

**YEARS AHEAD**

The North East  
Forum on Ageing

## Loneliness and Isolation

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# A Survey of Initiatives to Combat Loneliness and Isolation in Older People in the North East Region

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## 1.0 Introduction

The Years Ahead Partnership Board (The North East Regional Forum on Ageing) commissioned this report in response to the concerns raised by the individual constituency Board Members.

This is a “**snapshot**” in time of what is available in the region as work is continuing and initiatives are evolving. The aim of this report is to:

- Raise awareness of loneliness and why working to reduce it matters
- Build the evidence base by gathering the evidence, promote what works and find the gaps in current interventions
- Share future-proofing ideas for individuals helping us all to future-proof our lives against loneliness in older age.

Rather than concentrate on the issues which have been explored in depth by a range of organisations i.e. the Campaign to End Loneliness, the Task Group has worked to produce a report on services and activities from around the region as noted in this document.

### 1.1 What is Loneliness?

Emotional loneliness is felt when someone misses the companionship of one particular person; often a spouse, sibling or best friend.

Social loneliness is experienced when we lack a wider social network or group of friends.

Loneliness can be a transient feeling that comes and goes. It can be situational; for example only occurring at certain times like Sundays, bank holidays or Christmas. Alternatively, loneliness can be chronic as when someone feels lonely all or most of the time.

We must draw a distinction between loneliness and isolation. Loneliness is linked to social isolation but it is not the same thing. Isolation is an objective state whereby the number of contacts a person has can be counted. One way

of describing this distinction is that one can be lonely in a crowded room, but one will not, in those circumstances, be socially isolated.

## 1.2 Risk Factors in Older Age

Loneliness can be felt by people of all ages, but as we get older, risk factors that might lead to loneliness begin to increase and converge. Such risk factors include (but are not limited to):

Personal	Wider Society
Poor health	Lack of public transport
Sensory loss	Physical environment (e.g. No public toilets or seating)
Loss of mobility	Housing
Lower income	Fear of crime
Bereavement	High population turnover
Retirement	Demographics
Becoming a carer	Technological changes
Other changes (e.g. giving up driving)	

The impacts of loneliness are devastating and costly with comparable health impacts to smoking and obesity.

## 1.3 Solitude

This is the opposite of loneliness: language... has created the word "loneliness" to express the pain of being alone. Yet it has created the word "solitude" to express the glory of being alone. (Paul Johannes Tillich)

## 1.4 Loneliness in the United Kingdom

- 6 -13% of older people say they feel very or always lonely
- 6% of older people leave their house once a week or less
- 17% of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once week, and;
- 11% are in contact less than once a month
- Over half (51%) of all people aged 75 and over live alone (ONS, 2010)
- Almost 5 million older people say that the television is their main form of company

## 2.0 Why should we act on loneliness?

- Those aged 60+ will rise to 24 per cent of the population by 2030.
- In the next 20 years, the population of those aged over 80 will treble and those over 90 will double.

Loneliness has a very negative impact on our health. Research has demonstrated it has an effect on mortality that is similar in size to cigarette smoking, and that it is worse for us than obesity.

Loneliness is also associated with conditions such as cardiovascular disease, dementia, poor sleep and depression. These factors can be alleviated by society and self-help.

### 2.1 Businesses and employers

- Support pre-retirees through retirement to stay connected.
- Offer products and services with built-in ways to bring people together.

### 2.2 Government

- Tackling loneliness as a health and wellbeing priority.
- Ensure there is regular, affordable public transport.
- Identify populations most at risk of loneliness e.g. BME groups.
- Prioritise preventative services or activities which will reduce loneliness

- Provide information and advice for people who are lonely.
- Reduce fear of crime.

### **2.3 Charities and Civil Society**

- Include tackling loneliness as a specific goal of their work.
- Build partnerships with statutory bodies and other charities.
- Reach out to most isolated people.
- Involve older people in service design, 'nothing about us without us'.

### **2.4 Individuals**

- Prepare for one's own future life.
- Volunteer (keep contributing after retirement) and join local groups.

## **3.0 Organisations Providing Services to Combat Loneliness**

### **3.1 Equal Arts**

Equal Arts is a registered charity that works with professional Artists to improve participation of older people in high quality arts activity. The organisation works in arts venues, residential care homes, sheltered housing schemes and community venues throughout the north east.

