

10 TIPS TO HELP YOUR PROJECT REDUCE LONELINESS

- Tip 1** | Think about how to involve users 
- Tip 2** | Consider working with volunteers 
- Tip 3** | Build on local assets and strengths 
- Tip 4** | Make sure group activities are based on shared interest 
- Tip 5** | Ensure one-to-one connections feel genuine 
- Tip 6** | Be careful with your language 
- Tip 7** | Remain age-positive 
- Tip 8** | Focus on the neighbourhood 
- Tip 9** | Try to facilitate transport 
- Tip 10** | Harness digital technology—carefully 

INTRODUCTION

Building Connections Fund

Following the Prime Minister's endorsement of the Jo Cox Commission recommendations on loneliness, the Building Connections Fund has been set up to support projects that are able to prevent or reduce loneliness. This is part of Government's wider package to tackle loneliness, including the first loneliness strategy for England and recommendations on standard measures of loneliness.

The Building Connections Fund is a cross-government fund in partnership with The National Lottery Community Fund and The Co-op Foundation. The Fund provides grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations across England to fund projects aiming to prevent or reduce loneliness. These projects target people of all age groups and backgrounds.

What are these tips for?

Here we offer tips—based on a review of existing evidence—for Building Connections Fund grant-holders. It brings together emerging findings to help grant-holders plan and implement their projects, so that they work more effectively to reduce loneliness. We hope this review is also of use more broadly to organisations working to combat loneliness.

This guide does not contain original research or a comprehensive review of the evidence base. Rather, it tries to share insights from the existing evidence base with grant holders and other organisations working on combatting loneliness. There is currently a lack of solid evidence about individual activities or interventions. But here we draw out promising factors, mechanisms and approaches that make existing interventions more likely to be effective.

This work sets the stage for further research and evaluation support by identifying themes, issues and gaps to consider.

How can you use these tips?

These tips do not focus on **what** is delivered but on **how** services are delivered.

Many of your activities are already underway, so these tips focus on opportunities to tweak existing services to follow best practice. The diversity of types of loneliness, types of interventions, target beneficiaries and locales are such that there will never be a one-size-fits-all, or silver bullet approach to fighting loneliness. As some tips emphasise, approaches should be personalised and localised to tackle loneliness. Therefore, rather than a prescriptive checklist, these tips should be taken as ideas to explore.

We've grouped the 10 tips into 4 themes:

1. Involving users
2. Building new relationships
3. Reducing stigma
4. Reducing barriers to access

Each includes tips which can help improve your service. These tips can often reinforce each other and can work well in combination. Where appropriate, warnings have been included where there are common pitfalls. For more resources, [please look at the appendix](#).

What evidence are these tips based on?

The majority of the findings in this paper are excerpted and synthesised from five main sources. We reference these throughout using the listed acronyms:

1. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing (2018) [*An overview of reviews: the effectiveness of interventions to address loneliness at all stages of the life-course*](#). Referenced as **WWCW**.
2. The Campaign to End Loneliness (2015) [*Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life*](#). Referenced as **CEL**.
3. The National Lottery Community Fund (2018) [*Knowledge and learning programme briefing*](#) from their Ageing Better programme. Referenced as **AB**.
4. Centre for Policy on Ageing (2014) [*Rapid review on loneliness—evidence of the effectiveness of interventions*](#). Referenced as **CPA**.
5. UK Youth (2018) [*A place to belong—the role of youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness*](#). Referenced as **UKY**.

We also refer to other sources with acronyms, these can be found on page 15.

The evidence around what works to combat loneliness is scant and unequally distributed. The ONS (10 April 2018) reports that young people are more likely to suffer from loneliness than other age groups, but the bulk of the evidence base focuses on older demographics. The first four papers listed above describe what may work for older people, while only the last paper looks at younger people through the lens of youth workers' opinions. Evidence of what works with younger age groups, including middle ages, marks a significant gap in our understanding of best practice.

