social and emotional development and wellbeing and, linked to this, the responsibility to nurture and empower young people. The more we can help and support them, the more it can help us.

Improve the Promotion Processes

Every uniformed youth organisation should review the way it uses rank or hierarchy amongst participants so that there is:

- ▶ **A formalised promotion process:** there needs to be a more rigid/formal (national) ranking system to make it fair for all with fewer local groups deciding different ways of promoting people.
- ▶ **Transparent and consistent guidelines for ranking and promotion:** there could be a booklet for each rank which says what you need to do to get that rank (e.g. courses needed) and clarity on the responsibilities that come with rank.
- ▶ **Feedback offered on promotions:** be very transparent about why someone was not been promoted to avoid bias and so that people know how to improve for next time.
- ▶ **A process for teaching new recruits the expectations and capabilities of each rank:** this would mean they know what they are and are not allowed to do.

Improve Monitoring of NCO Use of Power

Senior NCOs or the mental health champions should monitor how other senior ranks use their status. We must ensure that all people of rank uphold the values of the organisation.

Continue to Undertake Research

We looked at lots of different ideas. There were some ideas for research that we didn't feel we had the time to cover and we prioritised other issues. We think that these are all interesting and should be looked at as they could have a link to loneliness, mental health and wellbeing

- ▶ **What is the wider impact of a well-trained adult volunteer on a young person?** In particular, we are interested in a comparison to other adults in their lives – e.g. parent, teachers, social workers. What evidence is there to show whether young people specifically choose to speak to a uniformed youth organisation adult volunteer and what are the factors that help or hinder that?
- ▶ **What is the transition from young person to young adult volunteer?** We think that this can be different in different uniformed youth organisations. How do different organisations make adjustments to the training; how much priority is there in the organisation to retain people; and, why is retention given this level of priority (or otherwise)?
- ▶ **Are there truly equal opportunities?** We wanted to look at the link between poverty and commitment within uniformed youth groups. We know that many uniformed youth organisations are opening new units in deprived areas and we wanted to understand how that will affect people.
- ▶ **How are young people impacted by competitions (e.g. “Cadet of the year” or informal ones like “best dressed”)?** We think that these can be uplifting for those winning but also disheartening for others. What evidence is there about how that can affect people's wellbeing?

- ▶ **Can uniformed youth organisations create dependency?** We wanted to know how far is too far in terms of involvement. We wanted to know about the balance between creating well-rounded young people and ensuring there are other opportunities for participants.

This report has been produced by members of the Youth United Foundation (YUF) Youth Panel 2018/19. All of us are young people involved in uniformed youth organisations. We are aged from 14–23 and are a mix of men and women.

We researched adult volunteers in uniformed youth organisations understanding of loneliness, mental health and wellbeing. We chose this issue because many of us are moving into these roles ourselves and often know lots of adult volunteers. We also looked at the impact on young people of the organisations being hierarchical or rank-based and if this impacted upon loneliness, mental health and wellbeing.

After being trained in research skills we spoke with 124 young people and 64 adult volunteers from across 10 different uniformed youth organisations. We then analysed all our results and wrote this report to feedback to them and others involved in uniformed youth organisations what we can do to make things better.