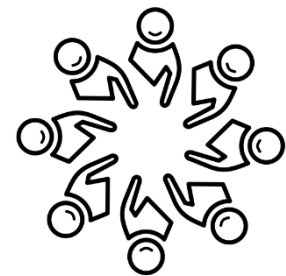


The Great Transition

Reconnected Project



Note of Intent

Synopsis: Loneliness of children living within a broken family environment is a pressing issue that has received minimal attention from public authorities and social stakeholders even in the most advanced countries. As a response, this document aims to:

- Document and analyze the problem.
- Suggest a practical methodology and a solution to contribute in fixing it.
- Assess its potential positive impacts and risks.
- Identify the execution requirements in terms of organizational and financial aspects.

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Problem:

Environmental factors, specifically family and community shape a child's vulnerability (OECD 2019). The family environment, once impacted from divorce, single parent families, or newly blended families can play a crucial role in a child's development. Further, the surrounding community environment, such as a schools and neighborhoods, are also major factors contributing to the development of children as they are often considered "secondary" places of consistency and safety for children. Consequently, "family ties" are becoming weaker and more individuals are living alone." (McPartland, 2013). Per UNICEF, 13.5% of children in France feel they are not well integrated within their families, 20.5% feel they are not well integrated within their neighborhood, and 16.7% feel they are not well integrated within their school environment (UNICEF France, 2013). These statistics result in identified increase in loneliness of children in one-parent families and broken families.

Further, divorce has been shown to diminish a child's future competence in all areas of life, including family relationships, education, emotional well-being, and future earning power (Anderson, 2014). Children are our future, their lack of self-confidence from the minimal support some may need during these difficult times can shape their mentality and greatly impact how they view relationships and deal with life challenges. Moreover, children of divorce are also particularly at risk of loneliness, they may feel like few understand their unique hurts and frustrations, and they may not feel comfortable expressing their true feelings even to people they love (Tanskanen, Anttila, 2016). The integration of this population within their school and their neighborhood is highly conditioned by their success in feeling integrated within their families first. The trajectory of an individual's future happiness and fulfillment is determined by 15% of what happens during her/his adolescence years spent with family (UNICEF, 2013). Much research has been conducted based on this theory and validates our thinking that family structure can be a contributor to loneliness (Zaidi, Morgan, 2017).

Early investment in education, health and families yields high returns later in life as well positioned children in turn become productive and functioning contributors to society. Direct investments in low-income children's health and education generate the highest pay-off, with direct benefits seen in the long run through increased tax revenue and lower social transfers (OECD 2019). Children do not choose the families they are brought into and further, not all children receive equal access to resources and support. Nonetheless, access to education is equal to all children in France and therefore, if parents or immediate family cannot provide proper support during these difficult times for children, access to help should be provided by one of the second communities – the schools.

Therefore, the objective is to support children aged 14 to 18 years in France feeling lonely as living within an evolving or broken family structure, in a secure manner by involving relevant stakeholders (parents, schools, psychological counselors).

Proposed concept:

Given that students already spend a significant part of their day at school, integrating a solution within the academic environment would be the most effective way to deal with the issue. Therefore, our proposed solution consists in designing and integrating an effective system to public high schools with an aim to identify, track, support and provide mentorship to children aged 14 to 18 suffering from loneliness resulting from their family broken or evolving structure.

The Methodology:

- **Assessment & Identification:** Using our loneliness survey to measure the loneliness of the school population, with an emphasis on the students' family structure.
- **Guidance:** Use a system of counselors, coaches, or teachers trained to provide guidance to at-risk students
- **Action:** Utilize the information gained from the survey, and the interaction with mentors to improve the current mental state of students.
 - **Integration:** through school's existing extra-curricular programs such as sports and arts to allow students to participate in group activities that may help them overcome feelings of loneliness and stress and build healthy relationships with peers.
 - **Instruction:** Instructing at-risk or affected students about various coping mechanisms and techniques to recognize, acknowledge and combat their problems. For instance, podcasts about how to deal with stressful situations at home or at school, relaxing activities such as yoga and meditation, courses on how to deal with stress and build social relationships.
 - **Feedback:** Use the loneliness survey to re-assess and recalibrate.

"Reconnected" is the software platform that will help in the implementation of the proposed methodology. Students will do a short 10-minute assessment on the platform at school once every month (Appendix 1). Guidance counsellors can then view a summary of the general state of loneliness within their school environment via the combined loneliness score for the school. Counsellors can further slice the information by viewing it by year of the students' study, gender, and questions on the loneliness survey.

Once the assessment is done, students identified as feeling lonely above the normal average will be marked as to benefit from guidance. The school can act on this information by organizing and nudging these students to join certain courses, activities or coaching sessions. To protect students' privacy, access to individual scores or answers of students will be restricted to few relevant stakeholders towards which students at-risk will be directed.

Expected positive impacts:

The project aims at achieving direct and indirect positive impacts:

- Identifying children feeling lonely and those at risk of feeling so, through the Loneliness Assessment Test (LAT).
- Caring for children in need by providing them with support from professionals at school and an affordable access to mental health-care professionals.
- Enabling children to perform better at school due to improved mental health.
- Removing the stigma around loneliness and mental health issues in general.

Given the subjective nature of loneliness, there is no absolute measure of success for the solution. Yet, some KPIs should be tracked. We will be recording the number of children addressed by our solution in order to measure the impact it can have at a society level. At the individual level, we would recommend tracking the Loneliness Assessment Test results before and after the care is provided. Lastly, it is also possible to look at students' grades evolution to see if their improved mental health does reflect on their academic performance.