Another evidence gap is around intergenerational approaches that don't take age groups in isolation but look at connections between them. Though there is not a solid evidence base here, there are individual intergenerational projects which have shown promise. For example, North London Cares runs intergenerational social clubs and befriending schemes with clearly measured benefits.

Beyond demographic, it is also hard to know which *activities* are the most promising. Most of the experiments that the WWCW considered sufficiently rigorous to prove causation were of *multiple* activities in a given site. Therefore, it is not possible to know how much influence each activity had on loneliness.

There is also substantial variation in the level of evidence used. The review from WWCW uses a very high threshold of evidence—mainly randomised control trials—whereas other sources draw on feedback, outcomes data, surveys and qualitative case studies. The report by UKY surveys youth workers combatting youth loneliness to get their take on key barriers and opportunities to success.

WHO IS EXPERIENCING LONELINESS?

Loneliness fluctuates throughout people's lives, with different causes and needs at different ages (DCMS 2018). It's not just about a decline in contact or change in relationships, but about a person's identity and sense of belonging, and whether they feel their social network is 'normal' for their life stage (DCMS 2018). [For more definitions on types of loneliness please see the glossary.](#)

The causes of loneliness will vary from person to person. We don't always know exactly what it is about an experience like unemployment that makes us lonely, or how these different factors might interact and build up over time. But there are some common themes. Previous experiences and conditions are thought to be important, combined with 'trigger' events that push a person into loneliness (DCMS 2018). Some factors are likely to be specific to the individual—for example, a person's personality or level of resilience at a particular time.

While everyone is different, ONS research (10 April 2018) shows that certain characteristics and life events or transitions can increase the chances that people experience loneliness. Though targeting these groups can be a good starting point, it is important to remember that anyone can experience loneliness and targeting the below groups should not be to the exclusion of others. ONS list the following characteristics and life events increasing chances of experiencing loneliness:

- Women reported feeling lonely more often than men.
- Those single or widowed were at particular risk of experiencing loneliness more often.
- People in poor health or who have conditions they describe as 'limiting' were also at particular risk of feeling lonely more often.
- Renters reported feeling lonely more often than homeowners.
- People who feel that they belong less strongly to their neighbourhood reported feeling lonely more often.
- People who have little trust of others in their local area reported feeling lonely more often.

Three profiles of people at particular risk from loneliness were identified:

- Widowed older homeowners living alone with long-term health conditions.
- Unmarried, middle-agers with long-term health conditions.
- Younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area.

10 TIPS FOR PROGRAMMES TARGETING LONELINESS

Theme: involving users

Tip 1 Think about how to involve users



There is evidence that user involvement can increase the impact of interventions to tackle loneliness (AB). User involvement can take a variety (see figure 1) of forms and the evidence is stronger for some forms than others. Users can be involved to varying degrees in services; from research, design to production. It is important to think carefully about where on this spectrum best fits the aims and capacity of your project. For more on co-design please see NPC's report [Make it count](#) (2018), and [our upcoming co-design guidance for Building Connections Fund](#).

Figure 1: NPC's spectrum of involvement approaches



As part of the [Ageing Better programme](#), all project activities were co-designed and delivered. Older people drove the decision-making and governance. Some commissioning decisions were also made by older people. Workshops were held with potential delivery organisations so that they might co-design their services with older people. This may have been a contributing factor to the decreasing sense of loneliness reported. In total across a range of Ageing Better projects, 38% felt less lonely after taking part.

Example 1: Older people driving the development of the older people's strategy in Torbay

[Ageing Well in Torbay](#) ran focus groups in friendly, welcoming venues like local cafes, and promoted these through postcards, social media and community networks. By making people feel welcome and valued, taking an informal approach and providing 'decent food', people felt free to contribute.

Ageing Well published feedback from over 300 participants and presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board, which brings together regional NHS, public health, social care and the Local Authority. They are now working to get the Local Authority to adopt and develop the vision for an Older Peoples' strategy in Torbay, using co-production with older people and also feeding into the development of an Older Peoples' Assembly.

