



**Recovery alongside social isolation:  
Research into the mental health  
impacts of COVID-19 for young people**





### Led by

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## What is it?



**Looking at the mental and social impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable young people**



Understanding how to support individual and community recovery from social and economic costs

- Data on young people's lived experiences of the pandemic
- Vulnerable communities and vulnerable young people



Mental health impacts of pandemic likely to be greater for vulnerable young people

- Pre-existing mental health
- NEET
- Socially isolated
- Coastal communities and deprived areas

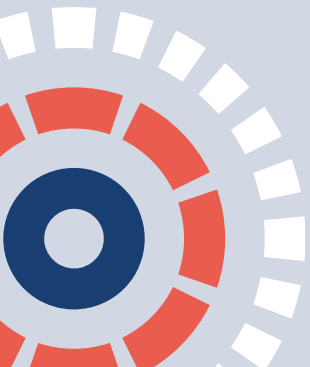
(Etheridge & Spantig, 2020; Kousoulis et al., 2020; Nobles et al., 2020)



## Effect of enforced social restrictions






- Loss of social interaction during COVID-19 impacts mental health (Etheridge & Spantig, 2020)
- Enforced social distancing linked with long-term negative mental health in young people (Loades et al, 2020)
- Covid-19 pandemic significantly changed young people's social and economic activities
  - Disruption in service support and availability



## Need to understand the mental health and psychosocial impacts of the pandemic



-  Particularly with vulnerable young people/adversely affected
-  Recovery planning – individual and community
  - Identify and test risk and protective factors
-  Work with young people in local communities
  - identify needs of vulnerable groups



## Discovery – Study Design



### **Mixed methods longitudinal study**

**Online survey and semi-structured interviews**  
**2 data collection points**



### **Recruitment**

**Sussex, Kent, Surrey and Norfolk**  
**Educational, community and social groups, mental health and well-being, social care, voluntary sector services**

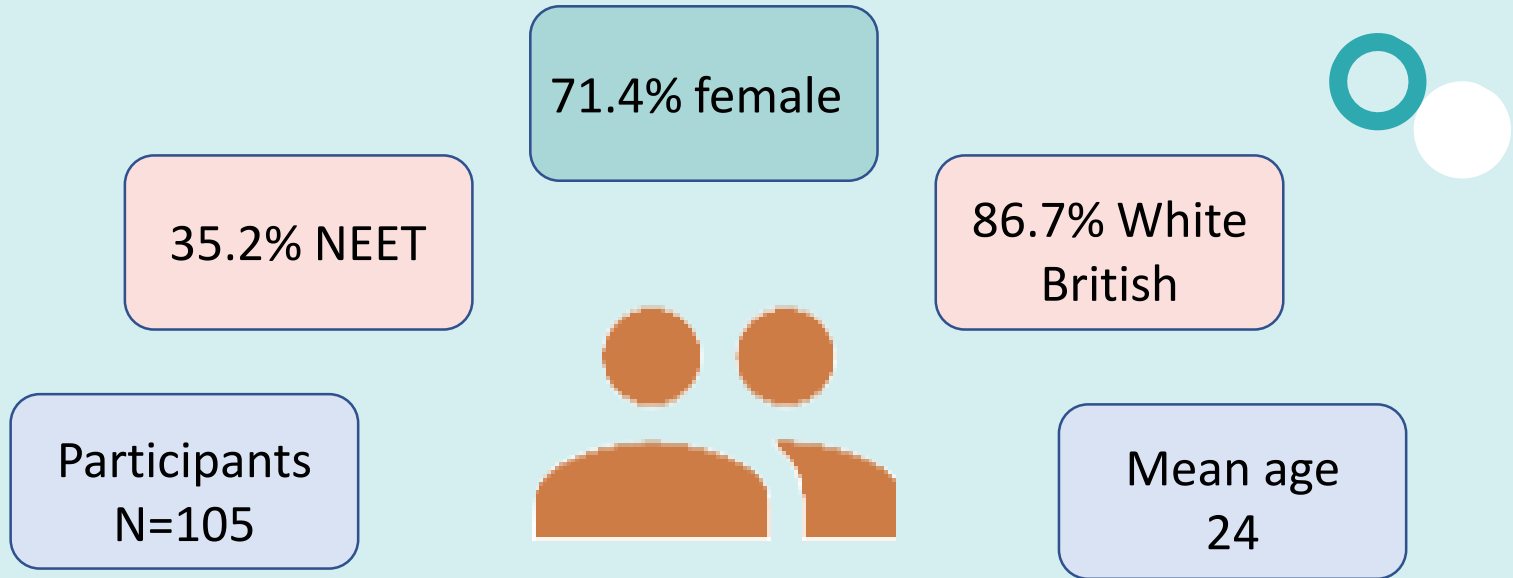


### **Aims**

**Relationship between social factors and young people's mental health during pandemic**  
**Support for recovery for young people and communities**



