



Essi Vilppola

# Experienced Encountering, Community, and Loneliness Among Young Drug Users

## A Case Study in the Nuoli Project

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## Abstract

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<p>The aim of this Bachelor's thesis was to find out how young homeless drug users experienced encountering, community and loneliness in the Nuoli project. The Nuoli project is a three-year long project aimed at young homeless drug users to reduce homelessness of young people and guide them toward a more stable phase in their life.</p> <p>The study was carried out by implementing a set of theme interviews. Twelve young people, clients of the Nuoli project were interviewed for the study. The interviews were carried out in the premises of the Nuoli project over three months. Half-structured theme interviews allowed the participants to speak freely on the topics of the assigned themes.</p> <p>The results showed that the participants valued the encounters in the Nuoli project. There was an experienced benefit of an employee taking the time to individually encounter clients and listen to them. The Nuoli project was seen as a community and the understanding of the fact that every client had their individual struggles in life was seen as an approachable factor to seek services and not feel like an outsider. To the majority of the participants, drug use had led to feelings of loneliness. There was a prevalent perception that among drug users there are ulterior motives and little trust which results in loneliness.</p> <p>The results lead to the conclusion that young homeless drug users have the experience of benefiting from low threshold services where they are given individual attention and encountered as they are, without judgements or expectations. This might be of help when developing new services for the target group in question.</p>	
Keywords	encountering, community, drug use, homelessness, loneliness, Nuoli project, young adults

## Abstrakti

Tekijä Otsikko	Essi Vilppola Koettu Kohtaaminen, Yhteisö ja Yksinäisyys Huumeita Käyttävillä Nuorilla – Tutkimus Nuoli-hankkeessa
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<p>Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli selvittää, miten nuoret asunnottomat huumeiden käyttäjät kokivat kohtaamisen, yhteisön ja yksinäisyyden Nuoli-hankkeessa. Nuoli on kolmevuotinen nuorille asunnottomille huumeiden käyttäjille suunnattu hanke, päämääränä vähentää nuorten asunnottomuutta ja ohjata nuoria kohti vakaampaa elämäntilannetta.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin käyttämällä teemahaastatteluja. Kahtatoista Nuoli-hankkeen asiakasta haastateltiin tutkimukseen. Haastattelut järjestettiin Nuoli-hankkeen tiloissa kolmen kuukauden aikana. Puolistrukturoidut teemahaastattelut antoivat osallistujille mahdollisuuden puhua vapaasti määrättyjen teemojen puitteissa.</p> <p>Tulosten mukaan osallistajat arvostivat kohtaamisia Nuoli-hankkeessa. Se, että työntekijät ottivat aikansa sekä kohtasivat asiakkaat yksilötasolla ja kuuntelivat heitä, koettiin hyödylliseksi. Nuoli-hanke koettiin yhteisöksi ja ymmärrys siitä, että jokaisella asiakkaalla oli omat vaikeutensa elämässä, tekivät palveluun hakeutumisen helpommaksi eikä nuori tuntenut oloaan ulkopuoliseksi. Suurimmalle osalle osallistujista huumeiden käyttö oli aiheuttanut yksinäisyyttä. Vallitseva näkemys oli, että huumeiden käyttäjien keskuudessa on taka-ajatuksia ja epäluottamusta, mikä johti yksinäisyyden tunteisiin.</p> <p>Tulokset johtivat siihen lopputulokseen, että nuoret asunnottomat huumeiden käyttäjät kokevat hyötyvänsä matalan kynnyksen palvelusta, mistä he saavat yksilöllistä huomiota ja heidät kohdataan sellaisina kuin he ovat, ilman tuomitsemista tai odotuksia. Tämä voi olla avuksi, kun kehitetään uusia palveluja kyseiselle kohderyhmälle.</p>	
Avainsanat	asunnottomuus, huumeiden käyttö, kohtaaminen, Nuoli-hanke, nuoret aikuiset, yhteisö, yksinäisyys

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis is made for Nuoli project of Sininauhasäätiö. Sininauhasäätiö is a private sector organization that seeks to help people struggling with homelessness, mental health, and substance abuse issues (Sininauhasäätiö 2021). The target group of this thesis are the clients of the Nuoli project, young homeless drug users.

The topic of young homelessness is particularly relevant in the year 2021. There have been significant efforts made to combat young homelessness as well as homelessness altogether in Finland. SAVE-project which started at the beginning of the year 2021 is an example of how the municipalities are making strives to alleviate homelessness. There are projects currently all over Finland attempting to reduce homelessness. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2021.)

Substance abuse issues are one of the main causes of homelessness (Ara, 2020). Therefore, the target group in this thesis is without exception, homeless drug users. There has been an improvement on the homelessness situation in Finland over the several years and the number of homeless individuals has decreased. Still, at the end of 2020 there were over 4000 homeless people in Finland and there were over 800 homeless young people, under the age of 25 years old. (Ara 2021.)

The aim of this thesis is to find out how young drug users experience encountering, community and loneliness in the Nuoli project. It is necessary to create new permanent models of services for young homeless drug users who are often left completely out of all services available (Sosiaali- ja kuntatalous, 2020: 11). When there are enough effective interventions and services available, significant, and meaningful improvements to the lives of young people could be made.

In the beginning of the thesis, the relevant concepts, which are drug use, homelessness, encountering, community, and loneliness, will be focused on. The participants in the study are clients of the Nuoli project. From the results of the study, Nuoli project receives views and experiences of young homeless drug users which it and other actors in the social service sector can utilize when creating and developing new and old services.

## **2 Nuoli project**

### **2.1 Encounter and support point Nuoli**

Encounter and support point Nuoli is a support point aimed at young homeless people who use drugs and young people living under a severe threat of homelessness (Dal Maso 2020). To be specific, 16-29-year-old homeless young substance abusers, who might have challenges with mental health and present symptoms through crime. Young people can go there anonymously, just the way they are, also intoxicated. (Malmivaara 2020.) The orientation of Nuoli is particularly at the previously mentioned young people who have been left outside of services either because there are no services, the services do not reach them or answer their needs the right way (Sosiaali- ja kuntatalous 2020: 11).

Nuoli project arose from worry on how to reach and support young people who actively use drugs, spend their nights outside and are exposed to threats and abuse (Sosiaali- ja kuntatalous 2020: 11). Dal Maso (2020: 7) relates that the need for a place like Nuoli started to show already in 2017. Many workers from low threshold actors began noticing that there started being more and more young homeless people who seemed intoxicated on the streets. Organizations that encounter young people in their work, like Preventative Action Force by the Police, the Red Cross of Finland, Etappi, Tukikohta ry, Sininauhasäätiö, the After Care of Child Protective Services and Vva ry established a task force to

deliberate on the situation. Sininauhasäätiö and Vva ry received funding from STEA for the three-year Nuoli-project, from 2019 to 2021.

Several young people have gone through difficult matters in their lives. In their recent history as well as currently there might be multiple things that do not withstand the light of day. Many of the clients in Nuoli have a long history in child protective services. The fear of public officials and authority is prevalent in homeless youth. Anonymity creates a feeling of security and gives protection against shame. When things are bad enough, shame is a factor that makes the clients want to present themselves as someone else. (Malmivaara 2020.)

