

# The Growing Need to Connect and Support Silently Disengaged Youth

Graeme Dingle Foundation evaluations of our Project K and Career Navigator community models revealed a growing concern in New Zealand communities around young people who are becoming increasingly disengaged. Our timeline was September 2020 - June 2021.

## Negative Events & Distress:

Our research revealed that in mid adolescence a negative stressful event (such as peer rejection, learning difficulties, death of a close family member, or a move to a new city) contributed to a negative appraisal of school and their sense of belonging.

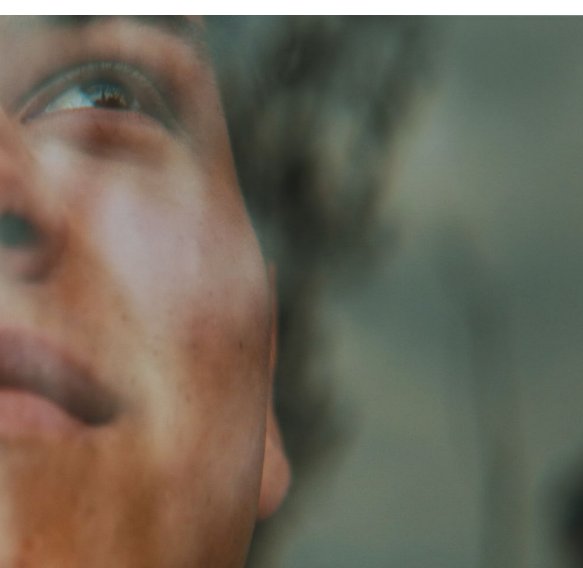
“His way of hiding from dyslexia is to be a clown... so people won't look much beyond that.”



## Disengagement:

Disengaged young people spend less time with their peers, become disengaged from school and learning, and from activities they would usually enjoy. As they start to socially withdraw they restrict opportunities to experience success and positive reinforcement that can challenge their negative self-appraisal. We found that young people who have 'silently' disengaged have decreased confidence and motivation and increased anxiety.

“Very much in his own bubble, if he is not in his room, he is hanging out with me or other family members. He doesn't have a huge social life, like kids his age...”



## Social Anxiety & Withdrawal:

However, they have strong values and a positive connection with parent/caregivers who are struggling to break the cycle of disengagement. When young people experience peer rejection and loneliness they are at more risk of developing affective conditions such as anxiety.

Research has found that adolescents with anxiety disorders are more likely to stop attending classes, stop socialising, avoid social situations, and leave school prematurely.<sup>1</sup>

Older adolescents (16-24's) say the fear that their social anxiety will impact their ability to function, thrive and connect with others, reducing their motivation to seek employment.<sup>2</sup> **18%** of early leavers remain disengaged from education, training and work their entire adult lives.<sup>3</sup>

“Of recent time she had troubles with her peers at school. She had a terrible year last year, in a really general sense of bullying and I think, we think the anxiety piece attributes...”



## The Pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have exacerbated this situation, increasing social isolation and having a negative impact on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of many young people. An Education Review Office (ERO) survey of secondary school students, principals, and teachers found that COVID-19 has decreased student attendance and enjoyment of learning, increasing the risk of more disengaged young people.<sup>4</sup>

“More active and being able to talk to people in real life again because I used to be very talkative but the past two years, I sort of forgot how to speak... For the first time in two years, it helped me get the courage to see my friends again.”



## We know our programmes work!

A theory of change process was used to explore how youth development programmes support successful outcomes for participants. For youth who have developed anxiety and a fear of failure interventions help them to progressively, and with safety nets, move toward greater independence and self-understanding.

Graeme Dingle Foundation's programmes provide a psychologically safe and inclusive group environment where participants can build competence, confidence, and connection. The young people are taken outside the relative comfort of their homes and take part in a social experience where supportive adults and friendship groups encourage and foster personal growth.

“Because of the past two years, I've just been sitting in my house... .. When this opportunity came up, I just really thought I had to do it, or I'll get nowhere.”

### Find out more:

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<sup>1</sup> M V Ameringen, C Mancini, P Farvolden (2003) The impact of anxiety disorders on educational achievement. Journal of Anxiety Disorders, Volume 17, Issue 5, Pages 561-571, Retrieved October 2021 from [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0887-6185\(02\)00228-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0887-6185(02)00228-1)

<sup>2</sup> Workplace Identity and relationships. Retrieved [September 2021], from [https://ntgc.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Psychology\\_RS\\_WORK-PLACE-IDENTITY-AND-RELATIONSHIP.pdf](https://ntgc.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Psychology_RS_WORK-PLACE-IDENTITY-AND-RELATIONSHIP.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The conversation. Leaving school early means you're likely never return to study and training in adult life. <https://theconversation.com/leaving-school-early-means-youre-likely-never-to-return-to-study-and-training-in-adult-life-79346>

<sup>4</sup> ERO Govt.NZ. Learning in a Covid-19 world: The impact of Covid-19 on schools ISBN 978-1-99-000235-9 <https://ero.govt.nz/search?keywords=Disengaged+and+Covid-19> Accessed 16/02/2022

All verbatim comments are directly from Project K or Career Navigator Community students