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# I Took My First Steps...

by Maria

**TYPE**  
**NARRATIVE**  
**PERSUASIVE**

This piece is from *My Generation Can: Public Narratives for Community Change* (2019, 826 Boston), a book by 12th Graders at Boston's Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers.

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I took my first steps in a small farming village in the northern part of Greece named Loudias. It was there that I learned how to talk, love my family, support my community, and give what I have. I grew up in a place where everybody knew their neighbor, where everyone said “hi” to each other. Ever since childhood, it was instilled in me to value family, community, and culture and this shaped the way I understood the world to be.

When I moved to West Roxbury three years ago, I remember being shocked by the fact that I didn't see any kids playing outside on a sunny afternoon. People mostly

keep to themselves here and don't feel a connection to each other. As a young person, this bothers me. I feel like without community young people are more likely to make bad decisions about where and with whom they hang out.

In Loudias, there is a small internet cafe? where my friends and I used to spend our free time. On sunny summer days after our end-of-year exams, we'd have unlimited time to play outside under a sun so hot that it made everyone sweat. There was ice cream and a pool outside, right across the square. It was just a happy, connected, and safe community that felt like home.

Since moving to West Roxbury, I have noticed that the lack of public recreational places for youth makes the

community feel antisocial. While West Roxbury does have parks and a gym, young people nowadays aren't so easily entertained. Something like a public recreational space for young people will help us bring the community together and save the environment. This would also impact adults and other members of the neighborhood, because it fosters a sense of belonging. When those spaces do not exist, people might become isolated. In fact, studies have found that young people are reporting feeling isolated more than ever before. There is also good evidence that loneliness is connected to mental and even physical health problems later in life.

**Attention West Roxbury residents!** If you understand where I am coming from and it bothers you as well, then all you have to do is write a letter to your state

representative, asking them to create more community centers geared specifically towards teenagers. They can also incentivize neighborhood organizations to host youth-centered community events and create more easily accessible and affordable public spaces that appeal more to young people.

I grew up in a country where community is a priority and it helped me become who I am today: a strong, powerful, and caring woman. I want to see our kids grow up like this and even better, so let's take a step forward and give these new young people a more connected future.

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## **Maria's letter to Massachusetts State Representative**

**Edward F. Coppinger:**

The Honorable Edward F. Coppinger Massachusetts

State House

24 Beacon St, Boston, MA 02108

14 February, 2019

Dear Representative Coppinger,

My name is Maria and I am a graduating senior at the Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers. My ELA class is working on a project about social issues that affect our daily lives and the quality of life in our communities. I am writing to draw your attention to the

lack of community spaces for young people in Boston, but more specifically in West Roxbury.

This is an issue that affects me personally because I was born in Greece and was lucky enough to grow up in a tight knit community. But when I moved to West Roxbury, I discovered that there weren't the same kind of public spaces where young people could hang out.

As you may know, studies have found that young people are reporting feeling isolated more than ever before.

There is also good evidence that loneliness is connected to mental and even physical health problems later in life.

I believe that something can be done to help young people feel connected, including:

- Creating more community centers geared specifically towards teenagers
- Incentivizing neighborhood organizations to host youth-centered community events
- Creating more easily accessible and affordable public spaces that appeal more to young people

I strongly urge you to present or support a bill that brings us closer to these solutions.

If we do nothing, I fear that the problem of loneliness among young people will become worse and spiral into a public health crisis. We may see an increase in

depression and everything that comes with it.

Thank you for reading and for your service to the  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Maria

West Roxbury, MA

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- Suzanne Degges-White Ph.D., “Are Today’s Young Adults Becoming ‘Generation Lonely’?” Psychology Today, August 3, 2018, accessed April 3, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifetime-connections/201808/are-todays-young-adults-becoming-generation-lonely>