

PRESS RELEASE

28 January 2019

Emotion-sensing technology to help young carers express social isolation through music

A new project will use cutting-edge 'emotion-sensing' technology to explore feelings of loneliness and social isolation experienced by young carers – and help them create music to give voice to their feelings.

Launching on Young Carers Awareness Day (31 January), Greater Manchester-based charity gaddum, and Manchester Metropolitan University, will develop and trial the new technology.

The technology is based around the connection between mood and music, aimed at tackling youth loneliness and isolation among young carers.

The young carers will create novel digital tools and musical performance pieces that utilise artificial intelligence (AI) software, which can read facial expressions and interpret them with music and sounds.

The project has been awarded funding from the government and Co-op Foundation's Building Connections Fund youth strand.

A young carer can be defined as a child or young person who provides regular and ongoing care and emotional support to a family member who is physically or mentally ill, disabled, or who misuses substances. Young adult carers are defined as young carers transitioning from childhood into adulthood.

There are an estimated 280,000 young carers living in Greater Manchester, who can be a hard to reach group because of the time and energy they put into caring for a loved one.

They face many face challenges including:

- Having different timeframes and responsibilities to many other young people, leaving them unable to socialise and 'hang out' when their friends or make new friends, compounding a sense of loneliness.
- Bullying from their peers which can amplify the effects of isolation and loneliness.
- Stress; in a young carer's day-to-day life there are many situations that can be quite stressful which can include factors such as finance, support in education, time and space, entertainment and understanding their caring role.
- Lack of time, energy and support available to them, preventing them from focusing on their studies.
- Lack of understanding of young carers issues by professionals resulting in them not receiving appropriate support.

In collaboration with young people, Manchester Metropolitan researchers Dr David Jackson and Dr Toby Heys will run a series of workshops to document the young carers' experiences of loneliness and isolation, and ways in which they can use music to intervene.

The project will help them explore ways that music can help young carers cope better with feelings of loneliness over time, and help to create connections with other young carers as well as educate the public about the private struggle of this group of young people.

Lynne Stafford, Chief Executive, gaddum and GM carers advisory lead for VCSE, said:

“This is an innovative project working with young carers in what should be an exciting time of their lives as they study for their future. We hope that this partnership with the skilled team at Manchester Metropolitan University will reach out to this audience to tackle loneliness, raise awareness of the issues they face and bring people together.”

Dr David Jackson, Research Associate at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University and researcher on the project said:

“By working with gaddum and their network of amazing young carers we’re looking forward to putting new music and AI technology to good use. We want to produce research that can be used by young carers and organisations around the UK to deal with issues surrounding loneliness. To do that it’s vital that we really listen to what these young people experience, are interested in and need - we’re expecting to be set some interesting creative and technical challenges in the process.”

Funding has been awarded from the £2m youth strand of the Building Connections Fund, a partnership between government and the Co-op Foundation.

It is part of the wider £11.5m Building Connections Fund that will support more than 120 organisations to increase social connections and create a sense of community and belonging.

The remaining £9.5 million of the Building Connections Fund is being delivered by the Big Lottery Fund.

Minister for Loneliness, Mims Davies MP, said:

“There is no one cause of loneliness and therefore no one solution. That is why we are working alongside a broad range of businesses, voluntary organisations and local councils to ensure that those who feel alone are best supported.

“From new digital communities, to sports classes that bring people together, this fund will go a long way to achieving that goal. I am committed to encouraging open conversations around this sensitive topic to reduce the stigma and create an environment where everyone is better connected.”

Co-op Foundation is the Co-op’s charity. Their [Belong](#) network of partners connects and empowers young people to tackle loneliness. It also works to strengthen local youth services and combat the stigma of loneliness.

Jamie Ward-Smith, Chair of the Co-op Foundation, said:

“By partnering with government on the youth strand of the Building Connections Fund, Co-op Foundation is supporting groups of young people most affected by loneliness to strengthen their connections and sense of belonging, and build their confidence and skills.