## 2.2 The work and values in the Nuoli project

The project manager of Nuoli, Päivi Malmivaara (National Homelessness Seminar 2020) describes that at the heart of the operation of Nuoli is meeting the basic needs of young people. The aim is to secure rest, nutrition, hygiene, and clean clothing. Large portion of the young people coming to Nuoli are in truly bad shape and lack everyday skills. Taking care of their own affairs is also difficult since many of them have lost their identity papers and phones. The Nuoli project helps in decreasing homelessness of young people. (Sosiaali- ja kuntatalous 2020: 11.)

The help received from Nuoli is not tied to municipal boundaries. There is not a place like Nuoli for young people anywhere in Finland. The operation is based on trust and transparency. Young people come to Nuoli voluntarily and they receive help and support to the matters they feel they need it to. No one acts behind the backs of the young people. (Dal Maso 2020: 7–8.)

Nuoli operates with the Housing first - principle which means that intoxication is not an obstacle. The objective is to provide support, security, rest, and warmth as well as to guide young people step by step towards a more stable life situation. The most important thing is shared trust and the mentality of moving



ahead side by side. The operation in Nuoli is based on trust, interactivity, and joint development. (Sininauhasäätiö 2020.)

### **3 Low threshold in substance abuse work**

#### **3.1 Low threshold services**

In the low threshold services clients can seek services without a referral or an appointment. The service can be used anonymously, and intoxication is not an obstacle. Service points for low threshold services can be health advice points, mobile units, or day center-type places. The faculty is usually multi-professional, including both professionals from the social services as well as health care. (Lappalainen-Lehto & Romu & Taskinen 2007: 186-187.)

In the health advice points the focus is on health advice and preventing the spread of infectious diseases. In the health advice points clients can get needles and other clean equipment used for intravenous drug use. They can return used intravenous drug use equipment to the health advice points. Health advice points also give out condoms and equipment for wound care. The clients visiting health advice points can get quick testing on HIV and C-hepatitis as well as are able to do pregnancy tests. The clients can get information on infectious disease, the infectiousness and prevention of said diseases. (Lappalainen-Lehto & Romu & Taskinen 2007: 187.)

The objectives and motives of the clients seeking services in health advice points are manifold and there is no need to explain or justify them. The clients seeking services from health advice points are usually people that other, more conventional, services have not reached. (Lappalainen-Lehto & Romu & Taskinen 2007: 187-188.)

### 3.2 Harm reduction

The concept of harm reduction is seen to be an ideological basis that guides action and work. Harm reduction is a series of measures that aim to reduce the harmful health, social and financial results caused by the action and specific behavior of an individual. (National Public Health Institute 2008: 20.)

The focus of harm reduction model is to reduce the risky behavior and the harm caused by substance abuse without judging or accepting the behavior of the individual. At the core of the philosophy of harm reduction is non-judgmental attitude, trust, and respect. (Social Work Degree Guide 2021.)

On a societal level drug use is commonly seen as abnormal behavior which for its part might have influenced the fact that drug users are often kept as outsiders and, in the margins, possibly in this manner, reasserting the exclusion and social problems from society. (National Public Health Institute 2008: 21.)

The model of harm reduction offers opportunities to people who are ready to commit to services but not necessarily ready to quit using drugs. Harm reduction attempts to eliminate the negative consequences of the phenomenon to the members of society without eliminating the phenomenon itself. Professionals who use the model of harm reduction develop interventions which reduce the harm caused by substance abuse without emphasizing that quitting using substances is the only way to reach harm reduction. (McMaster 2004: 358.)

When in Finland in the 1990's the harm reduction model was contemplated, there was a conscious decision to choose an operating model that emphasizes the offering of services at a low threshold. Services at low threshold signify the availability and accessibility of services. (National Public Health Institute 2008: 22-23.)

### 3.3 The role of the Nuoli Project in the service system

The report of Sosiaali- ja kuntatalous (2020) recount that one of the most important objectives of the Nuoli project is that even a young person who actively uses drugs can commit to help and support. Nuoli has supplemented the tasks of the public sector. The collaboration with different actors has ensured that the work of the project with drug using homeless young people is intricately linked to the service system.

Everyday life as a homeless person is strenuous. Insufficient rest and sleep deteriorate the problem-solving skills of young people. While hungry and tired, short-sighted decisions might be made, which can lead to incidental crime. Therefore, the possibility in meeting the basic needs offered by the Nuoli-project, also prevents crime, including petty thefts and break-ins. The reduction of everyday crime increases the feelings of safety of other citizens and the collaborative development and execution contribute to breaking the overgeneration substance abuse and crime spiral. In addition to this, Nuoli-project helps in decreasing homelessness of young people. (Sosiaali- ja kuntatalous 2020: 11.)

In the long run the reduction of ancillary crime and the harm caused by drug use will present itself as economic impact in society. Through collaboration it has been possible to build a service package for young people in which they will be directed to wider range of support. Collaboration is carried out systematically with municipalities and other organizational actors which promotes the establishments of effective practices into services. (Sosiaali- ja kuntatalous 2020: 11.)

## 4 Young drug users

### 4.1 Characteristics of young drug users

Attaching underage people and young people to services is extremely difficult. Often the young person leaves once their real age comes to light. This frightening away is seen to be highly damaging since in the worst-case scenario, the young person might be already left out of all the services from the onset of their drug use. If young people are scared or indifferent it is especially challenging to tell them about risks. Young people are often in progress of the falling in love-phase toward the drug and they do not think they could ever become addicts. Young people are seen to have a considerable amount of risk taking, and many of them do not comprehend how much risk there is involved with drug use. (National Public Health Institute 2008: 109).

Genetic factors have an impact on the drug use of young people notably when it comes to the continuation of drug use and the development of addiction. A young person, who has genetic risk factors for drug use has a greater tendency to continue drug use and develop addiction than a young person who does not have the same genetic risk factors. Aggressiveness, impulsiveness, severe behavioral disorders, and other difficulties in self-control during childhood predict drug use in adolescence and other disorders related to drug use. (Havio & Inkinen & Partanen 2008: 167.)

Risk factors of drug use at a young age can also be linked to family. Substance abuse and mental health issues of parents, the low socioeconomic status of the family, the inconsistency of the boundaries in the family, conflicts in the family and hostile environment can be a risk factor for drug use in adolescence. (Havio & Inkinen & Partanen 2008: 167.)

The most important environmental factors that can predispose to drug use are the glorifying attitude of friends towards drug use, an apparent antisocial

behavior and excess use of substances in a group of friends. (von der Pahlen & Lepistö & Marttunen 2013: 119).

## 4.2 Drug addiction

Drug addiction can be discussed when an individual has a compulsive need to use drugs constantly or occasionally, and the individual does not control their relationship toward the object of their addiction, drugs. (Havio & Inkinen & Partanen 2008: 42). West (2001 cited in Pycroft 2015: 55) summarizes that addiction is behavior in which one has defective control with destructive consequences. A characteristic for drug addiction is the continuous, often recurring, or compulsive procuring and using of the substance regardless of the social and health related harm caused by the use (National Public Health Institute 2008: 11).

