

Friendzone

Preliminary Insights from the Friendship Research Project

WWW.FRIENDZONE.SG

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Hi I'm Grace!

Co-founder of
Friendzone SG

:)



Career preparatory
workshops

Up to \$500 worth of
training benefits with
UTAP

Up to \$600 FairPrice e-
Vouchers with INCOME
insurance plan

@friendzonesg

building **Friendships** — across all **Zones** of life
and social capital through events, workshops,
& content creation



Friendzone's Journey (since 2018)

In university, I lived on campus and experienced a strong sense of community support.

Moving back home after university, I realised I didn't know anyone who lived near me & didn't have friends around that I could rely on or hangout with.



Started in neighbourhoods



Cozy, welcoming environment



Pre-assigned small groups

Friendzone Event Experience: Facilitated Conversations



Intentionally designed conversation formats facilitate the exchange of experiences and opinions



Trained & relatable facilitators drawn from our community



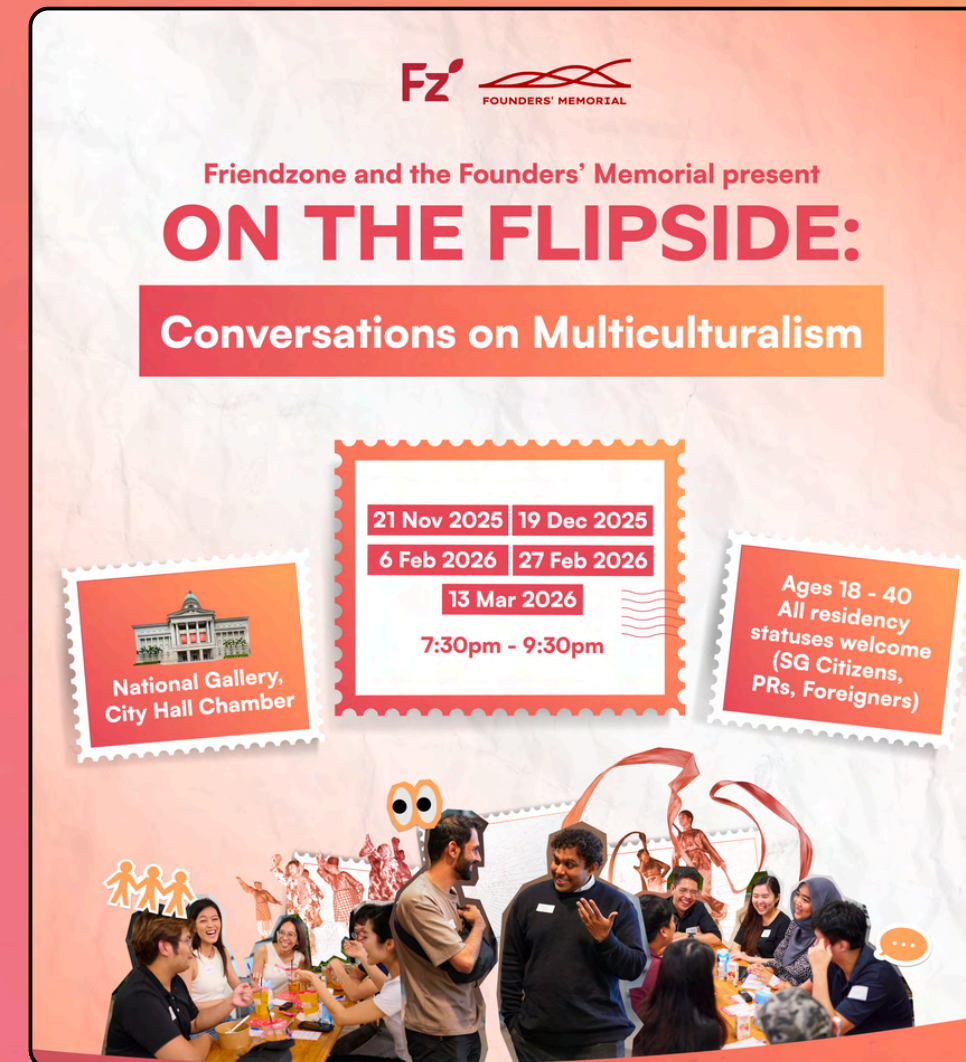
Bridges demographics (gender, race, SES) & personalities (introvert, extrovert)