Work has been undertaken with Northumbria University researchers and survey reports written.

#### **3.1.1 Survey Report Extracts**

'Creativity Matters' is a 5 year project, which was launched by Equal Arts in January 2012 and funded by the Big Lottery. Through bespoke training programmes, artists and volunteers aim to support residential care staff to adopt a more person-centred approach to the care of residents through the meaningful use of creative activity. The project objectives are to:



- Provide active older people living in the community with opportunities to develop their own creative interests and skills and to contribute to their communities.
- Develop the capacities of care staff to offer a more person-centred approach to the care of older people living in residential care.
- Combat isolation and improve the quality of life of older people with dementia, living in care homes.
- Contribute to the evidence base regarding the benefits of creative activity for older people's wellbeing.

The two volunteer groups established in January 2012 still operate and meet regularly with the artists to develop their creative interests and skills. 'Grand Gestures' now has 22 members, having recruited ten additional members in Year Two. The group is located in Gateshead and maintains a focus on improvised dance. Throughout the second year of the project, the volunteers have been introduced to a wider range of movements and encouraged to undertake more choreographic tasks. As an increasingly confident performance group, the volunteers completed their first public performance in January 2013, while also producing a number of short films, which have been shown at various events. The group has also engaged with a number of other artists and art forms, challenging its skills base. In addition to improving the volunteers' understanding of improvisation and the quality of their movements, the sessions are supporting their health and wellbeing; improving the functionality of their bodies, providing enjoyment, offering a means of self-expression, increasing confidence and combatting isolation. The group continues to feel challenged by the sessions and in 2014, the volunteers would like to maintain their focus on dance and to engage in further public performances.

### **3.1.2 Henpower**

HenPower is an Equal Arts project which encourages older people to get involved in hen keeping as a way of reducing isolation and increasing health and wellbeing.

For its work in tackling loneliness HenPower was shortlisted in the health category of the 2014 National Lottery Awards.

As well as looking after hens, hatching eggs and rearing chicks, the 'Hensioners' involve themselves in a range of creative activities from designing their own hen houses, to recording oral histories and designing a range of cards, calendars, tea towels, and other merchandise by working with sculptors, visual and new media artists.

Taking their knowledge of hens to schools and care settings the HenPower group is also seeing benefits in its work in dementia care settings with staff reporting a reduction in the use of anti-psychotic medication.

Three full reports have been provided. Please see [www.equalarts.org.uk](http://www.equalarts.org.uk).

## **3.2 Royal Voluntary Service**

Community Services to Combat Loneliness and Social Isolation.

### **3.2.1 Northumberland**

- Social Centres –friendship, activities, hot lunch, transp. provided–7
- Lunch Clubs – friendship and food – 3
- Coffee mornings/afternoons – friendship - 3
- Good Neighbours/befriending service – county wide
- Men in the Workshop – social inclusion for older men – 1
- Dementia Support Groups – people living with dementia and their carers – social inclusion
- Community Transport – county wide

### **3.2.2 Tyne & Wear**

North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland

- North Tyneside – Home Library Service – hopefully extend to befriending
- Newcastle – Home Library Service
- Newcastle – Patient/ Social Transport Service – combines befriending
- Newcastle – Monthly lunch club

- Newcastle – Stroke Club - 3 days per week - social inclusion
- South Tyneside – starting social centres year
- Gateshead – Home Library Service – combines befriending
- Gateshead – starting coffee mornings this year
- Sunderland – Home Library Service
- Sunderland – Stroke Club- social inclusion
- Sunderland – on-ward library delivery service

### **3.2.3 Durham & Darlington**

- Good Neighbours Service – social inclusion/transport
- Darlington – Home Library Service/befriending
- Sherburn House – befriending service

### **3.2.4 Tees Valley**

- Good Neighbours/befriending
- Handyman service

[www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk](http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk)

## **3.3 Newcastle Elders Council**

The Elders Council has long recognised the importance of tackling the question of Loneliness and Isolation in Older People and has, over the years, addressed this in a number of ways. Below is a summary of some of the initiatives currently in place.