Every person has their own reasons and motives to use drugs. Many kinds of factors determine whether the drug use of a person transforms into drug addiction. The essential part is what significance a person gives to drug use and how central part it starts to play in their everyday life. Drug use is associated with a strong pursuit of pleasure. An intense addiction can be developed towards things that produce pleasure. While addiction is characterized by the pursuit of immediate satisfaction, on the other hand, the action caused by addiction is used to get rid of negative feelings. In the beginning, the positive expectations of addictive behavior hold a great importance. Later, the avoidance of negative feelings by addictive behavior grows important. (Havio & Inkinen & Partanen 2008: 42-44.)

Addiction can be physical, psychological, or social as well as all of these in combinations or together. In physical addiction, the body has gotten used to the drug in a way that the absence of drugs results in different disruptions in body functions in which nervous system effects manifest in withdrawal symptoms. In psychological addiction, the drug user experiences the drug, the use of the drug and the effects of the drug essential to their well-being. The roots of

psychological addiction are in the individual personality development of a human. Social addiction appears as an attachment of an individual to a specific social network where drug use has a central role. (Havio & Inkinen & Partanen 2008: 42-43.) However, main debates have centered on the nature of the lack of control related to addiction and whether it originates from biological, psychological, or social processes (Pycroft 2015: 55).

## **5 Homelessness**

### **5.1 Homelessness in Finland**

At the end of the year 2020, there were 4 341 homeless people living alone in Finland. In proportion to the population the majority of homeless people were located to Helsinki, then Turku and Espoo. (Ara 2021.)

An individual is defined as homeless if they do not have an apartment and they live outdoors, in stairwells or shelters, in dormitories or accommodation establishments, in nursing home-type units, rehabilitative units, hospitals or other institutions as well as temporarily with acquaintances and relatives due to lack of housing. (Ara 2020.)

Homelessness has been decreasing in Finland in eight executive years. In 2020 there were 259 homeless people less than in 2019. The number of long-term homeless people increased by 93 from 2019. (Ara 2021.) A long-term homeless individual is a person who has a social or health problem that aggravates housing sustainability. These problems can include debts or mental health and substance abuse problems. Homelessness is long-term when it has lasted at least one year, or the person has been repeatedly homeless over the last three years. (Ara 2020.)

However, these statistics should be taken as guiding information only. It is difficult to obtain accurate information on homelessness. The statistical

categories are changing. For example, an individual, who based on statistic, lives with acquaintances might be left without a place to stay on several evenings and spend the night in a stairwell or outside. (Vva ry 2020.)

## 5.2 Homeless young people

Based on the results of ARA survey (2021), young homelessness has not decreased from the year 2019. Young homeless people, under the age of 25, at 854 individuals comprise 20% of the Finnish homeless population.

When the homelessness of young people is compiled into statistics, defining homelessness is complex because homelessness is always a personal experience and a tragedy. Compiling the statistics on homeless youth is also difficult because there are many young people who live with friends. And then there are those who have ended up on the streets. Homelessness may have gone down, but the need for help for these young people has increased. (Malmivaara, P. 2020.)

Based on a survey oriented toward different actors encountering homeless young people in their work, implemented by the Finnish Youth Housing Association (2019), the factors recognized to lead to homelessness were substance abuse problems, inadequate skills in living, mental health problems and ineptitude in financial management. It was discovered that in an acute homelessness threat situation, both individual and structural factors played a role in complicating the helping process. On an individual level the substance abuse problems, the lack of credit information or default note on rent debt of young people as well as the difficulty to reach them and their weak commitment and motivation toward goal-oriented work affected the helping process. The structural factors hampering the process were the lack of suitable apartments, signifying affordable and of the right size apartments as well as apartments to which one could move in having a default note and the solidity and contradictions of the service system, including the slowness of decision making,

challenges in gathering networks together and the problems with information flow between different actors.

### 5.3 Housing first principle

Housing first is a model of homelessness work in which the central viewpoint is that in homelessness work, acquiring a home takes precedence over other support measures. Allowing the homeless to live in their own home will help solve other social and health problems. Solving other problems is not a prerequisite for arranging housing, the model works the other way around. (Asunto Ensin 2018.) In addition to being a principle and a work model, housing first is an ideology and a way of thinking. The guiding principle is that an apartment is a part of human rights and a fundamental human right. (Y-Säätilö 2021.)

The housing first model is implemented according to four key principles and quality recommendations. The first principle is enabling independent living. The starting point is the assumption that everyone will be able to live if they receive the right kind of support. (Asunto Ensin 2018.) In housing first services, the therapeutic approach is harm reduction. A sufficient goal is to reduce the harm caused by substance abuse and psychiatric symptoms by ensuring housing. The key point is that refusing substance abuse and mental health services does not affect access to housing or the continuity to housing. (Y-Säätiö 2021.)

The second principle is freedom of choice and influence. The commitment to services and motivation to improve their own lives can be realized only when the resident has the right to choose the measures themselves. (Asunto Ensin 2018.) The third principle is rehabilitation and empowerment. Housing social work is presence work based on respectful and equal encounter, strengthening mutual trust and community atmosphere among all actors. Rehabilitation and empowerment take place on the own terms of the residents. (Y-Säätiö 2021.)



The fourth principle is integration to society and communities. Integration into society and communities starts from inclusion in the life of the individual. The housing first work supports the involvement of the residents in matters concerning their own lives, attachment to the surrounding community and strengthens contact with natural networks such as family members. (Asunto Ensin 2018.)

## **6 Encountering a substance abuser**

### **6.1 Interaction and appreciative encountering**

The encounter and interaction of a professional and a client is a key element in substance abuse work. There are present both backgrounds of the two people meeting, life-experience, education and the values and attitudes molded by social environment. (Lappalainen-Lehto & Romu & Taskinen 2007: 240.) In client situations there are present at least two individuals who decide their own affairs. Both the client as well as the worker have the right to operate autonomously, and both have the responsibility to respect the autonomy of each other. They also carry the accountability of their own actions. The right and responsibility of being accountable is part of the lives of people. It is accountability of their own actions and inactions as well as choices and decisions. (Mattila 2007: 57.)

Proper and constructive interaction is only possible in an appreciative and respectful climate. Appreciation a corner stone of good treatment and care. Appreciation is the appreciation of humane life, experience, and emotions in all its forms. It is the appreciation of personhood that is not depended on the achievements or failures of people. It is about giving equal value to everyone, to the clients and workers, regardless of their view of life, understanding or character. (Mattila 2007: 15.) Interaction is an essential part of client work; it is part of encountering (Virtanen 2017: 106).

Although contacts are by nature short-term in low threshold services, the encounter is of great significance. Through the collaboration relationship, an opportunity opens to discuss topics related to treatment, receive information about treatment possibilities, lower the threshold to seek treatment for substance abuse problems and mature the possibility of change. (Lappalainen-Lehto & Romu & Taskinen 2007: 188.)

Appreciative encounter enforces the experience of clients of the worth of their personhood. The trickiness of substance abuse issues or marginalized lifestyle do not diminish the value of a person nor their right to be treated well. (Mattila 2007: 60.) Respecting the humanity of clients and highlighting its fulness, regardless of external limitations, during interaction empowers clients and encourages them to take charge of their lives (Mattila 2007: 57-60).

