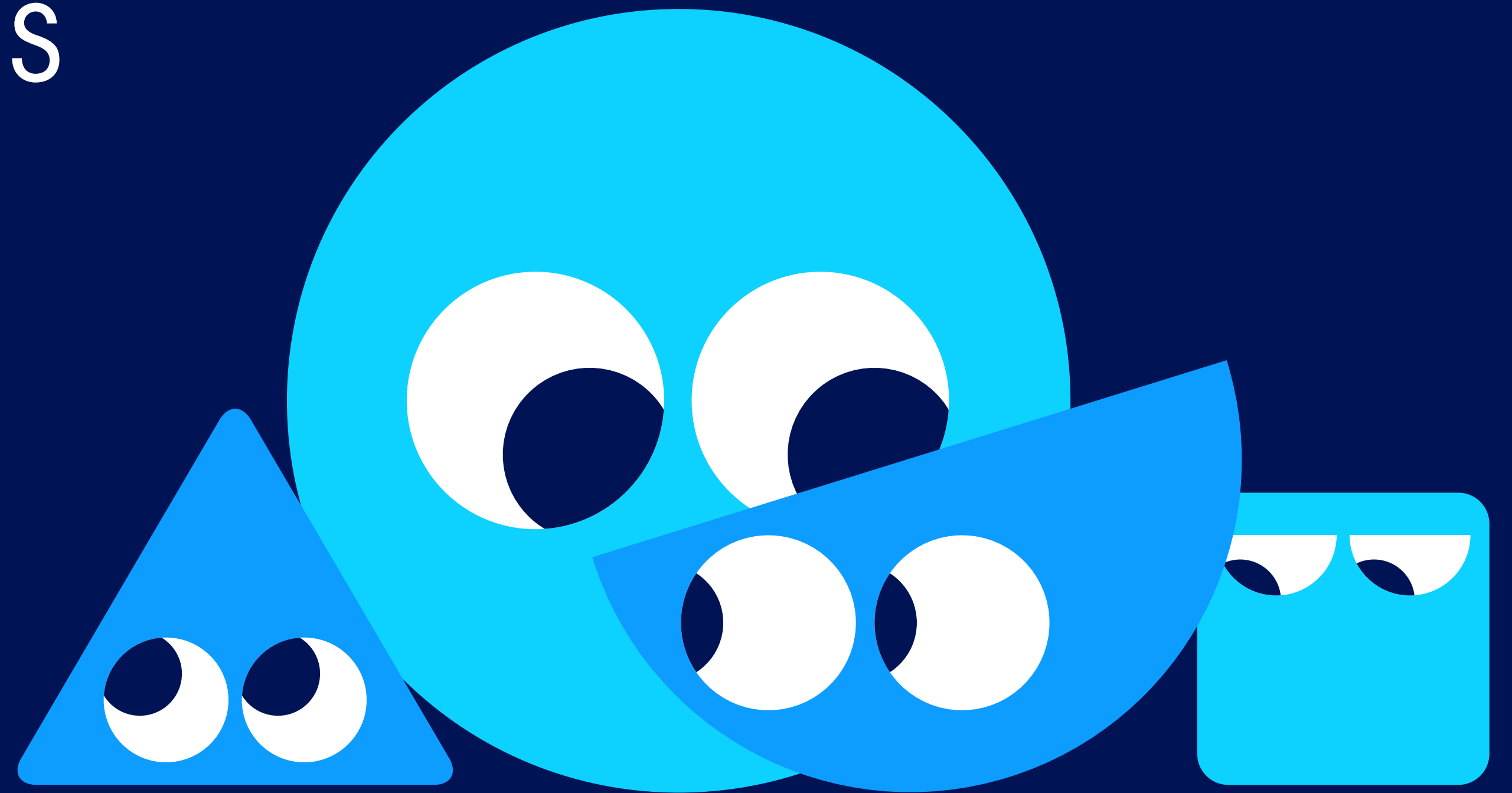
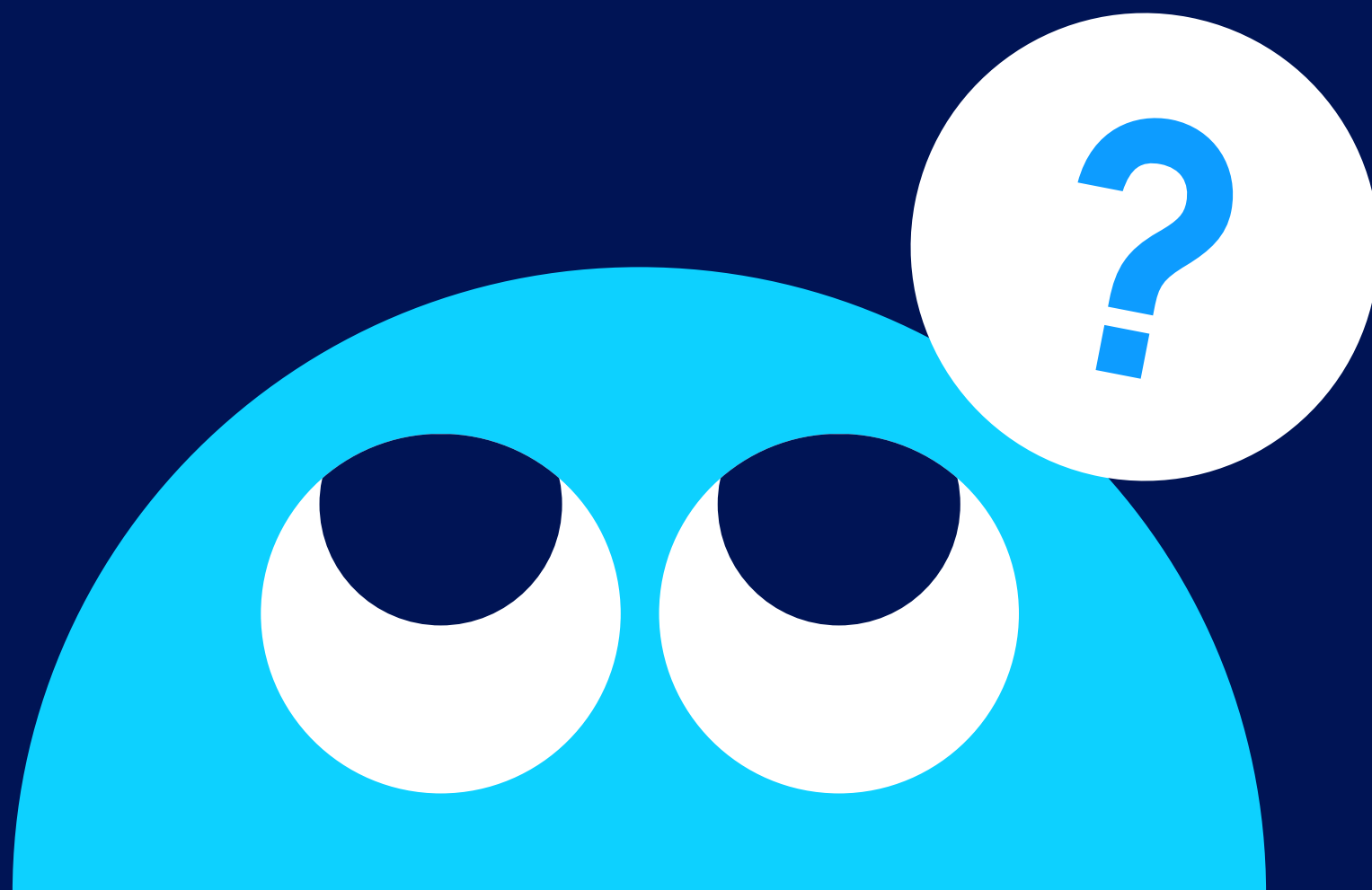


Loneliness: What Ireland's Young People Are Telling Us



Who We Are

spunout is Ireland's youth information and support platform, working towards an Ireland where all young people are supported and empowered to thrive. spunout has a range of free, anonymous online services that are there for you whenever you need them.



Our Mission

spunout's mission is to work collaboratively with young people to support our mental health and wellbeing. We do this by creating evidence-based, person-centred digital solutions and safe, validating support spaces.