“We look forward to working with all our partners over the coming years, helping them to tackle youth loneliness at a community level and boosting our joint understanding of loneliness.”

The Manchester Metropolitan researchers are part of the AMP (Algorithms for Marginalised People) research unit, a cross-disciplinary team of media and machine learning specialists who work with marginalised audiences to reflect their perspectives and create tools to combat bias.

gaddum is one of 22 organisations receiving grants from the £2m fund, which is targeted at organisations supporting young people in [more deprived areas](#) of England or with specific circumstances that increase the risk of loneliness.

For more information on the Co-op Foundation, visit www.coopfoundation.org.uk

For more information on gaddum visit: www.gaddumcentre.co.uk

ENDS

To request interviews with spokespeople, please contact Charlotte Brown, PR & Comms Lead, gaddum.

Contact:

Charlotte Brown, PR & Comms Lead, gaddum

6 Great Jackson Street, Manchester, M15 4AX

charlotte.brown@gaddum.co.uk

0161 834 6069

www.gaddumcentre.co.uk

Notes to Editors

About the Building Connections Fund Youth strand

- 22 projects have received funding from the Building Connections Fund Youth strand - a partnership between government and the Co-op Foundation.
- Funding of up to £80,000, to be spent by March 2021, was available for projects that supported any groups of young people within the most deprived 30% areas of England or that mainly benefited young people with any one or more of the following circumstances:
 - Being a carer
 - Being unemployed or precariously employed
 - Experiencing bereavement

- Having a disability or long-term health condition
- Having been in the care system

About Co-op Foundation

- Co-op Foundation is the Co-op's charity, set up to help communities UK-wide work together to make things better.
- Co-op Foundation is the leading funder of projects tackling youth loneliness in the UK. It's 'Belong' programme aims to connect and empower at least 5,000 young people while also strengthening youth services and tackling stigma associated with loneliness.
- The Foundation also provides interest-free loans and grants to eligible organisations looking to grow sustainably-funded community spaces.
- Co-op Foundation is a working name of Co-operative Community Investment Foundation, a charity registered in England and Wales (1093028) and Scotland (SC048102).
- www.coopfoundation.org.uk

About gaddum

- gaddum is one of Manchester's oldest charities. Set up in 1833, its vision is to support Greater Manchester's most vulnerable adults, children and families.
- We are focused on empowering people and enhancing lives through being innovative, forging partnerships and building relationships.
- gaddum is an established charity offering a range of health and social care services empowering and enhancing the lives of people in greater Manchester. We have three main focus areas: •therapy services (including palliative and bereavement support) •statutory advocacy •carers support service (including provision for young people) As a provider for making lives better, our work includes counselling, advocacy, advice, family and individual support along with training and development programmes for individuals, families, agencies, local and health authorities, professionals and companies We currently work in five Greater Manchester authorities, Bury, Manchester, Rochdale, Salford and Stockport.
- To find our more information, refer a person or family to one of our services, please visit our website www.gaddumcentre.co.uk

About Manchester Metropolitan University

- Manchester Metropolitan University is one of the most extensive higher education centres in Europe with 38,000 students and more than 1,000 undergraduate, postgraduate and professional courses. The University educates and trains large

numbers of legal and business professionals, scientists, engineers, teachers, health workers and creative professionals.

- Manchester Metropolitan achieved the silver award in the Teaching Excellence Framework, has 85% of research impact rated world-leading and internationally excellent as judged in the REF, is the UK's greenest university as ranked by the People and Planet sustainability league tables and is one of the country's top 25 best employers for LGBT staff, as featured in the Stonewall Top 100 Employers ranking.
- The University is in the top 200 global universities under 50 years old as ranked by the Times Higher Education and has more than 290,000 alumni living across the world, with a further 10,000 new graduates joining the community each year. Notable alumni include fashion designer Sarah Burton, actor Julie Walters, designer Thomas Heatherwick and marketing expert Jonathan Mildenhall.
- **For more information - <https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about-us>**
- **Latest news - <https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/news-and-events>**