

**Submission
No 16**

**INQUIRY INTO PREVALENCE, CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF
LONELINESS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Sandy Loyall, I'm a qualified Counsellor seeing clients from my home-office in Bangalow, near Byron Bay. My expertise is Mental Well-being.

I would like to contribute this information for your research.

A quick summary: In a nutshell, when we look more deeply into the feeling of loneliness, we find that it doesn't stem from the mere fact of being alone; it arises from the thoughts, beliefs and judgments that we accidentally attach to our solitude. When we're alone, it's our interpretation of that state - whether we see it as isolation, inadequacy, or a sign of something lacking - that directly creates the feeling of loneliness in our bodies. If we perceive being alone as a negative experience or equate it with being unloved or unwanted, the uncomfortable feeling of loneliness can set in. However, if we view solitude as an opportunity for self-reflection, growth, or peace, it can become a fulfilling experience instead. It's not the state of being alone that determines loneliness, but the meaning we give to it in our minds. This is why two (or 200!) different people having the same direct experience of being alone, can have a completely different psychological experience.

Why is it so important to understand this?

It can be incredibly empowering and transformational when people see, or “understand”, the role of their own thinking in their experience of life.

If you're someone who is required to spend a lot of time alone, this insight allows you to shift your perspective and change how you experience your solitude. Instead of feeling trapped by negative thoughts, you can recognise that these thoughts are not fixed truths - they're transient interpretations which your mind has constructed, that you have the choice to ignore; you can allow them to pass, which is the innate nature of our thoughts.

By understanding this, and dropping your negative mindset, you can transform solitude into a time for self-care, creativity, or personal growth. This understanding can reduce feelings of loneliness, making your alone time more peaceful and fulfilling. It can also help you build resilience, as you realise that your emotional well-being is innate, it's within the control of your own body/mind, not dependent on external circumstances. In essence, this awareness fosters a sense of empowerment and contentment in your own company.

Additionally, once the negative feelings (that have been generated by the negative thoughts) have subsided, the mental “bandwidth” that is freed can allow new ideas to arise, ideas that may result in more connection within the community, if that is what is desired. The bottom line is, we're alone because of the choices we're making. This understanding fosters the making of new choices, a capacity we all innately possess as human beings.

This approach is called Three Principles Psychology (TPP). You can find peer-reviewed links on the related Wikipedia page. It is currently being taught in a variety of institutions all around the world, including primary schools.

So, how could this understanding be implemented to reduce loneliness in Australia?

Strategic approaches aimed at reshaping how people perceive and experience solitude could be introduced.

This, from ChatGPT:

1. Public Awareness Campaigns:

Educational Programs: Develop campaigns that educate the public on the nature of loneliness, emphasising the idea that it's not just about being alone but about how we think about being alone. These could include workshops, online courses, and social media campaigns.

Storytelling and Testimonials: Share stories of people who have successfully reframed their experience of being alone, showing how changing their mindset transformed their feelings of loneliness into something positive.

2. Mental Health Support:

Counselling utilising Three Principles Psychology (TPP): Offer accessible mental health services that focus on helping individuals understand how their thoughts about solitude are. Government-funded TPP programs could specifically target those with negative thought patterns associated with loneliness.

Self-Help Resources: Create and distribute self-help materials, such as guides, apps, or podcasts based on TPP.

3. Community Building and Social Connectivity:

Virtual Communities and Support Groups: Fund online platforms where individuals can connect with others who share their interests, helping them feel connected even when physically alone. These groups could include facilitated discussions about the nature of loneliness and the power of mindset.

Mindfulness and Wellness Programs: Promote and fund mindfulness, meditation, and wellness programs that teach people how to be comfortable in their own company and find joy in solitude.

4. Training for Professionals:

Workshops for Healthcare Providers, Psychologists and Social Workers: Train professionals in TPP, in recognising the cognitive aspects of loneliness and equipping them to guide individuals toward a healthier understanding of their thought patterns.

Educational Initiatives for Educators: Integrate TPP lessons on mental well-being and the psychology of loneliness into school curricula to teach younger generations about the role of their thinking during solitude.

5. Promoting Positive Narratives:

Media and Arts Partnerships: Collaborate with media and arts organisations to create content (films, series, art projects) that normalises and even celebrates solitude as a time for self-discovery, creativity, and personal growth.

Social Media Challenges: Launch social media challenges that encourage people to share how they positively spend their time alone, shifting public perception about what it means to be alone.

6. Supportive Environments:

Safe Public Spaces: Design and fund public spaces that encourage solo activities, such as reading nooks, meditation areas, and art corners, where people can enjoy their own company without stigma.

Solo-Friendly Events: Organise events that encourage people to attend alone, such as solo dining experiences or "silent retreats," helping to normalise and celebrate solitude in social contexts.

Impact of the Initiative:

Empowerment: By helping individuals understand that loneliness is influenced by their thoughts, and that their feelings are nothing to be afraid of, the initiative empowers people to take control of their emotional well-being.

Reduction in Mental Health Issues: With a focus on "innate well-being", the initiative could reduce the incidence of depression and anxiety associated with loneliness.

Cultural Shift: Over time, this approach could foster a cultural shift where solitude is seen not as something to be feared, but as an opportunity for growth, creativity, and self-care.

Improved Social Connections: By encouraging healthier mindsets about being alone, people may also form more meaningful connections when they do engage with others, as they approach relationships from a place of contentment rather than need.

This holistic approach addresses loneliness from multiple angles, helping to reduce its prevalence by changing the narrative around what it means to be human, and alone.

Sandy Loyall (I am available and keen to discuss this with you!)