In response to your request for views from organisations who support people who experience loneliness and isolation. Our submission aims to provide an evidence based and organisational response to your key themes to support our views on the devastating effects of social isolation on young people.

The Rock Trust: Background:

The Rock Trust is a Scottish charity, which was set up in 1991. We work with homeless and vulnerable young people across the Lothians providing them with a range of support services. Each year we work with around 400 young people who are facing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. Many are affected by poor mental health, social isolation, loneliness and addiction issues. Our services include:

- Provision of supported accommodation in Edinburgh and West Lothian
- Visiting support to young people in Edinburgh
- The Compass project in Edinburgh which uses group work, drop ins, mentoring and mediation to support young people with housing, debt, and employment.
- The Rock Share project, helping young people finds suitable shared accommodation with pre-tenancy support.
- Scottish Social Networks project, which we manage for the Scottish Government http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/homeless/HomelessnessPrevention/co-ordinator
- ‘Network Approach’ training to professionals across Scotland promoting a homelessness prevention approach.

We also completed a four year study “Beyond Homelessness” This research examined the impact of social networks and its connection to homelessness and isolation. The study highlights best practice examples of support services with a focus on (re)building social networks, recognising their integral role in ensuring sustainable routes out of homelessness. The research demonstrates how, through an increased understanding of the social networks of those affected by homelessness, services can promote tenancy sustainment, ensure individual wellbeing and help reduce isolation.


What is the impact of loneliness and isolation?
The Rock Trust carried out a knowledge exchange in partnership with Prof Brigid Daniels from Stirling University [http://rms.stir.ac.uk/converis-stirling/person/11765](http://rms.stir.ac.uk/converis-stirling/person/11765), on relationships, resilience and well being. The event was attended by academics and service delivery organisations from across Scotland, to share learning on the concept of resilience and well being, and how positive relationships can impact on both. A secure base, relationships and activities were all seen as areas which promoted resilience and well being. Please see attached paper which was written by Prof Daniels.

As an organisation which works with young people in transition we see on a daily basis the impact of negative relationships or lack of relationships and the loneliness that our young people experience. Last year 64% of the young people we supported asked for support with relationships and loneliness.

**Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings:**

The Beyond Homelessness Research worked with four case study areas: Edinburgh; Highland; Aberdeenshire; West Dunbartonshire. We could see from the research that isolation occurred in both urban and rural settings. Temporary accommodation was identified throughout the research as key point of isolation in homelessness journeys. In the rural areas of Highland and Aberdeenshire being placed in temporary accommodation in different parts of the local authority contributed to isolation. The distances involved and lack of public transport had an impact on people being able to access friends and family, and contributed to feelings of loneliness.

**Impacts of social isolation: Homelessness**

In summary the key findings, taken from the Beyond Homelessness research project, indicated that;

- Support networks were seen to directly impact upon an individual’s resilience to homelessness, wellbeing and need for formal support whilst homeless. Accommodating these relationships where possible or providing formal support to assist where informal support networks could exist can help alleviate longer term negative impacts of homelessness and temporary accommodation.

- Social networks (both formal/informal) were those felt to be trusted, non-judgemental and available. People turned to their social networks (both formal/informal) for help, advice, and friendship, those with a good balance of formal and informal social networks in place were seen to be more resilient, less isolated and had increased wellbeing.

- Informal relationships were seen to reduce during periods of homelessness, especially when individuals were placed into temporary accommodation. Those who engaged positively with support services indicated that they had subsequently rebuilt relationships (45%), saw an improvement in their wellbeing (85%), had more
supportive people in their lives (74%), and were more able to support themselves (93%).

• Evidence from the research indicates a link between the need for future support when formal services fail to identify new/follow on support at the point of service disengagement. Isolation and not knowing where to go were two key themes identified as contributing towards repeat homelessness.

• Temporary accommodation was identified throughout the research as a key point of isolation and reduced informal networks in homelessness journeys. There was a need for increased work with formal services during this period to help overcome isolation.

**Best Practice: Networks Approach**

Examples of good practice in addressing homelessness, using a networks approach, were seen throughout the case studies within our Beyond Homelessness research project. Examples of; support plans and mediation work for young people, diversity in the role of housing officers to meet local support needs and a range of mediation, mentoring and befriending projects promoting increased informal support networks.

Within the Rock Trust we offer young people One to One support, Mentoring and Mediation as support to reducing isolation and loneliness. From our research and the work that we undertake directly with young people in transition, we believe that isolation can not be solved purely through attending activities. We support young people to explore their past and present relationships and to consider what they would like from future relationships. This is to ensure that they understand the reciprocal nature and the complex dynamics of relationships. We support them to develop social skills and build their confidence in social situations, to help them engage with the wider community. We believe that the approach of working with individuals to develop their social skills and social confidence is crucial to reducing isolation.

The Rock Trust has developed ‘Networks Approach’ training for professionals across the social services sector, to increase awareness and skills in using a networks approach with service users. The training has been running for over 5 years with an attendance of over 400 people with over 50 organisations involved inc voluntary organisations and Local Authority employees.

**Ideas, improvement and influencing policy**

The Scottish Government, through the funding of the Scottish Social Networks project has been working with local authorities across Scotland to raise awareness of the implications of isolation on homelessness. North Ayrshire Council, West Lothian Council and Fife Council have all implemented a Networks Approach to their Homelessness Strategy. In different ways these local authorities have developed their policies using a networks approach, to alleviate homelessness or to reduce
loneliness and isolation during the period of homelessness, and thus reduce repeat periods of homelessness. The recommendations from the Beyond Homelessness research are:

- Training is available to professionals working across the housing and homelessness sector to increase understanding and use of a networks approach
- Development of a framework by which social networks are assessed at a local level, measures for this could be incorporated into national policy by the Scottish Government
- Development of adequate measuring tools to chart the development of ‘soft outcomes’ across the sector – this could be done collaboratively between local authorities, support providers and the Scottish Social Networks project
- Provision of services focused on developing informal networks for service users and social networks to be considered in housing support needs assessments
- Increased awareness into the value of engaging in such services amongst service users through education. Peer support models were identified as one way of encouraging such practice during the research

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