



Flinders LONELINESS Scale

*The instrument, and a guide
for its administration,
scoring, and interpretation.*



**Flinders
University**

Acknowledgements

Flinders University is located on the traditional lands and waters of Kaurna Peoples, and we pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge their sovereignty and continued responsibility to care for country. We respect the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, languages and spirituality and their relationship with country.

This research would not have been possible without the funding from the Local Government Association and the Local Government Research and Development Scheme. Our thanks also to the South Australian Youth Forum for the provision of peer-researchers and their invaluable insights throughout the project and co-analysis.

Lastly, we extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the youth centre staff and young people involved in this project. Your insights and support were fundamental to our research efforts.

About the Project

This report and toolkit serve as a guide to aid measuring the impact of youth centres on young people's experiences of loneliness. This report is designed to aid workers in gathering further in-depth information about their impact on loneliness in young people that attend their sites and includes practical qualitative and quantitative measures to support this.

Publisher:

Flinders University. Sturt Road, Bedford Park, South Australia, 5042, Australia

First Published: 2026. Copyright © Flinders University 2026. This is an open access work distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY NC 4.0) license. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

DOI: [10.25957/nhth-1412](https://doi.org/10.25957/nhth-1412)

ISBN: 978-1-923178-41-0

Authors

Mr Kyal Bacon, Flinders University

Ms Stephanie Goodwin, Flinders University

Dr Ben Lohmeyer, Flinders University

Prof Lydia Woodyatt, Flinders University

Dr Tin Ablaza, Flinders University

South Australian Youth Forum

Design by Mitch Hearn and Dan Thorpe

Suggested citation

Bacon, K. Goodwin, S. Lohmeyer, B. Woodyatt, L. Ablaza, T. (2026). Measuring the impact of Youth Centres on Loneliness. Flinders university. DOI: [10.25957/nhth-1412](https://doi.org/10.25957/nhth-1412)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	iii
What is the Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale?	1
Administering the Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale	2
Scoring and Interpretation of the Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale	5
Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale.	9
ROI & calculating the change in loneliness	11
Calculating the Monetary Value of a Change in Loneliness	13
Worked Examples of Calculating ROI	17
Validation & Reliability	19



What is the Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale?

The Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale (FYLS) is a 21-item scale that we have designed to assess how young peoples' loneliness may change across different spaces, situations, and time points. It has been validated using data from two different large-scale online surveys, one with 850 participants from the United States of America, and one with 335 participants from across Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The scale is attached at the end of this document.

Administering the Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale

For the best estimate of a change in loneliness over time, we recommend that the scale is administered at a *minimum of two different points in time, no less than two weeks apart*, but preferably at *the beginning and end of a program* (more on Page 49). Once you have administered the scale (Page 45), you can use the scoring index (Page 46) to convert responses into a number, which allows you to find *the total score*.

Total Score

For a *general, overall estimate of loneliness*, it is recommended that this *total score* is used, which corresponds to both a severity level and written interpretation. To identify whether loneliness is being experienced by a young person in a problematic way that requires further intervention, the *cutoff score* of 50 may be used, with respect to this total score.

Subscales

For a more specific understanding of loneliness in order to facilitate intervention, we recommend that scores are calculated for each *subscale*. Subscales can also be administered *independently* of the whole scale, if there's one area in particular with which the young person may be experiencing challenges that you would like to measure in isolation.

There are five subscales within the full scale that indicate the different facets of life in which young people may be experiencing loneliness the most.

- **Social Support**; which relates to social loneliness and isolation — where feeling misunderstood, unsupported, or uncomfortable within social connections leads to loneliness.
- **Yearning**; which taps into emotional loneliness and isolation, where loneliness is characterised by a general feeling of yearning for more connection or more satisfying connections with others.