Major risks and actions to mitigate them:

The main risk that could arise from the project is the reluctance of main stakeholders to participate in the Reconnected project. First, children could refuse to participate either by fear of peers' judgement or if they see our solution as additional schoolwork burden. Second, public institutions could refuse to fund the project due to budget constraints and lack of human resources. Third, if we choose to expand our solution in the mid-run to paying apps, there is a risk that parents would not be willing to spend money for it.

To mitigate these risks, privacy and confidentiality will be put at the heart of the project all along the implementation phase to make students feel comfortable with Reconnected and not worried about judgements. Regarding public institutions, the emphasis will be put on the scale of the child loneliness issue and how tackling it would impact positively the society in terms of education, citizens' well-being and productivity. Lastly, parents must be involved with children in the project to make them understand that Reconnected is not a useless additional schoolwork but a well-being tool that they should pay attention to. Upon this conviction will depend their willingness to pay for potential apps in the mid-run.

Implementation Strategy & Major Milestones

In order to pitch our project to the responsible government authority such as the Ministry of Education, it is important to have a concrete proof of its efficiency and results. We therefore propose the following roadmap for the implementation of our project.

- **Initial Trials:** The implementation of the project is expected to begin at a micro-level in smaller schools, with the help of funding from NGOs, private charitable institutions and crowdfunding. This stage would function as a trial run for the project and allow the

assessment of its efficiency as well as the identification of possible barriers and improvement areas.

- **Mapping Results & Restructuring:** The quantification and demonstration of the success of the project based on the feedback from the trial phase. This step would also allow the improvement of the effectiveness of the process.
- **Pitch to the Ministry of National Education and Youth:** building a strong case for nation-wide implementation of the program backed by significant data and concrete results and pitching it to the Ministry of Education in order to persuade a government-backed integration of the program in the national educational curriculum.

Timeline for Implementation and Investment:

Given the scope and intensity of the project, a gradual implementation is necessary, starting with Tier I cities and gradually expanding to smaller cities and towns.

We propose a period of 6 academic years to initiate action on the first phase in the Tier I cities, wherein the program can be adapted to the unique environment of each school district. At the end of this period, we would then further assess the efficacy of the program and fine-tune it further.

In the year 2020, the project will be in its pilot phase with a focus on only 3 schools to check the feasibility of the concept and adjust the technical aspects before launching the implementation and development phases over the 2021-2016 period:

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Number of beneficiary high schools - Tier 1	25	49	73	97	121	144
Total Budget required (€ M)	0,83	1,00	1,26	1,52	2,13	2,38
Revenues from App's sales (€ M)	0,02	0,02	0,02	0,02	0,02	0,02
Total Net Budget required (€ M)	0,81	0,98	1,25	1,51	2,11	2,36

Organizations

- **Sponsor: Ministry of National Education and Youth**

Since the project targets high school students who suffer from loneliness in France as a result of their family structure. The ministry could include our project into its health care plan for students so that all students have the opportunity to thrive, enjoying good mental health and well-being.

A clear mission, a guidance book and long-term strategies for change should be included in this plan. In addition, the Ministry should allocate special funds to:

1. help public high schools build the loneliness prevention and detection system including hiring licensed clinical professional counselor, teachers' relevant training and so on.
2. support public schools in France to organize different kinds of arts and sports clubs and associations where students can relieve stress from school and family while improving teamwork and friendship among students and if possible, families.
3. strengthen collaboration across sectors at both provincial and local level to transform services so that all lonely teenagers have timely access to an integrated system of coordinated and effective promotion, prevention, early intervention, community support and treatment programs.

▪ **Partners:**

1. Public Schools: the project is supposed to be implemented first in public schools. All students in schools are required to go through the loneliness test and each school must have a Mentor or Co-Ordinator responsible for loneliness test and early intervention. Students and parents can talk over their concerns with the Mentors and work with them.
2. Psychological counselors: when target students feel extremely lonely and depressed, each school should have access to one local psychological counselor so that students can consult when needed.
3. Students' associations and organizations: All the students will strongly be recommended to join at least one club or associations at school so they can reduce pressure from the school and family when participating in arts and sports activities on one hand, while in the other, they will have more chance to communicate, which prevents loneliness at an early stage.

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Appendix:

Loneliness Assessment Test

How frequently are the below descriptions depictive of you:

I am a child from a divorced family [Y/N]

I am a child from blended family [Y/N]

A “I recurrently experience feeling this way”

B “I at times experience feeling this way”

C “I hardly experience feeling this way”

D “I never experience feeling this way”

1. I am unhappy undertaking so numerous activities alone
2. My hobbies, activities and ideas are not collective by nearby people
3. I am disconnected from people around me
4. I have no one to talk to
5. I miss company
6. I have nobody to visit
7. I am discouraged of feeling lonely
8. No one genuinely comprehends me
9. There is nobody I can talk with
10. I am no longer close to anyone
11. I identify as excluded and unnoticed
12. I am incompetent to seek communication with nearby people
13. I feel my social relations and dealings are superficial
14. I strongly desire companionship
15. I feel no one definitely knows me well
16. I am unhappy feeling detached and isolated
17. I find it tough to forge friendships
18. I feel excluded by people around me
19. People are present near me but are not with me
20. I feel completely lonely

Scoring:

A = 3 points

B = 2 points

C = 1 point

D = 0 point