Friendzone's Growth



Focus Groups & Community Engagement for various demographics

- Gender (e.g. Women)
- Life-stage (e.g. Parents)
- Neighbourhoods
- Educational Institutes (e.g. SUSS)
- Industries
- Ethnic Groups (e.g. Indians)
- Topics of interest (e.g. Heritage)



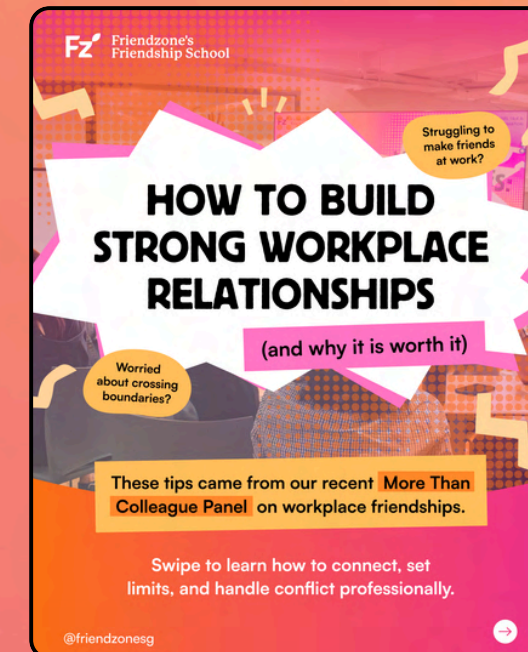
Integrating locals & foreigners through conversation
(in partnership with Founders' Memorial
- National Heritage Board)



Exhibiting at the Social Enterprise World
Forum in Taipei (2025)

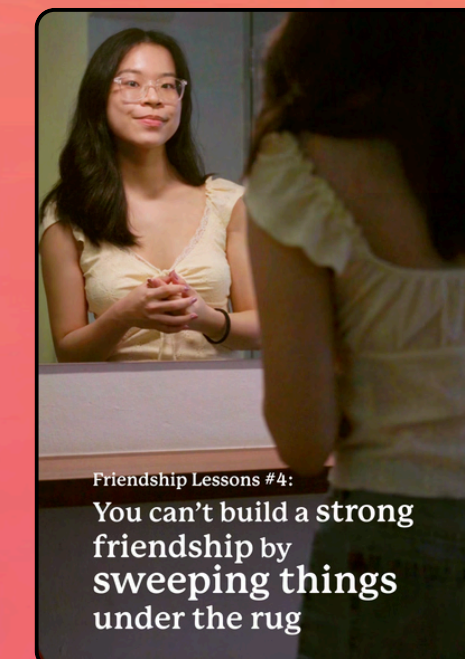
Friendship School & Content Creation

Workshops and Content to equip young adults with knowledge, skills, and attitude to navigate friendships in different areas of their life



