Reframing loneliness:
an intervention proposal for a holistic and preventative approach to loneliness in the high school context

The problem

For a long time, loneliness has mainly been recognized as a problem among elderly. Only in the last few years, people have been starting to realise that this is a concerning problem among adolescents too. A report from the GGD Haaglanden (2016) states that 42% of Delft's adolescents feel lonely. Looking into other research a similar trend is seen. Recent studies and the news coverage regarding loneliness and COVID-19, had sparked the interest in gaining a better understanding of the topic, in order to be able to take steps towards effective interventions for the youth of Delft. This initiated the collaboration with the Gemeente Delft to realize this project. It was decided to focus on the high school context specifically, because this is where adolescents spend most of their time while being surrounded by peers. It is also a vulnerable time, considering the many challenges that comes with puberty and being in a big social group.

The approach

Loneliness is only one word that contains a lot. So in order to get a good grip on this complex problem, the topic of loneliness as well as the high school context was extensively researched. This was done through literature research, contextmapping, expert interviews and other methods. The most interesting insight was that loneliness is, in fact, related to three underlying needs. This was found by applying the theory of the fundamental human needs (Desmet & Fokkinga, 2020). The three needs that play a role when it comes to loneliness are: need for community, need for relatedness and need for recognition.

The problem of loneliness in the high school context was **reframed** as:
"a problem of ignorance, by not treating the feeling as something we all experience and that teaches us about our underlying human needs."

Following this new way of approaching the problem, the **design statement** was formulated as:
"We want to show high school students how feelings like loneliness are indicators of underlying, fundamental human needs by letting them collectively reflect on these needs and their relation to emotions while also making them aware of the universality of those needs."

Community   Relatedness   Recognition

Loneliness
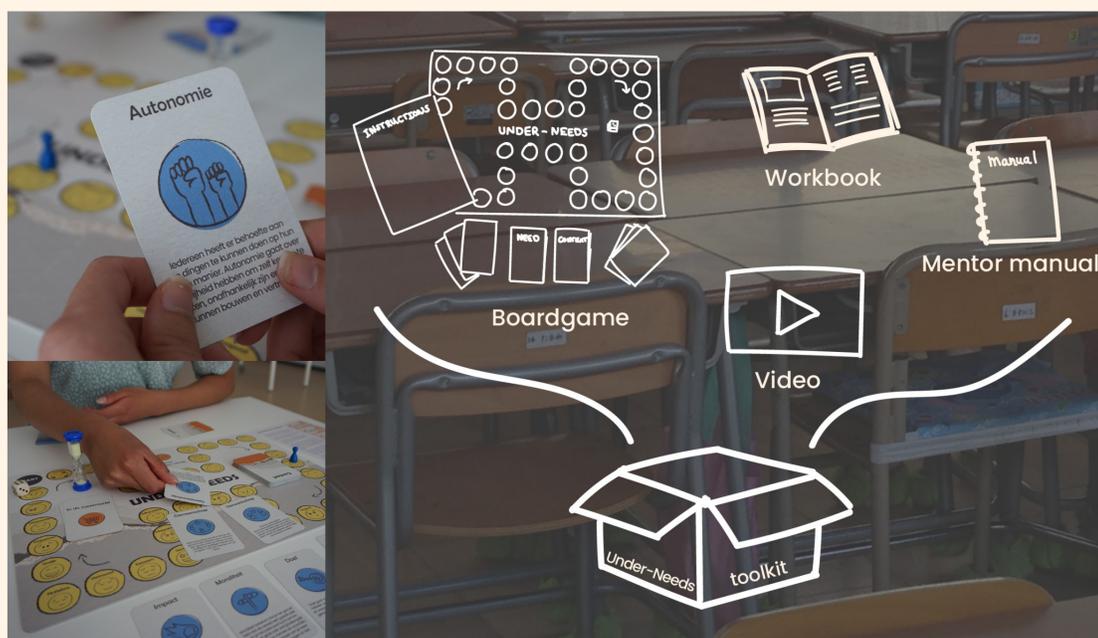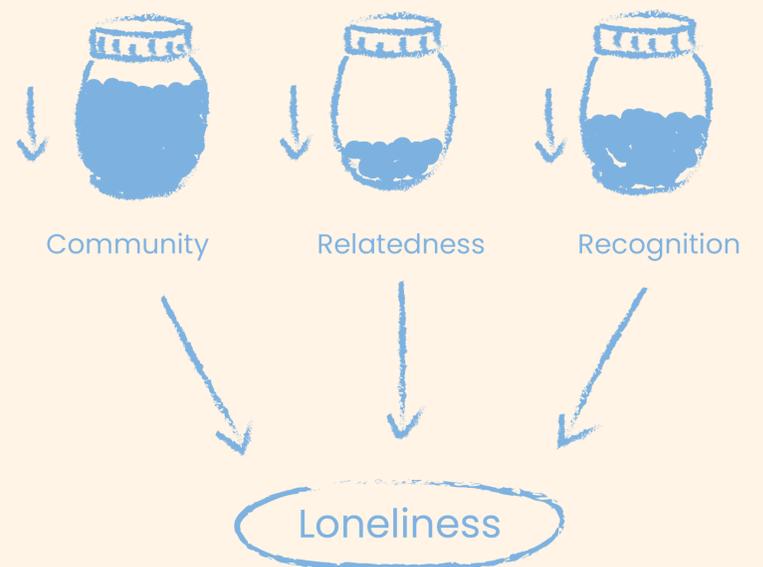
The Under-Needs toolkit