## Time 1 Data: January – July 2021

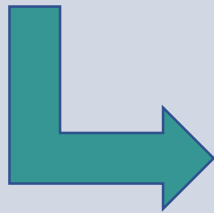


- 93.3% had pre-existing mental health difficulties
- 40% of scores indicated severe anxiety during covid-19
- 38.4% of scores indicated severe depression during covid-19

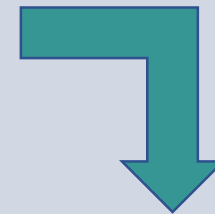
## Considering a social cure approach to well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic:



Groups we feel a psychological connection with can impact how we feel, behave and interact with others

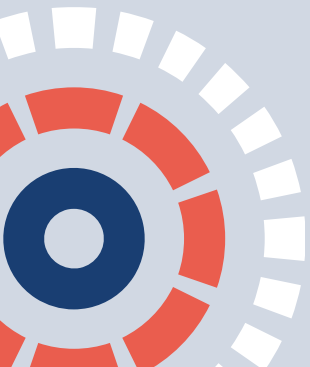


Psychological resources, such as a sense of connection, meaning, support or personal control



Mechanisms to support health and well-being (particularly in areas of recovery and resilience)

Haslam et al., 2018



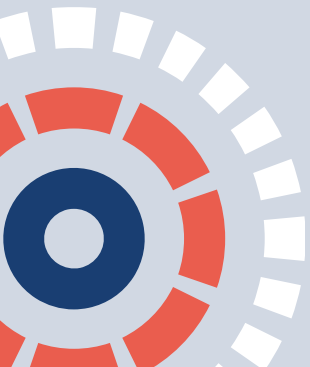
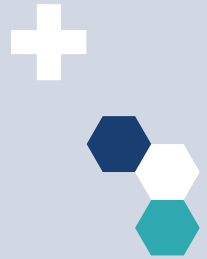


## T1 survey data suggests:

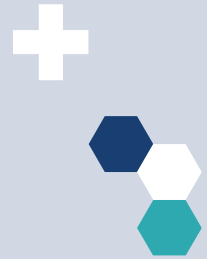
Claire Vella (PhD student) found that during COVID-19:

- Multiple group memberships before the pandemic\* were significantly associated with maintaining group memberships during the pandemic
- Maintaining group memberships during the pandemic was significantly associated with lower symptoms of depression, anxiety and psychotic-like symptoms

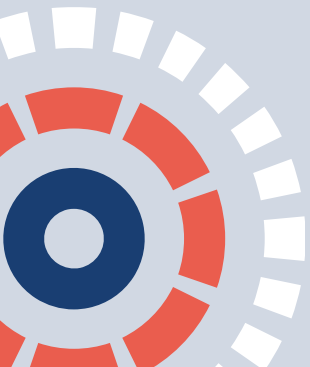
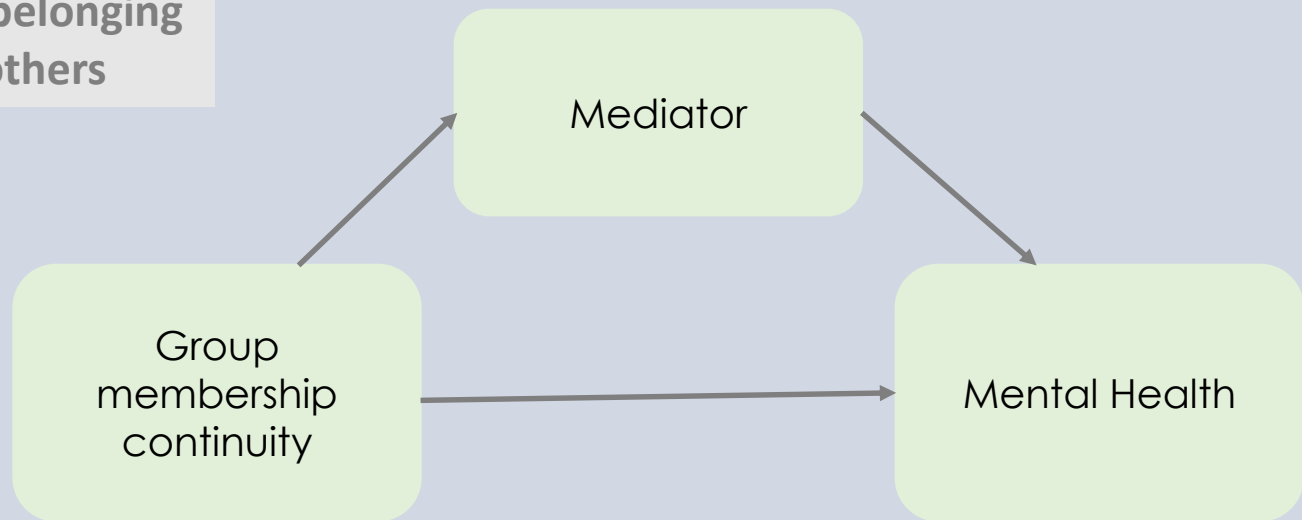
\* Measured retrospectively