The majority of current activity falls under the following five headings:

### **3.3.1 Bridging the Gaps work in Throckley**

It was recognised that to tackle the whole of Newcastle would be beyond available resources so it was decided to focus on Throckley and Jesmond

### **3.3.2 Bridging the Gaps work in Jesmond**

Following the closure of Jesmond Library and its takeover as a community facility, a group of local Elders Council members held 4 drop-in sessions for

older people to inform people about the importance of the library for information about local activities and services. Questions were also asked about what helped older people to stay connected, and to overcome loneliness. As a result, Jesmond Elders are working with the Friends of Jesmond Library, not only to develop the Library as an information hub, but also to arrange a programme of meetings on the theme of Wellbeing for Life. The aim is to bring together local organisations providing activities to talk about what is on offer, and to encourage everyone to try something new and/or identify any gaps in provision. It is proposed to cover social aspects of wellbeing, e.g. opportunities for exercise; outdoor activities including gardening; staying socially involved; befriending and volunteering; being creative; enjoying the arts etc. - and not just giving out information but actively encouraging and supporting each other to enjoy activities in friendly company.

### **3.3.3 Staying Connected**

In August 2013, this project was established, in conjunction with AgeUK Newcastle, whereby small grants are made available to individuals or groups who want to test out an idea for an activity or for an action that will make a difference to older people who may be socially isolated or lonely.

It could be that a group would like to reach out to include housebound people or maybe they would like to join up with others for support in trying a new activity. Perhaps there is an interest they could share with someone who feels lonely.

Applications were invited for suitable projects that would make a difference so that older people can feel that they are valued members of a community and can still give support to each other. So far, the scheme has proved very successful and a total of 19 Awards have been made.

### **3.3.4 Milecastle Drop In**

Elders Council spends a lot of time talking to members and encouraging them to keep involved, get out and about and keep active.

The offer of a room at the Milecastle, a public house on the corner of Westgate Road and Grainger Street, once a month for social get-togethers was taken up and the first meeting was held January 2014.

The first event was very successful and attracted an attendance of over 30 people which it is expected will grow.

### **3.3.5 Transport**

In Newcastle the use of subsidised transport by older people increased dramatically with the introduction of the free Concessionary Bus Pass.

Previously, there was a 50p charge for each journey; it was estimated that usage increased by up to three times previous figures with introduction of the free bus pass. This clearly has a considerable effect on reducing Isolation for older people.

The Transport Working Group continually emphasises this to Local Transport Bodies, Local Authorities and Government Departments. The risk of losing the free bus pass ranks high in the concerns of many older people.

## **3.4 Gateshead Older People's Assembly**

Whilst Gateshead Older People's Assembly is 'The Voice of older people in Gateshead', members are aware that they are unable to reach everybody, particularly those older people facing loneliness or social isolation.

Assembly members decided to find a way to tackle the issues and after a series of workshops devised a means of enabling older people to make contact and build friendships with others who may be in a similar situation. The idea of 'Friendship Groups' was born.

### **3.4.1 The Friendship Group Model**

A number of older volunteers would identify and engage with older people who experience loneliness and isolation, and from this engagement would create a 'Friendship Group'. The older volunteers would locate suitable venues and publicise the group in a number of ways. These include visiting sheltered housing schemes, advertising through the use of flyers and events and through

working with partner organisations working with older people. New groups of like-minded people can then be formed to engage in activities of their choice. This in turn encourages involvement and companionship rather than loneliness and isolation.

An important element of the Friendship Group model is that it is led and run by older people themselves. Experience has shown that the best people to engage with older people are other older people. Older volunteers can empathise with people their own age, and may have experienced similar issues. With administrative and practical support from the operational staff of the Assembly, the work of older volunteers has, through the development of these Friendship Groups, already begun to have a big impact on the more isolated older people of Gateshead.

### **3.4.2 The Growth of Friendship Groups**

Gateshead Older People's Assembly set up its fourth Friendship Group in November 2013. The first group began in January 2013, and is based at Kay's Cottages, Windy Nook. In order to set up these groups and help them to get started, a grant was secured of just under £5,000 from Gateshead Housing Company's Community Fund. By advising the groups of ways they could generate small amounts for their group, they have become largely self-sustaining. The four groups that have been set up so far are:

- Kay's Cottages – Windy Nook (started January 2013)
- Felling (based within the Assembly premises) (started Spring 2013)
- Low Fell (St Helen's Church Hall) (started summer 2013)
- Birtley ) (Based in Birtley Hub) (started November 2013)

The groups have all shown great initiative and creativity. Some of the activities include craft sessions, trips to the coast, card games, exercise sessions, trips to Safety Works, film club and guest speakers from other organisations. The groups have between 20-30 members each, with more people coming along all the time.