The insights from the research and the reframe led to an intervention proposal. The Under-Needs toolkit contains tools for an educational programme which takes place during the first couple of months of the first year of high school.

Goal of the toolkit
The toolkit provides the tools for the high school context to educate students on their emotions and underlying needs. While it does not directly tackle loneliness, it aims to teach students how to reflect on feelings like loneliness and trace them back to their underlying needs. This will help them to make better sense of feelings like loneliness, because they get taught how to see them in the bigger picture and what it tells them about their underlying needs. Besides that, it makes them aware of the universality of the underlying needs.
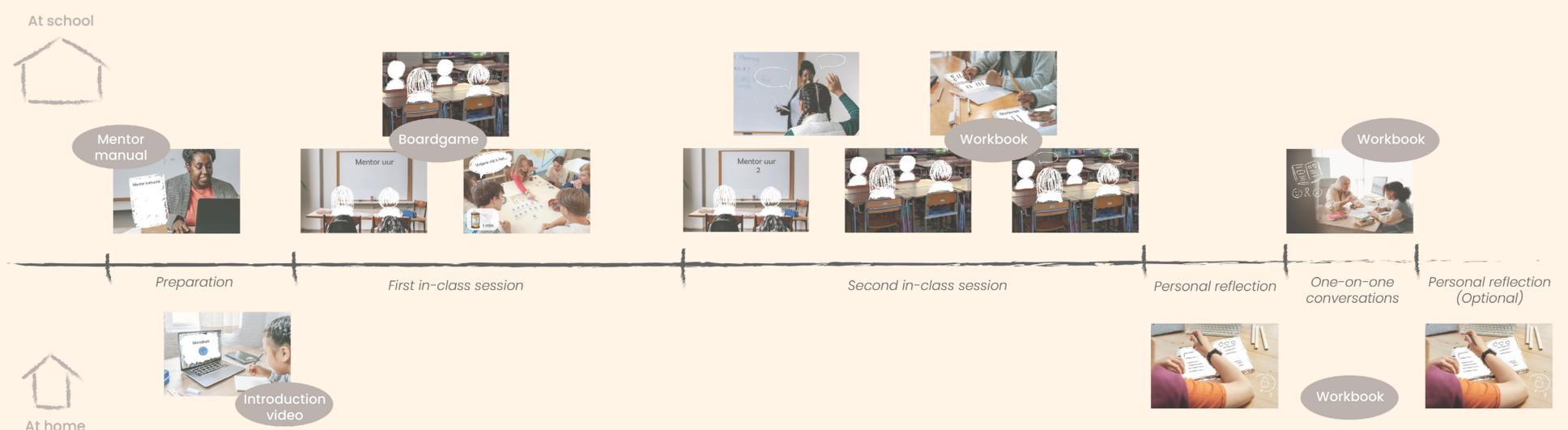
Message:
Feelings like loneliness can be traced back to thirteen underlying human needs, which are the same for everyone.

Intended effect:
Encourage introspection of an individual's emotion and underlying needs throughout their high school career by collectively, as well as individually, reflecting on day-to-day situations.

Scenario of use

At school

Mentor manual · Boardgame · Workbook · Workbook

Preparation · First in-class session · Second in-class session · Personal reflection · One-on-one conversations · Personal reflection (Optional)

Introduction video · Workbook

At home

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Reframing loneliness in the high school context
29-07-2021
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