Source: [The National Lottery Community Fund, Ageing Better](#)

Be aware: Organisations frequently report taking longer than anticipated to establish the right structures to make user involvement meaningful and sustainable (AB). It takes a real investment of time and resource to effectively engage and co-produce with users.

Tip 2 Consider working with volunteers



Volunteering offers another way for users to be involved in your programme by actively delivering provision. In addition to ensuring programmes remain user-focused, volunteering has other advantages. Volunteering can fight loneliness by increasing self-esteem, skills and capacities, expanding career opportunities and improving physical and mental health of volunteers themselves (CEL). Because volunteers feel more connected with society, and social connections developed through volunteering can provide sources of support they might not have access to otherwise, volunteers tend to be happier (MHF 2010).

Volunteering can fight loneliness by increasing self-esteem, skills and capacities, expanding career opportunities and improving physical and mental health of volunteers themselves.

Volunteering can reduce loneliness in younger people. The UK programme ‘Step Into Sport’ (which targets 14–19-year-olds and provides volunteering opportunities in sport) demonstrates that when younger people volunteer, they report increased social connectedness (NCVO 2018). The study also highlights that training and proper support is critical to making volunteering impactful (NCVO 2018).

The Ageing Better programme found that older people want to feel useful and engaged and not just as recipients of services. Often they feel more comfortable contributing than they do receiving and many enjoy opportunities to ‘give something back’ to their community. Those over 50 who volunteer, and who feel appreciated when doing so, are less socially isolated than those who do not volunteer. A recent US study demonstrates that volunteering for two or more hours a week can help reduce feelings of loneliness amongst widows (NCVO 2018).

Be aware: It’s important to note that the language of volunteering can discourage engagement. This may be due to mistrust of officialdom, not feeling able to make open-ended commitments or be tied down by the perceived responsibilities of volunteering (AB). Some projects are testing new approaches to talking about and recruiting volunteers to see how to remove these barriers, such as offering flexible opportunities including ‘micro’ volunteering (small discrete chances to input into a project) or avoiding the language of volunteering by using images by asking local people how they want to ‘help out’ (AB). For more on choosing the right language, see Tip 6.

Example 2: Royal Voluntary Service (RVS)

RVS currently works with more than 35,000 volunteers throughout the UK. It asks for interests and available time and tailors opportunities to volunteers. RVS particularly believes that volunteering benefits the volunteer themselves. The 2012 impact report found that there is a strong positive effect of volunteering on well-being, seen through a decline in the depression and social isolation scores of volunteers. RVS often finds that people who are initially referred to them as potential service recipients are willing to become volunteers and find the role extremely fulfilling.

Source: [CEL Promising Approaches](#)

Tip 3 | Build on local assets and strengths



There is evidence that an ‘asset-based’ or ‘strength-based’ approach can improve the effectiveness of loneliness interventions (AB & CEL). These focus on ‘what is strong’ in an individual or a community, rather than the more traditional approach that looks at problems or deficits that need to be ‘fixed’. It then seeks to support the community to mobilise, connect and build on those strengths to achieve desired outcomes.

As with volunteering, these approaches can be more sustainable, better suited to target populations, and themselves connect people and reduce loneliness.

Though asset and strength-based approaches can work at many levels—from the individual to the system—a community-focused approach is increasingly popular in combatting loneliness (CEL). Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) considers the supply of assets and resources in every community that can be utilised, such as willing people’s time, social connections, under-used buildings and public spaces, land, mini-buses, and library space.

The ABCD Institute suggests the key stages of Asset Based Community Development are (ABCD & CEL):

- Mapping the capacities and assets in the area
- Building relationships and connections between residents—and between residents and agencies—to change values and attitudes
- Mobilising residents to become self-organising and active by sharing knowledge and resources and identifying common interests
- Convening a core group of residents to identify—from the asset mapping and mobilising activities—the key theme or issue that will inspire people to get organised and to create a vision and a plan leveraging in outside resources

Theme: Building new relationships

Tip 4 | Make sure group activities are based on shared interest



There is strong evidence that certain group activities can reduce loneliness with older people (CEL, AB, WWCW). These can include community sharing/companionship (eg, home sharing), shared meals (small meals hosted by volunteers), or community indoor or outdoor gardening (WWCW).

