

Combatting loneliness: Learning from the UK

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What I'll cover today

- About loneliness
- The UK's loneliness journey - from safeguarding the convoy to the loneliness test
 - The Campaign to End Loneliness
 - Galvanising local action
 - *Promising Approaches* – in theory and practice
 - Turbocharging the national agenda: the impact of the Jo Cox Commission on loneliness
 - Towards a national strategy
- A connected society – A strategy for tackling loneliness
- What next?

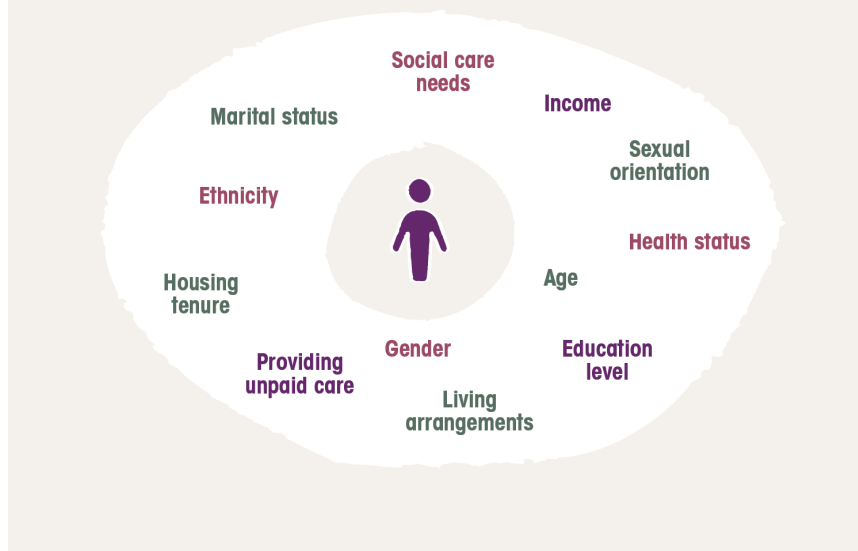
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About loneliness

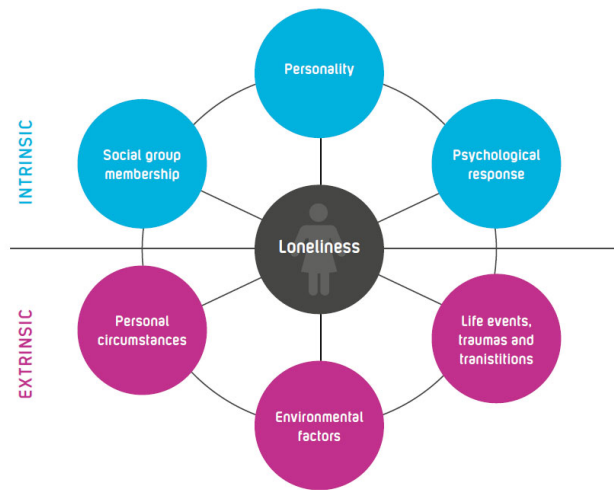
- **Loneliness:** A subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of relationships that we have, and those that we want. (Perlman and Peplau)
- It can be:
 - Social or emotional
 - Fluctuating or chronic
- **Social isolation:** An objective state – a measure of quantity or frequency of contacts or interactions
- **Solitude:** “Language... has created the word "loneliness" to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word "solitude" to express the glory of being alone.” (Paul Johannes Tillich)

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Risk factors for loneliness



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About loneliness

- Loneliness and social isolation have clear impacts on health
- Weak social connection is an equivalent risk factor for early mortality to smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- Loneliness directly impacts health – it is linked to depression, stroke, dementia etc.
- Loneliness makes people less likely to pursue healthy behaviours – e.g. physical activity, healthy eating, stopping smoking