## 6.2 Competence of workers encountering substance abusers

There is a clear link between the attitudes of professionals encountering substance abusers and the lack of their own competence and knowledge. There was seen to be lack of competence both in knowledge of substance abuse treatment as well as in competence to encounter an intoxicated individual. (Koivunen & Hakala & Peltomaa 2017: 573; Heikkilä 2012: 48.) Lack of knowledge, not knowing enough about encountering and treating substance abusers agitates fear and insecurity which can result in feelings of helplessness and incompetence (Lappalainen-Lehto & Romu & Taskinen 2007: 242).

Lack of competence is also seen through the eyes of the clients, where young substance abusers wished that their workers would have more training both in knowledge about drugs as well as the complexity of treating substance abusers who use multiple substances (Ikola 2010: 67).

### 6.3 Attitudes toward substance abusers in the service system

Substance abusers have an experience of being encountered with a skeptical, pre-decided attitude of a stereotypical drug user. They are not met as individuals in need nor do the professionals encountering them have a real desire to help them. (Suominen & Malin-Kaartinen 2012: 10.) There has been experiences of workers being passive and indifferent to young substance abusers (Ikola 2010: 67).

Since receiving poor treatment from social- and health care services is common for substance abusers, they often come in to seek help in an already pre-tuned mood to have to fight for their rights (Lappalainen-Lehto & Romu & Taskinen 2007: 242). Moralistic and categorizing attitudes of workers that stigmatizes and labels clients, complicates appreciative encounters (Mattila 2007: 16).

When a person is intoxicated their understanding and perception is often impaired. It may be difficult to understand speech and signals of others when an individual has used substances and they themselves might not be able to communicate clearly. Misunderstandings are common. (Havio & Inkinen & Partanen 2008: 203.) The more professionals encounter intoxicated people, the more negative their attitudes shift toward them (Heikkilä 2012: 49).

## 7 Community

Community is a small consortium of people which also alludes to common and shared in significance (Eräsaari 2017: 35). The term community is used loosely. Originally it signified the natural association of people that helped them to survive the demands of everyday life. (Kopakkala 2005: 31.)

Although through modern life, the care-aspect of communities has decreased, from the point of view of the individual, the significance of communities has not decreased. Individuals still need the valuation of community to feel their lives to

be meaningful. A central sustaining factor of community is the experience of kinship of members. One can be a part of community without acting in it actively. (Kopakkala 2005: 31.) Belonging to a community is possible without acting in it and in large communities' kinship is often only in the thoughts of its members (Jauhiainen & Eskola 1993: 46). Feeling of togetherness, however, is strengthened in concrete action. The importance of the objective of community action, the meaning of the members of community and own participation builds deeper experience of belonging to a community. (Kopakkala 2005: 31.)

Jauhiainen and Eskola (1993: 46-47) agree that crucial characteristic of community is the experience of community. Awareness of a unifying thing creates the feeling of togetherness and the opportunity to activate to action if necessary, depending on the extent to which individuals hold it important to themselves. The community experience is important, if not the most important, characteristic of community. Co-operation amplifies cohesion, although it is not a prerequisite. The experience of cohesiveness expresses the relationship of the participants to the purpose of the activity and at the same time, to each other. These two factors depend on each other: the more the existence of a community means to its member, the more meaningful that member experiences others who feel and think the same way. And the more people mean to each other, the more likely it is that they start to hold the activity of the community important to themselves. And the more meaningful to themselves they see others and the activity, the more they attempt to interact and co-operate. Community is inclusion.

Inclusion is presented as the opposite of social exclusion, non-participation, and externality. Non-inclusion is also talked about as the externality of the unemployed and marginalized as well as missing the experience of inclusion. (Mattila-Aalto 2009: 21.)

## 8 Loneliness

Loneliness is common and everyone can experience it (Mielenterveyden keskusliitto 2020). Loneliness is defined as a subjectively perceived negative mental state in which a person experiences anxiety about quantitative or qualitative deficiencies in human relationships. People experiencing loneliness describe the state as feeling irrelevance, being invisible, not belonging, feeling hopelessness and as a wasted life. (Junttila & Jyrkkä & Tolmunen 2016: 22.)

Loneliness is often divided into emotional loneliness and social loneliness. Social loneliness is characterized in lacking or having only few meaningful relationships or networks. In emotional loneliness the more essential factor over the quantity of relationships is the quality and experienced kinship. Emotional loneliness occurs when one does not experience meaningfulness in their existing social relationships. (HelsinkiMissio 2021.)

Both the objective being alone, and the subjective experience of loneliness are detrimental. Of these two however, the experience of loneliness is much more intense in the context of anxiety, social fears, depression, suicide, mental illness, eating disorders, poor physical health and education and breaks in career in future life. (Junttila & Jyrkkä & Tolmunen 2016: 24.)

## 9 Implementation of the thesis

### 9.1 Purpose of the thesis and the research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to find out how encountering, community and loneliness are experienced by young homeless drug users in the Nuoli project. The aim is to utilize the results to develop services aimed at young drug users.

The research questions are:

How young drug users experience encountering and community in the Nuoli project?

How is loneliness experienced among young drug users?

### 9.2 Research method

#### 9.2.1 Qualitative research

Researching the experienced encountering, community, and loneliness, I chose a qualitative research for the research method. This is due to it being challenging to study the unique experiences of people through numbers, tables, and charts, in the line of a quantitative research.

Studying the significance of different concepts to people demands exploring it from various perspectives. Qualitative research was the best suited option for such topic. Qualitative research is constructed by using previous studies and theory related to the topic in question, empirical material as well as the thinking and reasoning of the researcher. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006). Qualitative research is a methodological trend in scientific research that attempts to explore comprehensively the quality, attributes, and meanings of the topic to be studied. The common features of the different methods of qualitative

research emphasize the point of view of the occurrence environment, meaning and expression of the object. Qualitative research creates broad and detailed research data that could not be obtained necessarily statistically or numerically. (Auvinen & Tarkiainen 2018.)

### 9.2.2 Theme interview

A semi-structured theme interview was best suited for collecting the material for the Bachelor's thesis. A theme interview is placed between a form interview and an open interview in its formality. The interview does not proceed through precise, detailed, pre-formatted questions. It proceeds rather loosely focusing on specific pre-planned themes. Theme interview is more structured than an open interview as the topics, themes, prepared based on previous research and familiarization with the topic, are the same for all interviewees, although they move flexibly without a strict path forward. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.)

I concluded the themes of the interviews and composed questions inside them (Appendix 3). This allowed me to focus questions on the topics I wanted, but it also left room for the own voice of the clients. Theme interview is a conversational situation in which pre-planned themes are gone through. The order of the conversation of the themes is free and not all matters are discussed with the interviewees to the same extent. Themes are intended to be discussed quite freely. There is an aim to consider the interpretations of people and the meaning given to them when doing theme interviews. Space is given to the unrestricted speech of people, although the themes decided in advance are strived to be discussed with every interviewee. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.) Analysis of structured interview material cannot provide an answer to the question of what meanings the interviewees give to different matters. When studying meaning structures, how people perceive and construe different things, the material must be in text, in which they talk about various matters using their own words. (Alasuutari 2011: 83.)