The most successful group activities aimed at reducing loneliness are those whose primary ‘offer’ was not social contact, but something else desirable—for example, learning, health promotion, sport, music, support through difficult circumstances, etc (CEL). Evidence also points to these activities being most successful when they are user-led, and specifically targeted. There are lots of initiatives that fit these criteria such as coffee mornings, faith groups and community choirs (CEL).

Activities should ideally be facilitated in a way that enables social contact to continue outside of the group—not just limited to the session. That’s because often the positive feelings only last as long as the session does if people don’t make and sustain connections as a result.

Young people particularly require access to a reliable group of peers and adults that accept them and with whom they feel comfortable speaking about their lives (UKY). The weaker this network is, the greater the risk of becoming lonely.

Example 3: Brighton and Hove Carers Centre—Male Carers Support Group

This Male Carers Support Group was established in recognition of the fact that male carers often need particular support and had not been participating at other events run by the Carers Centre. The group meets in community settings such as cafés to schedule coffee mornings and other social activities.

A core group of men come along regularly, most of whom are caring for their partners. At each meeting the carers decide on their next activity, and all activities are free. In the past these have included bowling, pool, mini-golf, fishing, and cinema trips. Meals are very popular and the group holds an end of year meal and a 'Male Carers Big Breakfast'. An evaluation questionnaire suggests that men feel less depression, stress and isolation as a result of this programme.

Source: [CEL Promising Approaches](#)

Tip 5 | Ensure one-to-one connections feel genuine



Bringing people together with a meaningful one-on-one connection and then nurturing friendships can lead to reduced loneliness (CEL). The most common form of one-to-one is traditional 'befriending' services, through which someone is matched with a worker or volunteer who visits or telephones them on a regular basis. Such activities can play a vital role in reducing loneliness, particularly for those with mobility issues or young people.

Bringing people together with a meaningful one-on-one connection and then nurturing friendships have led to reduced loneliness.

For young people, mentoring and targeted individualised provision can provide frequent and structured contact with a youth worker, which can allow for stronger relationships to develop. Targeted programmes can focus on young people experiencing specific challenges in their lives, whether mental health issues, special educational needs, or around education and employment (UKY).

As described in the Tip 2, there is growing consensus that asking lonely people to become befrienders themselves can lead to tremendous benefits and feelings of self-worth.

Currently, the evidence on the effectiveness of one-to-one approaches for reducing loneliness is not conclusive (CEL & WWCW). This may be because so many different types of intervention are grouped under one heading, from befriending for older people to mentoring for younger people.

Be aware: As with matching people to group interventions, there should be a focus on developing and sustaining meaningful relationships over a focus or shared interest. Traditional befriending approaches don't work for everyone. Formally pairing volunteers and older people without thinking about shared interests or something to 'glue' people together doesn't work as they either lose interest or don't see the relationship as 'real' (AB).

Example 4: b:Friend in Doncaster

b:Friend matches isolated elderly neighbours with volunteer befrienders, who will visit for a cuppa and a chat. It was awarded £241,000 at the end of 2017 to expand its existing voluntary commitment and increase the number of volunteer befrienders and social clubs.

Befriender Julie says of her friend Hazel: *“At the time we first met she had recently lost her husband, and I’d just lost my mum, so we were able to help each other through some sad times, laughing and reminiscing. We always have things to talk about – there are never any awkward silences. I look forward to my visits every week and always leave feeling happy – and I know Hazel is the same.”*

Source: DCMS

Theme: Reducing stigma**Tip 6**  **Be careful with your language**

Stigma is a significant issue for people facing loneliness (UKY & Lau and Gruen, 1992). This impacts people’s willingness to report feeling lonely and to seek help. Survey results show that one in three people would be too embarrassed to admit to feeling lonely (MHF 2010). This is even higher among young people (MHF 2010). Young people can often feel pressured to be perceived as perfect. This stigma and pressure can then reinforce their isolation and loneliness. Young people need strong relationships with trusted adults before they feel comfortable to talk freely about their feelings and experiences.