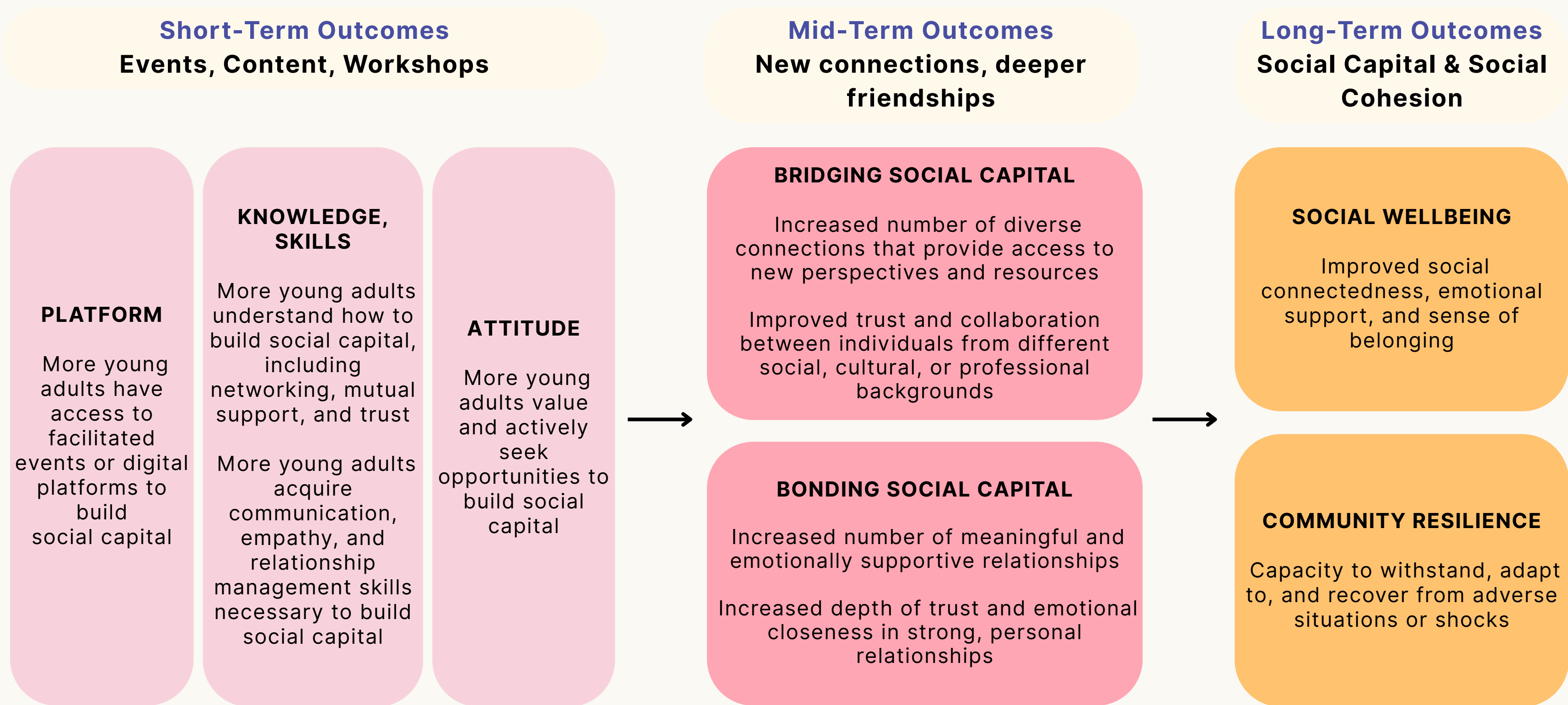
Workshop topics include:

