

# Loneliness Roundtable

To mark the anniversary of Jo Cox's death and to coincide with the Great Get Together, Age Cymru invited a range of organisations to attend a roundtable on the theme of loneliness. The roundtable was chaired by Jayne Bryant AM and provided an opportunity to debate and highlight different solutions for tackling loneliness and to commit to continuing to working together to ensure Wales has compassionate communities all year round, not just at times of crisis.

## Roundtable Report

Loneliness and isolation are a daily reality for many older people. 75,000 older people in Wales report 'always or often' feeling lonely, and there is increasing evidence that this can have severe implications for physical and mental health.

People may become increasingly isolated in later life for diverse reasons, including retirement, bereavement, ill health, a lack of local services or transport and a poor physical environment. Some older people choose to miss out on socialising or activities because even small charges to attend, or the costs of transport, are beyond them. This means that some people barely leave their home, resulting in chronic loneliness and what we increasingly understand to be the severe health impacts associated with this.

During the meeting, attendees shared examples of projects that have been successful in tackling loneliness. The projects highlight the different ways third sector organisations, statutory services and citizens can work together to reach isolated older people and create social networks that reduce levels of loneliness. In order to share the learning and expertise from these projects, a short summary of six projects is included in this report.

In addition to sharing good practice the group asked questions and exchanged the following ideas and solutions:

### Working in partnership

The group discussed the benefits of working with GPs to identify and reach older people who are socially isolated and may be feeling lonely. All agreed that having someone to listen and show they care can make an individual feel significantly better about their situation. Spending time with someone may encourage them to open up about issues even a GP would not be aware of. Age Cymru Gwent shared an example of one person who told a project worker about an alcohol difficulty, despite having never mentioned it to a GP, allowing treatment and support to be secured, with a significant benefit to that individual's ongoing wellbeing. As such, it may not always be the case that interventions need to be highly complex in order to achieve very positive results.

### We believe regional partnership boards should;

- **Facilitate** integrated working between GPs, local authorities and the third sector organisations to ensure isolated older people are able to access the support they need.



## Working with volunteers and community groups

The majority of projects highlighted by the group are either led or sustained by volunteers. Whilst the value and importance of volunteering should not be underestimated, group members were keen to stress that, in order to be successful and sustainable, projects require an element of statutory or third sector support.

For many organisations working with volunteers, an element of formal financial support is vital to carry out safeguarding checks and manage volunteers effectively. A paid staff member can also ensure the sustainability and growth of a project by providing marketing and outreach services.

It was recognised that there could be difficulties in dealing with bureaucracy. Funding applications can be very time consuming, particularly for those who have not made applications on the past, with guidance being quite poor. As such, it was felt that these processes would benefit from being clearer and applicants better supported. Similarly, several contributors felt there needs to be a clearer, more user-friendly means of transferring local authority assets to local groups, although the importance of authorities ensuring projects are viable is still recognised

Although the case studies below demonstrate that adopting new approaches to working with communities can save public money, they also demonstrate that an element of statutory support is key to ensuring a project's success.

## Showing effectiveness

It was generally felt that there needs to be enough time to prove the value and effectiveness of a service. As such, many contributors felt that project funding should be made available for reasonable amounts of time, rather than fund short-term project after short-term project without allowing them to adequately establishing their services.

Longer term funding would also increase a project's ability to build successful partnerships with other organisations. On this issue of proving effectiveness, it was also recognised that there is a need to utilise a more consistent means of measuring the impact of interventions.

## We believe regional partnership boards should;

- **Work** with the third sector to explore different models of funding for lunch clubs allow these valuable community groups to be established on a sustainable basis across Wales.
- **Support** older people and community groups to develop and deliver local solutions that counteract loneliness.
- **Consider** innovative ways to support such activities by encouraging the use of council facilities.