Based on social cure theory, will social connection (online and in-person) and hope mediate the relationship between social group continuity and mental health during the pandemic?



Social connection =  
subjective sense of belonging  
and relatedness to others

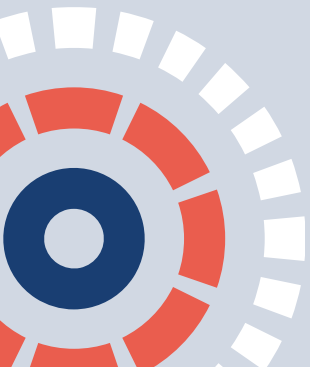
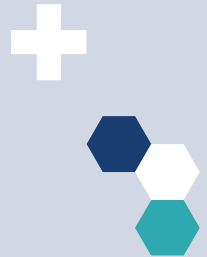


...T1 survey data suggests (continued):

## *Depression*

- **In-person social connectedness\*, online social connectedness and hope\* significantly mediated the relationship between membership continuity and lower symptoms of depression**

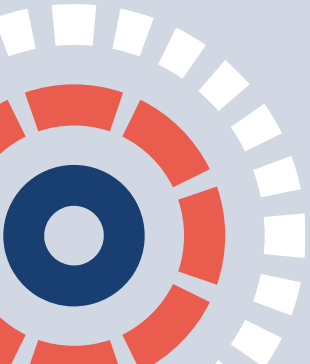

\* Even after controlling for age, gender, ethnicity, years since mental health difficulties started and the number of in-person and online interactions with social groups



...T1 survey data suggests (continued):

## *Anxiety*

- Only in-person social connectedness significantly mediated the relationship between membership continuity and lower symptoms of anxiety



Even after controlling for age, gender, ethnicity, years since mental health difficulties started and the number of in-person and online interactions with social groups

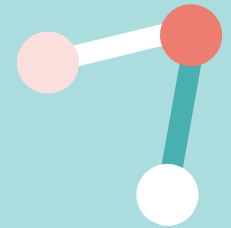
...T1 survey data suggests (continued):

### *Psychotic-Like Experiences*

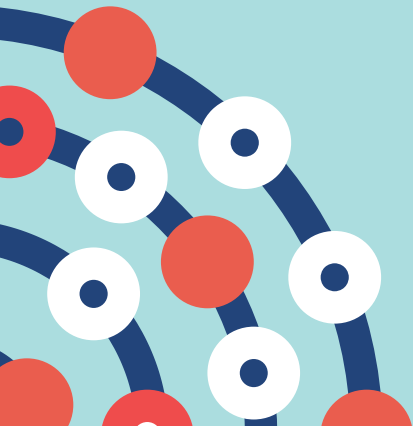
- Only hope significantly mediated the relationship between membership continuity and fewer psychotic-like experiences

Even after controlling for age, gender, ethnicity, years since mental health difficulties started and the number of in-person and online interactions with social groups





# Young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)



## NEET Participants

### NEET

NEET associated with increased risk of mental health issues and negative life outcomes (Palmer & Small, 2021)

Covid-19 – increased social exclusion and mental health problems (Kvieskiene et al., 2021)