- *Negative Treatment*; which measures an aspect of loneliness that appears to be both unique and fundamental to the experiences of young people, where social interactions can be characterised by hostility, unfair treatment, rejection, or exclusion.
- *Awareness of Social Judgment*; another aspect of loneliness that appears to be unique to young people. This subscale taps into stigmatisation, surveillance of one's social behaviour, and a general awareness of judgement from others in social situations.
- *Comfortable Spaces*; a new aspect of loneliness that is central to the experiences of young people. This subscale taps into the Danish and Norwegian idea of "Hygge", which is a mood that is derived from spaces that are cozy and comfortable to the senses.

With these more specific scores, each category corresponds to different *recommendations for interventions* or *further actions* that may be taken to target loneliness within that facet of life, which we will cover later in this toolkit.



Scoring and Interpretation of the Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale

Once you have a completed questionnaire with the young person, fill out the score sheet (Page 46) by circling or highlighting the number that corresponds to the box that the young person has ticked. Write the total score for each subscale in the space beneath each subscale, and write the overall scale score in the space the end of the page — calculating it by adding up all of the subscale scores.

Interpreting Total Scores

Total scores on the FYLS may range from 21–84, where scores closer to 21 indicate minimal loneliness, and scores closer to 84 indicate a high degree of loneliness. The following table outline guidance for what each range of scores means with respect to loneliness.

Score	Severity Level
21-45	Negligible or very low loneliness
46-49	Mild loneliness
50-52*	*Moderate loneliness
57+	Severe loneliness

* 50 is the cut-off score for the scale, indicating the point at which the loneliness being experienced by a young person is most likely problematic and requiring further intervention.

Interpreting Subscale Scores

Total scores on the FYLS range from 4–16 for social support, yearning, awareness of social judgment, and comfortable spaces; and from 5–20 for negative treatment. Higher scores indicate more difficulty in the subscale's domain, with lower scores indicating less difficulty. The following tables provide score interpretation guides for each subscale. Additionally, we map score ranges to recommended interventions; providing a starting point for youth workers and young people to improve their outcomes within each area.

<i>Social Support Score (Items 1-4)</i>	<i>Severity Level</i>	<i>Recommended Intervention</i>
4–7	Well supported	None needed immediately; monitor for changes.
8–10	Supported	
11–12	Slightly unsupported	Strengthen their social support within the centre; talk to them about their current circle; strengthen their communication skills; referral to a psychologist, counsellor, or therapist if feasible; monitor for any changes.
13+	Little to no social support	

<i>Yearning Score (Items 5-8)</i>	<i>Severity Level</i>	<i>Recommended Intervention</i>
4-7	Little to no yearning	None needed immediately; monitor for changes.
8-10	Some yearning	
11-12	Moderate yearning	Strengthen connections within the centre; seek local clubs, groups, events, or volunteer groups that may be of interest; organisations like Headspace for resources; referral to a psychologist, counsellor, or therapist if feasible; monitor for any changes.
13+	Significant yearning	

<i>Negative Treatment (Items 9-12)</i>	<i>Severity Level</i>	<i>Recommended Intervention</i>
5-7	Few negative interactions	None needed immediately; monitor for changes.
8-10	Some negative treatment	Strengthen connections within the centre. Monitor for changes.
11-13	Moderate negative treatment	Provide them with a safe space to talk about their experiences; organisations like Headspace for resources; bullying resources may be helpful; referral to a psychologist, counsellor, or therapist if feasible; monitor for any changes.
14-20	Significant hostility	

<i>Awareness of Social Judgment (Items 13-16)</i>	<i>Severity Level</i>	<i>Recommended Intervention</i>
4-6	Minimal awareness	None needed immediately; monitor for changes.
7-8	Some awareness	
9-11	Moderate awareness	Provide them with a safe space to talk about their experiences; referral to a psychologist, counsellor, or therapist if feasible; monitor for any changes.
12-16	Debilitating awareness	

<i>Comfortable spaces (Items 17-20)</i>	<i>Severity Level</i>	<i>Recommended Intervention</i>
4-6	Able to find comfort across spaces	None needed immediately; monitor for changes.
7-8	Mostly comfortable in spaces	
9-11	Some comfortable spaces	Discuss and explore their specific sensory needs; seek local clubs, groups, events, or volunteer groups that may be of interest; monitor for any changes.
12-16	Few to no comfortable spaces	

Flinders Youth Loneliness Scale.