### **3.4.3 The Future**

Friendship Groups have proven to be a very successful and cost effective way to tackle the issue of loneliness and isolation in older people. There is much evidence to suggest that the positive health benefits will also reduce adult health and social care costs in the future.

### **3.5 Stockton-on-Tees over 50s Assembly**

Through a better understanding of the concept of loneliness, how and why people become lonely, and how it impacts on the lives of those aged over 50 in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees, the Council and its partners have an opportunity to, prevent the development of loneliness and where it has already become an issue, find ways to address the problem and reduce its impact on individuals.

The methodology used to understand the issue of loneliness was an initial desk based review of all existing loneliness research, followed by a structured questionnaire with a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions and follow up focus groups. The UCLA Loneliness scale (Russell, 1996) along with the recognised Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al, 1985) and a Deprivation scale were used to add formal measures of comparability.

#### **3.5.1 Key findings**

Who in Stockton are currently most vulnerable to the effects of loneliness?

- Either aged 50-65 or over 85
- Divorced or has always been single
- In very poor health
- Always/Often/sometimes have too little to spend on personal needs
- Low score for life satisfaction (ranges from 5 to 25)
- Unlikely to attend groups or networks or volunteer
- Watch television or choose to spend time alone
- Less likely to have children or close family
- May have recently been made redundant or divorced
- High levels of fear of crime and low levels of satisfaction with local area

Why with the knowledge of current support in place are people still experiencing loneliness in Stockton on Tees?

- People are unwilling to get involved: feedback highlighted many lacked any interest in taking part and lack motivation.
- People are unable to get involved. Feedback highlighted there were many reasons people couldn't get involved; the cost of taking part, mobility and health issues, awareness of what is available and transport.
- People have increased caring responsibilities. Feedback highlighted the demands and pressures required to look after partners, family or their grandchildren
- Lack of education - unaware of the impact that loneliness can have
- Lack of awareness of what is available

### **3.5.2 How Could People be Supported?**

- Look at intervention by appropriate agencies when starting to recognise the triggers for loneliness
- Raise awareness of how actions and events can impact and make people lonely
- Look at the provision of transport
- Positive promotion of what is on or what people can do to help themselves: go to a group, do a hobby, go for a walk.
- Support in place for those experiencing major life experiences e.g. divorce, redundancy
- Financial advice and guidance for those 50+
- Remove the social stigma of 'being lonely'

## **3.6 Independent Age**

The charity was founded 150 years ago and has 1500 volunteers and 70 staff around the UK and Ireland. They provide friendship and support services to around 5,000 older people.

Services include:

- Visit older people at home.



- Provide telephone support as telephone friends.
- Run 'Live Wires' telephone groups for book and discussions.
- Telephone buddies – a telephone befriending service.
- Advice for older people, their families and carers.

More information on this organisation and these services can be found at [www.independentage.org/](http://www.independentage.org/)

### **3.7 Age UK Northumberland**

#### **3.7.1 The Friendship Programme**

This service delivers a regular telephone call to older people each week and provides company for many older people. Through the Friendship Programme the organisation is also able to provide lunch trips for clients who use the service together with a peer support programme to “link up” clients who wish to extend their social networks. During consultations with clients it was found that many people asked for home visits as part of the service

#### **3.7.2 The Rural Access Project**

The service provides supported outings (cultural & shopping) to older vulnerable or isolated people with mobility difficulties in the rural north of the county.

#### **3.7.3 Lunch Clubs**

There are 8 lunch clubs across the county. Some of them run an exercise class before lunch and bingo afterwards.

#### **3.7.4 Information and Advice Line**

This service provides a wide range of information and advice including on benefits.

#### **3.7.5 Visiting Friends**

A pilot scheme of 'Visiting Friends' has been successful in the town of Ashington Funding is now being sought to expand the service across the county.

### 3.8 Age UK Darlington

Over the last two years the Age UK Darlington 'Rely on Me' befriending and telephone befriending service has been extremely successful in tackling the isolation and loneliness of 240 older people.