Our Vision

An Ireland where all young people are supported and empowered to thrive.

Our Story

Life can be hard sometimes; we can feel unsure or even unsafe. We can find ourselves a little lost, nervous or worried, not knowing where or who to turn to next. We can all feel lonely at times too, alone with no one to talk to or in a crowd with no one to relate to. spunout is there for everyone as we travel our own unique journey.

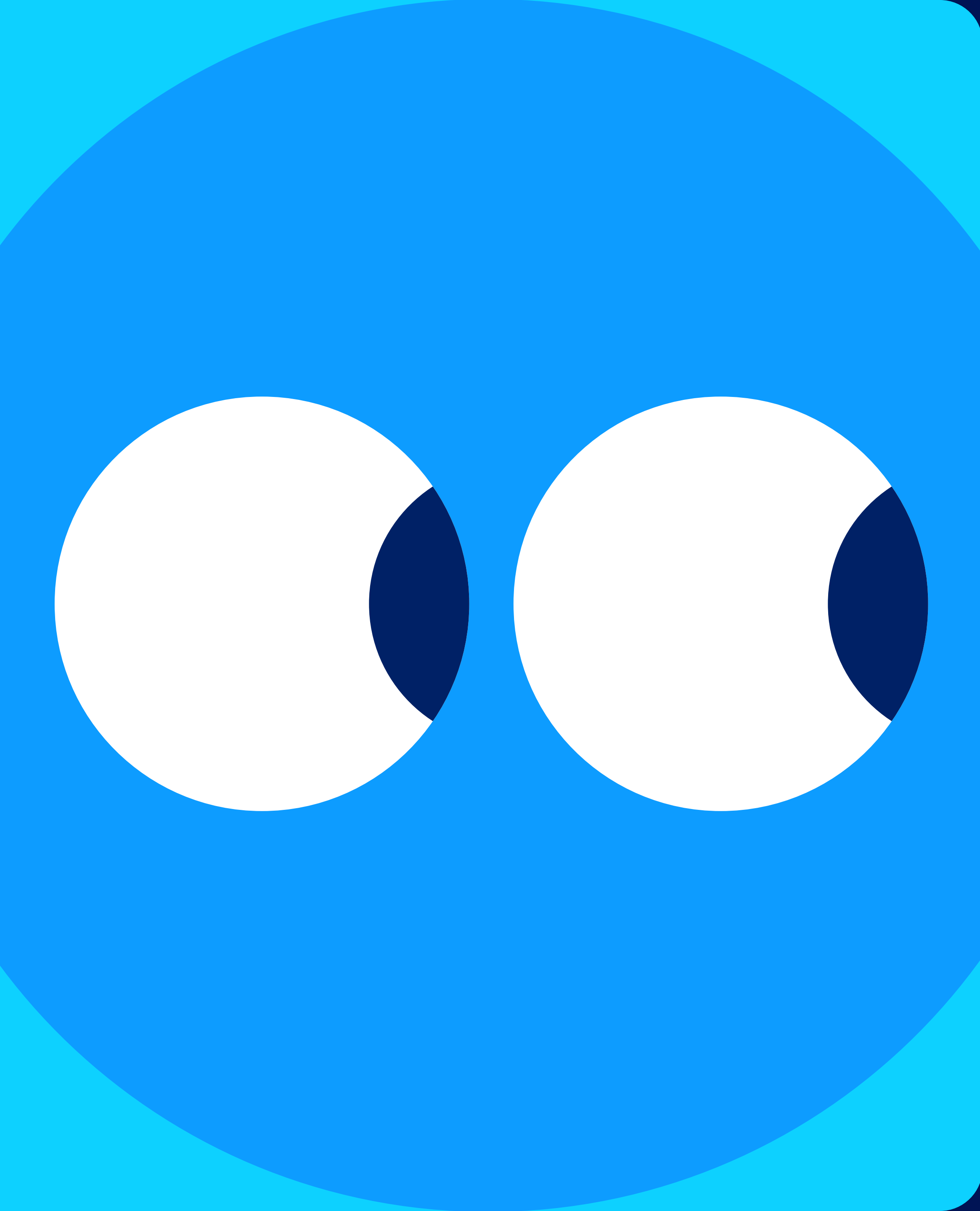
We are here for you if you just need a helping hand or if you're lost, low or lonely.

Together we can drive away the clouds, lighten the load and find a clear path ahead. If it matters to you, it matters to us. You can connect with us for support. You can share what's on your mind. With spunout, you can take a step to make your life a little better.

**If it matters to you,
it matters to us.**

**“It’s a relief to know I’m not alone
and have someone available
to talk with. Being isolated and
alone is hard, really hard.”***

* All quotes included in this report are the voices of young people between the ages of 12 and 34 who used our service. Quotes are presented anonymously to protect their privacy.



01

Introduction



Forward from CEO Sinéad Keane

Loneliness, when it is felt, touches every part of who we are. It is something that too many young people are experiencing right now, even in this world where everyone is always online and connected.

It can be a difficult topic to discuss, but loneliness is fast becoming a critical public health concern in Ireland. For young people, persistent loneliness can shape every aspect of their lives, impacting their mental health, self esteem, relationships, health outcomes and sense of belonging. Today, Ireland is reporting the highest level of loneliness in Europe, with young people among the most at risk.

At spunout we see daily evidence of this through Text About It, our free, anonymous, 24/7 messaging support service. Every year we connect with tens of thousands of young people reaching out to our trained volunteers for support and guidance. Data gathered through this vital service provides spunout with unique insights into the challenges faced by young people today.

This data shows that one in every five conversations with young people relates to loneliness, most commonly between 7pm and 2am when other supports are closed. Our service works to fill this gap, by ensuring that young people can access care and connection at the

Forward from CEO Sinéad Keane

times when they need it most. For some, this service offers a friendly, supportive listening connection; for others it is a lifeline during moments of deep distress.

Troublingly, many young people who reach out about loneliness live in a family home. This reminds us that loneliness is not simply about being physically alone, but reflects a complex experience of disconnection and isolation, even in the presence of others. This is particularly poignant against the backdrop of Ireland's housing and cost of living crises. It is vital to understand loneliness not just as an individual experience but one that is deeply shaped by economic and social pressures.

We know that loneliness is not always experienced in isolation. It often appears alongside feelings

of anxiety, depression, stress, thoughts of self-harm and suicidal ideation. This highlights that loneliness is not a stand alone issue, but rather represents one piece of the broader challenges impacting young people in Ireland today. Our volunteer and clinical model plays a critical role in supporting young people in managing these challenges, with 100% of high risk conversations related to loneliness safely de-escalated through human compassionate care and connection.