When thinking about the past *TWO WEEKS*, tick the box that most applied to you.

	Did not apply to me at all	Applied to me some of the time	Applied to me a good part of the time	Applied to me most of the time
I had somebody to go to when I needed someone	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt that I could relate to others	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt understood by others	☐	☐	☐	☐
I had people with whom I felt comfortable	☐	☐	☐	☐
I wanted more friends	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt lonely	☐	☐	☐	☐
I did not feel fulfilled by my current social connections	☐	☐	☐	☐
I wished I was more "in the loop" with others' lives	☐	☐	☐	☐
I had negative interactions with others	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt rejected or excluded by others	☐	☐	☐	☐
My feelings were overlooked in situations where they should have been considered	☐	☐	☐	☐
My voice was not listened to by others	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was treated unfairly by others online	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt bad about myself when thinking about certain interactions I had	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt that I would be judged if I was seen on my own	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt watched by others in the places I accessed	☐	☐	☐	☐
When seeing people interact on social media, I felt bad about my own social life	☐	☐	☐	☐
I accessed places that catered well to my needs	☐	☐	☐	☐
I accessed places where I felt comfortable to be myself	☐	☐	☐	☐
I accessed places where I felt safe and respected	☐	☐	☐	☐
I accessed places that felt cozy and homely	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scoring sheet	Did not apply to me at all	Applied to me some of the time	Applied to me a good part of the time	Applied to me most of the time
I had somebody to go to when I needed someone	4	3	2	1
I felt that I could relate to others	4	3	2	1
I felt understood by others	4	3	2	1
I had people with whom I felt comfortable	4	3	2	1
<i>Total for Social Support</i>	/16			
I felt lonely	1	2	3	4
I did not feel fulfilled by my current social connections	1	2	3	4
I wished I was more "in the loop" with others' lives	1	2	3	4
<i>Total for Yearning</i>	/16			
I had negative interactions with others	1	2	3	4
I felt rejected or excluded by others	1	2	3	4
My feelings were overlooked in situations where they should have been considered	1	2	3	4
My voice was not listened to by others	1	2	3	4
I was treated unfairly by others online	1	2	3	4
<i>Total for Negative Treatment</i>	/20			
I felt bad about myself when thinking about certain interactions I had	1	2	3	4
I felt that I would be judged if I was seen on my own	1	2	3	4
I felt watched by others in the places I accessed	1	2	3	4
When seeing people interact on social media, I felt bad about my own social life	1	2	3	4
<i>Total for Awareness of Social Judgement</i>	/16			
I accessed places that catered well to my needs	1	2	3	4
I accessed places where I felt comfortable to be myself	1	2	3	4
I accessed places where I felt safe and respected	1	2	3	4
I accessed places that felt cozy and homely	1	2	3	4
<i>Total for comfortable spaces</i>	/16			
<i>Total score for all subscales</i>	/84			

ROI & calculating the change in loneliness

To show a change in the level of loneliness across the course of a program, take an average (i.e., the sum of the total scores divided by the number of participants) of the total scores from participants at the beginning of the program, and an average of the total scores from participants at the end of the program, and compare the two. (Trotter & Rawlings Adams, 2017).



What if the group of young people changes from beginning to end?

While it is ideal to have identical participants at the pre- and post-program timepoints for a proper evaluation, you can still calculate the change in loneliness scores for pilot programs. However, you would need to provide a caveat about what that change in participants looked like from pre to post (e.g., numbers of people who did not continue with the program). Otherwise, if applicable, you can still calculate the average of the specific group who have stayed the same (e.g., if there are only five young people who have remained from the beginning of the program until the end).