The service has now become 'The' recognised provider in Darlington for referrals. It is supported by 90 volunteers and continues to provide companionship to isolated older people on a weekly basis (minimum 1.5 hours), either in an individual's home, sheltered accommodation or in a care home. Visits involve lively conversation, listening to music, providing companionship watching television, an accompanied short walk, a shopping trip or for coffee/lunch/afternoon tea. The service aims to provide whatever the individual wants from the befriending visit. Volunteers also provide a driver service to take people shopping and to medical appointments, these visits are all accompanied as the driver stays with the befriended person until they are ready to go home.

#### 3.8.1 Good Friends (Good Neighbouring)

Good Friends is a volunteer project with a difference. Good Friends focusses on the ways people can help to improve the life of their older or vulnerable neighbours.

This project bridges the gap between voluntary social services such as Age UK Darlington's 'Rely on Me' Befriending and Neighbourhood Watches 'just watching' approach. A network of Good Friends keeps a watchful eye on their older, isolated and/or vulnerable neighbours. They provide support and friendship. They also assist with a range of issues which if left unaddressed could compromise their ability to live safely and independently. The kinds of assistance Good Friends have provided over the past year include:

- Social support: helping to decrease isolation, increase confidence and promote positive well-being.
- Practical tasks, particularly for people with disabilities; for example helping with gardening, taking out wheelie bins, walking dogs.

- Accompanying on trips out, often where the recipient would not have had the confidence to do so alone, including going to the shops, attending lunch clubs, days out.

Since the project start in October 2013 over 600 Good Friends have been recruited and they support over 350 older people. Good Friends recipients all report feeling more positive and having improved wellbeing as a result of being involved in the project.

### **3.9 Age UK Sunderland**

#### **3.9.1 Social focus group**

The social focus service aims to provide a relaxed and enjoyable environment for people over the age of fifty who suffer from anxiety, stress or depression.

The objectives are

- To help each individual by giving them the confidence and self-esteem needed to progress forward
- To support and encourage each individual to access a variety of activities within their local community

The service aims to help individuals over an initial six month period, during which time assessments will be ongoing and hopefully lead to appropriate placements in mainstream day clubs or other socially-based activities within the community.

#### **3.9.2 Telephone service**

The telephone service offers regular phone calls to isolated, lonely older people in the Sunderland area.

The office is staffed by a co-ordinator and a team of volunteers who provide a regular point of contact for the older person and giving them a friendly call to look forward to.

Some older people feel that they wouldn't like to have a visitor coming into their own home, but a regular call can build up a friendship without intrusion.

People who use our telephone service are extremely encouraged to think that someone cares enough to make a call to them and once regular contact has been established, clients then feel that they can ask for advice and information.

### **3.9.3 Friendly Faces Home Visiting Service**

Our friendly faces service is for older people in Sunderland who feel lonely and isolated. They have a team of volunteers who make regular social visits to older people, offering company and a friendly chat.

Age UK Sunderland's friendly faces home visiting service is a service for older people in the city who:

- Live alone,
- Are housebound,
- Have days when they see no one.

### **3.9.4 Dial-a-Driver Scheme**

This project is aimed at older people, and people with disabilities who are able to use standard cars.

The project's aims are:

- To provide cheaper transport to the beneficiary group
- To enable users to get to and from doctors, chiropodist, hospital and social appointments/engagements
- To provide support from the volunteer drivers on the way in to and out of appointments, and in the waiting room

The project uses volunteer drivers, and their own cars. It costs 45p per mile, from the driver leaving their own home to their return. The charge is to reimburse drivers for their out-of-pocket expenses and is paid by the service user directly to the driver. They will issue a receipt if requested.

An attempt will be made to get a driver who lives as close as possible to the service user to minimise costs. If going to a doctors/hospital appointment, the driver can normally wait and escort the service user in and out if necessary.

### **3.9.5 Day Clubs and Day Services**

There are currently over 40 day clubs that run Monday to Friday in the Sunderland, Penshaw, Houghton, Hetton, Washington and Easington Lane areas that are used by around 600 people.

### **3.9.6 ActivAge**

Courses include computer courses, modern languages, arts and crafts and health and fitness.

### **3.9.7 Men's group**

The men's group is an opportunity for men who may have become isolated or lonely due to ill health or bereavement to get together, chat and socialise in a relaxed environment.

The men enjoy a game of dominoes, sit and chat over a cup of tea or coffee and sometimes go on day trips. Everyone is made welcome.