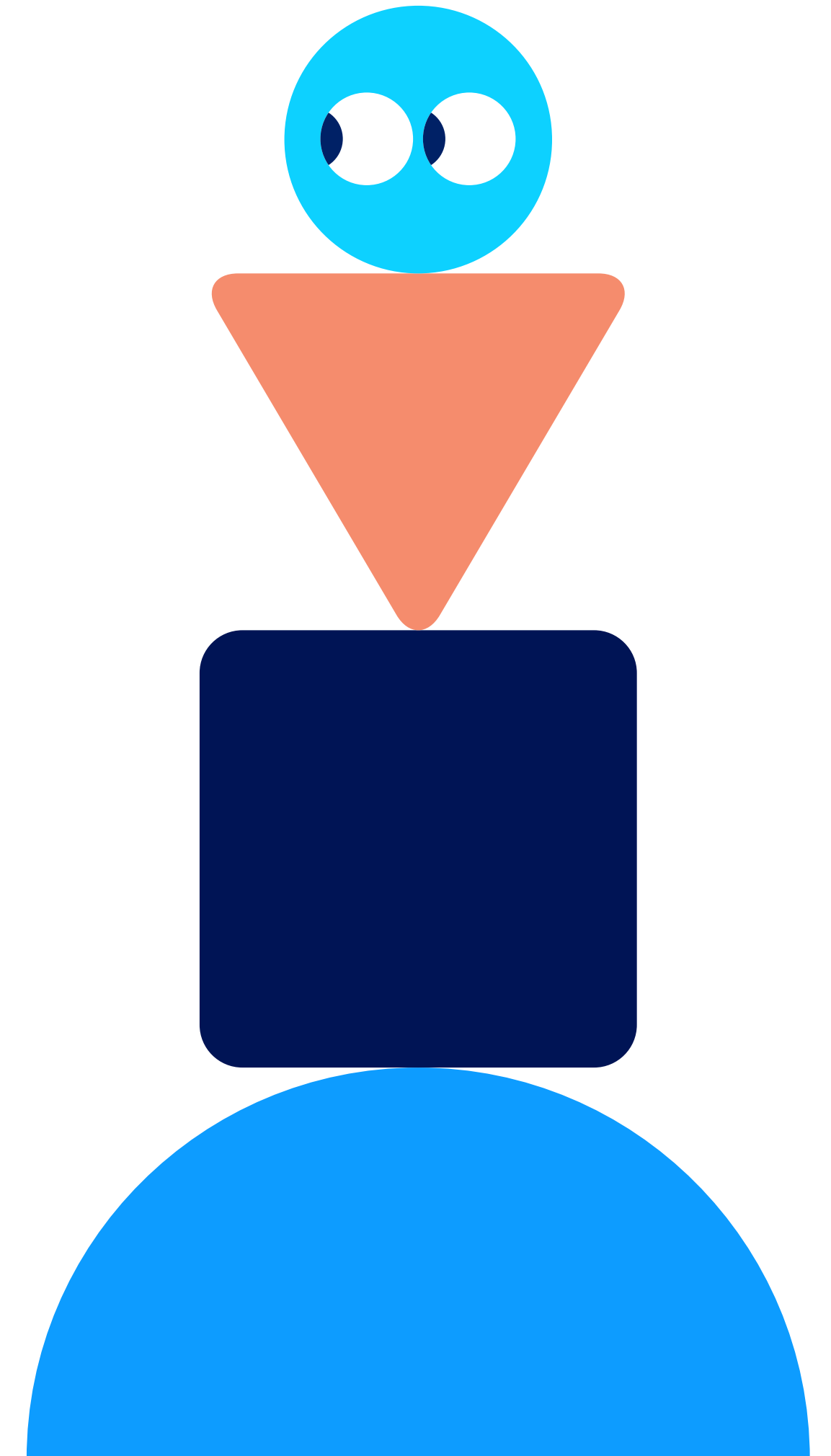
These are not just numbers, they are the lived experiences of real young people across Ireland. As a youth-led organisation, spunout is committed to listening and responding to what young people tell us. We are by young people, for young people and report on real lives, real concerns and real connections.

Our data, grounded in the voice of young people will prove invaluable for government, policy makers and the wider youth mental health sector in gaining unique perspectives to better understand and respond to this growing challenge. Addressing loneliness requires ongoing support and collective effort with key partners to continue to meet young people where they are, and to support them in accessing timely support.

spunout is proud to continue to partner with government and policy makers to ensure sustained investment in this critical area. Together, we can shape a more connected Ireland where every young person feels seen, supported and valued.



Sinéad Keane
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER





Executive Summary

Loneliness is one of the critical mental health issues facing young people in Ireland and they are turning to spunout for help. This help is provided by spunout's Text About It service which is a free, anonymous, 24/7 messaging service providing everything from a calming chat to immediate support for our mental health and emotional wellbeing. Over the past 12 months, we have supported over 52,000 conversations through this life-saving service, most happening at night when young people are feeling most alone and when other services are simply not available.

From connecting with young people through Text About it, we know that loneliness is a recurring struggle for them. It frequently sits alongside other difficult emotions such as anxiety, sadness and depression. These experiences are complex and deeply connected to mental health and wellbeing.

However, with spunout's commitment to listen to and advocate for young people in Ireland, loneliness can be tackled with the correct support offered through youth-led interventions.

What The Data Shows

Loneliness is a **recurring topic of concern** reported by young people using spunout’s Text About It 24/7 text service.

Peak times for conversations relating to loneliness were between 7pm and 2am, which suggests a link with unstructured times and social disconnection.

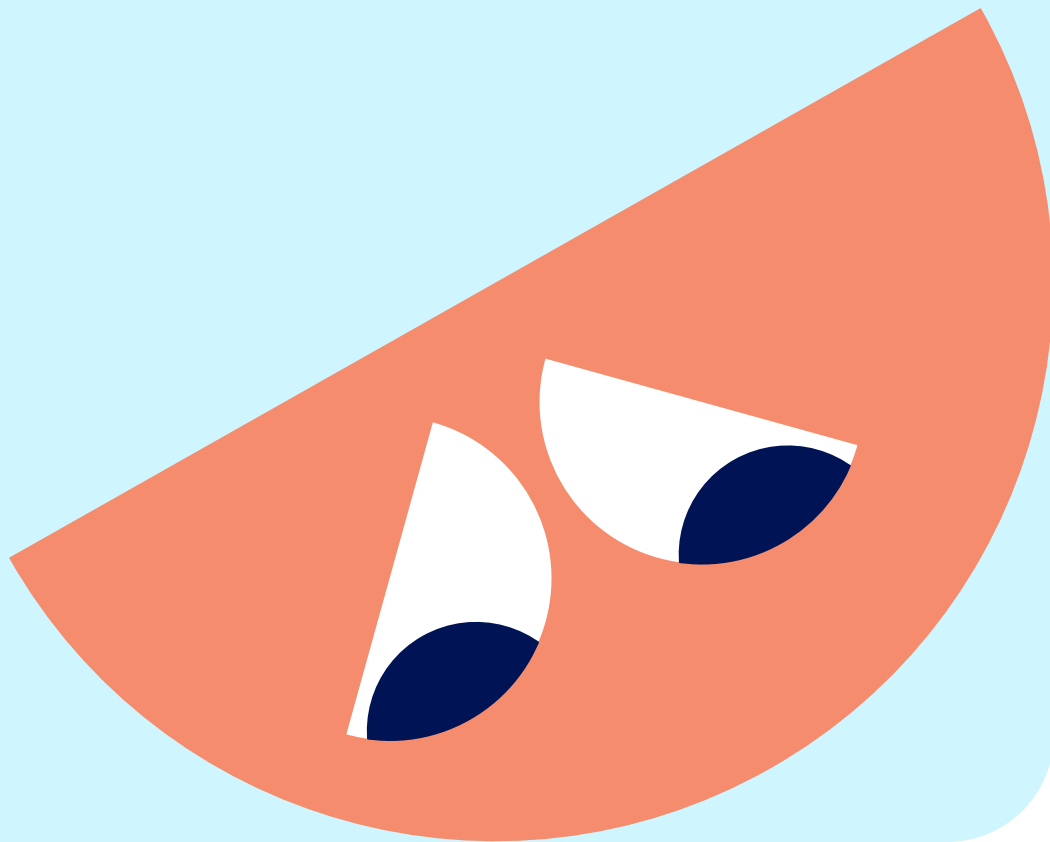
Young people aged between **16–24 reported the highest levels of loneliness**.

Young people with a secondary-level education **reported higher levels of loneliness** than those with a third-level education.

Among 12-34 year olds, **1 in 5** conversations related to loneliness.

Loneliness rarely occurs in isolation—many texters who sought support for being lonely also spoke about **anxiety, sadness, stress, relationship difficulties and thoughts of self harm**.

Many young people experience loneliness, **despite 59% of texters living in a family home**.



Why It Matters

Loneliness has a lasting impact on health and wellbeing. It increases the risk of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and self-harm.⁶ Without early intervention, the human and economic cost of loneliness will continue to grow. Recognising loneliness as the public health concern that it is, is the first step towards tackling it.

What We Need To Do

- 01

Recognise loneliness as a public health priority.
- 02

Support education and early intervention initiatives.
- 03

Invest in community, digital and youth led initiatives.
- 04

Support youth-led prevention solutions.