- Navigating friendship conflict
- Networking skills

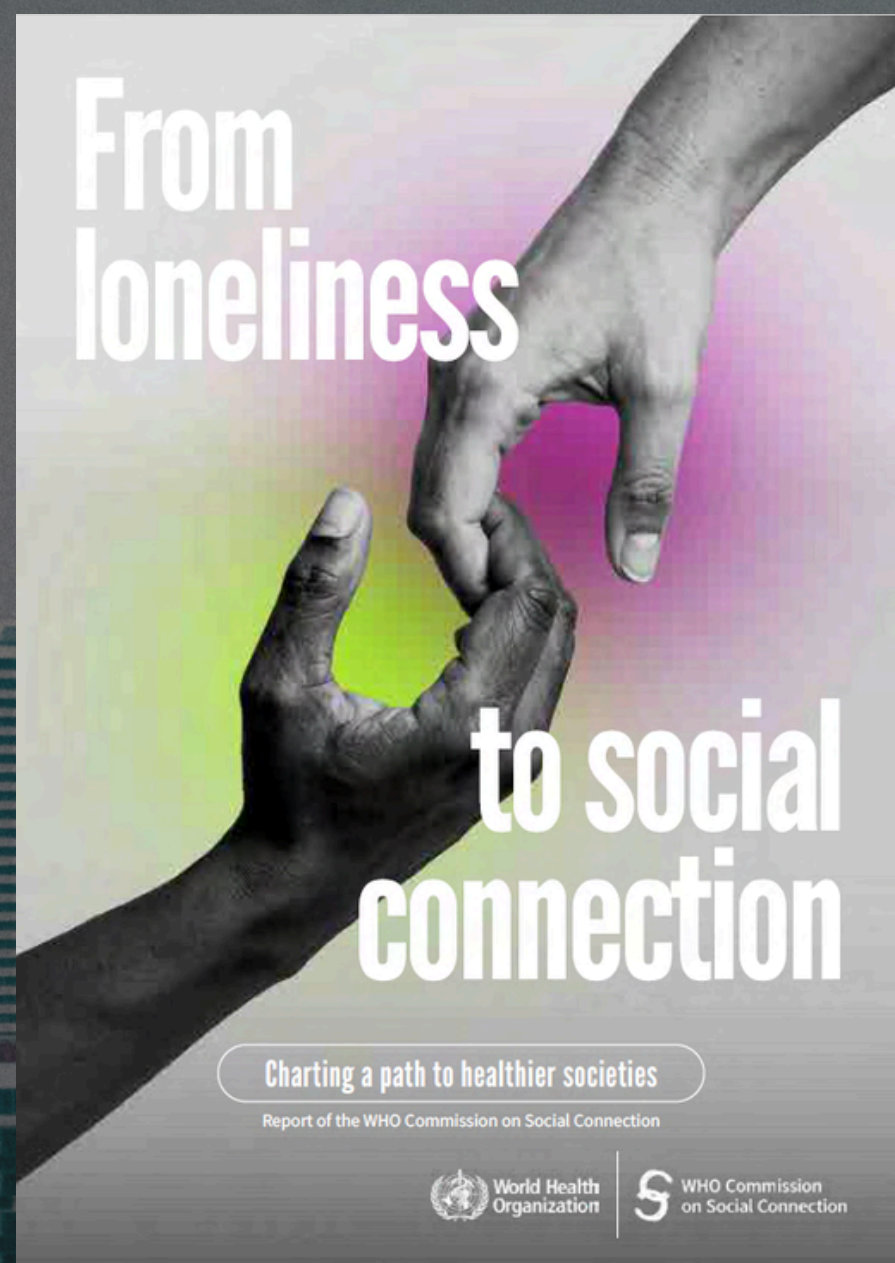


Instagram carousels and short video content

Friendzone's Theory of Change



Why Our Work Matters: Social Disconnection – A Public Health Crisis



The World Health Organization (2025) reports that:

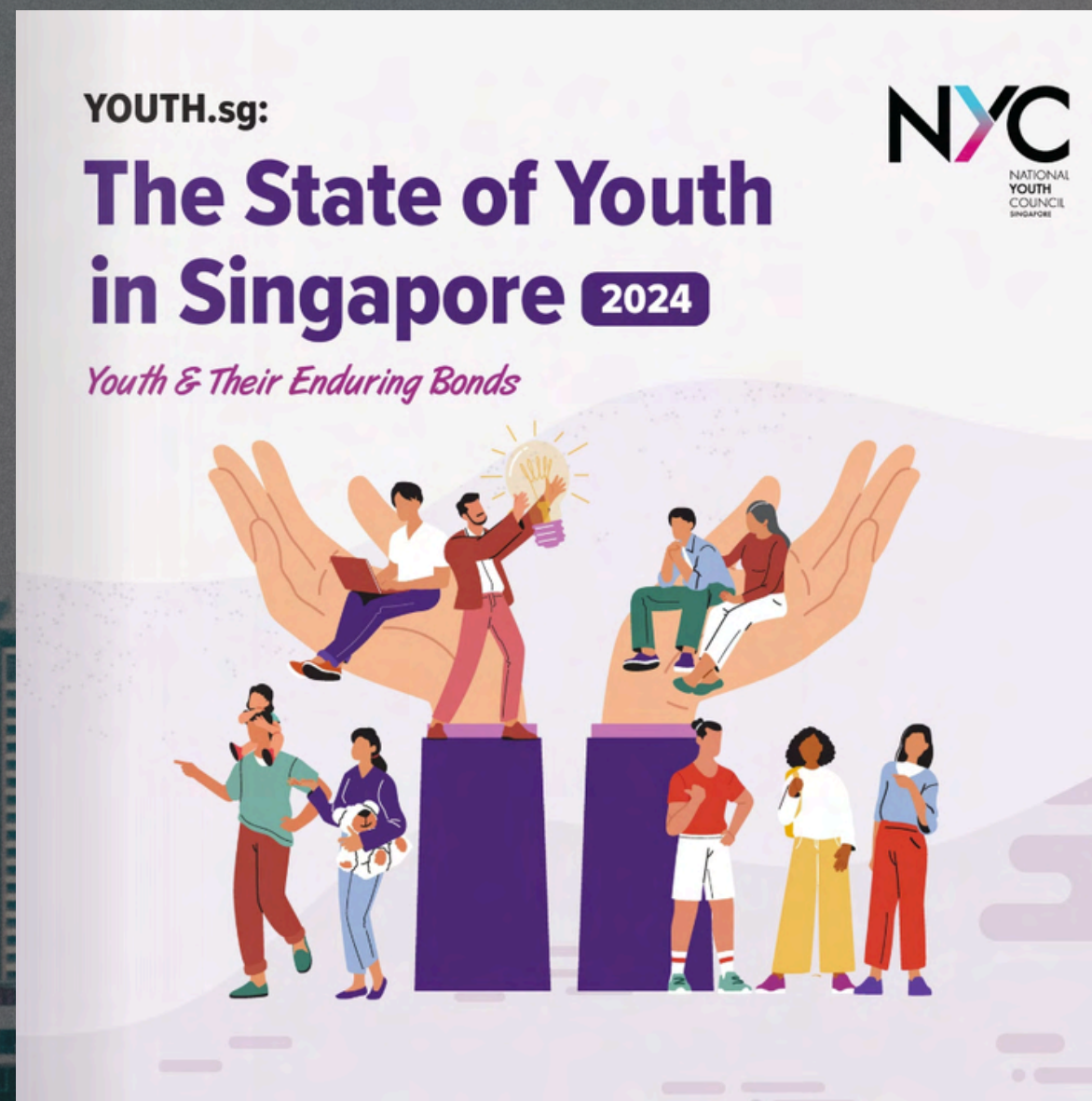
1 in 6 people globally experience loneliness