## **3.10 South Tyneside**

### **3.10.1 South Tyneside Council**

South Tyneside Council, as all local authorities, has a duty to assess the needs of all older people referred to them, and do, as a part of that assessment of need, identify if loneliness and isolation is an issue. They then signpost or pass on information regarding the various options available.

South Tyneside Council website has a comprehensive list of all community services in the borough.

### **3.10.2 Churches Together**

Churches Together in South Tyneside offer a Happy at Home befriending service. Information is available through the council and its website, through

its Happy at Home website and through the various churches in South Tyneside.

### **3.10.3 Age UK South Tyneside**

Age UK offers advice and information regarding services and has a community café.

### **3.10.4 Community Centres**

There are two luncheon clubs for older people available through Community Centres (the Phab Club in Jarrow and Trinity Centre in South Shields) and also 'Meet and Eat' sessions.

- There is a Stroke Support Group and a Speech after Stroke Group
- Tea Dances
- Sight Service assesses the needs of all visually impaired people and if loneliness or isolation is identified offers telesupport, befriending and or someone to take people out.
- Sight Service offers a weekly luncheon group to vulnerable visually impaired people (with transport available) together with a social group and regular drop in sessions.
- Action on Hearing Loss (RNID) offer a monthly drop in /social group.
- South Tyneside Deaf Club meets regular at their Centre in Westoe Road, South Shields.
- Blissability offer information on request regarding services to relieve loneliness and isolation.

## **3.11 Northumberland Ageing Well Partnership Board**

A report from the Northumberland Ageing Well programme was presented to the Ageing Well Partnership Board in September 2014.

In 2013 / 14 Ageing Well began to engage with the loneliness agenda in Northumberland, holding two 'Opening the Door on Loneliness in Later Life' consultation events with older people. The consultation events discussed issues around loneliness and how to combat them, to influence the Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Activity in 2014 includes:

- Step into Spring in Ponteland, attended by around 170 older people
- A new social activity group in Seaton Sluice in partnership with the Royal Voluntary Service
- Continuation of the Blooming Well gardening groups and a successful bid by Groundwork to extend the programme for a further 2 years
- Stobhill community planting (Spring 2014) and social group
- Supported walks programme in West Northumberland with North County Leisure
- Planning of 'Winter Warmers' events to stay safe, healthy, warm and well
- Promotion of Dementia Friendly Communities and Dementia Friends
- Nutrition & Hydration week events
- Partnership with BAIT Arts for Health Creative People Creative Places programme in South East Northumberland to offer a range of arts based activity with professional artists who include people living with dementia and their families.

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### **3.12 Redcar and Cleveland Older People's Partnership**

In a survey 'How Comfortable is Your Life', 28% of people said they felt lonely or isolated. The Older People's Partnership organises events to ensure that people can come together for social activities in addition to offering help and information to address isolation.

### **3.13 Seton Care Befrienders**

The Seton Care Befrienders Project was set up in August 2012 to provide a voluntary befriending service to anyone over 55 living in Berwickshire or north Northumberland.

### **3.13.1 What a volunteer befriender can do**

- Arrange to do social activities with a lonely person, such as attending drop-in centres or hobby clubs
- Give time to talk
- Help someone with a hobby
- Pop in to say hello
- Visit for a cup of tea and provide some companionship.

### **3.13.2 The Project**

The project has over 20 volunteers and around 40 service users but those numbers are rising all the time. The project was a runner-up for Outstanding Project of the Year at Berwick Voluntary Forum's Annual Awards in 2014 and earlier in the year, the project achieved the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation's Approved Provider Standard accreditation.

[www.setoncare.org.uk](http://www.setoncare.org.uk)

## **3.14 The Alzheimer's Society**

### **3.14.1 Dementia 2013 Report**

In their report Dementia 2013, the Alzheimer's Society addressed the problem of loneliness;

- A third (33%) of people with dementia said they lost friends following a diagnosis.
- More than a third (39%) of people with dementia responding to the survey said they felt lonely. Only a quarter (24%) of over 55s in the general public said they have felt lonely in the last month.
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of people with dementia who live on their own said they felt lonely. Difficulties in maintaining social relationships and other features of dementia contributed to this.



