

Understanding Loneliness

The Friends for Good TimeWeTalked Survey

2019



 TimeWeTalked



friends
for good®

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Understanding Loneliness: The Friends for Good TimeWeTalked Survey.

Executive Summary

Friends for Good is a Melbourne-based not-for-profit organisation and is Australia's first charity focusing solely on loneliness.

We wanted to find out more about people's experiences of loneliness to inform future research and service provision. The TimeWeTalked campaign and on-line survey began in March of 2017 and ended in 2018. Although funding constraints meant the survey could not cover lengthy issues related to loneliness, some key findings were obtained.

A total of 1,745 participants undertook the 10-question anonymous survey. It was advertised on the Friends for Good social media platforms and was distributed through the Victorian Department of Health and Humans Services to seniors on their mailing list.

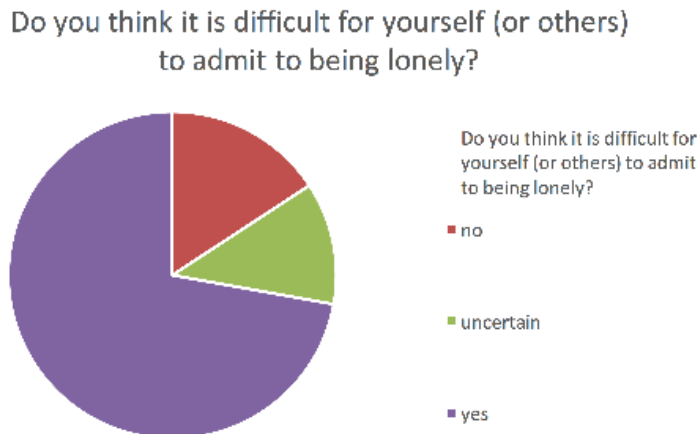
A number of community organisations also distributed the survey and it was advertised in leaflets that were given out in various areas across metropolitan Melbourne. Using this convenience sampling method, it is hoped that we have gained a reasonably varied sample of a cross-section of society, although we did not gain detailed demographic data.

Majority of respondents (73%) were female and respondents were of different age groups with the largest group represented being the 60-69 years of age (this was 43% of our sample).

Interestingly, 72% of respondents thought it was difficult to admit being lonely, this confirmed what other research suggests, namely that there is a stigma surrounding this issue, this may have implications for people being able to talk about the issue and access services.

Results

Figure 1: Breakdown of responses to whether people think it is difficult to admit being lonely.



Many people reported having felt lonely with around a third of respondents (34.2%) identifying as lonely at the time of undertaking the survey.

As can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, loneliness also impacts a sizable percentage of respondents often (48.3%), with a large majority responding that they have felt lonely at some point in their lives (88.4%).

Figure 2: Responses to how often people feel lonely.

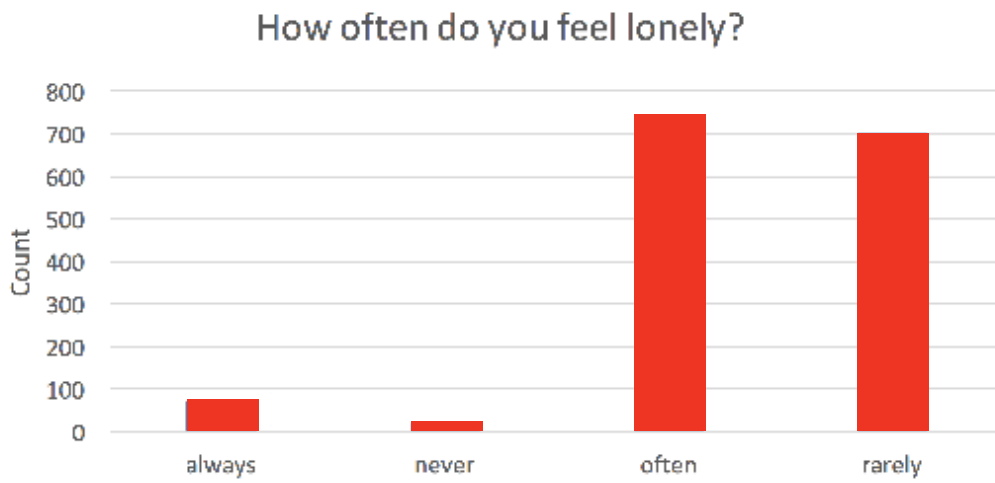
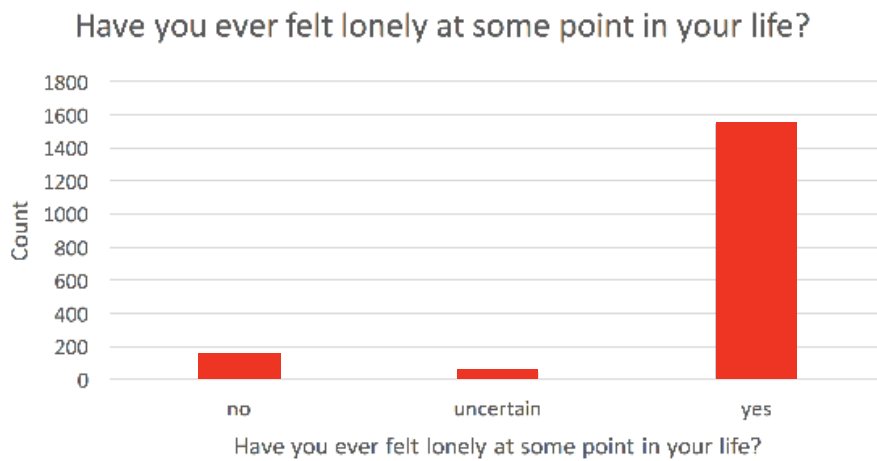


Figure 3: Responses to whether people have felt lonely at some point in their lives.