A careful familiarization on the subject matter and knowledge on the situations of the interviewees is demanded for the interview to be targeted to specific themes. Therefore, content, and situational analysis is important in theme interviews. The addressed themes are chosen based on the familiarization of the studied topic. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.) A thematic interview should be considered primarily as a situation in which parties to the conversation use their “sociological imaginary”. They are the active producers of research material. Through their speech and the roles, they have embraced as well as their attitudes, they produce concrete examples on how to act or one can act in different situations within the culture. (Alasuutari 2011: 147-148.)

### 9.3 Content analysis

In content analysis the material is examined in detail, looking for and summarizing similarities and differences. Content analysis is a text analysis in which materials that are already in text form or changed to such are examined. The aim of the content analysis is to form a concise description of the phenomenon that is studied, which links the results to the broader context of the phenomenon and to other research results on the topic. Content analysis is referred to as a verbal description of the content of a text. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.)

All the interviews for this thesis were recorded and then typed into text form. In the qualitative content analysis of the research material, the material is first fragmented into small parts, conceptualized, and finally reorganized into a new kind of entirety. Content analysis can be executed as data-based, theory-oriented, or theory-based (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006). For this study, a data-based content analysis was chosen.

The first step in data-based content analysis is reduction of the material. The material relevant to the research is searched, noted, and marked. Thereafter, the marked points are reduced by rewriting them in a condensed form. The second step in the content analysis is clustering. While executing clustering the



reduced points are grouped in a way that expressions meaning the same subject form a subcategory. The subcategories are named with a title that describes the content. The third and final step of the data-based content analysis is abstraction which stands for formation of general concepts. The grouping is continued by combining the subcategories created in the clustering phase into upper classes. The upper classes are formed into main categories, and the main categories into one connecting category. All categories are named with a title that describes the content. (Leinonen 2018.)

#### 9.4 Ethics and the reliability of the study

The identities of the clients partaking in the interviews are not revealed. I clarified to the clients that even other employees of the Nuoli project would not know what they had said specifically, only I knew the full content of their answers.

I prepared interview permits which I gave out to every participant to read and sign before the interviews (Appendix 2). Considering that the Nuoli project is a low-threshold service, the clients participating in the interviews did not have to sign the interview permits with their own names since they can take care of their own affairs completely anonymously if they choose to do so. The timetable and structure of the process was laid out in the interview permit. Also, a possibility of the clients receiving and reading the Bachelor's thesis after its finished was given to the clients.

I had a working relationship with the participants, fluctuating from eight months to few weeks depending on who I was interviewing. I realized that the nature of our relationship would modify the answers the participants gave compared to someone they would not know. I suspect that due to the relationship I had with the participants, the answers in the interviews are truthful and comprehensive.

The basis of the work in the Nuoli project is client-oriented with a harm reduction orientation with workers existing side by side with the clients as

equals. An ideal situation for interviews occurs when both parties of the interview encounter each other as equal subjects and the situation is not based on a power relationship objectifying its object (Alasuutari 2011: 146). I believe that the interviews took place aligning with the values of the Nuoli project.

## 10 Results

For this study I interviewed twelve young people, clients of the Nuoli project. All the participants were young homeless drug users, and the interviews took place in the premises of the Nuoli project. The time for the interviews was not arranged in advanced, rather I asked each participant individually about their interest to participate in the study and I interviewed them in that moment.

The participants consisted of four women and eight men, between the ages of 19 to 30 years old. I have divided the participants into two age groups for reviewing some of the results. The younger age group consisted of, 19-23-year-olds, five participants, and the older age group consisted of 26-30-year-olds, seven participants.

### 10.1 Drug use

#### 10.1.1 The start of drug use

The younger the participants were, the earlier their daily drug use had started. Participants who belonged in the younger age group, 19- to 23-year-olds had started using drugs between the ages of 11 and 16-years old.

The older participants had started using drugs daily, with only one exception, as an adult. The participants in the older age group, 26- to 30-year-olds, had started using drugs daily between the ages of 18 to 23-years old. The one exception had started using drugs daily at 14 years old.

Those participants who had separately brought up the time they had started using alcohol, had started using it from a noticeably young age, between the ages of 9 to 13-years old. This applies to both age groups. The participants who identified the substances they used when they first started to experiment with substances, started out without exception with alcohol and cannabis. From there, they moved on to ecstasy and amphetamine.

### 10.1.2 Main drugs

As their main drugs, the participants named Subutex, amphetamine and benzos. Eleven of the participants identified Subutex, nine of the participants identified amphetamine and four of the participants identified benzos as their main drug or one of their main drugs.

In the older age group, 26 to 30 years old, the main drug was only Subutex or Subutex and amphetamine. In the younger age group, 19 to 23 years old, only one of the participants had one main drug, amphetamine, everyone else identified Subutex, amphetamine as well as benzos as their main drugs.

### 10.1.3 Contributing factors for starting drug use

The factors that influenced the onset of drug use were strongly related to the current group of friends with all participants. Most of them viewed the beginning of drug use as having fun. Some experienced pressure from a group of friends and the environment to experiment with certain drugs. The drug use of a significant other was mentioned as a predisposing factor for starting using drugs.

Drug use started gradually. The drug use was viewed as recreational, taking place over the weekends. Curiosity was named as a factor in initiating drug use.

## 10.2 Encountering

### 10.2.1 First time in the Nuoli project

As the participants recall their first visit in Nuoli, the nervousness they experienced arose from their stories. Strange place and new people made the situation unnerving, one participant even told that a friend tried to persuade him to coming to Nuoli for several weeks before he agreed to it.

In the end, all the participants experienced coming to Nuoli as a positive experience. Overall, the first visit left a good feeling. The facilities of the Nuoli project as well as nice workers made an impression. It was a relieving experience to find a place where one could be safe.

*My first time was pretty good, I just was very nervous when I came here. But this turned out to be quite alright, a really relaxed place.*

*I felt relieved that there was some place where I can be safe.*

### 10.2.2 Encountering in the Nuoli project

The experience of encountering in Nuoli was a positive one. In particular, the encounters and listening to the clients. There was an awareness that all the clients of the Nuoli project had their own personal story and history, and the clients were encountered as individuals. The prevailing experience of the encountering of the workers in the Nuoli project was non-judgmental and non-disparaging, the opposite of what the participants had experienced from society.

The opinion of the participants was that the employees were nice, and the general experience was that help is given as much as possible in the form of both listening as well as direct actions. The commitment of the employees to their clients was noticed. Concrete actions to move the situation of the clients forward was valued and the prevailing perception was that in the Nuoli project,

plans did not remain in the level of speech, but things were taken care of immediately.

The milieu of the Nuoli project was connected to encountering as well as meeting basic needs. The Nuoli project was described as homelike, and it was considered important that one received food and a place to sleep. Nuoli was considered a place where it was nice to come to.

*I have received positive support and I have been listened to.*

*Really, I have been encountered quite well. I have been listened to and helped as much as one can.*

*Regardless of the prevailing situation, state of emergency with coronavirus, I have always felt good when coming here. Which tells me that here I am well.*

### 10.2.3 Effects of drug use on encountering

Thoughts on how their drug use affects the way they are encountered in Nuoli were unanimous. None of the participants felt like the way they were encountered in Nuoli was affected by their drug use or intoxication.