Research Summary

Loneliness is a significant public health concern, linked with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease and poor general health.¹ Loneliness is typically described as a negative emotional state associated with a lack of social connection.²

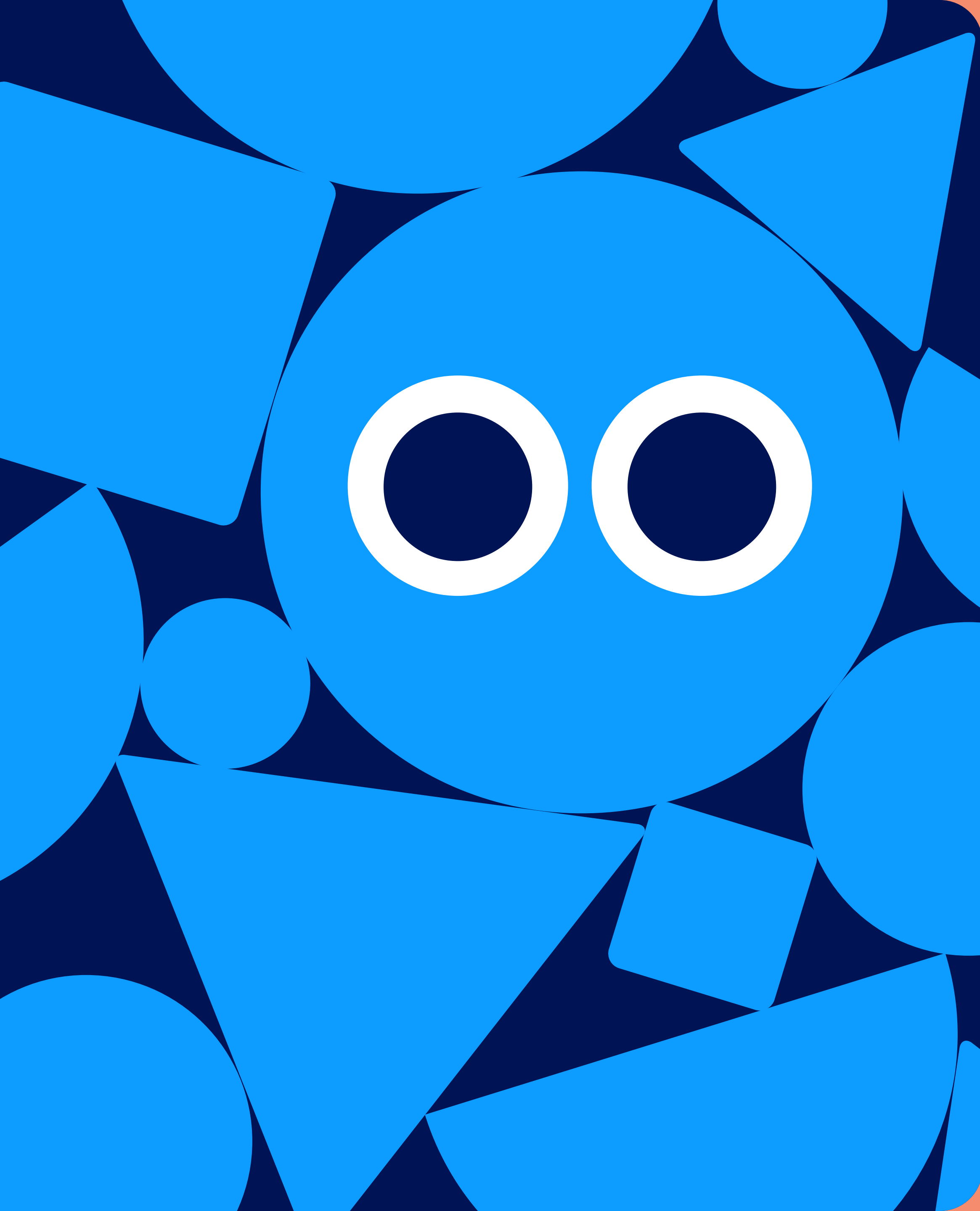
Social connection is influenced by three key dimensions: structural, functional and qualitative. When one or more of these dimensions are lacking, it can lead to feelings of loneliness.¹ (See Table 1)

Loneliness can either be transient or chronic. Transient loneliness is often a temporary experience in response to a significant life event, such as moving to a new city, or leaving home for the first time. This type of loneliness is considered a normal part of the human experience.

In contrast, chronic loneliness is persistent and long-lasting, often continuing for two years or more.¹ Unlike transient loneliness, chronic loneliness can lead to a range of negative health outcomes.

DIMENSION	EXAMPLE
Structural The number and type of social connections a person has.	<i>Living arrangements, relationship status, social networks.</i>
Functional The support people receive from their social connections.	<i>Perceived social support, actual social support (i.e. belonging, emotional support).</i>
Qualitative The quality of relationships and interactions ranging from positive to negative.	<i>Loving, satisfying relationships versus draining, strained relationships.</i>

Table 1



02

Scale and Impact of the Problem

**1 in 6 people
report feeling
lonely**



A Growing Public Health Concern

Approximately 1 in 6 people report feeling lonely.¹

While loneliness is a global issue, recent evidence suggests that Ireland has the highest reported rates of loneliness in Europe. Some 20% of Irish people reported feeling lonely most or all of the time, compared to 13% of Europeans, which underscores the urgency of addressing chronic loneliness among the Irish population.³

More worryingly, young people in Ireland are particularly at risk for experiencing loneliness, with 5.6% of 16-24 year olds reporting feeling lonely most of the time in 2024, representing a significant increase from 0.6% in 2023.⁴

This is in line with global trends which indicate that loneliness is most prevalent among individuals in the 16-24 and 25-34 age group.¹

Loneliness is increasingly recognised as a social determinant of health. The experience of chronic loneliness can negatively shape physical and mental health outcomes.

870,000 deaths per year

Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of mortality, causing approximately 870,000 deaths per year.¹

Observed Globally

This increased risk of mortality is observed across all world regions, including high, middle and low-income countries.⁵

Increased mental health risks

Loneliness has a severe impact on mental health, and is linked with depression, increased anxiety, suicidal ideation and self-harm.⁶

Life threatening impacts

Being chronically lonely is associated with premature death, as well as an increased risk for cardiovascular disease, stroke and diabetes.¹

Poor adolescent well-being

Loneliness among adolescents is associated with lower life satisfaction, poor wellbeing and depression.¹



What Young People Are Telling Us

Between 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2025, our Text About It service connected with 194,234 texters across Ireland.

After each conversation, texters receive a link to a short post-conversation survey. This survey helps us to gather insights into who is using our service, the issues they are facing and how we can ensure continued quality service.

A total of 14,409 people (7.41% of all texters) took part in the survey and provided their age, allowing us to explore patterns of loneliness among young people who use our service. Notably, approximately 76% of respondents were aged between 12 and 34, reflecting the predominant youth audience engaging with spunout (see Figure 1).

The following report focused specifically on young people between the ages of 12-34 who contacted our Text About It service seeking support related to loneliness.

Among this age group, approximately one in every five conversations related to loneliness.

