



## Extended Research Article

# Social network intervention for loneliness and social isolation in a community setting: the PALS cluster-RCT

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**Disclaimer:** This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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## Plain language summary

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## Plain language summary

Loneliness is a negative feeling relating to desired level of social contact with others. Around 30% of the United Kingdom population experience loneliness. Feeling lonely and isolated has a negative impact on a person's emotional and physical health, but one way to tackle loneliness is through connecting with community resources which can help protect against loneliness.

This study aimed to recruit people experiencing loneliness or isolation, working with community organisations around Southampton and Liverpool. Half of the people in the study were given access to a tool called PALS ('project about loneliness and social networks'), designed to map a person's social network and connect them to local community groups and activities.

We looked at the impact of PALS on mental health and other health outcomes, compared to 'usual care' for the organisation. We also looked at both quality of life and costs to see whether PALS offers value for money (i.e. is 'cost-effective'). We looked at how PALS was delivered, and interviewed participants about their experiences of loneliness.

We recruited 469 adults from 44 different organisations. Our findings show that it would be possible to sustain delivery of an intervention for loneliness in a community setting if organisations were able to work together to overcome resource issues.

However, we found that although acceptable, PALS did not 'work' to significantly impact on mental health or loneliness. PALS was cheap to deliver but we did not find evidence that it offers better value for money compared to usual care. We do not recommend it becomes national public health policy.

Participant interviews highlighted a link between loneliness and a lack of confidence and skills for building emotional connections with others. Connecting to new community activities was also impacted by social factors like availability in the local area and access to transport. Future interventions should include a multistep approach focused around these areas.

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## This article

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