As we moved to discuss those experiences in the outside world, opinions varied. Four of the participants did not feel like their drug use affected the way they were encountered, five thought that their drug use did affect the way they were encountered and three of the participants did not have an answer.

For those participants who felt like their drug use had an impact on their encounters, nasty experiences within health care services emerged strongly. The prevailing experience was that the participants received poorer care and treatment because of their known drug use. Examples of inadequate aid and outright abuse were highlighted.

Unfortunate experiences with the authorities also aroused in dealings with guards and the police. The behavior of other fellow citizens also affected their experience of encounters outside of the Nuoli project. The participants talked about situations where they were looked down on, shied away from and whispered about by strangers in stores and public transportation.

*It is like I am worthless. Like all these junkies are the same.*

*In the hospital one time I had this cut right here on my arm. And the woman who was cleaning my wound, gave me no mercy at all. She was digging around my wound saying it is my fault because you know I use drugs. Like punishing me.*

#### 10.2.4 Hopes on encountering

The way the participants hope to be encountered were simple. When I asked them how they wanted to be encountered, the answers were unique and at the same time, extremely similar. Everyone wanted to be encountered with respect and equally, as a human being.

*As I am.*

*Like everyone else, equally.*

*As a human being. Just as myself. The same way as everyone else.*

### 10.3 Community

#### 10.3.1 What is community?

The participants had different ideas on the term community. The unifying factor for the interpretation of the concept of community was being together, doing

together and some unifying trait in people. Doing together and being together, involving all members of the community and non-discrimination were strongly present in the community-image of the participants.

Homelessness and substance abuse issues were mentioned as a unifying feature. It was seen meaningful that through the community of the Nuoli project, one could realize that they were not alone with their problems.

The community was seen as a group with common goals and the idea was that the members of the community work together while supporting each other.

*Community is something that has comrades of sorts and they are supposed to work together to make do and survive in life.*

*We all have something in common, that something brings us here and it is this homelessness and substance abuse problems too. Then we somehow get a moment in which we can feel that we are not the one and only who has problems.*

*Community is like when everyone gets along together, no one is discriminated. Everyone is included and no one is left outside.*

### 10.3.2 Community in the Nuoli project

The participants thought of the Nuoli project as a community. The community in Nuoli is seen as a tight community. The prevailing experience is that those who want to be in Nuoli and commit to the support provided, commit to the rules in the Nuoli project and work together.

The participants brought up that everyone in those circles knows everyone. Many of the participants have known clients of the Nuoli project for years which creates a deeper connection between them. New friends have been found in the Nuoli project too. Many spend time with the same people also outside of Nuoli.

However, nearly half of the participants believed that the young people present, and their behavior was of great significance for the community of Nuoli. The experience of community depends on which group of young people is present in Nuoli at any given time. The brutality of the world of drugs impacted the community in Nuoli negatively. Stealing and deceiving of others for the benefit of oneself is common and has an influence inside the community of Nuoli.

*People from the community of Nuoli are the same I hang out with outside of Nuoli.*

*On the other hand, yeah there is a community in Nuoli, but in bad times I feel like people even take the ashes out of the nest. I mean stealing and thinking only about themselves. But maybe it is a bit of a hypocrisy. However, this is such a small world, you will immediately hear that for example someone says they can sell something at a good price and then another one says that he has not said anything like that to me, like people are trying to bullshit you in every possible way sometimes. Something like, give me the money first, I have to go get the drugs by myself and then supposedly the police come, then lockup and what have you.*

*There is a community in Nuoli to some extent. But of course, there are specific groups of friends who hang out here daily and then they do not necessarily take everyone fully into account.*

*There is a community here, we work together. Good mood.*

### 10.3.3 The atmosphere in Nuoli

The atmosphere between the young people in Nuoli is greatly influenced by the clients in Nuoli on an individual level. When there are clients present who respect the rules, the atmosphere is free. Rule-breaking and the perpetrators of "stupid things" affect the overall mood. During the interviews, it was discussed



whether the amount of young people affect the general atmosphere. It was noted, that in a larger group, it was easier to get into disputes over drugs and debts, especially when the same faces were seen daily.

Overall, the atmosphere is considered good and relaxed. The participants appreciate that one can be quite freely in Nuoli and, for example, there is not constant attempts to limit their topics of conversation, one can also talk about drugs.

*It depends on the group that is here. Like not everyone knows how to behave, then there is like this tense atmosphere. When all here are these good guys respecting the rules, then Nuoli has a good atmosphere.*

#### 10.3.4 The significance of the community in Nuoli

The community of Nuoli has an enormous significance in the lives of the participants. The support received from Nuoli and the community, a break from the criminal lifestyle as well as moving personal affairs forward are brought up as the most important factors of the community in Nuoli. Another great meaningful factor for the participants is the friends made in Nuoli project. On the matter of friends, however, a part of the participants emphasizes the friends from Nuoli as friends from drug circles and recognize the conditional nature of the relationships and the constant presence of ulterior motives.

The participants emphasize the appreciation they have for having a place where they are allowed to be on their own terms. No one is forced or rushed to anything. The participants express their gratitude that this community is a part of their lives.

*Place to stay, food, everything else. I have met new friends, or fellow drug users. I do not think all of them as my friends, but some of them. True friends, maybe, maybe not.*

*It is like a bit of a refuge, somewhat like a family. You get that kind of support, you need in life.*

### 10.3.5 Close circle

The thoughts of the participants of their own close circle of people were varied but went fairly evenly among the participants. Five out of twelve participants named one or two family members, either mother, parents, an older sibling, or a spouse, as a part of their close circle. Three out of twelve participants named their friends as part of their close circle. Four out of twelve participants named either Nuoli as a whole or by separating the clients and employees of Nuoli as part of their close circle.

## 10.4 Loneliness

### 10.4.1 Loneliness and drug use

Only one of the twelve participants felt that drug use had never caused them loneliness. That participant was in the age group of 19 to 23 years old.

The physical and mental effects of drug use itself are seen as causing loneliness. Mentally, drug use has caused isolation among the participants and attempts have been made to treat it with more drug use, and the never stopping circle had emerged. There were attempts to improve the mental and physical well-being of oneself and in the end, it was found out that it had only made the situation worse.

The participants mentioned that drug use that had started at a young age had caused depression, which had led into loneliness. Withdrawal symptoms are also highlighted as a cause of depression leading to loneliness.

The social circles in which drugs are used as a cause of loneliness came up in several interviews. It is the experience that people are with each other only

because of drugs and there is not any other unifying factor. Lack of trust among drug users also often creates feelings of loneliness.

Loneliness has also been a result of the behavior of oneself under the influence of drugs. While under the influence of drugs the participants may have pushed people away from them either by misbehavior or by retreating. Also, the momentary cessation of drug use, whether caused by intentional cessation, running out of money, or going to jail, was seen to cause loneliness.