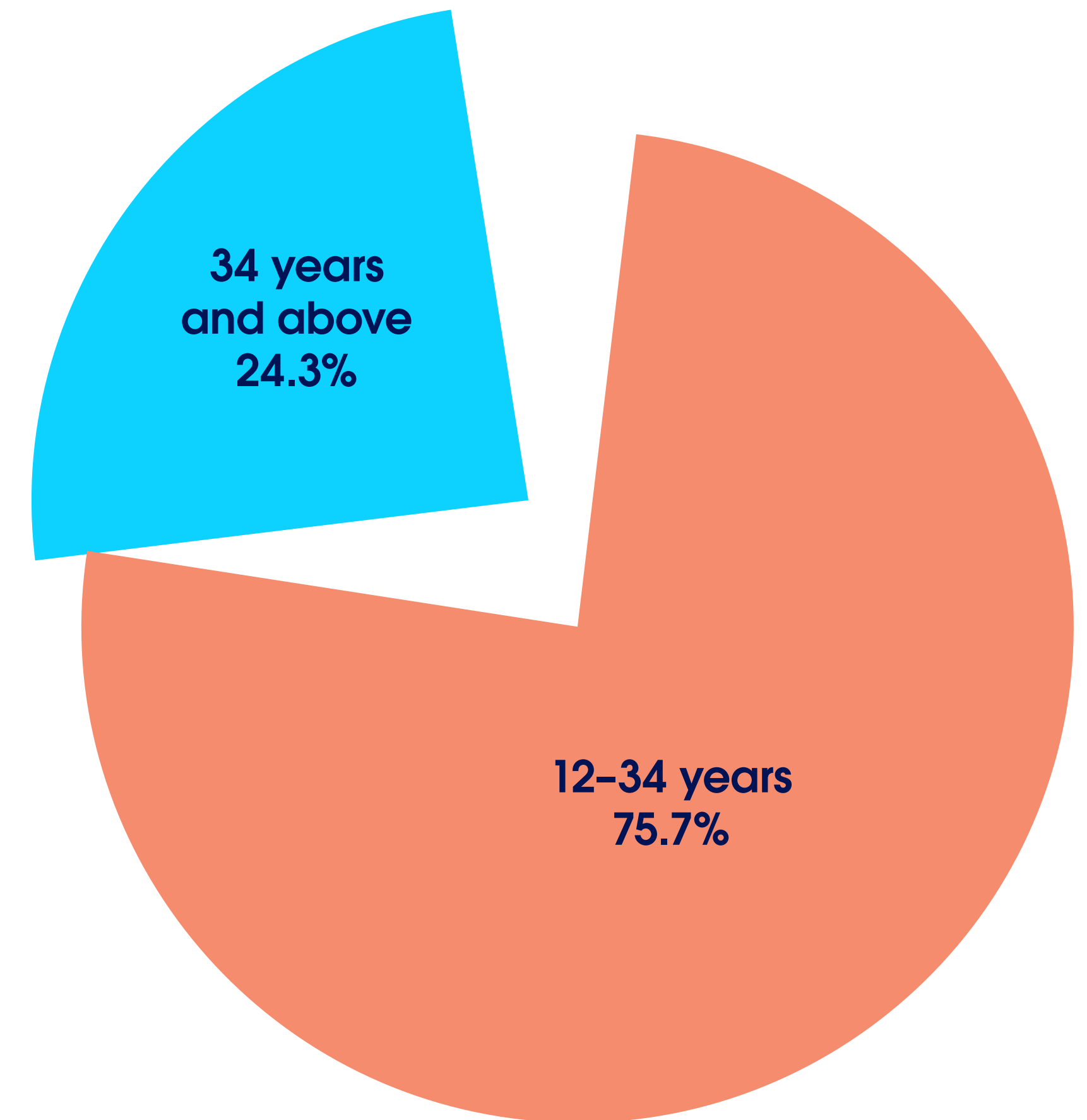
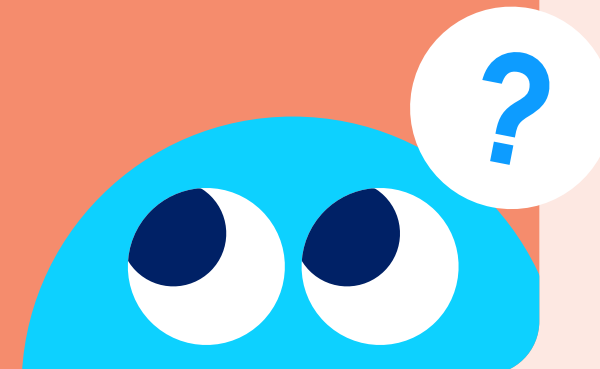


Figure 1 Age breakdown of those who participated in the post-conversation survey

“I’ve been really struggling with loneliness at the moment, so having someone to listen meant a lot to me at this time.”

Who Experiences Loneliness?

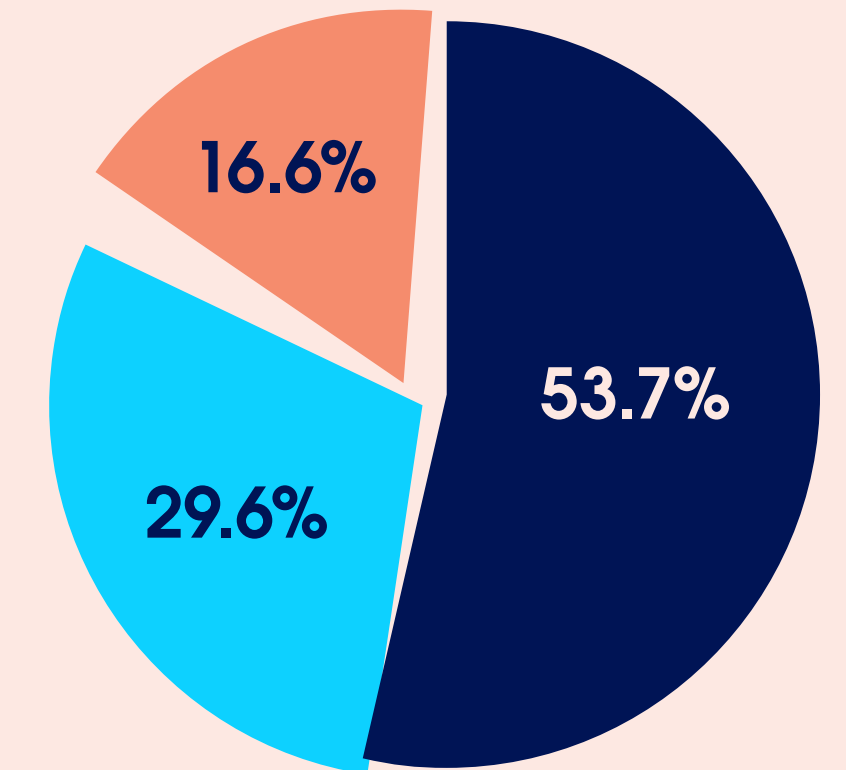
In our post-conversation survey, we ask texters to share anonymous demographic information. This helps us to explore the characteristics of those using our service to identify trends and patterns among different groups.

Among the texters who discussed loneliness, we found the following:

Age

- 16-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 15 years old or younger

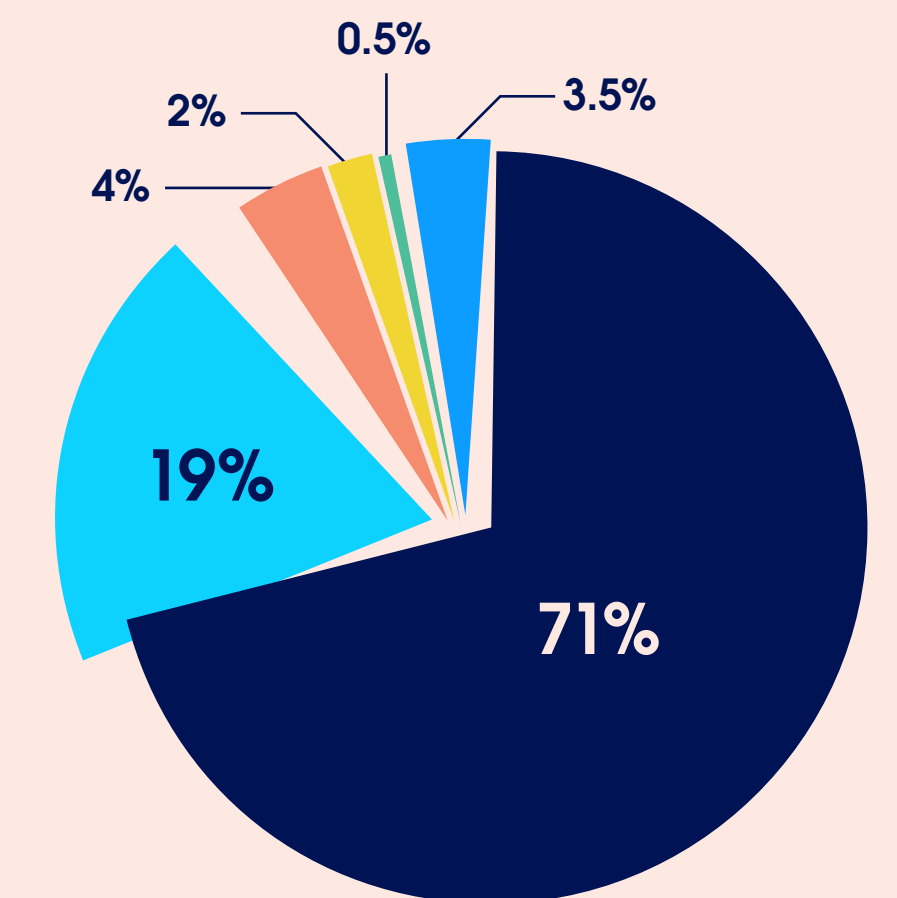
Figure 2 Age breakdown of texters reporting loneliness