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About loneliness

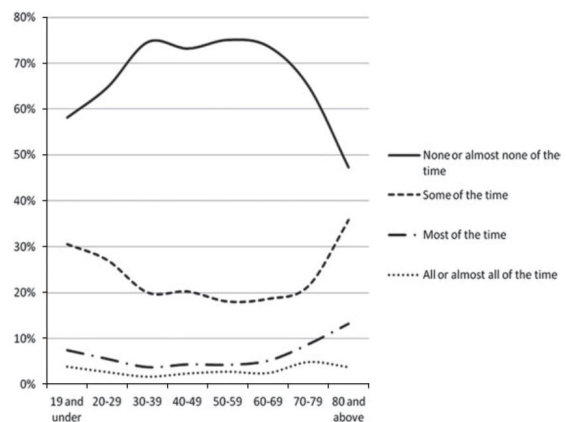
- Evidence around the cost implications of loneliness is weaker – but impact is thought to be significant
- *Reconnections* programme in Worcestershire is testing the assumption that being lonely costs around £12,000 per person across their older lifetime
- Work undertaken by the London School of Economics for the Campaign to End Loneliness estimates that the return on investment of signposting services is £2-3 for every £1 invested

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Levels of loneliness in UK

- Around 10% of older people (65+) are often or always lonely – this has been consistent over decades
- Absolute numbers are growing
- Recent surveys have suggested that younger people are more lonely than older people (but there are reasons for caution here)
- A U-shaped curve of loneliness through the life course

Source: Yang K. & Victor C. (2011), using data from the European Social Survey



Tackling loneliness: The Campaign to End Loneliness

- Not a new issue, but a new focus
- Launched in 2011 by a coalition of organisations working with older people to bring focus to the issue, identify action and bring people together
- Started with research – published *Safeguarding the Convoy* – bringing together the evidence, and using it to call for action
- Aimed to raise national awareness, promote local action, and improve practice
- A network of local and national organisations and service providers
- A funder (the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) prepared to take risk

Campaign to
EndLoneliness
CONNECTIONS IN OLDER AGE

The case for action: everybody's work

- Key challenges
 - To move away from seeing loneliness as an issue to be tackled only by communities and families
 - Overcoming “you can't legislate for friendship”
- Making the case for the vital role played by:
 - The voluntary and community sector
 - Local authorities
 - National Government

Jeremy Hunt: UK should adopt Asian culture of caring for the elderly

Health secretary says families should take in elderly relatives when they can no longer live alone as they do in Asian cultures



Jeremy Hunt will say in his speech: 'We must restore and reinvigorate the social contract between generations.'
Photograph: Leon Neal/AFP/Getty Images

The case for action: Loneliness harms health

- Locating loneliness in the public health agenda
- Linking to the prevention and integration agenda
- Sharing the evidence – around impact, and potential for action
- Identified a key actor – Health and Wellbeing Boards
- Pressured Boards to include loneliness in their strategies for local communities – 80% of strategies now acknowledge loneliness (only around half in 2013)
- Moving from commitment to action remained a challenge

Lonely elderly make 30million GP visits a year just for company

LONELY pensioners make 30 million visits a year to the doctor – just to have someone to talk to, an alarming survey has found.

By SARAH O'GRADY
PUBLISHED: 00:00, Fri, Nov 15, 2013

SHARE



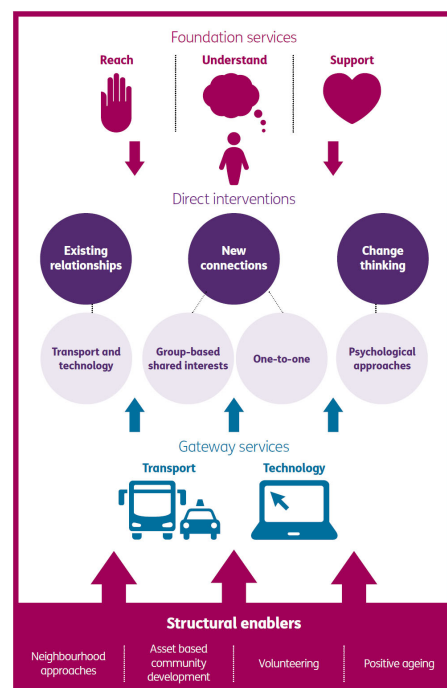
There are more than 800,000 people in England who are chronically lonely says Hunt [GETTY - PIC POSED]

As many as one in 10 of those over 65 in England does so to break out of isolation.

The survey found three in four family doctors said between one and five elderly patients a day visit them due to loneliness.