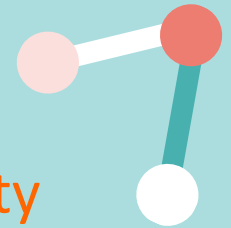
### Help-seeking intention

Help-seeking behaviour is protective factor for Young people

- Mental Health
- Well Being
- Development

In 2019, NEET rates among young people (16-24) in UK was 10.5%

**T1 survey data**  
**NEET and non-NEET (subgroups)**



Comparison of NEET and non-NEET for depression, anxiety and psychotic-like symptoms during Covid-19

**Findings suggest:**

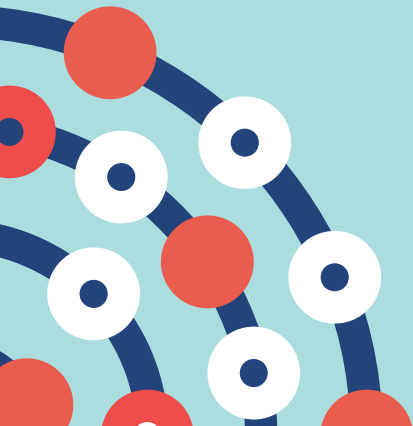
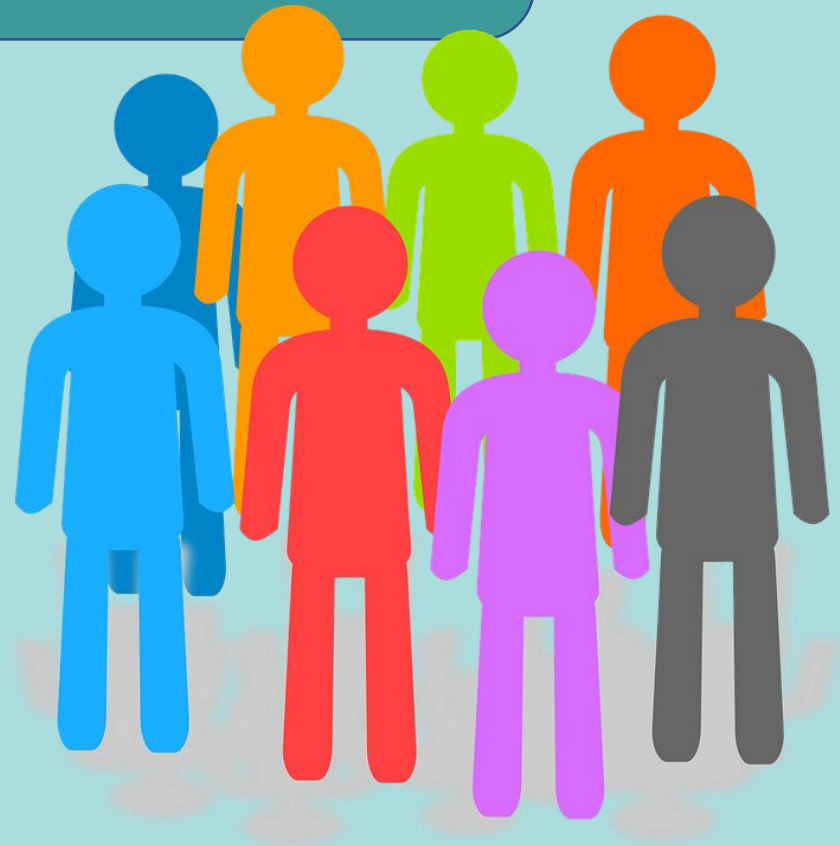
- **Depression** – significantly greater amongst NEET participants compared to non-NEET participants
- **Anxiety** – not significantly different amongst NEET participants and non-NEET participants
- **Psychotic-like symptoms** – not significantly different amongst NEET participants and non-NEET participants