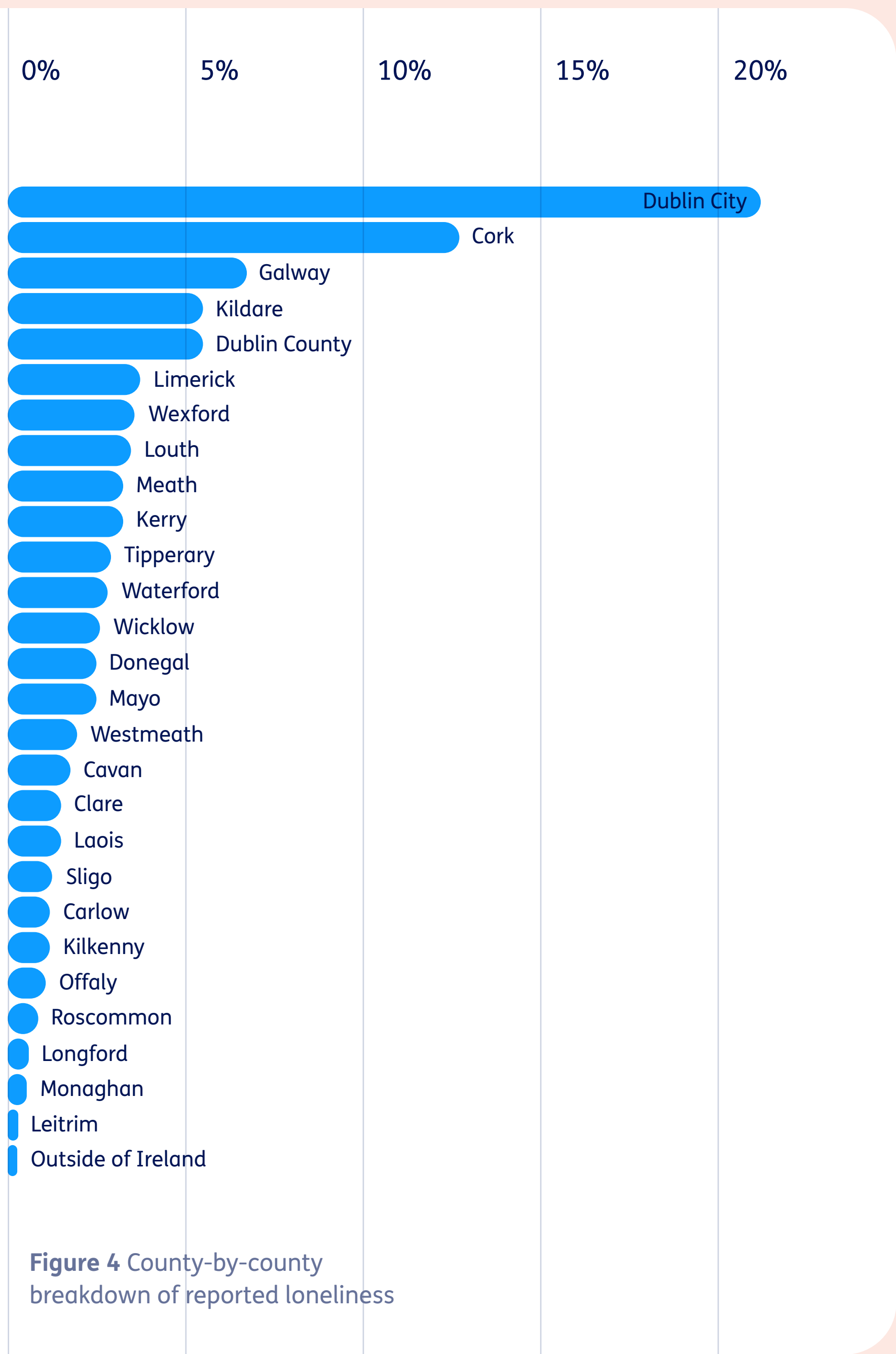
Gender

- Cisgender Women
- Cisgender Men
- Non-binary individuals
- Trans Men
- Trans Women
- Other/ Prefer not to say

Figure 3 Gender breakdown of texters reporting loneliness



* These figures closely mirror the overall gender distribution of TAI service users.



Who Experiences Loneliness?

Housing Status

Loneliness was highest among individuals living in a house owned by a family member (59%), followed by those renting a home (19%).

Education Status

Loneliness was higher among texters whose highest level of education was the Junior Certificate (23%), followed by the Leaving Certificate (22%) than those with a third-level education (degree 17%; non-degree 12%).

Employment Status

Conversations relating to loneliness were highest among students (50%), followed by full-time workers (21%) and part-time workers (12%).

Location

Dublin city had the highest number of texters reporting loneliness in the country (21%), followed by Cork (12%). See Figure 4 for a detailed county-by-county breakdown.

How spunout Makes a Difference

All conversations with the Text About It service are rigorously risk-assessed using a systematic clinical approach. This ensures all texters receive the care they need in the moment. Conversations in which texters disclose thoughts of suicide or self-harm are categorised as

high-risk conversations. Following a laddered risk assessment, texters are supported to stay safe by our trained volunteers and clinical support staff. spunout plays a crucial role in supporting young people in staying safe.

Of the conversations concerning loneliness:

23%

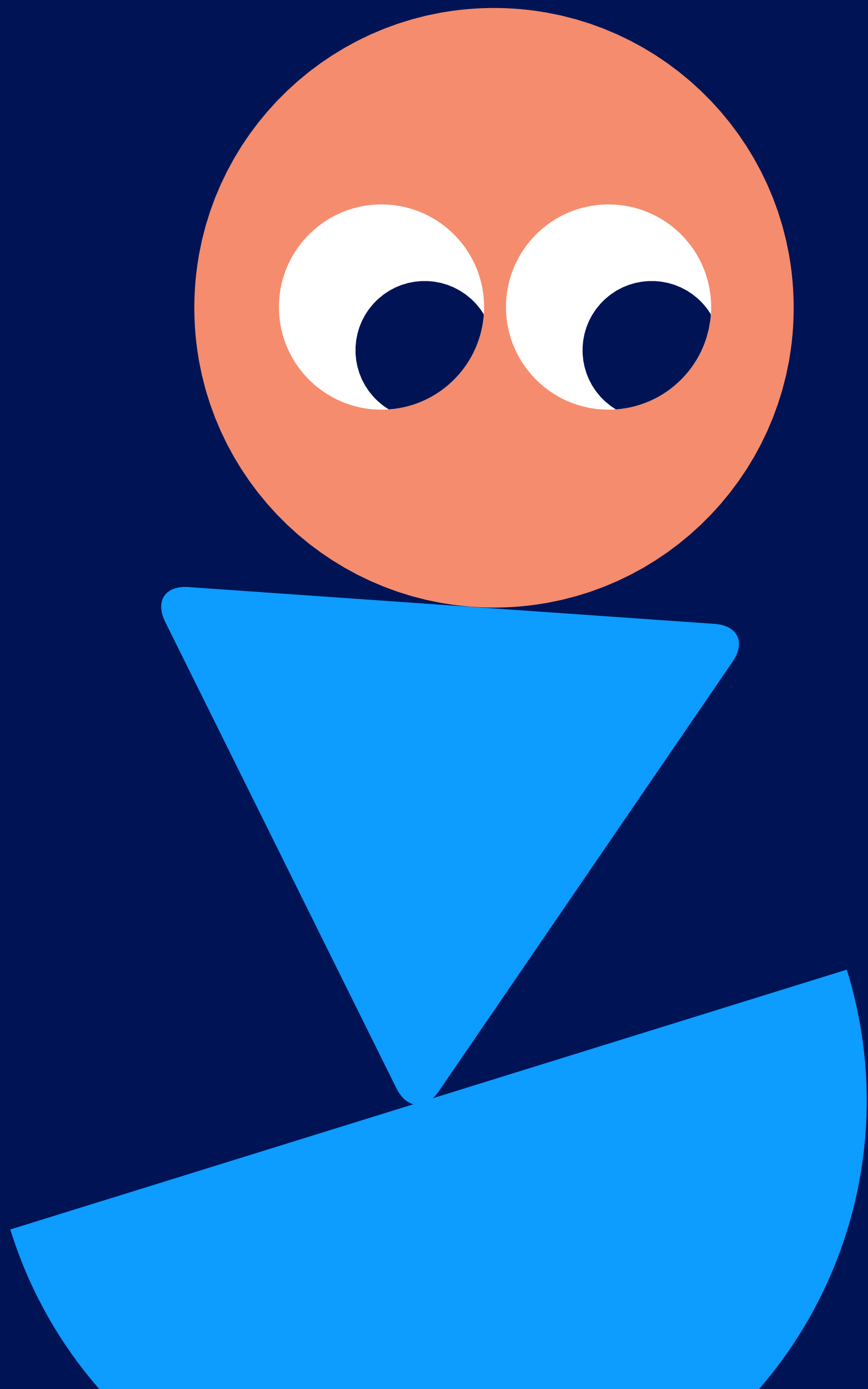
of conversations were categorised as high-risk conversations.

