

# Loneliness harms health

## One year on

Over the last year, the Campaign to End Loneliness has been asking people across the country to join us in highlighting loneliness as a major health and care issue that should be taken seriously by those making decisions about our health.

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the new health and wellbeing boards took on their statutory functions. This means that these boards, bringing together local leaders from across the NHS, public health, adult social care, children's services, HealthWatch and elected councillors, are now officially responsible for planning how to meet our local health and social care needs.

As well as recognising that loneliness should be treated alongside other major public health issues such as obesity, we want to see boards adopt a target to reduce loneliness, develop a strategy to allow this to happen and start measuring the extent of loneliness in their area.

Marianne, our Campaigns Officer, first initiated 5 flagship campaigns across the country to kick-start *Loneliness Harms Health* and show what could be achieved when we come together as a community to lobby local decision makers on loneliness.

These dedicated local groups in Cornwall, Essex, Stoke and Sefton have now ensured loneliness is high on the local health agenda.

We then asked you to help us make sure that this happened everywhere else. This update celebrates the progress of campaigns across the country a year on.

Only one year ago, the fact that loneliness is as bad for our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day was not known by many making decisions about our health in local areas. Now, with your help, this message is getting through. We know of at least 20 health and wellbeing boards that have listened to the voices of local campaigners, attended our events and taken notice of the wealth of evidence that supports their argument.

Today, we want to celebrate these achievements. But we must remember that there's still much work to be done to make sure that every board across the country is working together with the voluntary sector, private sector and the community to tackle loneliness.



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### Essex

A flagship area for *Loneliness Harms Health*, The Campaign to End Loneliness spent several months bringing together front line organisations, local charities and older people's forums to take part in the local campaign. Together with local people, we gave presentations, wrote letters to MPs, councillors

and the Health and Wellbeing Board, responded to consultations and submitted press releases. The campaign culminated in a well-attended public meeting in October, which was addressed by a senior councillor and the Chief Executive of Age UK Essex. The Council enthusiastically engaged with the Campaign and loneliness has since been included in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. An innovative isolation index has been developed by Essex County Council. The Council also plans to implement a behaviour change neighbourhood campaign aimed at reducing isolation and loneliness. Various other schemes have also been started by the local voluntary sector, including a loneliness campaign implemented by Brightlingsea U3A.



Campaign to End Loneliness – Essex Loneliness Harms Health open meeting

## Cornwall

A flagship *Loneliness Harms Health* campaign, campaigners in Cornwall took up the cause with great energy and enthusiasm. Older people’s forums, community groups and front line organisations joined together to lobby their councillors, MPs and the Health and Wellbeing Board to make sure that the health implications of loneliness were recognised. The Board said they were “flooded” with responses to their consultation highlighting loneliness and

campaigners made sure the issue was raised at every opportunity. There were several newspaper articles about the campaign as well as several radio interviews. The campaign culminated in *Keeping Connected in Cornwall: a fair for the over 60s*, a day of live music and arts and crafts, which also showcased available services to help people stay connected. The day also collected personal stories of people who were experiencing loneliness. As a direct result of the campaign, tackling loneliness became one of twelve guiding principles for the Cornwall Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

## Gloucestershire

Age UK Gloucestershire were inspired to campaign on loneliness after attending our international research conference and invited the Campaign to speak at their AGM in October. Third sector organisations, older people’s forums and County Council employees attended the presentation, including a Public Health Manager at Gloucestershire City Council. She started to raise awareness of the issue with colleagues and with the Health and Wellbeing Board. At the same time, a member of a Gloucestershire CCG and a Senior Research Analyst at the council were also starting to investigate loneliness, and they attended our online ‘webinar’ for local authorities to learn more about how to address the issue. As a result of this, responses to public consultations and the work of charities across the county, Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Board, and the county council, are now working to learn more about how the issue is affecting their county and what more could be done to address it. In addition Gloucestershire County Council has decided to use public health data to better measure loneliness and isolation.

## Wokingham

One of our supporter organisations in Wokingham – The Link Visiting Scheme - heard about our loneliness toolkit for health and wellbeing boards, and sent it onto his local board. As a result, he was invited to attend a consultation meeting and, with the help of our *Loneliness Harms Health* action pack, argued for loneliness to be included in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This has resulted in social isolation being included in the most recent draft strategy document and the local authority also agreed to maintain the funding for their befriending scheme.

## North Yorkshire

In October 2012, North Yorkshire County Council ran the 'North Yorkshire Wider Partnership Conference' with a theme of health and wellbeing. Attendees included local government officers, other statutory sector groups, care providers and third sector organisations from across the North Yorkshire region. They invited Laura Ferguson, Director of the Campaign, to run a workshop on tackling loneliness in older age.

Social isolation and its impact on mental and wider aspects of people's health is a priority and area of focus under the Ageing Population challenge for North Yorkshire, which pledges to "develop and test innovative approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation."

## York

When York City Council consulted on their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the issue of loneliness came up strongly during this process. After learning of the negative impact of loneliness on

our health from local campaigners, York Health and Wellbeing Board made "addressing loneliness and social isolation" one of five sub-priorities under the overarching banner of 'Making York a great place for older people to live' in their JHWS.