The most effective route to deal with this is to change the narrative around loneliness, encourage awareness and openness to talk about the topic, while increasing knowledge of local connections and services. Language you choose to use to describe your service or users can influence people’s receptiveness. For example, people may not see themselves as ‘isolated’ or ‘lonely’, they may find these terms negative, or deficit based. Creating positivity around an issue can encourage people to engage and be a part of something that is working, rather than focusing on the problem.

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Terminology around age and demographic can also be a barrier. Very few people consider themselves ‘old’, with recent surveys showing only the 70+ age group has most people identifying as old (AB). Some of these people may be unwilling to participate in activities that are defined as being for ‘older people’ (AB). Here, emphasising intergenerational approaches can be effective, or at least that activities can be targeted at all ages. Finally, some people don’t like or want to be referred to as a ‘beneficiary’ or a ‘volunteer’. Projects are learning that plain, accessible and positive language is often key to engaging people. For example, calling volunteers ‘champions’ and talking about improving ‘well-being’ instead of reducing loneliness (AB & Parkin 2017). Language should be active with a positive spin and can be aided by a sense of fun.

Be aware: Some youth workers are anxious that if awareness is not raised in a responsible, sensitive and clear way, some young people may be quick to self-diagnose and use ‘loneliness’ to mask other problems. This is something they’ve seen happen around mental health language (UKY). This appears to be a rich opportunity for involving young people in finding the right vocabulary. See pages 14 and 16 for more on terminology.

Tip 7 Remain age-positive



An age-positive approach can be a tremendous enabler to combatting loneliness (CEL). Such an approach involves emphasising a healthy and active ageing, and rejects negative stereotypes of ageing. There are often gaps of service support for people in their mid-life stage, when pressures can be acute (NPC, 2015). More generally, these approaches can target individuals with particular needs or things in common rather than their age. For example, an environment that suits an older person with limited mobility is also likely to help disabled people or someone pushing a pram.

‘Age-friendly’ approaches help to foster a positive mentality among a wide range of key organisations and institutions within a local area.

Negative attitudes to old age or youth can discourage certain age groups from taking up support available to enable social connection, and these attitudes should be broken down. The World Health Organisation has developed a network of ‘age-friendly’ communities with the intent of creating, ‘*environments free from physical and social barriers and supported by policies, systems, services, products and technologies*’ to foster healthy and active ageing (AB & WHO).

‘Age-friendly’ approaches help to foster a positive mentality among a wide range of key organisations and institutions within a local area. This encourages more creative thinking about what services and facilities enable people to build meaningful connections.

Making age-friendly communities creates new meeting spaces and ways into additional support. In 2010 Manchester became the UK’s first age-friendly city. It involved a wide range of organisations in tackling isolation and took a community approach to improving ageing (CEL). The Culture Champions programme recruited older people, gave them information about arts and culture events in the City, and offered benefits like discounted tickets. They were invited to contribute to projects at specific cultural venues (CEL).

Example 5: Isle of Wight, Age-Friendly Island

Age-friendly interactive training courses have been run with many young people and professionals (from services including fire, police, library, college and council) plus ‘train the trainer’ sessions for the local bus company. Sessions encourage awareness and empathy. For example, participants had the chance to wear an ‘ageing suit’ which emulates a range of physical conditions associated with ageing. As a result, attendees have learned to adapt their approach to communicating and working with older people. The bus company reports a reduction in slips, trips and falls from older travellers since their staff completed the training.

Source: [The National Lottery Community Fund Ageing Better](#)

Theme: Reducing barriers to access

Tip 8 Focus on the neighbourhood

Most people spend a significant amount of their time in their immediate neighbourhood, making their locality a significant influence on their well-being. In one study of a programme, it was found that adult and youth loneliness in Bradford Moore were deeply interlinked, and that working on place-based solutions had the potential to improve both (JRF 2014).

Whilst local authority spending on youth services has reduced, it is important to recognise the new and innovative thinking that has emerged, including new partnerships and collaborations spanning public, private and civil society partners. This includes reaching those who are geographically isolated whether through detached youth workers or other means. Geographically isolated people can include those without family support to attend services, those unaware of the services available, and those who may not feel comfortable attending a structured programme, community or youth centre.

There is strong evidence that focusing on a particular place, or even a neighbourhood, can be particularly effective in combatting loneliness (CEL). People who feel that they belong to the neighbourhood and who trust others are also less likely to experience chronic loneliness (ONS, 10 April 2018). There are practical benefits to tackling loneliness neighbourhood by neighbourhood, such as breaking areas down into more manageable chunks, allowing more effective targeting of initiatives, and enabling outreach efforts (CEL).

Example 6: Leeds City Council's Neighbourhood Network contract

Leeds City Council runs a scheme delivered locally by 37 third sector organisations. They aim to enable older people to feel included in their local community and to have control over their lives. The scheme is run by committees that are representative of the communities they serve.

There are four key goals for the schemes: increasing contribution and involvement; improving choice and control; improving well-being and healthier life choices; and reducing social isolation. Each of the schemes delivers a range of services, shaped by local people to meet these outcomes. Services include health related activities, digital inclusion, social groups, outings and trips, information and advice, and practical support. These services are largely delivered by volunteers, many of whom are older people.

Source: [CEL Promising Approaches](#)

Tip 9 Try to facilitate transport

There is clear evidence that the built environment and local area infrastructure is essential to support vibrant social networks (CEL & AB). Good transport links, community facilities and people-centred design are all important to help people to access work, stay healthy and remain linked into their communities. Residents living in walkable neighbourhoods are more likely to know their neighbours, maintain existing connections, participate politically, trust others, be involved socially (Leyden 2003).

For older people, a lack of appropriate transport can be a major barrier, not just to maintaining their existing social connections but also to accessing those services designed to reduce social isolation. Many loneliness initiatives, such as Contact the Elderly provide transport to their activities. Sometimes transport can itself create

opportunities for social interaction, and the great advantage of these casual social interactions is that there is no stigma to taking up the service in the first place. Age UK Kensington and Chelsea's shopping service has hung opportunities for social interaction around the provision of an accessible and affordable transport service to groups who are unable to use public transport.

Example 7: Contact the Elderly tea parties

Contact the Elderly organises free monthly Sunday afternoon tea parties for people aged 75 and over, who live alone and have limited support from family and friends. The provision of transport is integral to the model as guests are collected from home and driven to tea parties by a regular volunteer driver. Each tea party group is formed of 6–8 older guests, 3–4 volunteer drivers, a bank of volunteer hosts and a volunteer coordinator. The group visits a different host each month but the volunteer drivers stay the same, ensuring that friendships are formed over time. A survey of 1,200 guests highlighted the profound difference tea parties make: 80% feel less lonely since joining a group.

Source: [CEL Promising Approaches](#)

Tip 10 | Harness digital technology—carefully



There is evidence that digital technology can both exacerbate and help fight loneliness. Much attention has been paid to the ways that technology can exacerbate loneliness through preventing us from forging meaningful relationships, and excluding certain groups like older people who are not digitally literate. Technology has allowed us to work more flexibly and autonomously. But it can also limit opportunities for interaction by preventing us from socialising in the workplace as well as affecting our work-life balance—which can hold us back from forging meaningful relationships in our personal lives. Social media is often highlighted as a cause of loneliness, particularly among young people, but its effects are more complicated. How it relates to loneliness seems to depend on which platform is used, and whether it is a substitute or a complement to real-life interaction.