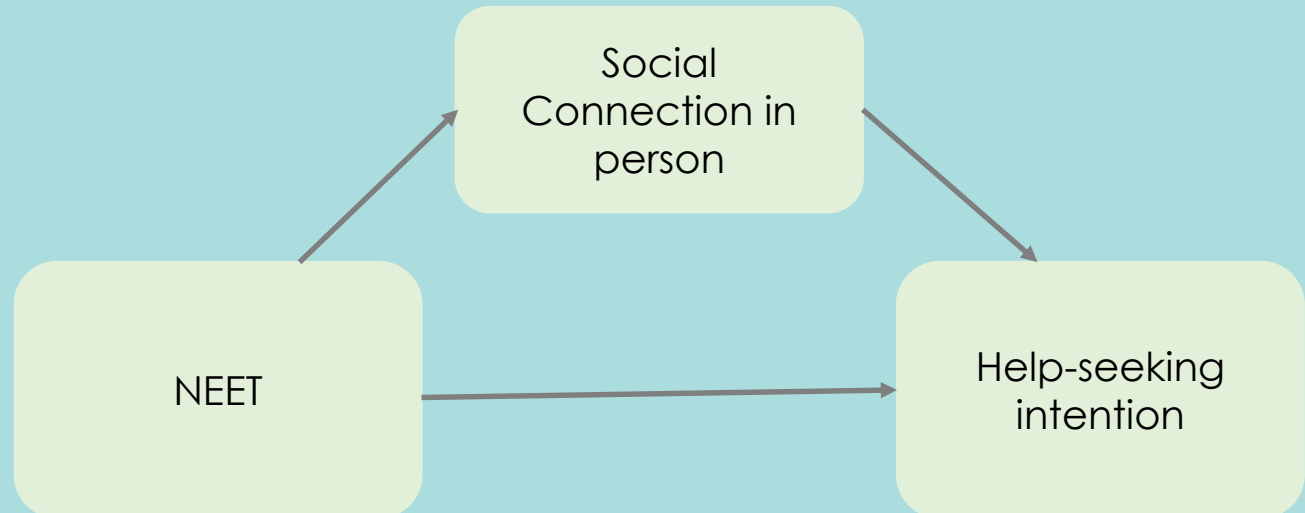
Does self-rated social connection in-person or hope mediate NEET and help-seeking intention during Covid-19 pandemic?

**Help-seeking intention: self-rating on seeking help from a range of professional and non-professional people (or no one) for a personal or emotional problem**



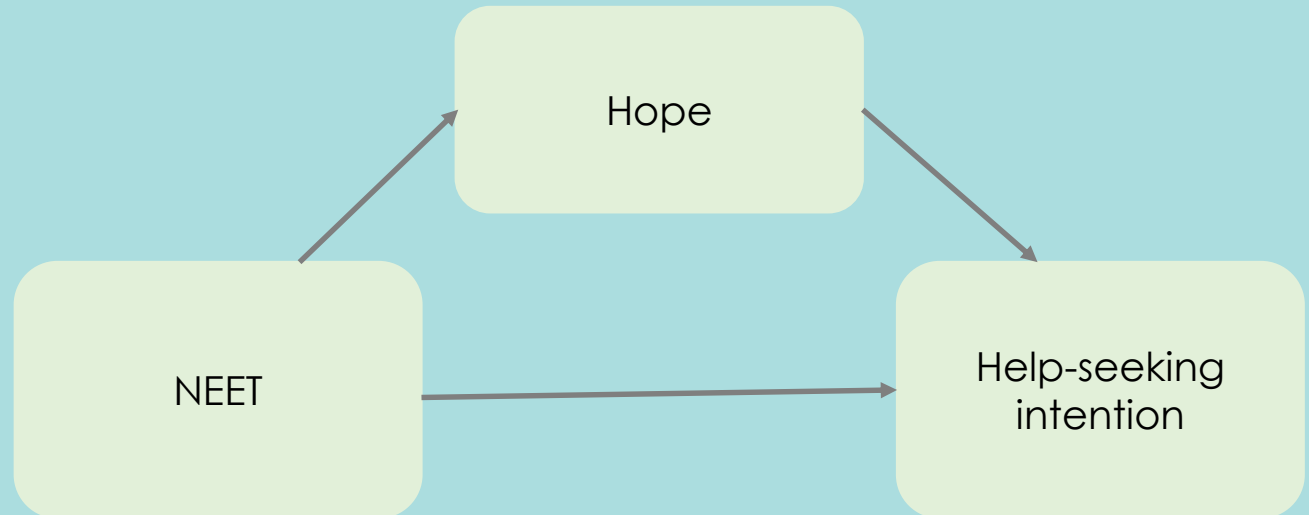
## T1 survey data suggests:

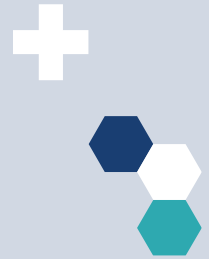
Social connection in person significantly mediated the relationship between NEET and help-seeking intention



