



East Suffolk Community Partnership Board
Social Isolation and Loneliness in East Suffolk
September 5, 2022

Introduction and Background

1. Since the Community Partnerships were formed in 2019, Social Isolation and Loneliness has been the top priority for the Board and identified as a priority by seven of the eight individual Community Partnerships.
2. The Board and Partnership have invested more than a million pounds in projects aimed at reducing the levels of Isolation and Loneliness in East Suffolk, including:
 - a. Four rounds of 'Hidden Needs' grants targeting isolation and loneliness 'hot spots'
 - b. 'Boost' grants aimed at reducing isolation and loneliness in specific groups - those with dementia and their carers, those with disabilities, and people experiencing mental ill health
 - c. 'Bounce Back' (East Suffolk) and 'Community Restart' (Suffolk) grants to enable community groups and voluntary organisations to 'open up' again after the pandemic
 - d. Grandpads – simplified tablets for older people launched as part of the Covid-19 response in East Suffolk
 - e. Virtual Walks e.g. Lowestoft Mile
 - f. Voice of a Friend befriending in Lowestoft, Kessingland and Carlton Colville
 - g. Covid Buddies (funding provided to Community Action Suffolk)
 - h. Talk and Chat benches
 - i. EAST (Everyone Active, Supported, Together) – Christmas 2020
3. The Covid-19 pandemic, specifically the national lockdowns, shone a spotlight on isolation and loneliness and its impacts are still being felt by people of all ages. There is evidence that significant numbers of people in Suffolk do not feel that it is safe to return to previous groups and activities.

Defining Loneliness and Isolation

4. Loneliness is a mismatch between the relationships we have and the relationships that we want – the pain of being alone. Isolation is where there is no choice but to be alone. The Campaign to End Loneliness talk about the link between poor health and loneliness but also about the health risks of being lonely.

5. During a presentation at the meeting, data about loneliness and isolation in East Suffolk will be explored further. Despite the headlines and focus of activities to combat loneliness being on older people, the prevalence of people who said that they 'often/always' feel lonely is highest amongst 16-24 year olds. Having said that there are significant numbers of people who often/always feel lonely across all age bands.

Loneliness and Isolation Workshop – 2022 Forum

6. At the most recent Community Partnerships Forum, held at Trinity Park in March 2022, a workshop focussing on Loneliness and Isolation was one of the best attended on the day. The workshop focussed on key data about the topic, including new data relating to loneliness during the pandemic (which will be part of the presentation to the Board).
7. The focus questions for the interactive part of the session were:
 1. **What already exists in East Suffolk to reduce isolation and loneliness?**
 2. **What are the gaps – who and where?**
 3. **If you had no budget but willing partners, what would you do to support the groups and places identified?**
 4. **If you had a magic wand and unlimited budget, what would you do to support the groups and places identified?**
8. Some of the key results from this activity were summarised in the Forum report to the June Board meeting and more detail is provided below. An overview will be provided at the September meeting as part of the presentation and Board members are asked to consider any gaps/additional ideas.

Q1a. Sources of Community Connection

- Meet Up Mondays (CAS/RCC)
- Worry Tree Café's
- Rural Coffee Caravan
- Coffee and Friends Events (RCC)
- Good Neighbour Schemes (CAS)
- Men's Sheds/Menders Sheds
- Chin Wags (BSEVC)
- Hearts and Minds (BCS and ACT)
- Digital Champions
- Robopets (ESC)
- Christmas Card Campaign (ESC)
- Support/Peer Support Groups (e.g. dementia, carers, disability, mother and toddler)
- 'Living with / health recovery groups
- Compassionate Communities/Companions
- Environment / Nature Groups
- Park Runs
- Befriending support
- Art/Craft Clubs
- Courses – e.g. photography
- Lunch Clubs e.g. Over 60's
- Social Prescribing
- Community Café's
- Walk & Talk Events
- Theatre / Dance groups
- Choirs/Singing for Health
- Knit and Natter Groups
- Membership Groups
- Youth Groups/Clubs
- Sports clubs/teams e.g. football, boxing, walking football
- Uniformed Groups - Brownies, Guides, Cubs and Scouts
- Faith Groups
- Book / Reading Groups

Q1b. Places of Connection

- Village Halls / Community Centres
- Leisure Centres and Gyms
- Community Café's
- More than a Shop (RCC)
- Top Up and Pop Up Shops
- Supermarkets
- Allotments
- Pubs
- Care Farms
- Dementia Day Centres
- Churches
- Libraries
- Schools
- Supported Housing
- Citizens Advice
- Parish Council offices
- 'Warm Rooms'

Q2. Who are our Priority Groups in terms of isolation and loneliness?

- Early years, particularly children born during the pandemic
- Children
- Young people aged 16 – 24
- Children in care
- Young people leaving care
- 25 – 29 year olds
- Working age males
- Men aged 40 plus
- Single parents
- Aged 50 - 64 - preventative ageing
- Older people 65 plus
- Older people 80 plus
- People who are new to an area
- With mental ill health, particularly Men
- With long term/acute health issues
- Discharged from hospital
- Carers – need respite support
- Non-drivers (particularly rural areas)
- New mum's
- BAME communities
- Refugees

Other issues of concern include affordability, accessible technology and holding social groups in evenings.

9. In terms of the ideas generated under both of the 'no money but connections' and 'magic wand, unlimited funding' scenarios, these will be discussed and prioritised in more detail at the Board meeting.

Next Steps

10. As part of its resident's survey in 2021, East Suffolk Council included the question 'How often do you feel lonely' with the response options 'Always', 'Often', 'Sometimes' and 'Never'. Fifty respondents selected the 'Often' or 'Always' options and it is proposed to convene a focus group of a subset of those respondents (those who said that they would be happy to be contacted again) to ensure that we understand the reasons for their loneliness and what solutions could be supported.
11. This workshop will be held between the September and December Board meetings, and it is proposed to convene a new iteration of the Isolation and Loneliness Task and Finish Group to help plan the focus group and to consider the outcomes from it, alongside the outcomes from the Forum workshop that will be presented at the Board meeting
12. Board Members are asked to consider whether they or someone else within their organisation or partnership could participate in this Task and Finish Group.
13. An outcome proposal, including a request for funding, would then be developed for consideration at the December Board meeting.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

- 1) Note the ideas from the Forum workshop about key sources and places of connection to reduce loneliness, and priority groups, and consider any gaps prior to the meeting**
- 2) Receive a presentation at the meeting including key data and input into identifying our key areas of focus**
- 3) Endorse the proposed approach to convene a focus group of residents, reform the Task and Finish Group and develop an outcome proposal for the December Board meeting**
- 4) Consider participation in the Task and Finish Group – either the Board Member or someone else from their organisation/partnership.**

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