Yet technology can also be used to help fight loneliness through joining up data about need and provision, supporting people to maintain relationships, and offering a cost-effective way of providing wider services that support social connection. For example, technology is being used to identify where loneliness exists in our communities. Service providers can benefit from this by working with partners such as the local council to get access to this data. Age UK have been working with councils to develop proxy indicators of loneliness. Their heat map system shows the relative risk of loneliness across 32,844 neighbourhoods in England. The risk of loneliness is based on factors—such as marital status, self-reported health status, age and household size—which can predict around 20% of the loneliness observed amongst people 65+. Together with an understanding of local neighbourhoods, such data can improve the allocation of limited resources and help to inform whether existing services are reaching areas of need.

Technology can play a vital role in supporting older people to maintain (and, to a lesser extent, develop) their social connections. There is evidence that digital technology-based solutions—such as teaching older people to use video conferencing technology like Skype to reconnect with their family—reduces loneliness (WWCW). It also enables new social connections. Indeed, in some cases the provision of technology creates an 'excuse' for new face-to-face relationships, for example IT training sessions. And it also offers a cost-effective way of providing wider services and supports to social connection, such as with a telephone befriending service.

Technology-based provision may sometimes represent the best feasible support in a time of limited resources, and when people are hard to reach. While some technologies may currently be inaccessible and unpalatable to older people, others—such as mobile phones—are increasingly accessible to them. Over time, as new cohorts age, the range of commonly accepted and accessible technologies may widen, opening up new possibilities for technology-based loneliness solutions. Still, it's important to stay alert to how use of technology may exacerbate loneliness.

Example 8: Call in Time

Age UK's Call in Time is a national telephone befriending service based on a corporate volunteering model. Organisations that sign up allow their staff to volunteer—usually during working hours—for half-an-hour a week to befriend an older person. Age UK recognise that most older people would prefer to receive a face-to-face befriending service, so Call in Time tends to serve clients in areas where no face-to-face services are available due to lack of funding, or difficulties recruiting volunteers.

Because Call in Time is delivered over the telephone, with the support of employers, Age UK is able to deliver a cost-effective service and reports few problems attracting volunteers. An independent evaluation of the pilot phase of the project found that *'perceived well-being and mood improved and activity levels increased among telephone befriending service recipients, including those suffering from chronic depression. Many reported a reduction in loneliness.'*

Source: [CEL Promising Approaches](#)

This document was produced as part of learning and evaluation partnership for the **Building Connections Fund**. The Building Connections Fund is an £11.5m investment funded by the UK government, The National Lottery Community Fund, and Co-op Foundation. [NPC is partnering](#) with the Centre for Youth Impact, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, Brunel University London, Bryson Purdon Social Research, and David Pritchard to capture the impact of the Fund on reducing and preventing loneliness and support grant holders with their evaluation practice.

For further guidance and to find out more visit our dedicated [webpage in collaboration with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#).

Co-Funded by:



Evaluation in partnership with:



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APPENDIX

Important elements that define being and feeling alone, loneliness and isolation

Contributor	Being alone	Feeling alone	Loneliness	Isolation
Physical or mental state	A physical state	An emotional state	An emotional and physical state	May be both a state of mind and a physical state
Choice	Can be a positive choice (but may not be), 'you can choose to be alone'	Not chosen, 'not being able to change your situation'	Not chosen, 'it happens to you'	May be chosen as a form of protection, 'You don't share the same interests'; May be imposed by others, 'no one wants to talk to you'
Pathways	Being alone more than one would choose may lead to feeling alone/loneliness, 'Constantly being alone', 'being alone could be more just like physical separation'	Feeling alone caused by being alone may lead to loneliness, 'Constantly being alone by yourself'	A possible stepping stone to isolation (or mental health condition), 'you feel like you have nobody'	May involve pushing others away' or intentionally withdrawing from others as well as lacking opportunities to connect socially, 'Don't have connections'
Time period and reoccurrence	Short term/transient, 'Alone is like a short period of time'	Short term but can occur frequently, 'lonely is like a long period of time'	Longer term than 'feeling alone'	Long term /entrenched though could be shorter term when associated with punishment)
Associated feelings	Being by yourself, empowerment (if chosen to be alone)	Feeling of having 'no one', feeling of having 'no one to talk to'	Wishing there was someone there for you, no one who can relate to you	Can't let people in emotionally, not wanted by other people, worthless
Associated circumstances	Physical separation, on your own at home, school holidays (away from friends)	Being on your own, no one to talk to, no one to share experiences with	Lacking confidantes, being ignored	Pushing people away, mental health condition, having no support