Measuring individual change

To show individual change for young people who join the program for an extended period, measure their loneliness score when they first join the program, and then again at the end of the program, and compare these scores.

It is also useful to have additional insights that support the written interpretations from the scale. These insights may be obtained from having conversational interviews with young people, conducted either before or after administering the scale.

Calculating the Monetary Value of a Change in Loneliness

Based on an online survey we conducted through CloudResearch with 335 people from across Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (Table 1), we found that 1 unit of movement on the FYLS is equivalent to -0.282 units of movement on the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) (significance of $<.001$). As a result, it is possible to calculate the financial impact of a change in the FYLS.

Table 1.

Frequency and proportion of participants who scored within each score range on the SWEMWBS

Category	Overall SWEMWBS score	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
1	7-14	16	4.8
2	15-16	26	7.8
3	17-18	36	10.7
4	19-20	55	16.4
5	21-22	56	16.7
6	23-24	45	13.4
7	25-26	38	11.3
8	27-28	42	12.5
9	29-30	9	2.7
10	31-32	7	2.1
11	33-34	3	0.9
12	35	2	0.6

13

Note. These data are based on a survey of 335 people from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

The valuation of this change has been interpreted from the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT; Trotter & Rallings Adams, 2017) wellbeing valuation table. Table 2 shows the change in the SWEMWBS scale results that have been calculated to "represent the additional money, the average individual would need to improve their wellbeing, which is the same amount as the improvement in their SWEMWBS score" (p. 5). In other words, if someone completing the scale improved by a given amount due to your program, this calculation shows how much money they would have to otherwise be given to produce the same improvement in their wellbeing.

Table 2.

The raw scores on the FYLS and their equivalent SWEMWBS score and wellbeing valuation

Category	Overall SWEMWBS score	*Equivalent Score on FYLS	Cost (Pounds/£)
1	11-14	83.97 – 73.33	0
2	15-16	69.79 – 66.24	9,639
3	17-18	62.70 – 59.15	12,255
4	19-20	55.60 – 52.06	17,561
5	21-22	48.51 – 44.96	21,049
6	23-24	41.42 – 37.87	22,944
7	25-26	34.33 – 30.78	24,225
8	27-28	27.23 – 23.69	24,877
9	29-30	20.14 – 16.60	25,480

Note. The wellbeing valuation has been interpreted from the HACT (Trotter & Rallings Adams, 2017) wellbeing valuation table, where an improvement SWEMWBS score reflects an improvement in wellbeing, that can be translated into a monetary increase.

*This assumes that one unit of movement on the FYLS scale equates to the SWEMWBS score minus 34.68 (unstandardised regression constant), divided by -0.282 (unstandardized regression Beta).

The formula may be written as $FYLS\ score = SWEMWBS\ score - 34.68$
 -0.282

How to Calculate this Return

Based on the above mapping between the SWEMWBS and FYLS, youth centres can attribute a monetary value to a shift in loneliness among their participants. *Table 3* (right) outlines 9 categories on the SWEMWBS and their associated monetary value. For example, if survey results show a shift from Category 1 to Category 2, this reflects an improvement in wellbeing/reduction in loneliness that we could expect to reproduce by giving each person an additional \$19,278.

Using the formula below, youth centres can calculate the total social impact of the program by taking away the cost of delivering the program from the value calculated through the shift in loneliness in their participants:

$$\begin{array}{lcl} \textcircled{1} & \textit{Shift in categories (including "deadweight")} & - \\ \textcircled{2} & \textit{Total cost of running the program} & = \\ \textcircled{3} & \textit{Net social impact} & \end{array}$$

For each program participant, we need to calculate the change in FYLS score by subtracting the "after" score from the "pre-program" score. We then subtract 27% from this difference to account for improvements in wellbeing that would have happened anyway without the program (the deadweight; Trotter & Rallings Adams, 2017)..

We provide two worked examples of calculating these changes on the following pages.

Table 3.

