

Notes from the Community Partnership task and finish group on social isolation and loneliness

The task

At the meeting of the Aldeburgh, Leiston, Saxmundham and Villages Community Partnership meeting on 13.08.2020 the task and finish group was asked:

- To look at issues or gaps in groups, services or support systems in relation to tackling the priority of social isolation and loneliness - particularly in relation to family carers, older people and men over 40.
- To produce a plan about what can be done and how it will benefit the community (including costings).
- To submit a plan to the Community Partnership core members for a discussion and a decision about funding.

Community groups currently supporting people who are isolated in Saxmundham, Leiston and Aldeburgh and the Villages were emailed and asked:

- What are you currently able to offer/do in relation to reducing social isolation and loneliness – e.g. activities, befriending, phone support, volunteering – and what gaps are there.
- Whether you have any ideas that you would like to bring to life.
- Whether you want to be involved in this task and finish group.

Responses

Replies were received by email or phone from:

1. IP17 Good Neighbour Scheme/Saxmundham Town Council
2. Sax'cess House
3. United Reform Church, Saxmundham
4. St. John's Church, Saxmundham
5. The Wardens Trust, Sizewell
6. Rose and Sweet William Club, Leiston
7. The Worry Tree, Leiston
8. Leiston Good Neighbour Scheme
9. Leiston Dementia Project
10. Leiston and Saxmundham Men's Shed
11. Parish Nurse, Aldeburgh
12. AGNES (Aldeburgh Good Neighbour Scheme)

There was general agreement that the Covid situation is increasing feelings of social isolation and loneliness whilst reducing opportunities for social contact due to the government guidance and restrictions. This means that it is a major challenge to generate any ideas.

Most social/support/activity groups which are aimed at older people or family carers are closed and are unlikely to open before January 2021. This is because it is recognised that members may be particularly vulnerable and/or physical distancing and other safety measures would be very difficult

to implement. Some groups such as the Men's Shed and The Worry Tree are planning to open with restricted numbers/new safety procedures.

In the meantime support is being provided in the form of phone call systems, doorstep/outdoor one-to-ones, church services, delivering newsletters and practical help. Examples of activities that have been found to be helpful were suggested and these included crafts such as individuals working from home on a group wall hanging. The 'Grandpads' pilot from East Suffolk Council was also mentioned which is aimed at enabling people to get online.

Some groups have plans to start new activities such as outdoor fitness and sports in Saxmundham and surrounding areas. The walking football group was just getting going before lockdown and has lots of potential.

Ideas

Three main ideas have emerged from the responses.

1. An (initially) home based creative arts project with a view to an exhibition/festival/display next year or when conditions allow and potentially leading to establishing a number of groups across the area. There are many of these initiatives around the country which seem to be working well via a combination of delivering kits or workbooks to people at home with telephone or online support. The theme of 'the year life stood still' was suggested as something that everyone could relate to. It was also suggested that activities could be adapted for abilities and interests and need not be limited to traditional crafts.
2. Establish friendship benches in key locations across the area. For an example see www.thefriendlybench.co.uk . These benches are not only a resting point for people on their walks but they also send out a positive message and can be used as a location for activities when the weather allows.
3. Increase opportunities for men to connect, converse and create by establishing a new Men's Shed in Aldeburgh and supporting the development of the Leiston and Saxmundham Sheds.

Other issues were also raised such as how to coordinate the information about what is available and whether it would be helpful to have a list of facilities that could be used by groups.

Decision

Those that responded to a request for feedback on the three ideas identified the arts project as the most feasible and with the potential to reach the most people.

Di Eastman, Sue Liddell and Sharon Cuthbert agreed to prepare a proposal for the Community Partnership on behalf of the community groups who will support with implementation if a grant application is successful.

Sharon Cuthbert

25.09.20