*The experiences of not belonging to anywhere and receiving judgement from other people reinforces the feelings of loneliness.*

*Sometimes drug use has caused loneliness. It is a feeling of not belonging.*

*Yes, it has. I shut down quite a lot when I use drugs and then I use drugs to open myself up. It is a vicious circle.*

*Because no one can really trust anyone in the circle of drug users, it often feels lonely, when there is no trust in anyone. Then I am lonely.*

*Sometimes I feel like people are with each other only because of drugs and they do not have anything else in common. The only thing that unites them are the drugs.*

#### 10.4.2 The impact of the Nuoli community on the experience of loneliness

The experiences on the effectiveness of the Nuoli community on loneliness were mixed. Some of the participants had not experienced loneliness while being a client of Nuoli. All in all, the Nuoli community was seen as a positive factor with respect of the experience of being an outsider as well as companionship.

It was realized that all the young people who take care of their affairs in Nuoli have their own challenges which makes coming to Nuoli easier, they do not feel as much of an outsider. The discussions had with the employees of Nuoli were also seen as a factor reducing loneliness. Some of the participants felt the need for an ordinary, “more intellectual” conversations than what drug circles could offer. The conversations had with the employees were perceived as a constructive thing.

Only one of the participants had felt that the Nuoli community had caused them loneliness due to past disputes among the clients of Nuoli.

*It at least has helped with it because everyone here has their own things why they come here, so it is easy to be here because of it. I do not feel like such an outsider.*

*Sometimes it helps When there are quarrels then it is like them against me and then I am alone. But then I usually find some new people.*

*I have not experienced loneliness during my time in Nuoli.*

*It has reduced it loneliness.*

#### 10.4.3 Factors causing loneliness

The reasons for factors causing loneliness were diverse in the thoughts of the participants. Only one factor directly linking to drugs was the lack of money and the situations in which one could not afford to use drugs. These situations were often followed by unsuccessful attempts to obtain money for drugs which generally lead to being alone in jail and thus to loneliness.

Many of the participants mentioned a factor causing loneliness being left outside and being an outsider. Situations were described where the participants had been left outside in a group either intentionally or unintentionally.

Fear of failure as well as dissatisfaction on own appearance had made the participants less social which had led to feelings of loneliness as well as drug use to medicate those negative feelings.

### 10.5 Opinions on the operation of the Nuoli project

Satisfaction and thankfulness of the services of the Nuoli project came across from the individual interviews continuously. The participants were especially satisfied for the fact that there is a service like the Nuoli project for young people. The homeliness of Nuoli was seen as an approachable factor compared to other shelters and services for the homeless in Helsinki.

Many of the participants talked about the personal help and the time the employees have to encounter the clients compared to the bigger service centers and their assembly line-like work in which the clients get lost in the crowd of people.

A striking notion in the interviews was also the need for the participants to express their wish that a service like the Nuoli project would continue to operate also after they themselves are no longer in need for it or when their age becomes an obstacle.

*This is like a home compared to the emergency shelter. And when this is for people under thirty, there is definitely a much lower threshold to come here than go straight to Alppikulma (an emergency shelter in Helsinki). It feels like here the employees have time for people when in there they do not. There we are taken in quickly and then it is always to the next one.*

*It would be good that this operation continues in the future too, even if I would not come here when I am older or I have a different life situation. Just thinking of other young people.*

*It is easier to receive help from Nuoli. There should be more of these places. There are so many young people who do not necessarily even know about a place like this and even if they did, they are not able to bring themselves up to coming, dare or they are too nervous or something.*

*I do not know what would have happened if I had found a place like this when I was 18 years old. The situation might be totally different.*

## **11 Conclusions**

The younger participants had started using drugs daily at a noticeably young age while the older participants had started using drugs daily mainly as adults. This might have to do with the fact that buying drugs has become much easier in a short period of time. During the previous years, the expansion of online drug trafficking has most likely improved access to substances, specifically to minors (Karjalainen, Hakkarainen & Raitasalo 2019: 318.) This would support the results from the youngest participants who had started their daily drug use as minors.

Young people start to use substances approximately at 12-13 years old. Based on research, actual substance abuse disorders start to develop approximately at 14-15 years old. The substance abuse disorders are usually prolonged, difficult to treat and easily recurring. It is common that a young person with substance abuse disorder uses multiple substances at the same time. (von der Pahlen & Lepistö & Marttunen 2013: 114.) Although daily drug use with the older participants had mainly started as an adult, this research supports the results of the interviews. The participants had started experimenting with substances in their adolescence and most of the participants did use more than one substance daily, although given not as their main drugs.

The way an individual is encountered is significant. The experience that the workers want to be present for their clients and truly work for their benefit is something that is noticed among the participants. The authentic caring for the well-being of an individual is seen to be particularly important for young substance abusers (Ikola 2010: 69). Nuoli was experienced as a place where one felt good and safe to come to. The employees of Nuoli were seen as nice and the participants valued the conversations had with the employees as well as the help they received from them. Workers can affect the atmosphere and the feeling clients experience while encountering them by putting in the work themselves. An atmosphere of warmth and humanity promotes humane and caring encounters. (Duncan et al. 2017: 6.) There is an assumption to be made that the way the employees behave and conduct themselves has a major impact on the experiences of the clients.

Being listened to was an experience that made the encounters in the Nuoli project good. The participants often equated listening and helping, which gives an assumption that just listening to a client is sometimes all one needs to do to help their current situation. One major part of the experience of encountering in the Nuoli project for the participants was what happened after the initial encounters. Almost every participant spoke about the help and the manner of help they had received from Nuoli. The participants appreciated the effectiveness and timeliness of the help received from Nuoli. It was felt that in Nuoli there is not just talks about doing something to get the affairs of the clients in order, rather, actions are taken immediately.

It is not only the actions of individuals that make the whole concept of encountering a positive or a negative experience for a young homeless drug user. The accommodation and the atmosphere of Nuoli was mentioned to be a part of the experience of encountering. Nuoli was seen as 'home-like' and the fact that one could sleep and eat there was important. Fulfilment of basic needs like food, water, rest, and warmth, is a fundamental need of a human being and must be fulfilled before an individual can satisfy their other needs as noted in the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod 2020).

How the participants wanted to be encountered was the exact opposite from their experiences of encountering from society altogether. The prevalent hope was that they would be encountered like everyone else. No judgements or prejudices, just equally to others as human beings. On the other hand, the encounters they had experienced from law enforcement, other officials and just people in public places did not meet their wishes on encountering. Lack of encountering is an experience among substance abusers which unites them. The lack of encountering is something central in their lives and it impairs their ability to take care of their affairs the way they want. (Suominen & Malin-Kaartinen 2012: 9.)

The participants did see Nuoli as a community. A place of kinship, where one did not feel like an outsider since they were among with people who shared a similarity in the issues they faced in life. There are many positive factors that come from the Nuoli community, making new friends, and having the ability to have so to speak 'normal' conversations with the employees, different than what the clients of Nuoli are used to having in their own personal circles. On the other hand, it became abundantly obvious that there was a prevalent understanding that within the drug using circles, people have ulterior motives. Many did not see the people in their lives as true friends and realized that drugs were the only unifying factor between them. Although as a term community points to warm and pleasant relationships between people, it does not mean that communities could not be devastating (Eräsaari 2017: 35). What Eräsaari points out, stands in line with the fact that within the community of Nuoli, among drug users, stealing and disputes occur somewhat regularly.