Interpretation of wellbeing valuation from SWEMWBS and FYLS scores.

Category	Overall SWEMWBS score	Number of respondents	Cost (Pounds)*	Cost (AUD)*
1	7-14	84 – 73	0	0
2	15-16	72 – 66	9,639	19,278
3	17-18	65 – 59	12,255	24,510
4	19-20	58 – 52	17,561	35,122
5	21-22	51 – 44	21,049	42,098
6	23-24	43 – 37	22,944	45,888
7	25-26	36 – 30	24,255	48,510
8	27-28	29 – 23	24,877	49,754
9	29-30	22 – 21	25,480	50,960

Note. Scores on the FYLS have been rounded to the nearest whole number, and score ranges have thus been interpreted for comparison between the FYLS and SWEMWBS scores. The wellbeing valuation has been interpreted from the HACT (Trotter & Rallings Adams, 2017) wellbeing valuation table.

*Comparable value (real buying power) adjusted for cost-of-living differences, where £1.00 ~ AUD\$2. These are conservative values, subject to inflation. It is also important to note that the conversion is subject to change.

Worked Examples of Calculating ROI

Worked Example One.

Adding Scores Participant-by-Participant

Participant	FYLS “before” score	Model value	FYLS “after” score	Model value
Participant A	68	\$19,278	55	\$35,122
Participant B	74	\$0	47	\$42,098

① *Per person social impact* = After score model value – Before score model value x (1 – deadweight)

Participant A: (\$35,122 – \$19,278) x (1 – 0.27) = **\$11,566.12**

Participant B: (\$42,098 – \$0) x (1 – 0.27) = **\$30,731.54**

② *Total social impact* = Participant A social impact + Participant B social impact

\$11,566.12 + \$30,731.54 = **\$42,297.66**

③ *Net social impact* = Total social impact – Total costs.

\$42,297.66 – (\$16,000 for equipment, venue hire, and staff) = **\$26,297.66**

So, your return on investment would be **\$26,298**, meaning that your program has led to an increase in wellbeing for these 2 participants that would otherwise require an additional **\$47,147.06** to effect.

As a reminder, our formula for calculating return is:

- ① *Shift in categories* (including “deadweight”) –
- ② *Total cost* of running the program =
- ③ *Net social impact*

Worked Example Two.

Average FYLS Scores across Participants

Participant	FYLS “before” score	Model value	FYLS “after” score	Model value
Average scores across 20 participants	67.8	\$19,278	40.3	\$45,888

① *Per person social impact* = After score model value – Before score model value x (1 – deadweight)

$$(\$45,888 - \$19,278) \times (1 - 0.27) = \$19,425.30$$

② *Total social impact* = Participant A social impact + Participant B social impact

$$\$19,425.30 \times 20 = \$388,506$$

③ *Net social impact* = Total social impact – Total costs.

$$\begin{aligned} &1. \$388,506 - 2 \text{ staff members } (\$100,000) \text{ for the First Quarter (i.e., a 10-week program)} \\ &\quad - \text{equipment } (\$10,000) - \text{venue hire } (\$5,000) \\ &= \$273,506 \end{aligned}$$

So, your return on investment would be **\$273,506**, meaning that your program has led to an increase in wellbeing for these 20 participants that would otherwise require an additional **\$273,506** to effect.

Validation & Reliability

Table 4.

Correlations between FYLS and Other Variables

Construct	Measure	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance
Loneliness	University of California (UCLA) Loneliness Scale Version 3	.856 (38-item version)	P < .001
Wellbeing	Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF)	-.712 (38-item version)	P < .001

We found that there is a positive relationship between the FYLS and the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3, indicating good convergent validity. This means that the FYLS measures loneliness in a similar way to other loneliness scales.

In contrast, the FYLS and MHC-SF were negatively correlated, indicating good discriminant validity. This means that somebody who scores highly on a wellbeing measure should score low on the FYLS, as loneliness and wellbeing are distinctly different variables that are not measured in a similar way.





