

The Social Report

By *Beate Matthies*, Chair, Auckland District Council of Social Services

We have just had the shortest day of the year. The long darkness can be quite depressing for people who leave for work in the morning and return in the evening – especially for those who work in offices without natural light.

Many people are less social during the winter time, and some might withdraw into a kind of winter hole. The isolation of those who live on their own and who feel lonely during the whole year is even worse than in other seasons and this is where the benefits of a good community come in. Communities that engage the lonely, the isolated, and the marginalised.

The *Ministry of Social Development (MSD)* surprises in its **Social Report 2016**¹ with the fact that young people are experiencing the highest level of loneliness! Who would have thought that in this ever so well connected society of ours, in which especially some young people seem to consider their mobile phones as part of their cutlery and wouldn't like to live without, the young people feel more lonely than the older generation.



Here are some results mentioned in the report:

- Those aged 15–24 years had the highest levels of loneliness (16.8 per cent), while those aged 65–74 had the lowest levels (9.6 per cent).
- In 2014, females (15.6 per cent) were more likely than males (12.1 per cent) to report feeling lonely sometimes, most of the time, or always, during the last four weeks.
- Ethnic groups reported similar rates of loneliness in 2014. Those in the European/Other group had a reported rate of 13.2 per

1. socialreport.msd.govt.nz/social-connectedness/loneliness.html

cent, which was similar to the rate for Pacific peoples (13.5 per cent). The rates for Māori and those in the Asian ethnic group were 16.6 per cent and 16.7 per cent respectively.

- People with personal incomes of \$30,000 or less had double the rate of loneliness (17.6 per cent) compared to those with incomes over \$70,000 (8.8 per cent).
- People not living in a family nucleus (18.9 per cent) were more likely than people living as couples to report feeling lonely.

These figures show how important community work is today. It seems like those who are least likely to feel lonely are those who are now retired, who have or had a functioning family life, who have enough money and time to be (socially) active and who, most likely, own the house they live in.

This has been a realistic dream for a few generations, but it might be wishful thinking in the future.

An African proverb says that it takes a village to raise a child – and I think it takes a community to make people feel happy and included!

The ADCOSS forums are focussed on this approach. The forums on *Community Gardens*, on *Age-friendly Cities*, on *Housing for Older People*, on *Intergenerational Dialogues*, and many more.



Thanks to our members who work on the grass roots, ADCOSS offers forums of relevance and we are looking forward to continue this work.