### **3.14.2 Services Available**

The Society has the following services in place to help people living with dementia to deal with feelings of loneliness;

- A long established befriending service in Gateshead commissioned by Gateshead Council with some additional funding from the CCG to support carers. A Befriending Manager is in post with a deputy as well as a Community Support Worker and volunteers.
- Sunderland Council commissions a befriending scheme and the Alzheimer's Society employs a befriending manager. The scheme is delivered by volunteers
- In Northumberland two Befriending Managers have been recruited along with two Community Support Workers.
- Funding is in place to begin a new style project in Durham funded through voluntary income to combat loneliness and social isolation.

### **3.15 The Local Government Association**

The LGA, in its 2014 report *Combatting Loneliness a Guide for Local Authorities*, the Chair of the LGA Community Wellbeing Board, wrote in his foreword, "There is growing recognition that loneliness is a serious problem, with far reaching implications, not just for individuals, but also for wider communities, which merits the attention of local authorities." It was acknowledged that loneliness is increasingly understood to be a serious condition which can affect a person's mental and physical health.

### **3.16 Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

The Foundation has published a resource pack at [www.jrf.org.uk/publications/loneliness-resource-pack](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/loneliness-resource-pack) which is the result of a comprehensive study.

## 4.0 Widely Used Interventions

### 4.1 Befriending Schemes

Befriending schemes are perhaps the longest established loneliness intervention; the schemes represent a low cost and effective remedy for some of the most vulnerable individuals experiencing loneliness, in particular those who are housebound. Whilst befriending schemes are long established in many areas, practice is becoming ever more sophisticated with increasing attention paid to peer-to-peer models of befriending, an emphasis on matching individuals based on mutual interests, and an increasing use of technology such as Skype, are building new dimensions to the model.

#### 4.1.1 The mentoring and Befriending foundation

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (mandbf) defines mentoring and befriending as: *A voluntary, mutually beneficial and purposeful relationship in which an individual gives time to support another to enable them to make changes in their life.* The methods used can be face to face or tele-befriending by telephone calls. E-befriending by emails is a third method but this would exclude a lot of older people. [www.mandbf.org](http://www.mandbf.org)

### 4.2 Lunch Clubs

Lunch clubs typically offer a warm and friendly atmosphere in which older people can meet with friends and enjoy a nutritious meal. It is a social occasion as much as an occasion to eat well. Lunch clubs typically meet anything from weekly to monthly and many offer transport to people who would otherwise have no means of getting there. They are a means of meeting old friends and making new ones. Some lunch clubs offer activities before and after lunch to make good use of time and to give the opportunity to increase the interests of those attending.

Some clubs cater for people with mobility issues or dementia and are largely staffed by volunteers.

### **4.3 Exercise Groups/Dance Groups/Supported Walks and Shopping or Cultural Visits**

Any kind of physical activity will be beneficial to older people provided it is at a pace to suit individual needs and ability. Groups which offer these activities, usually at a small charge, are well attended and provide social as well as health benefits. The social and emotional wellbeing benefits of supported walks or shopping trips need no explanation.

### **4.4 Wavelength**

Wavelength is a voluntary organisation which provides televisions and radios for isolated and lonely people; there is no cost to the recipient. In some exceptional cases, they can also help cover the cost of a TV licence or aerial for beneficiaries who don't already have one. Wavelength takes care of all installation and delivery. Beneficiaries cover a wide spectrum, but typically they are over 75 years of age and living with chronic sickness, disability or mental health problems.

For further information about this charity, visit <http://wavelength.org.uk>

### **4.5 The Ageing Well programme**

The Local Government Association's Ageing Well programme was an intensive programme of support for councils which were funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. It was designed to help councils develop good places to grow older.

Working in a variety of ways, it helped local authorities diagnose what needed to be prioritised and provided support mechanisms to help councils achieve that.

The work covered areas such as age equality, intergenerational projects, loneliness and isolation, engaging with older people, housing, creating dementia friendly communities, health and wellbeing, volunteering, strategic measures and taking a whole place approach.

The programme has now come to an end, but councils can still get support from the Ageing Well website that includes a wealth of resources drawn together during the two year programme including written guides, toolkits, videos, case studies and links to other organisations which can help. [www.local.gov.uk/ageing-well](http://www.local.gov.uk/ageing-well)

## **5.0 For Further Information**

The Campaign to End Loneliness [www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk](http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk)

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