Drug use had caused feelings of loneliness to most of the participants. Many also identified depression as a cause of drug use. Drug addiction is associated with a wide range of psychosocial problems. Many addicts suffer from depression or anxiety. When an individual notices that they may get some alleviation from their psychological problems by using drugs, drug use may operate as a temporary attempt of self-care and can lead to harmful use and possible addiction through time. (Tacke 2006: 139.) This type of behavior,



medicating negative feelings with drug use, did become repeating action to some of the participants and was identified as a cause for feelings of loneliness. One could draw a conclusion that a more approachable and easier path to mental health and substance abuse treatment services could be a way to stop the vicious circle that forms with young people so that they would not have to ease their feelings of depression and loneliness with drugs.

## **12 Discussion**

The aim of this thesis was to find out the experienced encountering, community, and loneliness of young drug users in the context of the Nuoli project. The experiences of the target group of a service like the Nuoli project is vital when planning and developing new and more permanent services for young homeless drug users.

From the start it was clear that a qualitative study would be implemented with individual interviews. When finding out the individual experiences of people, they should be given an opportunity to freely express themselves which would have been too strictive using a quantitative study with questionnaires. Individual interviews were chosen over group interviews for the reason of privacy. The supposition was that the young person participating in the interview would not necessarily feel safe or comfortable enough to partake fully in the interviews if there were peers of them present.

I had a working relationship with all the participants. With some of them I had worked with for several months and with others the working relationship was quite new. There was an understanding that the working relationship in question would affect the way the participants would answer the interview questions. Discussions in the Nuoli project between the employers were had and we all came to the conclusion that the working relationship I had with the participants would affect the number of answers as well as the inclination to participate in a positive matter.

Throughout the thesis process, I followed good scientific practice and committed to research-related principles. I have attempted to review the results critically and report the results truthfully. I have tried to ensure the reliability of the thesis by considering the solutions in accordance with ethics, by operating honestly and by exercising due diligence in the study.

Based on the results of the interviews, young homeless drug users receive a great benefit of a service where one gets personal attention and is met as a valued individual. The low threshold service the Nuoli project offers is experienced as beneficial by the young people who need their time to get used to new surroundings and people, a place where they are not pressured or rushed. However, prompt actions on behalf of the clients, when they are ready to take care of their affairs, are appreciated.

The results the study brought forth were in line with previous studies made on encountering substance abusers. However, I hope that my thesis could offer new insights and perspectives on the significance of encountering for young drug users and how meaningful appreciative and good encounter is to the individual in question.

Based on the experiences of the twelve 19–30-year-old participants, a low threshold service for young homeless drug users where every client can receive individual attention and time from employees is valued and needed. Within the participants there was a distinctive desire to share the help and the good they had received from Nuoli. The participants talked about their hopes for additional places like the the Nuoli project. A worry for young people in the same situation as they are was noticeable. This leads me to believe that the Nuoli project has already made a significant impact to the lives of the participants of the study.

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## Appendices

### Research permit


Tutkimuslupahakemus

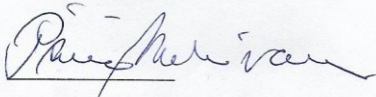
Haen Sininauhasäätiöltä tutkimuslupaa opinnäytetyölleni Nuorten kohtaamis- ja tukipiste Nuolessa suoritettaviin haastatteluihin. Opinnäytetyöni liittyy Metropolia Ammattikorkeakoulun sosionomi (AMK):n opintoihin. Opinnäytetyössäni tutkin kohtaamisen, yhteisön ja yksinäisyyden vaikutusta ja merkitystä päihteitä käyttäville nuorille.

Tutkimus tehdään käyttäen kvalitatiivista tutkimustapaa. Aineistonkeruumenetelmänä käytän asiakashaastatteluja. Keräämäni aineiston analysointiin käytän laadullisen tutkimuksen sisällönanalyysia. Suoritan haastattelut niin, ettei niistä selviä haastateltavien henkilöllisyys sekä hävitän aineiston, kun olen analysoinut sen.

Haastattelut suoritetaan alkuvuodesta 2021, helmi-, maaliskuu- ja huhtikuun aikana. Työn suunniteltu valmistuminen on toukokuussa 2021.

*Helsinki 15.2.2021*

  
Essi Vilppola  
Opinnäytetyön tekijä

  
Päivi Malmivaara  
Projektipäällikkö

## Interview permit

### HAASTATTELULUPA

Hei!

Olen Nuorten kohtaamis- ja tukipiste Nuolen ohjaaja sekä kolmannen vuoden sosionomiopiskelija Metropolia Ammattikorkeakoulusta. Teen opinnäytetyötä kohtaamisen, yhteisön ja yksinäisyyden merkityksestä ja vaikutuksesta huumeita käyttäville nuorille.

Saadakseni kohderyhmän omia ääniä kuuluviin, teen aiheesta asiakashaastatteluja. Haastattelut tehdään nimettöminä, ja niin, ettei haastateltavaa pysty tunnistamaan. Haastattelut ovat luottamuksellisia. Haastatteluja ei kuule tai näe kukaan muu, kuin minä.

Tarkoitukseni on haastatella asiakkaita ja nauhoittaa keskustelu aineiston analysointia varten. Vain tulokset tulevat opinnäytetyöhöni, ei haastattelut. Hävitän aineiston, kun olen analysoinut sen.

Kun opinnäytetyöni valmistuu, voin lähettää/antaa sen haastateltavilleni. Valmistumisaikataulu on toukokuussa 2021.

Pyydän lupaa haastatella teitä.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Essi Vilppola

Annan luvan haastatteluun

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## Interview frame

### Haastattelurunko

1. Kerro itsestäsi ja päihteiden käytöstäsi.
2. Minkä ikäisenä aloit käyttämään päihteitä? Osaatko kertoa miksi tai mitkä asiat johtivat/edesauttoivat asiaa?
3. Muistatko ensimmäisen käyntisi Nuorten kohtaamis- ja tukipiste Nuolessa? Kerro siitä.
4. Kohtaaminen
  - Miten koet, että sinut on kohdattu Nuolessa?
  - Koetko, että päihteiden käytöllä on ollut merkitystä kohtaamisessa? Miten?
  - Miten toivoisit, että sinut kohdataan?
5. Yhteisö
  - Miten koet Nuolen yhteisönä? Onko täällä yhteisöä?
  - Minkälainen fiilis Nuolessa on nuorten kesken?
  - Mikä merkitys yhteisöllä on sinulle?
  - Mitä mieltä olet Nuolen toiminnasta?
6. Yksinäisyys
  - Kenet miellät lähipiiriisi?
  - Onko päihteiden käyttö aiheuttanut yksinäisyyttä/ yksinäisyys johtanut päihteiden käyttöön?
  - Onko yhteisöllä ollut merkitystä yksinäisyyteesi?
  - Mikä mielestäsi aiheuttaa yksinäisyyttä?
  - Mitä ajatuksia yksinäisyys herättää sinussa?
7. Haluatko kertoa tai lisätä vielä jotain?