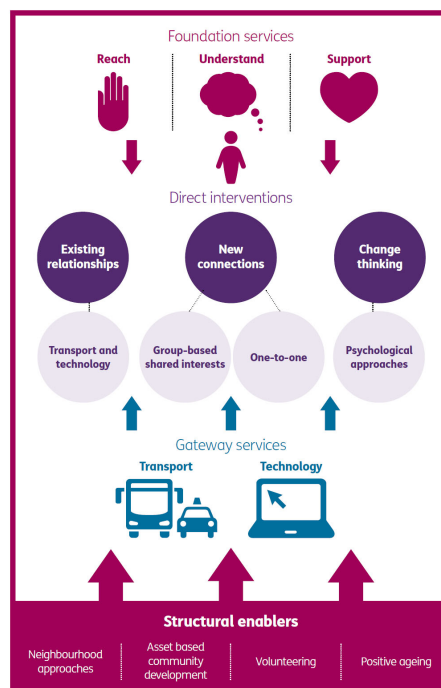
What works in addressing loneliness?: The *Promising Approaches* framework

- Developed for Age UK and the Campaign to End Loneliness
- Aim to offer direction for local authorities looking to act
- Has been used to inform local strategies in communities throughout England
- The approaches have been further piloted and tested by Age UK



The *Promising Approaches* framework

- A way of understanding the role played by different types of intervention
- Demonstrates the “web” of support needed for people at risk of, or experiencing loneliness
- Does not cover every form of intervention that could be made to combat loneliness – e.g. does not touch on preventative measures / culture change activity



Foundation Services

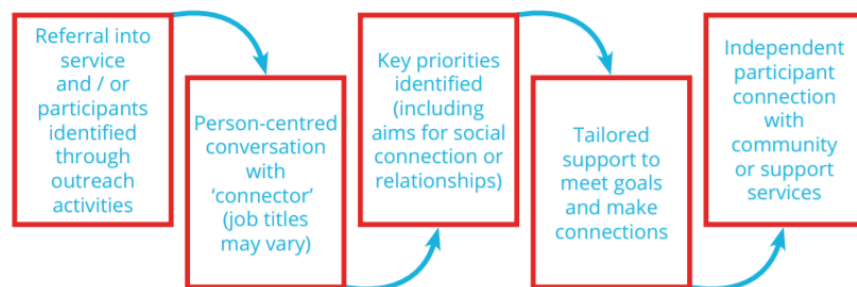
- These identify, understand and support people – many do all three
 - Identifying people who are lonely, and outreaching to them
 - Understanding why they are lonely and what would work for them
 - Supporting them to access these services (more than “signposting”)
- They work – in Age UK’s *Testing Promising Approaches* programme:
 - More than 70% of people who said they were lonely sometimes or frequently reduced their loneliness scores
 - Nearly 90% of people who were frequently lonely reduced their scores



Community Connectors

- Umbrella term for a raft of services – including Village Agents, Social Prescribers, Local Area Coordinators etc
- Good evidence these are effective in supporting lonely people – as well as meeting other needs

Figure 1. How connector services work



Direct Interventions

- Often studied and most “front of mind” in tackling loneliness
- We know the criteria for effective group-based interventions:
 - Targeted towards a specific group
 - Focussed on a shared interest / enabling learning
 - Involve older people in running the group
- Group based interventions include choirs, knitting groups, COPD peer support groups, carers support, Men’s Sheds etc
- One-to-one interventions are crucial. Evidence is mixed, but they are highly valued; and may be critical for the most lonely individuals
- There is strong evidence of the impact of psychological approaches – but these are rarely found

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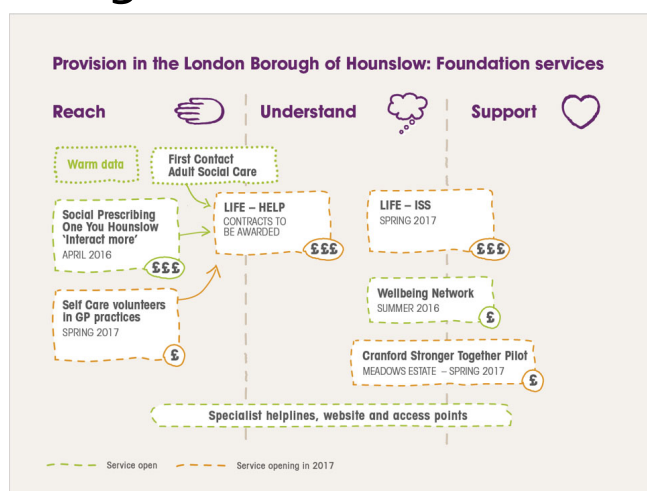
Promising Approaches in action