## Housing providers' initiatives

Social housing providers, Linc Cymru and Derwen Cymru, described their initiatives aimed at combating loneliness, including clubs and activities aimed not only at their tenants, but those living in the wider community. Such initiatives recognise that if their tenants are to be fully involved in their communities they should not be segregated from others in the locality, but take an active interest and role in activities within their communities.

## We believe regional partnership boards should;

- **Encourage** social housing and residential care providers to open their activities and premises to with the wider community.



## Examples of Good Practice in Tackling Loneliness

### Newport Older Person's Integrated Pathway (NOPP)

The Newport Older Person's Integrated Pathway (NOPP) project commenced in Aug 2014 as a pilot in one Newport GP surgery. It now involves 10 surgeries, with 3 coming on board shortly, with an intention to roll out to cover the whole of Newport.

A collaboration between Age Cymru Gwent, Newport City Council and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), the project aims to help people remain in their homes as independently and safely as possible, and to allow individuals the freedom, options and choices to make decisions that will benefit their health and general wellbeing whilst ensuring continued participation within their communities.

Working with a Care Facilitator, participants are supported to agree to a plan of action that best suits their needs to maintain their standard of living and, where possible, make improvements to ensure their quality of life is also maintained or improved. The resulting "Stay Well Plan" will support people in the things that will make their lives easier, focusing on health, wellbeing, safety, finances, independence and social activities – essentially, factors which can lead to isolation and loneliness.

Initial evaluation data has shown that those who have a Stay Well Plan have benefited from:

- A significant reduction in attendances at A&E
- A significant reduction in emergency admissions
- A significant reduction Frailty (CRT) episodes
- Increased access to benefits such as attendance allowance, allowing them to access community activities and support independently.

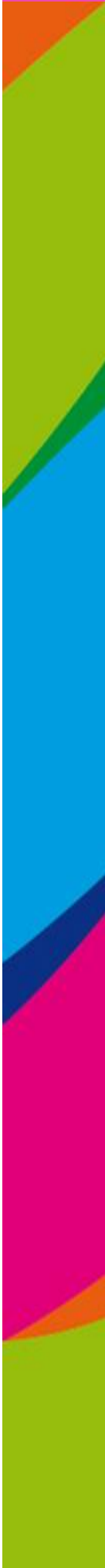
Furthermore, those who have maintained their participation in the programme are less likely to need to access Social Care services than those who have opted out.

### Circles of Support

Mark John-Williams, Director of the Co-production Network for Wales, highlighted the potential to introduce "circles of support" into Wales. Currently found in England and Scotland, there are currently relatively few "Circles" initiatives in Wales at the moment, one notable exception being the Flintshire Community Circles project.

Community Circles are a way for friends and family to support someone through conversation and actions. Each Community Circle has a purpose – the reason why the concerned person wants a circle. This may be to meet new people, get practical support, feel stronger, or help with managing a change. The people in the circle carry out the actions which will help the person start to do or carry on doing things that are important to them.

A Community Circle can be held in someone's home, in a church, temple, or



school, a restaurant or a pub: anywhere where the person is comfortable. Members meet every few weeks with the person being supported and their Circle Facilitator, who keeps things on track and makes sure that conversations turn into actions. Essentially everyone in the Circle gains by being part of something shared, focused and often life changing.

Age UK Doncaster has secured a Big Lottery Fund grant of almost £500k to recruit 374 volunteer circle facilitators over the 5-year period of their *Circles for Independence in Later Life* project. Working in partnership with Community Circles, they will particularly target older people who've already been hospitalised, people over 85 living alone and those with dementia symptoms, helping to increase their resilience and social contact, and achieve their goals. Circles will typically meet bi-monthly to review progress and add new goals.

Further details on Circles of Support can be found at <http://community-circles.co.uk/> , whilst details of Age UK Doncaster's *Circles for Independence in Later Life* can be found at <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/doncaster/our-services/circles-for-independence-in-later-life/>

### **Derwen Links Project**

Derwen currently provides homes and services to people aged over 55 in 945 properties, covering Independent Living, Sheltered Living, or Extra Care across Newport, Monmouthshire and Caerphilly.


