

GENERATION ISOLATION: LONDON'S YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO GET OFF PHONES BUT NEED REAL-LIFE ALTERNATIVES TO KICK THE HABIT

Monday 4 November, 2024

- *Four OnSide Youth Zones in London - together supporting 12,778 young people - are today calling for better real-life alternatives to smartphones*
- *New research from youth charity OnSide reveals 21% of 11-18 year-olds across London spend most of their free time on their smartphone*
- *54% of London's young people would like to break the habit but don't know how*
- *Young people in London feel lonely and anxious – 51% have high or very high feelings of loneliness while 56% have high or very high feelings of anxiety*
- *Young people in London are crying out for real-life social experiences in their community – 95% say more affordable leisure activities like youth centres would do the most to improve their life outside school, while 28% want safe, fun social places to hang out with friends.*

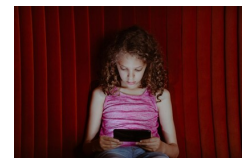
National youth charity OnSide's Generation Isolation report, the largest study of its type into the way 11–18-year-olds spend their free time, today reveals that young people want to reduce the amount of time they spend on their phones - but simply don't know how to break the habit. The new report, based on a survey of 5,213 11-18-year-olds in England in partnership with YouGov shows that smartphone use is one of the most dominant free time activities for young people in London, with 24% spending most of their free time when not in school on their phone. The four Youth Zones in London - Future in Barking and Dagenham, Unitas in Barnet, Legacy in Croydon and WEST in Hammersmith & Fulham - are part of the national OnSide network of 15 Youth Zones and provide vital youth worker support and activities for over 12,778 young people in London. Today the four Youth Zones reacted to the report's findings by calling for better, real-life alternatives to smartphone dependency. Specifically, for every young person to have access to high-quality youth centres and dedicated youth workers to help them build rich, real-life social connections and experiences that are more compelling than the lure of a smartphone. Generation Isolation, now in its third year, finds smartphone use is now the most dominant free time activity for 11–18-year-olds in England with 1.3 million* (24%) spending most of their free time on their smartphone. Of those who spend the most time on their devices, the study reveals that across England over half (52%) would like to reduce their screen time, yet 46% don't know how to break the habit. This is mirrored across London with 21% of young people spending most of their time outside school on their phones, 54% of these would like to reduce their screen time, however, 40% do not know how to. When asked about why they spend time on their smartphone, 49% of young people in London said they are worried about feeling left out from friends if they don't use their devices; 30% said they have more friends to talk to on their smartphones than they do in real life and 3% said being on their phone is better than real-life. Worryingly, asked for the first time about levels of loneliness, 51% of young people in London said they'd experienced high or very high levels of loneliness. Feelings of loneliness almost match sustained anxiety in this age group as 56% of those polled in London stated they've experienced high or very high levels of anxiety.

Young people in London are clear about what is needed. Asked what one thing would improve their lives outside 23% opted for more affordable leisure activities, 23% wanted more safe and fun places to socialise and 26% want more opportunities to learn skills outside of school.

Generation Isolation has been released to coincide with National Youth Work Week, an initiative to raise awareness of youth work and youth workers.

The report shows that the solution to many of the problems young people face today lies in youth clubs, which play a vital role in enabling them to build face-to-face connections and develop skills and resilience. The vast majority, 95% of young people who attend a youth club in London say it has made a positive difference to their lives with 'making friends and social interaction' being the most popular reason for this, and 96% say their youth club has helped them to develop new skills. Together, London's four Youth Zones are joining OnSide, which is currently developing a further eight Youth Zones in some of the country's most disadvantaged areas, in calling for every young person to have access to high-quality youth centres to help them build rich social connections, achieve their potential and develop into happy, healthy thriving adults. Maria, 13, from Thornton Heath, has one older brother, 20, a university student has been coming to OnSide's Legacy Youth Zone for a year. She says "My phone is

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my baby, I spend most of my free time on it, I feel anxious if I don't have it. I would feel lonely without it. I walk around my house chatting to my best friends on FaceTime or Snapchat, they're with me all the time. I use it for YouTube and Netflix and I like making TikTok films. "When I walked into Legacy [Youth Zone] I just thought "Wow!". I couldn't believe they gave out food and had basketball and a gym and loads of other things going on. It felt crazy that they looked after all these people. I came on my own because I'd heard friends mention "going down Legacy" at school. I was curious. I spoke to two boys I'd never met before, and they showed me around. "I come as many nights as I can now. I like meeting new people, rather than staying with the same gang of friends like everyone does at school. You can use your phone here but personally I don't because there's so much going on. If I wasn't here there would be nowhere else to go, I know I'd just be at home on my phone." Commenting on the findings, Robin Moss Chief Executive at Unitas, Barnet Youth Zone said "Today's "Generation Isolation" report has good and bad news. The challenge is that young people are lonely, isolated, anxious and spend huge amounts of time on screens. But the report highlights a powerful solution: youth centres and youth workers, who offer in-person, positive, meaningful activities in a safe environment where young people can make new friends, learn new skills and improve their physical and mental health. The four OnSide Youth Zones in London supported more than 10,000 young people last year, and we have big plans to grow those numbers. Youth Zones are needed now more than ever." **OnSide Chief**

Executive, Jamie Masraff, said: "The message from young people is overwhelmingly clear - they want to ditch smartphone dependency and socialise in person, but feel trapped in a habit that is leaving them lonely, isolated and anxious. We are letting young people down by treating time outside of school as an afterthought and not creating enough opportunities in real life that are better than life on screens. "Without the provision of affordable, safe places to flourish outside of school, we risk a generation becoming adults who struggle to exist in a real-world environment, riddled with social anxiety and lacking in social skills. "Evidence shows that youth clubs offer rich and vibrant environments where young people, supported by dedicated youth workers, have fun, build confidence, develop life skills and become happy, healthy, thriving adults. Youth provision is the untapped solution to the challenges outlined in Generation Isolation. – it must become a right and reality for all young people."

To read the full Generation Isolation report visit: www.onsideyouthzones.org/generationisolation

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