- Not intended as a blueprint for new services - many of the *Promising Approaches* are already found in communities
- Few would need / want to be defined as “loneliness services”
- Many are commissioned or funded under broader ambitions

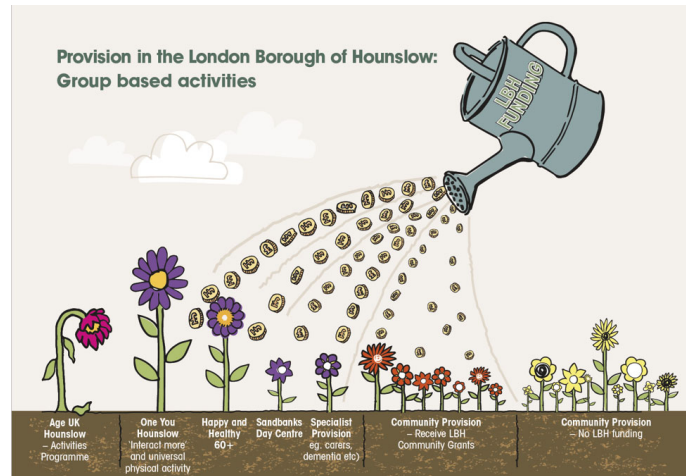
However:

- They will be more effective if they are conscious about tackling loneliness
- They may need modification to be most effective

Applying Promising Approaches in a London Borough



Applying Promising Approaches in a London Borough

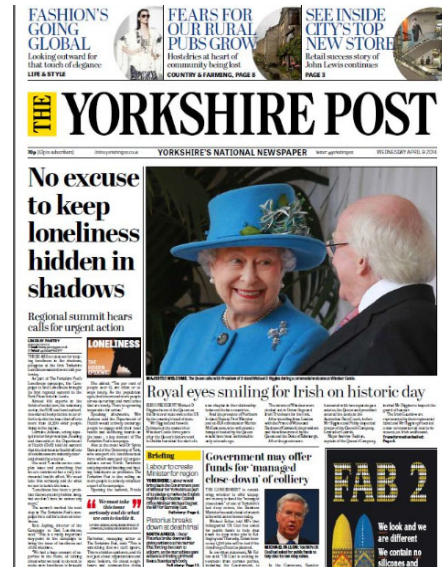


Beyond *Promising Approaches*

- The loneliness challenge is broader:
 - Preventing loneliness – by enabling individuals to act and building “loneliness proof” communities
 - Addressing societal attitudes and changing behaviour
- National leadership was needed particularly around:
 - Funding
 - Measurement
 - The wider policy environment
 - Public messaging

Building the pressure: Media interest

- Growing press attention: e.g. Yorkshire Post campaign (since 2014); regular national press (not just at Christmas)
- Documentaries: e.g. The Age of Loneliness (Sue Bourne, 2016)
- Charity campaigns: e.g. Man in the Moon (John Lewis Christmas advert 2016, with Age UK)
- TV campaigns: e.g. ITV's One Million Minutes
- Social media: e.g. Sarah Millican #joinin



Building the pressure: Funding for change

- Ongoing funding for the Campaign to End Loneliness from Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, and now other trusts and foundations
- Major investment by Big Lottery Fund in Ageing Better programme in 14 local areas
- Big Lottery Fund now funding Campaign to End Loneliness to extent their work
- Co-op partnership with British Red Cross
- Co-op Foundation investment in loneliness among young people
- Research funding especially via National Institute for Health Research, and Economic and Social Research Council

Building the pressure: The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

- Established by backbench MP Jo Cox, who brought together a coalition of charities and businesses with an interest in loneliness across all ages
- Jo was inspired by stories of loneliness in her constituency, and by her experience of loneliness as a student
- She wanted to “turbocharge” the loneliness agenda
- In June 2016 Jo was murdered by a far right extremist
- Her work was taken forward by two MPs – one Labour and one Conservative – and the coalition she assembled

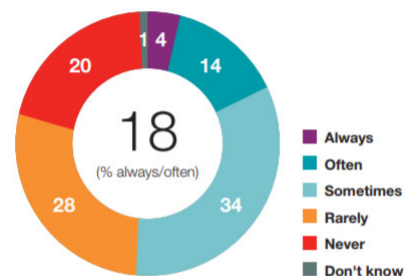


An all-age agenda for Loneliness

- Research for Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation highlighting the role of transitions across the life course
- British Red Cross and Co-op partnership research said 9 million people in the UK were often or always lonely
- Jo Cox Commission reports and focus weeks emphasised different communities at risk
- Work to shift attitudes “happy to chat”

Source: British Red Cross and Co-op (2016) *Trapped in a Bubble*

Figure 3. Prevalence of loneliness in the UK general public



Source Q1: How often do you feel lonely, if at all.
Base: All UK adults aged 16+ (2,523).