Recent research shows that 75% of Derwen's residents live alone, 32% are aged over 80 and 68% have mobility problems or a long term illness. Furthermore a quarter of its residents see family friends or carers once a week or less and nearly half state that they feel lonely at least some of the time. Treberth and Bishpool estate, made up of 300 older people's bungalows in the East of Newport, areas where residents believed there was little sense of community and very few activities or initiatives which allowed them to come together.

The project, which ran from 2016 -17, started off by trying to identify those people who were at risk of loneliness, and focused on bringing people together around shared interests and hobbies. Part of the project funding supported a part-time member of staff to work with the community in order to identify and implement new interventions and activities, with residents being involved with the creation and running of these activities.

One of the most successful aspects was the "Knock a Neighbour" scheme, where residents called on a neighbour they may or may not have known in order to attend the community centre together.

The project had significant benefits, with participants noting a marked decrease in their loneliness scale (using the Campaign to End Loneliness assessment tool). They made real connections with their neighbours, leading to increased confidence and feelings of safety and security, as well as improving their general wellbeing.

Funding for the project has now ended but the community continues to benefit through the Community Champions who emerged as a result of this initiative. They act as volunteer befrienders, working with Derwen to encourage others, particularly new residents or residents at risk of social isolation, to become



engaged with the community activities. A pamphlet which the community champions developed gives information on key issues, events and contacts, and has been found to be especially useful to new residents who may benefit from a friendly welcome from a neighbour.

### **Linc Care Day Services**

Established in 1977, Linc-Cymru Housing Association is a socially responsible business, with all profits being reinvested for the benefit of its customers, rather than being distributed to shareholders. The firm has two primary strands: Linc Homes, which operates across South Wales and provides social and affordable homes for rent and to buy, and Linc Care, which provides homes and services to older and vulnerable tenants, including sheltered housing, extra care housing, nursing and respite care.

Linc Care's day services offer the opportunity for non-residents to participate and socialise in a safe and supportive environment, helping to tackle isolation and loneliness. As well as receiving a home cooked meal older people can share experiences, make new friends, socialise with others and build confidence whilst maintaining their independence.

Operating from 10am until 4pm, Linc's day services aim to offer activities which have therapeutic benefits that are inclusive to all. These activities are also designed to encourage people with memory problems to feel part of the community.

The focus is very much on promoting independence and preventing people from feeling socially isolated within their own community. A signposting service is also offered, enabling individuals to establish contact with other community services.

This service is geared towards people who are able to get to and from Linc's extra care schemes, who do not require care services while visiting and who do not meet local authority criteria to qualify for day care. For those who need them, local pick up/drop off buses are available.



**The following individuals attended the Roundtable and were involved in this report:**

Roon Adam  
Race Equality First

Christine Boston  
Community Transport Wales (CTA  
Wales)

Shan Bowden  
One Voice Wales

Jayne Bryant AM  
National Assembly for Wales

Prof Vanessa Burholt  
Swansea University

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Linc Cymru

Paul Cockeram  
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John Griffiths AM  
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Margaret Griffiths  
Cafe 50 - Pontyclun

Paul Griffiths  
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David Hagendyk  
Learning and Work Institute

Vikki Hiscocks  
Derwen Cymru

Tony Husein  
Age Cymru Gwent

Steve Huxton  
Older People's Commissioner for  
Wales

Mark John-Williams  
Co-production Network for Wales

Janice Jones  
Church of the Resurrection

Saleem Kidwai OBE  
The Muslim Council of Wales

Rachel Lewis  
Age Cymru

Scott Sanders  
Derwen Cymru

Carys Sharp  
Pontprennau Community Church

Lesley Thompson  
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The Church in Wales

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