A local councillor and campaign supporter has been campaigning on this issue for many years and it is thanks to her efforts and the efforts of many others across the region, that both York and North Yorkshire Health and Wellbeing Boards now have very strong commitments to addressing loneliness.



Filming at 'Keeping Connected in Cornwall' - run by Cornwall Loneliness Harms Health

## Blackburn with Darwen

The Blackburn 50+ Partnership worked closely with the local Health and Wellbeing Board and supported the development of their strategy. Social isolation and loneliness were quickly identified as key issues. The challenge, however, was to evidence cause and effects. So a workshop was held to explore the matter further, which resulted in an agreement to research it further in an Integrated Strategic Needs Assessment (ISNA). As part of this, a series of community meetings to collect individual stories of social isolation and loneliness to feed into the ISNA were held. A public event to raise awareness and gather local

views and suggest possible solutions also took place, and the Campaign took part in this event. Based on this process, a series of recommendations were put together which were then presented to a joint CCG and local authority commissioning group. This led to the beginning of a more joined up programme of commissioning and fundraising with a better informed partnership approach to meet the needs of vulnerable lonely people in Blackburn with Darwen.

## Thurrock

Thurrock Council heard about the Campaign to End Loneliness through the *Loneliness Harms Health* campaign in Essex. Using our various publications, including the loneliness toolkit for health and wellbeing boards, Thurrock have included a very strong entry on tackling loneliness in their Health and Wellbeing Strategy and have pledged to develop plans for addressing loneliness as part of their Emotional Wellbeing Plan 2013-14. Thurrock Council and Age UK Essex are also shortly launching a Digital Inclusion Project. They will be utilising Skype type technology for people to talk to loved ones and to form friendship groups. This will take place alongside various other programmes for at least a year to see if the council can design loneliness and isolation services in the future based on what has proven to be effective.



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## Oxfordshire

Campaign management group partner, Age UK Oxfordshire, championed the issue in their area – making a concerted effort to lobby their local health and wellbeing board. The local MP, Sir Tony Baldry has also been supportive of the campaign and will be hosting meetings with Age UK Oxfordshire, local RVS services and other charities to discuss the issue of loneliness with the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board, county council and NHS. In its strategy, the Board has acknowledged the health implications of loneliness and pledged to learn more about the issue in the locality.

## Barnet

A new supporter heard about our campaign and decided to start a *Loneliness Harms Health* campaign in Barnet. Using templates from our action pack, he wrote to the Chair of the Barnet Health and Wellbeing Board, and to other relevant members of the Board. He has received positive responses, including from the Council's Later Life Lead, Older People's Joint Commissioner and from his local councillor. Alongside this, he has written to all his local MPs, London councillors and MEPS, and is planning on contacting various third sector organisations in his Borough. As a result of his efforts, two members of Barnet's council will be joining the Campaign at Connect + Act, our conference in June.

## Bedford

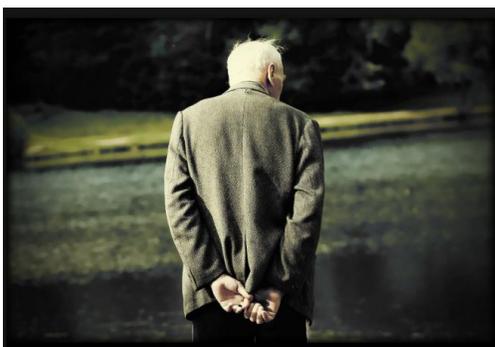
A long-standing supporter has been lobbying her board in Bedford for the past few months. Writing first to her MP, she received a quick response. She also made contact several times with the board and her local councillor via letters, phone calls and emails and has recently

received an encouraging letter from the Mayor of Bedford, who is also the Chair of the Bedford Borough Health and Wellbeing Board. The letter makes clear that loneliness in the over 65s is a high priority for the Borough and that the Health and Wellbeing Board is committed to working closely with partners and communities to implement appropriate support and advice. She has been invited to attend the Adult Health and Wellbeing sub group to highlight the issue further. Loneliness has not been included in the local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, so continued campaigning is necessary to make sure that the issue is clearly cemented in the commissioning plans for the Borough. If you live in Bedford and would like to help this supporter in her campaign, please get in touch.

## Hertfordshire

An active supporter has initiated a *Loneliness Harms Health* campaign in Hertfordshire. She has written to members of the Health and Wellbeing Board and to her County Councillor, and has had letters printed in several local newspapers. She has also presented on the

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topic to several groups across the East of England, including Future East, the England Forum on Ageing for the East of England. She is looking for other campaigners interested in joining her on this campaign.

## What next?

There are many more great campaigns going on across the country. As we hope these case studies demonstrate, raising awareness of this issue with local government and services can really make a difference.

If you, your community group or charity is concerned about loneliness in older age, why not take a look at the [\*Loneliness Harms Health Action Pack\*](#) to find out how you can get this issue on the agenda of those setting health and wellbeing priorities in your area.

If you are planning to campaign and would like us to come and speak to your group about the issue, or if you would like us to speak at a health and wellbeing board event, please email us on [marianne@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk](mailto:marianne@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk)