Initial evidence review:

Strategies for encouraging psychological and emotional resilience in response to loneliness

Project in brief

The project will consist of a relatively rapid, preliminary evidence review to identify, map and summarise learning from approaches which seek to equip individuals with greater psychological and emotional resilience as a means of addressing feelings of loneliness directly, supporting engagement with other types of initiatives (such as community-based provision) or improving the wellbeing of individuals experiencing closely related challenges, such as depression or bereavement.

It will inform the development of a wider development programme, in part by providing insights into questions of for whom such approaches are likely to work and in what circumstances.

About the Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign to End Loneliness believe that people of all ages need connections that matter.

There are nine million lonely people in the UK and four million of them are older people. Many older people find constant loneliness hardest to overcome. They lack the friendship and support we all need.

We've been experts in the field of loneliness and connection since 2011. We share research, evidence and knowledge with thousands of other organisations and the public to make a difference to older people's lives.

We inspire everyone to connect and bring communities together across the UK.

We're hosted by Independent Age, supported by National Lottery funding through the Big Lottery Fund, and also funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, The Tudor Trust and donations from the general public.

The Campaign to End Loneliness is hosted by Independent Age, one of the five founding organisations of the Campaign. Independent Age is responsible for all the Campaign's activities, employees, expenditure, funding obligations, governance and management. The Campaign operates under Independent Age's charity number. Independent Age is the operating name of the Royal United Kingdom Beneficent Association, registered charity number 210729 (England and Wales) SC047184 (Scotland)

Background to this project: an exciting new programme of work funded by DCMS and the Big Lottery Fund

The Campaign to End Loneliness has recently received funding from DCMS and the Big Lottery Fund to develop new approaches to equipping people with the psychological and emotional skills and capacity both to address loneliness directly and to prepare them for better relationships and other activities.

Most existing initiatives aimed at tackling loneliness seek to encourage or enable social support and connection, and do so in relatively direct ways - for example, through 'befriending' schemes or opportunities for group-based activities. Projects of this kind have been shown to be effective and cost effective for some people experiencing loneliness in some circumstances (see, for example, Jopling, 2015), and they make intuitive sense to funders, service providers and members of local communities.

However, they also have important limitations. Perhaps most obviously, some of the thoughts and feelings associated with (and sometimes leading to) loneliness can prevent people from engaging with such initiatives in the first place. Individuals experiencing loneliness may simply lack social skills or confidence; and those in greatest need of help or support – those experiencing chronic loneliness - may be especially sensitive to the possibility of rejection and hostility, leading them to misinterpret ambiguous social situations and withdraw further. This potential 'perceptual distortion' was identified by Weiss as long ago as 1973, but its implications for services and support have not been fully examined.

> *"The individual is forever appraising others for their potential as providers of the needed relationships, and forever appraising situations in terms of their potential for making the needed relationships available . . . (Loneliness) produces an oversensitivity to minimal cues and a tendency to misinterpret or to exaggerate the hostile intent of others."(Weiss, 1973)*

There are existing initiatives and approaches in this area, and the suggestion that loneliness cannot always be 'fixed from the outside' is supported by one of the most rigorous reviews of the effectiveness of loneliness interventions (Masi et al., 2011), where the researchers concluded that "the most successful interventions addressed maladaptive social cognition" through the use of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). We know, too, that psychological therapies have been widely and successfully used to improve the wellbeing of individuals dealing with other adverse experiences, such as depression and/or bereavement, that are strongly associated with loneliness and social isolation.

However, previous work by the Campaign to End Loneliness ("Promising Approaches", published in 2014) suggested that emotional and psychological support for people experiencing loneliness in the UK was patchy, fledgling and underpinned by little evidence. The funding from DCMS and BLF will allow us to investigate this area more systematically. By working collaboratively on this development programme, we aim to fill the current gap in knowledge and ultimately practice and policy.

Taking the subjective and highly variable experience of loneliness as its starting point, then, the programme as a whole aims to change the way that practitioners and policy makers think about solutions. As such, it will complement and strengthen our ongoing work based on community approaches to loneliness. The intention here is not to signal that loneliness is *only* a subjective phenomenon, nor to transfer responsibility for addressing it from society to individuals. Equally, however, there is a need to recognise that social support and social connection may often be necessary but not sufficient pre-conditions for loneliness to be tackled

effectively. Indeed, some forms of loneliness – such as that sometimes experienced *within* relationships – may not be characterised by social isolation at all, at least not as conventionally conceived.

In order to kickstart, underpin and inform this programme of work, the Campaign wishes to commission an external contractor to conduct a preliminary review of the evidence base around strategies for addressing 'internal' factors shaping the experience of loneliness.

Project scope and objectives

Given the relative paucity of existing research evidence, it is not envisaged that this will take the form of a conventional literature review or research synthesis focused on a single question.

Rather, the project will draw on a variety of evidence sources and seek to address a range of related objectives, including the following

- To provide a concise overview of the 'state of the art' academic literature focused specifically on this area (this is expected to be relatively sparse).
- To identify initiatives and approaches which have an implicit or explicit theory of change focused on changing individuals' thoughts and feelings about loneliness and/or social engagement more generally
- To summarise and classify those initiatives and approaches in terms of underlying model, how they are described, target population, funder, provider, etc.
- To identify any formal evidence of effectiveness, cost effectiveness (if available) and broader learning around process, implementation, sustainability and scalability
- To develop the evidence base around which forms of provision appear to work best for whom, in what circumstances
- To consider the links between loneliness and other adverse experiences common in older age, such as depression and bereavement, and how psychological therapies might impact on or disrupt such connections.
- To identify promising approaches to engaging 'hard to reach' groups or those experiencing more chronic or debilitating forms of loneliness, and assess the challenges of using one-to-one or talk-based approaches in this context
- To identify current and potential ways in which such provision can most effectively work alongside and complement other strategies for addressing loneliness

In keeping with the broader remit of the Campaign, it is envisaged that the primary focus of this work should be on the experiences of older people, although we recognise that there may also be some important evidence and insights to be gleaned from work with a broader demographic focus.

Anticipated approach

We anticipate that project methods may include searches of the published and 'grey' literature; consultation with subject experts and service providers; and (potentially) telephone interviews and/or a small number of site visits to learn more about the operation of specific initiatives. Suggestions for additional or alternative approaches are welcome.

Although we anticipate that the main focus of the review will be on the UK, developments, evidence and insights from other countries should be included where relevant and accessible.

Timescales and deliverables

The review is a relatively short project intended to help kickstart the wider programme. The successful tenderer will need to be in a position to start work in February 2019 and to complete the project within 4 months, working with the following key deliverables and milestones:

- Projection inception meeting w/c 25 February 2019
- Agreement of final scope and method w/c 11 March 2019
- Draft report w/c 20 May 2019
- Final report w/c 24 June 2019

The final report (which is likely to be no more than 50 pages in length) should be thematic in nature, providing an overview of the key findings in relation to each of the identified objectives and highlighting clear implications for further development work in this area. In other words, it should be analytical rather than purely descriptive. However, it should also be accompanied by an indexed listing of sources or simple database, providing links to and summaries of the individual evidence sources consulted.

It is intended that the final report will be published in some form by the Campaign, alongside other outputs from the wider programme. The costs associated with publication will be borne by the Campaign. Such outputs will be of interest to a broad range of audiences, including policy makers, funders, researchers and organisations working in the field of loneliness and with older people. The style of the outputs from the review should, therefore, be suitable for these audiences and not confined to a primarily academic audience.

What we are looking for

We are looking for an individual or team already familiar with academic debates and policy developments relating to loneliness and with a track record of working across diverse sources of evidence - including published research, policy documents and grey literature, and informal engagement with key stakeholders

and projects. Prior experience of applied research in a policy or practice setting would be strongly advantageous.

This will be a relatively quick, dynamic and potentially evolving commission, so we are looking for a supplier capable of working flexibly and able to respond to new challenges or opportunities as they arise. Although we will expect rigour from the appointed contractor, we are also looking for creativity and insight to help us to think critically about the subsequent stages of the programme. While our primary goal is to gain a better understanding of what is currently known about this area, we are also looking for lateral thinking that will help to draw in evidence and insights from related fields and identify *gaps* in existing understanding.

Budget

The total budget available for the project is £20,000, including VAT, travel and all other expenses. Payment will be made upon acceptance of the final report which must be completed and received by the Campaign by the end of June 2019. All costs must be identified in the bid document

Project governance and management

The review will be overseen by the Advisory Group for the programme of work as a whole. This may include academics, practitioners, experts by experience and representatives of the Campaign. The Advisory Group will provide practical support and guidance to the contractors, help to assure the quality of outputs, and ensure that the review delivers on its objectives and is appropriately integrated with other elements of the programme.

Day to day project management and oversight will be provided by Kirsten Ireland and Laura Alcock-Ferguson.

Performance and quality requirements

The contractor will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and must agree to abide by any guidelines issued by their profession.

Ownership of all research outcomes, including the final report and all data produced as a result of the research, lies with the Campaign to End Loneliness. The appointed contractor should not discuss project findings in public before a final report has been cleared by us, although with prior agreement aspects of the study may be discussed. Following publication the contractor will be free to discuss the study in public; however, we should be given the opportunity to comment on any proposed presentation or publication using data or findings from this project.

How to respond to this brief

Bidders should supply a short proposal document (of up to 15 pages with a minimum 11 point font size) outlining:

- their understanding of the project and its role within the wider programme
- proposed approach to the task/methodology
- a proposed timeline and implementation plan, including planned ways of working and estimate of hours required
- an overview of the team associated with the management and delivery of the project, and the role, input, relevant experience and expertise of individual team members
- wider organisational capacity, experience and expertise, where relevant
- a full budget breakdown

Curricula vitae for key staff may be included as an appendix.

Any questions about the tender should be directed to laura@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk. The deadline for clarification questions is 5pm on Monday 4 February 2019.

Bidders should submit an electronic copy of their tender submission to laura@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk no later than 12.00 Noon on Monday 11 February 2019. The subject line should be as follows: "Tender reference – psychological emotional resilience".

By submitting a tender, the bidder agrees to keep that tender open for acceptance by the Campaign for 90 days following the closing date for submission of tenders.

Selection process

Tenders will be assessed in accordance with the following criteria.

Evaluation criterion	Description	Weighting
Understanding our needs	Indication of your ability to understand the objectives of the review and how it will be used by the Campaign	10%
Methodology/Approach	Details of methodology/approach to be used; Plans for dealing with any risks and contingencies not covered by the matters referred to above.	20%
Implementation plan	Details of your implementation plan to meet the timescales.	10%
Quality	Details of how you will ensure that a high quality service is maintained throughout the contract period.	10%
Staffing / Resources	Details of any proposed staff or sub-contractors to be used for the provision of the services.	10%
Technical experience	Evidence of providing similar services to other organisations.	10%
Price	A full breakdown of all costs should be given.	30%

If required, selection interviews may be held at the Campaign's London offices during w/c 18 February 2019.

The Campaign is under no obligation to accept the lowest tender. All tenderers will be notified of the contract award decision.

The Campaign does not bind itself to award a contract or contracts and shall not be liable for any costs incurred in the production or submission of ITT. Under no circumstances will the Campaign or any of its advisers be liable for any costs or expenses incurred by Bidders and/or their members in this procurement.

References

Jopling, K. (2015) *Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life*. Age UK

Weiss, R. S. (1973). *Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social isolation.* Cambridge, MA, US: The MIT Press.