contributing to over **871,000 deaths** annually (2014-2019) with significant impacts on mental and physical well-being.

Digital technologies are drivers of social connection, social isolation and loneliness (p.57)

- Enables communication, community-building and support
- Increases isolation when replacing or interfering with in-person interactions
- Negative impacts are linked to how, why, and by whom technology is used, not just usage itself

Why Our Work Matters: Social Disconnection – A Public Health Crisis



In Singapore, the National Youth Council's 2022 survey reveals that:

Almost 20% of youths (aged 15-34) have only one or no close friends

As social circles shrink and diversity in friendships declines, young people are increasingly disconnected — from their peers, their neighbourhoods, and wider society.

<https://www.nyc.gov.sg/research-engagement/youth-studies/national-youth-survey>

Key Observations from 500+ Events & 15,000+ Participants



Some participants experience challenges in social interaction, including:

- Difficulties in initiating or sustaining conversation
- Challenges interpreting non-verbal cues such as tone and body language
- Skipping expected steps in social interaction

These challenges point to **gaps in social skills**

Prior research has also found associations between difficulties in social communication and interaction skills, and higher reported levels of loneliness (Segrin & Kinney, 1995; Segrin, 2000).



Friendship Research Project (2025): The State of Youth Friendships

Scope

- Understand how youths form & sustain friendships today
- Focus on friendships in everyday life, including the impact of digital interactions, and lack of shared physical spaces (i.e. third places) for interaction

Scale

- 700 youths
- July 2025 — March 2026

Methodology

- Focus group discussions, during which participants also make new friends
- Supported by National Youth Council (SG Youth Plan)



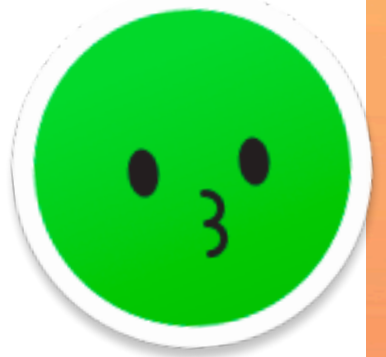
Insight 1: Tech forms acquaintances, not friends

Digital platforms have made it easier to transition from strangers to acquaintances

- However, moving from acquaintances to true friendship faces new barriers
- People rely on small digital signals (e.g., reply speed, tone, message style, and grammar) to assess sincerity, safety, and trust

Online spaces are prone to misinterpretation

- Users quickly judge others based on limited cues
- Many are cautious about deepening friendships from online spaces
- Asynchronous communication can encourage overthinking



Insight 2: Friendship burnout alert!