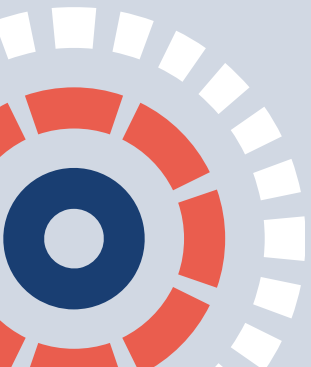
## T1 survey data suggests:

Hope significantly mediated the relationship between NEET and help-seeking intention

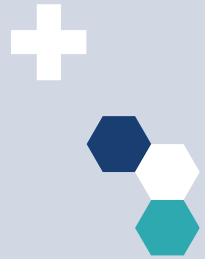




# Qualitative Interviews



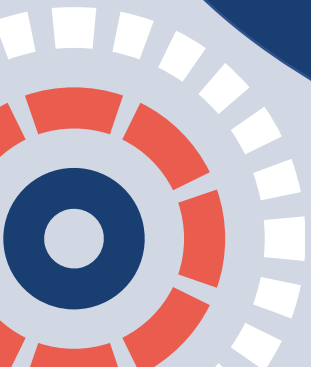
## T1 interviews



**Interviews conducted with 25 young people**

**Focus of interviews:**

- Mental health, relationships, support from services, community knowledge and interaction
- Indirect and direct effect of pandemic on these areas
- Support wanted



## T1 interview data (NEET subgroup) suggests

### **Removal of the pressures of social convention**

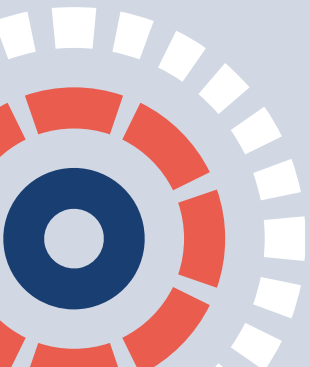
"...in the pandemic there isn't that constant pressure. Trying to find work and stuff like that, isn't it? Yeah, not being expected, that sort of mental pressure"

### **Someone regular to talk to**

"I suppose just like someone to talk to on a regular basis would be nice"

### **Lockdown as a continuation of normal life**

"the lockdowns felt fairly similar to the past ten years or so for me. That's how I've, that's how I've been living for a long time at this point"



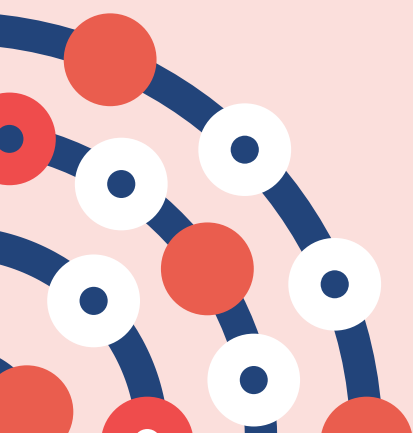
Claire Vella is looking at...

**Young people's social experiences and their  
mental health during the  
COVID-19 pandemic**

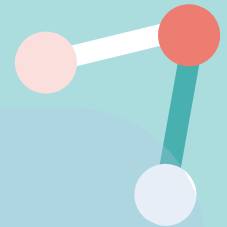


*Qualitative analysis of DisCOVery T1 and T2 interviews*

- Young people age 16-25 with pre-existing mental health difficulties:
  - 16 baseline interviews (T1 data: January 2021-July 2021)
  - 6 follow up interviews (T2 data: July 2021-January 2022)
- Currently transcribing and coding follow up interviews
- Thematic analysis



## So what now?



**TOGETHER** (Chief Investigator: Dr Clio Berry)

Continuation of Discovery

Feasibility study exploring the Groups 4 Health intervention

- Targets social isolation
- Supports development of social connections

Delivered to service users through community, primary and secondary care youth services





## So what now?

### CATALYST

Lead by Dr Daniel Michelson, Professor Harm van Marwijk and  
Professor David Fowler

Coproduction and testing asset-based task-sharing model for youth services

Lived experienced young people, families, local community and staff from services co-design with research team

Working across Kent, Surrey and Sussex – areas of high social and economic deprivation

Thank you for listening  
on behalf of the



Research Team

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