



## Addressing Loneliness

Healthwatch Sheffield Voluntary, Community &  
Faith Sector Health & Wellbeing Forum

Briefing March 2018

*'Young or old, loneliness doesn't discriminate... it is something many of us could easily help with.'*

- Jo Cox

The [recent report](#) from The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness gave a call to action to public sector leaders and community and voluntary groups, as well as national Government:

Findings from the report include:

- 50% of disabled people will feel lonely on any given day
- 43% of children and young people experience problems with loneliness
- Over 30% of people over 75 say their feelings of loneliness have gotten out of their control

Loneliness and social isolation affect so many people in our society and we know that the voluntary sector have been tackling these issues for years and have many valuable insights and ideas to share.

That's why we partnered with Sheffield Flourish for the first Health and Wellbeing Forum of 2018, to 'start the conversation' about what action we can take to combat these issues.

### Guest Speakers

#### Natasha Wilson, Age UK Sheffield

Natasha's presentation focused on the loneliness faced by people with dementia. Natasha outlined the frameworks that Age UK base their work on (Tom Kitwood's Model of Psychological Needs and Mike Nolan's Senses Framework), particularly drawing on Kitwood's emphasis on 'love'.

Natasha consistently hears that people with dementia are lonely because they're treated differently, and that family and carers find caring an isolating experience. Natasha highlighted the importance of family involvement and of making the most of opportunities for real connections.

View presentation [here](#).

#### Jo Eckersley, Sheffield Flourish

Jo briefed the Forum on ways to combat loneliness in the digital world by highlighting three ways to help tackle social isolation (based on research by Age UK and Mind), then showcasing three websites that do this. Digital approaches can be online only, promote 'real life' activities and opportunities, or a combination.

Jo shared research showing that using digital media has positive impacts on loneliness and mental wellbeing, however, some of the most socially isolated people don't have access to the internet, which is why Flourish has Digital Ambassadors to help people get on line.

View presentation [here](#).

## #connectedcity

We live tweeted 19 posts during the event, engaging participants outside of the room, with tweets making over 1300 impressions.

### Ways to design a disconnected city

#### What would you do to create isolation?

- Stop communication between neighbours
- Cut public transport to separate people geographically
- Reduce access to local parks, shops, libraries, cafés, and pubs
- Cut funding to community projects
- Increase working hours
- Less face to face services, more over the phone and on-line
- Reduce access to on-line and digital resources
- Reduce opportunities to contribute to democratic processes
- Increase divisive narratives

### Ways to design a connected city

#### Flip the first statements to make them positive.

- Focus on smaller communities as well as the city as whole – drive connections that suit the individual communities, host street parties, look out for your neighbours
- Make public transport more accessible to all
- More cafés and shops (and not just in the city centre)
- Develop to scale and depth of community groups and local enterprises – focus on enabling people to make self sustaining change
- Decrease working hours and implement a living wage

### What assets do we have to connect our city?

#### How can we use what we have to prevent loneliness?

- **Food** – develop community eating projects like [Food Cycle](#) and [The Real Junk Food Project](#)
- **Variety in volunteering** - mix volunteer roles up, play different roles in different places.
- **Public transport** – although some concessions are available to people with some long term conditions and [carers](#), there is a campaign for free travel for all [Young Carers](#). Further concessions for people at risk of isolation could be considered.  
**Involve bus and tram providers**, with journeys being opportunities for connections - use the 'next stop' screen to prompt conversations, for example 'Have you said hello to the person next to you today?' or 'Do you need help to carry your bags off the bus?'
- **Dancing** - more evening dancing groups in community halls with a focus on getting to know others and learning new routines, with that all ages and backgrounds could be included
- **Open up avenues of communication** - host language courses, conversation clubs, and shop local to build a rapport with neighbours in communities. More community spaces (inside and out), small pots of money to fund community trips or classes.
- **In the workplace** - change the office layout to make people feel less cut off, identify a staff room, encourage co-working spaces for small organisations. Go for a walk with lunch, link family to work – meet your family/friends for lunch.
- **Community entertainment venues** - pubs and cafés were identified as great potential social areas. Cafés could open later to include those who don't want to drink alcohol, and more pubs and cafés could be opened in Sheffield's smaller communities, making them easier to access for people who don't want to come into the centre.
- **Research** – advance the evidence base demonstrating links between loneliness and health, and the most effective ways to improve connections.
- **Individual community leaders** – incentivise people at the heart of communities who want to do more, with small grant schemes.

### Who was in the room?

Service Users, Adira, Sheffield Mind, University of Sheffield, Groundworks, Sheffield City Council, Age Better, Drink Wise Age Well, Haven, The Terminus Initiative, Foodcycle