Digital tools have increased emotional labour of friendships

Emotional labour in the digital age

- Social media creates an unspoken expectation to always be available, leading to invisible emotional labour in maintaining friendships.
- Micro-actions (replying, reacting, acknowledging messages) have become expected, but require constant time and energy
- New source of tension in friendships

Pressure to stay responsive

- Even when tired and overwhelmed
- Coping mechanisms (muting chats, delaying replies, rationing energy)
- Maintenance burden affects both close and casual friends



Hey! How are you?

4:20PM ✓✓

Insight 3: Social media distorts the perception of friendship quality



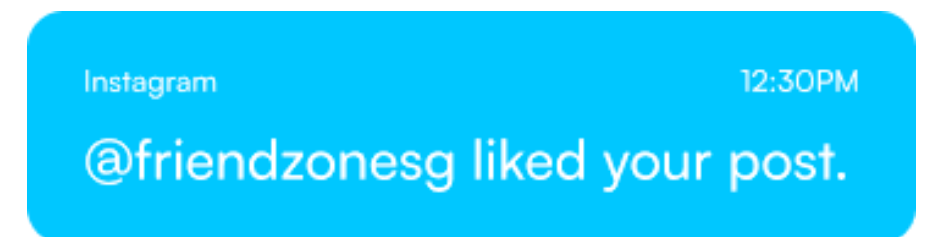
Friendships are increasingly assessed by what is visible online

- Digital updates (stories, posts) allow us to keep up with friends' lives
- Yet these don't show the full picture



Online activity has become a tool to gauge perceived closeness

- Public responses (likes, comments, posts) are seen as indicators of care and effort, yet can feel transactional and performative
- Private check-ins are still important



Rise in Parasocial relationships

- Feeling closer to an acquaintance due to frequent online interaction or viewing updates



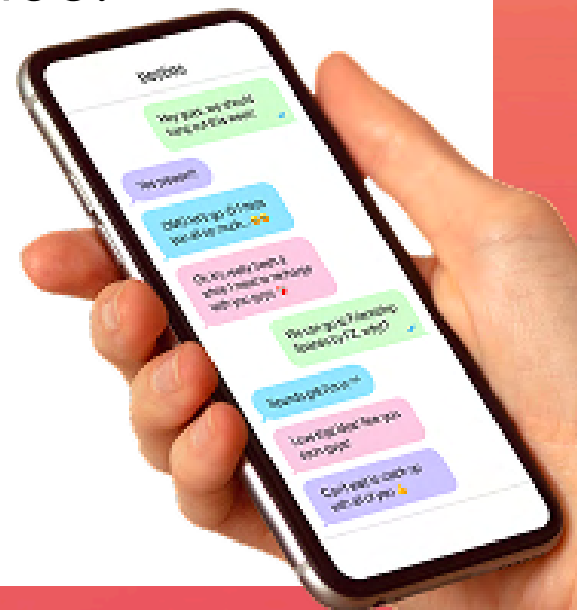
What This Tells Us About Friendships Today

From our sessions, we observe that:

- Friendships are not weakening, but becoming more complex to maintain.
- Digital tools increase access, but also raise expectations.
- Emotional effort is now spread across many small online interactions.
- Offline time remains the anchor for trust, meaning, and cohesion.

Taken together, these insights point to opportunities to rethink how friendships are supported in practice:

- **Designing new opportunities:** Prioritise offline settings that allow time and depth to develop.
- **Designing interactions:** Reduce pressure for constant responsiveness and performance.
- **Designing support:** Build people's social skills and confidence, not just events
- or opportunities to meet.



What's Next: Designing for Stronger Friendships

These insights are shaping how Friendzone designs experiences in 2026:

Designing a Third Place

Supporting low-pressure, repeated interaction among youth, so friendships can grow over time rather than through one-off encounters.



Friendship School

Supporting young adults to build the skills and confidence needed to initiate, sustain, and navigate friendships in everyday life.



What's Next: Publishing the Friendship Research Project

Summarising insights & putting this up as a report on our website!

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Thank you!

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