100%

of these high-risk conversations were de-escalated by trained spunout volunteers and texters were supported in staying safe.

“I felt very distressed when the conversation first started, but the volunteer made me feel so calm that I began to feel less stressed out about what’s happened”

“I felt so lonely and helpless at the start of the conversation but being listened to and really trying to understand my situation helped me see that i’m not alone”



03

Co-occurrence & Support

Co-occurrence

When someone reaches out for support, they rarely experience just one emotion or challenge in isolation. Conversations are complex and multifaceted — a person discussing anxiety might simultaneously grapple with stress, while someone feeling lonely may also share concerns about friendships.

Many texters discussed other topics alongside loneliness:

* One conversation can touch on multiple topics—**these are co-occurrences, not exclusive categories**, meaning that percentages do not sum to 100%.

33%

of texters reported anxiety and loneliness

32%

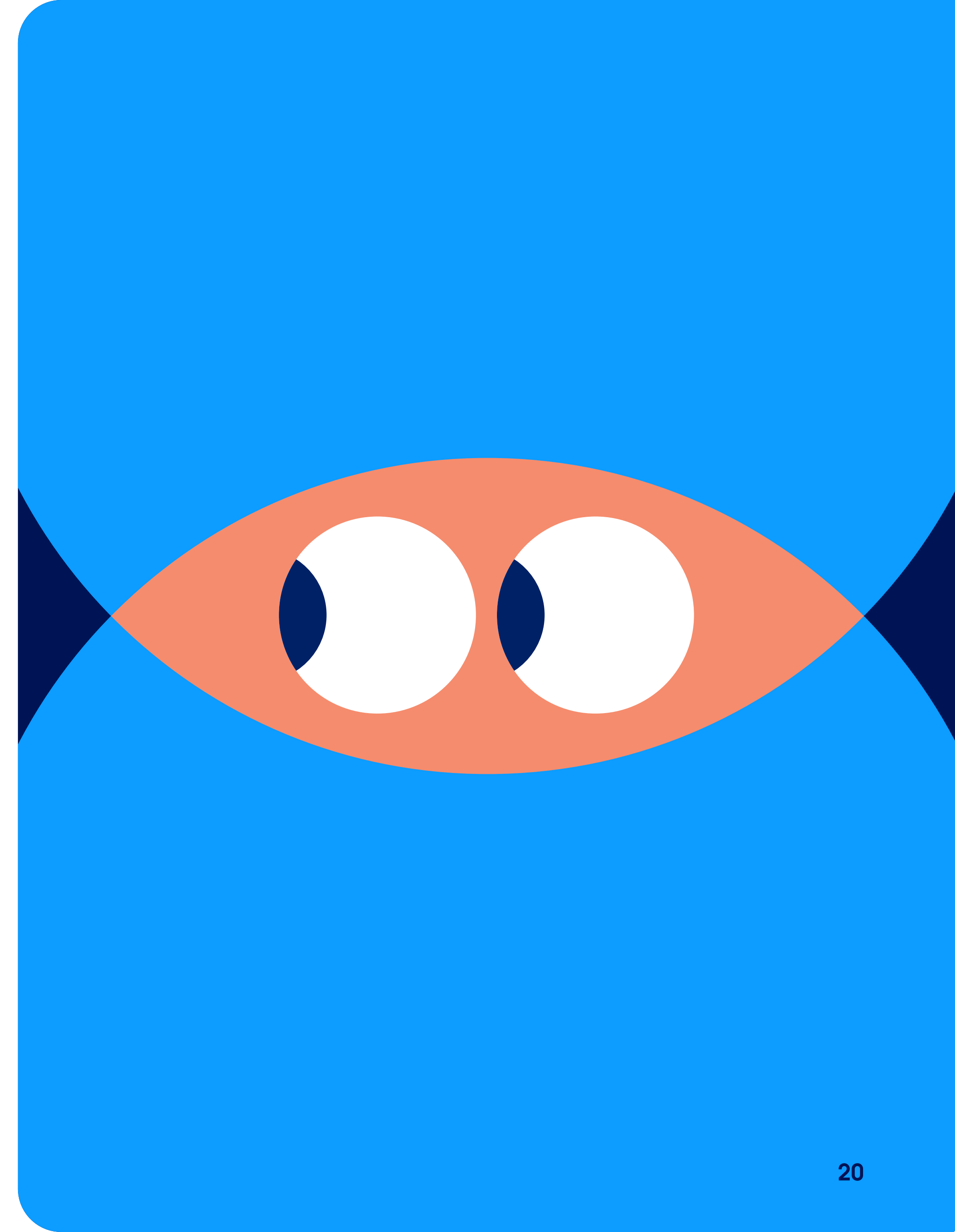
of texters reported sadness and loneliness

29%

of texters reported stress and loneliness

26%

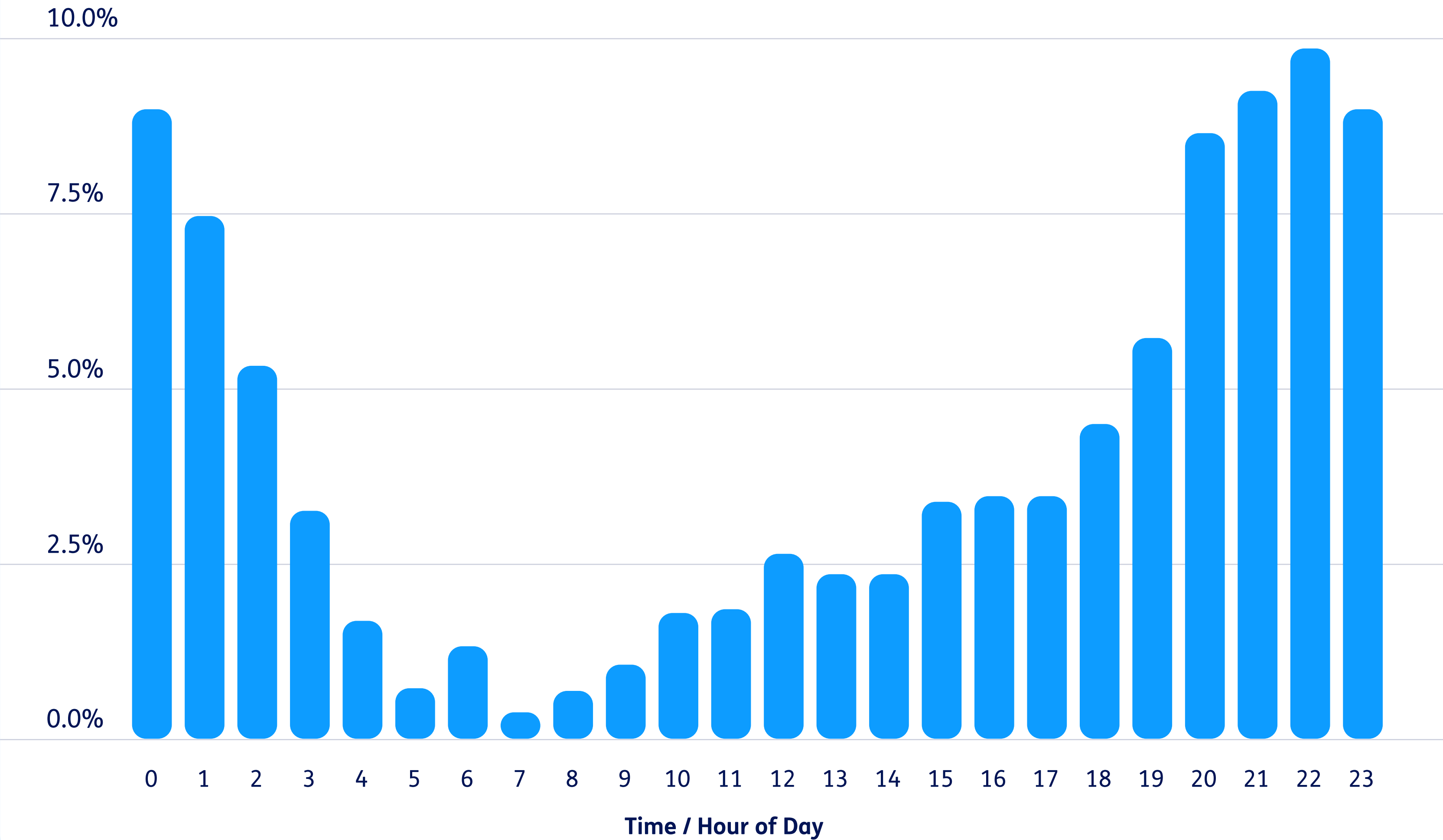
of texters reported friendship and loneliness*