Source: [ONS 'Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018'](#)

References and other useful links

The Campaign to End Loneliness and Age UK (2015) [Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life.](#)

Centre for Policy on Ageing (2014) [Rapid review on loneliness—evidence of the effectiveness of interventions.](#)

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NPC (2018) [Make it count: Why impact matters in user involvement.](#)

NPC (2015) [Decision time: Will the voluntary sector embrace the age of opportunity?](#)

ONS Loneliness data:

[Loneliness—What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?](#)

[Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018](#)

[Loneliness in children and young people](#)

[Introduction: Developing national indicators of loneliness](#)

[Recommended national indicators of loneliness](#)

[Mapping the loneliness measurement landscape](#)

[Freedom of Information \(FOI\): Loneliness](#)

Parkin, G. (2017) *Project 'Deep Dives' report*. Age Better in Sheffield

UK Youth (2018) [A place to belong—the role of youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness.](#)

Victor, C., Mansfield, L., Kay, T. et al (2018) [An overview of reviews: the effectiveness of interventions to address loneliness at all stages of the life-course.](#)

World Health Organization website: [Age-friendly in practice.](#)

Glossary

Differing uses of common terms and concepts create the potential for confusion and misunderstanding. This can cause problems as you consider what to measure, look to interpret evidence and results produced by others, and discuss best practices with each other and experts. The below glossary draws from the evidence we have cited, and is designed to facilitate communication.

Words and concepts	Definitions
Loneliness	A subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want.
Transient/everyday loneliness	Includes brief and occasional lonely moods. These experiences have not been of much concern to researchers or clinicians.
Situational/transitional loneliness	Involves people who had satisfying relationships until some specific change occurred, such as divorce, bereavement or moving to a new town.
Chronic loneliness	Occurs when a person has lacked satisfactory social relations for a period of two or more years.
Social Isolation	When isolation is observable. For example, we may look at how many relationships someone has or how often they speak to other people to help us understand whether someone is isolated.
Loneliness risk-factors	Defined by ONS eg, renters, carers, 16–24
Foundation services	These include: reaching lonely individuals (eg data matching/heat map), understanding the nature of an individuals loneliness and developing a personal response, and supporting lonely individuals to access appropriate services (eg, signposting/social prescribing)
Structural enablers/disablers	For example technology, transport, lived environment
Neighbourhood approaches	Working within the small localities with which individuals identify.

Asset- or strength-based approach	Focusing on 'what is strong' in an individual or a community and supporting them to mobilise, connect and build on those strengths to achieve their desired outcomes.
Asset based community development (ABCD)	Working with existing resources and capacities in the area to build something with the community.
Volunteering	Any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives.
Age-positive	Approaches that start from a positive understanding of ageing and later life as a time of opportunity—including Age-Friendly Cities, Dementia Friendly Communities, etc.
Direct intervention	These include helping support and maintain existing relationships , foster and enable new connections , and to help to change the way we think about social connections.
Group-based services	For example, meet-ups, peer support or shared activities.
One-to-one services	For example, befriending or mentoring.
Psychological approaches	Help people change their thinking about their social connections.
Gateway services	Including transport and technology.
Data matching	Identifying people with risk factors for loneliness.

TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy. Over the past 15 years we have worked with charities, funders, philanthropists and others, supporting them to deliver the greatest possible impact for the causes and beneficiaries they exist to serve.

NPC occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

Increasing the impact of funders: NPC's role is to make funders more successful too. We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders: NPC's mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact. We can help funders and those they fund to connect and transform the way they work together to achieve their vision.

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