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

- Final call to action launched in December 2017, focussed on the need for national action to provide:
 - Leadership (strategy, and a loneliness test)
 - Measurement (impact and prevalence)
 - Funding (for research, innovation, and roll out)
- Highlighted need for shift in societal norms around loneliness and connection – 5 a day?

JO COX
LONELINESS
start a conversation

Combatting loneliness
one conversation at a time

A call to action



Becoming a world-leader in loneliness

- In January 2018 the Commission's recommendations were accepted in full
 - A Minister for Loneliness was appointed
 - Work to develop national measures of loneliness was begun
 - A "Building Connections" fund was launched
 - A cross departmental team was established within Government to develop a new strategy, backed by a Ministerial group
- Loneliness Action Group brought stakeholders together to feed in to the work in Government

**British People Are So Lonely That They
Now Have a Minister for Loneliness**

A connected society: The national strategy for tackling loneliness

- Launched October 2018
- Headline commitments include:
 - rolling out social prescribing services to all GPs by 2023 (a key foundation service – if we get them right)
 - Employer pledge for tackling loneliness in the workplace
 - £1.8 million fund for improving community spaces
- Commitments across every government department

 HM Government

A connected society
A strategy for tackling loneliness –
laying the foundations for change



A connected society: The national strategy for tackling loneliness

- Government listened to stakeholders. The strategy includes commitments on:
 - Housing – around community-led housing and cohousing, and designing for wellbeing and connection
 - Employment support
 - Support for bereaved people
 - Transport - including community transport, and support for people who can no longer drive
 - Improving information about community activities
 - Highlighting loneliness within mental health campaigns
 - Improving mental health support for students
 - Building loneliness into curriculum for children and young people
 - Pilot programmes with the Royal Mail to check in on isolated residents
 - Enabling people to volunteer right through the life course
 - Promoting sporting, art and cultural activities as means of reducing isolation
 - Support for care leavers
 - And more

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A connected society: The national strategy for tackling loneliness

- Plans for ongoing Ministerial oversight
- Developing a loneliness test
- Reporting on loneliness via the Ministerial group
- Commitment to building the evidence
- Embedding national measures in key frameworks

 HM Government

A connected society
A strategy for tackling loneliness –
laying the foundations for change



But...

- There are real risks:
 - Multiple drivers around many of the key commitments
 - E.g. social prescribing – balancing health vs social aspirations
 - Lots of pilots and plans – but will action follow?
 - Work on changing public attitudes still to be developed, and not yet matched by funding needed (especially when compared to mental health)
 - Some of the key trends are in the wrong direction – e.g. Underfunding of local government, especially social care; cuts to public health; voluntary and community sector under strain etc.
 - The Minister has resigned
 - And..... Brexit

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The work continues...

- Campaign to End Loneliness continues to explore new ways of tackling loneliness – e.g. exploring how to encourage behaviour change:
 - Focusing on small moments of connection
 - Shifting the debate from loneliness to the power of connection
 - #BeMoreUs
- The Jo Cox Foundation’s “Great Get Together” and the “Big Lunch” continue to promote neighbourliness
- The Loneliness Action Group continues to support work to influence and shape activity
- New evidence is being developed, including through the Building Connections Fund
- Work in local communities continues
-We’re still on the journey ...

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Still a lot to learn

- Growing interest across the globe – beginnings of a global movement
- It’s great to be at the forefront but we:
 - Are only at the start of understanding how to change attitudes
 - Still don’t have enough evidence about what works, for whom, and in what circumstances
 - Still haven’t cracked where to locate this politically and structurally to maximise impact
- Let’s work together to make this happen

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Campaign to End Loneliness

Join www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/support-us

Twitter @EndLonelinessUK

Facebook @Thecampaigntoendloneliness

Email info@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk

Call +44 203 865 3908

Write Campaign to End Loneliness, 3 Waterhouse Square, 138 Holborn, London, England, EC1N 2SW

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Thank you

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