When Support Is Most Needed

Conversations related to loneliness most frequently occurred between the hours of 7pm and 2am, highlighting the crucial role of spunout’s 24/7 Text About It service in supporting young people in Ireland.

Figure 5 Breakdown of peak conversation times



**“I really needed to talk to
someone and you’ve been
there for me, even at these
crazy hours”**

04

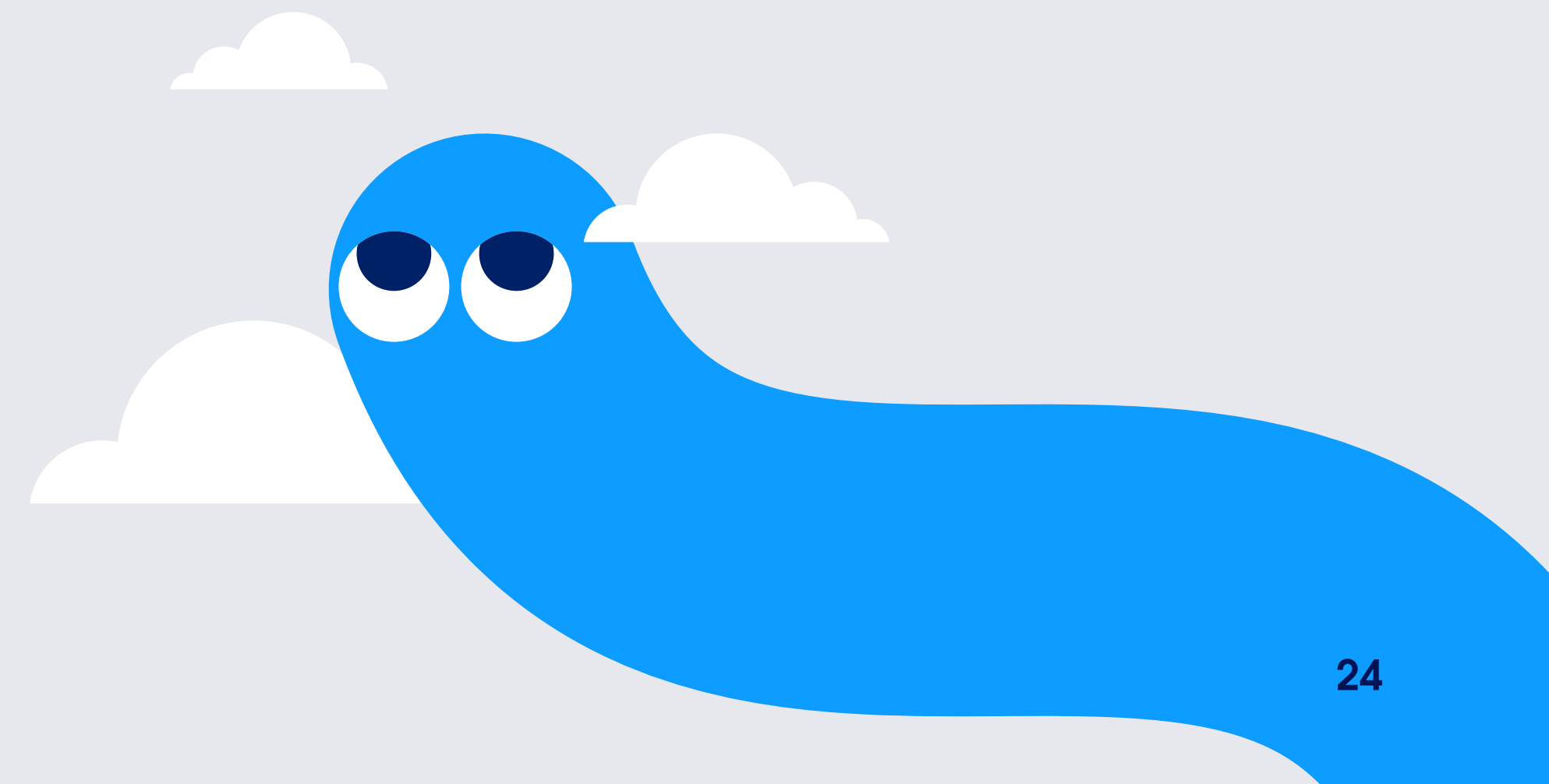
Conclusion

“Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Our conversation was the highlight of my day.”

Conclusion

spunout’s data demonstrates that loneliness is a key concern for young people in Ireland. Approximately 1 in 5 young texters who contact Text About It expressed experiencing loneliness. It rarely occurs in isolation, often presenting alongside other complex feelings of sadness, depression and anxiety, demonstrating that loneliness is part of a broader picture alongside other instances of poor mental health.

These findings highlight the urgent need to recognise loneliness as a public health priority in Ireland. Consistent with global evidence, spunout’s data identifies that conversations relating to loneliness were more common among young adults between the ages 16-24 and 25-34. Targeted interventions are essential to reduce loneliness and improve mental health outcomes.



Our Call To Action

For Policymakers

To reduce the growing harm caused by loneliness we ask Government to:

01

Recognise loneliness as a core public health priority

Include youth loneliness as a challenge to be addressed within mental health and wellbeing strategies, with targeted funding and accountability. We propose the embedding of metrics concerning social connection in national strategies and the development of a National Youth Loneliness Action Plan with clear aims, resources, accountability and most importantly youth input.

02

Support education and early intervention initiatives

Embed emotional literacy and help-seeking skills and awareness in schools, youth services and online spaces, ensuring the inclusion of alternative pathways to social connection for young people not engaged in third-level education.

03

Strengthen all connections

Invest in community, digital and peer-led initiatives that create belonging and real connection for young people, ensuring a strong focus on a settings-based approach, embedding social connection within the everyday environments where young people are.

04

Youth-led solutions

Place young people at the center of understanding the problem and the design and delivery of loneliness prevention activities. Fund and support youth-led initiatives to foster social connection in acceptable settings.

spunout's Commitment

Together, we can ensure that no young person in Ireland feels alone.

01

To Listen: Provide 24/7 digital support and safe spaces for young people to be supported and heard.

02

To Lead with Evidence: Use our data to highlight emerging youth mental health trends.

03

To Advocate: Advocate for policy change that reflects the needs of young people's lived experiences.

04

To Act: Facilitate and support the codesign of solutions with young people.

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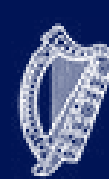
National Office
for Suicide
Prevention



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth



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