The qualitative data responses were also very powerful.

We asked people to define what loneliness is; many common themes emerged such as a lack of connectivity, feelings of sadness and depression and sense of hopelessness.

Some responses include defining loneliness as:

- “Depressing, want to just kill myself”
- “Not sharing a life with my late husband”
- “Thinking that there is no-one who cares about me thus my life must be a total waste.”
- “Living on my own and often not communicating with anyone else for several days a week”
- “Sad, no one cares, out of sight out of mind, invisible”
- “Having the feeling that you are of no use to anyone and that no one wants your company”
- “Alone at home, especially in the evenings and nights. Nobody to share the days experience with.”

When we asked people about potential solutions for loneliness 18.3% left this section blank or indicated they were unsure. Some of the qualitative answers to this question included:

- “Die”
- “Wish I knew”
- “If I knew that I’d be a millionaire”
- “Talk your sorrow out .. cry whenever it makes you”
- “I don’t know – it’s not easy to go out and meet people”
- “Suffer”

It seems that solutions to the problem may be complex and difficult to determine.

Discussion

Overall, the survey confirmed information gained from anecdotal evidence and our own experience working in the not-for-profit sector. That is, many people feel lonely and it is a difficult thing for people to talk about.

The many negative feelings and problematic experiences associated with loneliness are having a very detrimental impact on some people's lives. In addition, many of the respondents do not have any ideas about how to overcome the lonely situation they find themselves in.

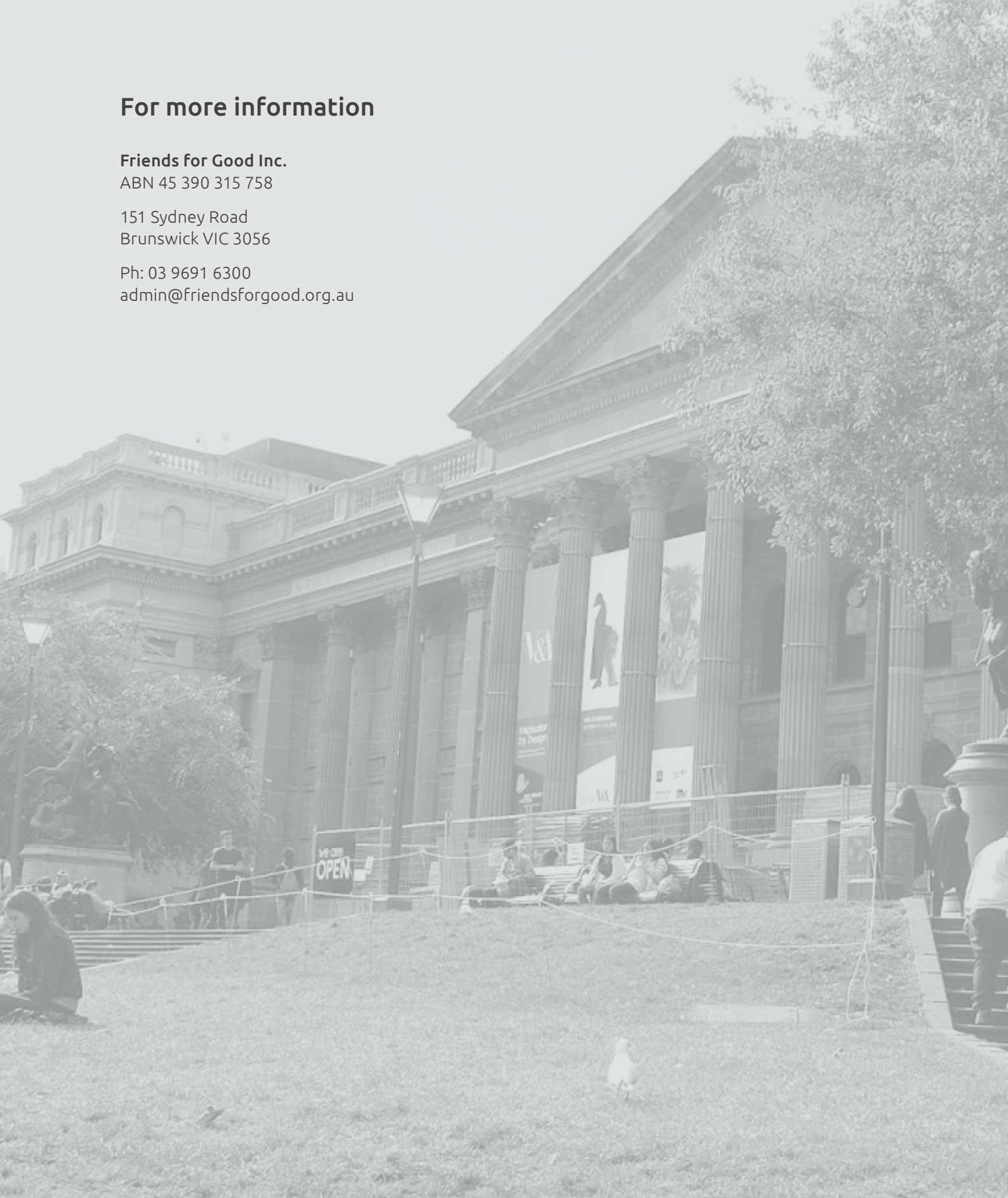
The TimeWeTalked survey is, we hope, the first of many research endeavours to find out more about Australians experiences of loneliness. We see this as a pilot study that can be used to inform more in depth research using representative samples.

For more information

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