



NEWS RELEASE

Embargoed release until: 1st December 2011

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Local commissioners must address the health risks of loneliness by supporting and promoting local support that helps combat loneliness in older age.

A report has found that few people know where they would go to find help if they felt lonely - 42% of people surveyed did not know of any organisations or services that could help those facing loneliness. This is despite many local organisations providing support for people in their older age to stay connected, shown by a growing number of organisations becoming supporters of the Campaign to End Loneliness.

In "Listening to You: a baseline report", launched today, the Campaign to End Loneliness sets out a role for local health commissioners in combating loneliness. They should support and promote groups and organisations providing services that prevent and alleviate loneliness in their area.

Laura Ferguson, Director of the Campaign to End Loneliness, said: "If people don't know that there is help available to them, they might remain lonely or isolated. This is particularly problematic in winter when those living alone are more at risk of poor health, or feel particularly lonely due to being left out of Christmas celebrations. To tackle loneliness permanently, it is vital that those responsible for the local health and wellbeing agenda address the negative health impacts of loneliness in older age by working with and raising awareness of local groups and services that can help".

In the foreword to this report, Esther Rantzen CBE, wrote: “We live in an age when the collapse of the extended family and the shattering of communities, together with the brave new idea of “independent living” has created an epidemic of loneliness. But like all epidemics, if we admit the problem and diagnose the causes, together we can find an effective treatment. And this report is a crucial step towards that diagnosis, it takes us an important first step towards discovering the symptoms and the causes of loneliness, and finding, let’s hope, effective cures.”

There are many triggers for loneliness in older age but relatively simple ways to reduce loneliness are often the most transformative, as this case study demonstrates:

“Betty* lives in a rural area in the North East of England and suffers from a degenerative condition that has left her in a wheelchair. A lack of adapted public transport in her rural location meant she became housebound and this led her to feel very lonely despite having regular visits from carers, who she said were “strangers and changed on a daily basis”.

However, gaining an adapted vehicle for her wheelchair was a vital step for overcoming her loneliness as she can now get out and about in her community independently. She told us: “I feel liberated – free again and a part of society again. It’s so hard being isolated at home in a rural environment.”

Sally Cupitt, Senior Consultant at the Charity Evaluation Services, said: “It was a striking finding in our research how many older people wanted to do more to prevent loneliness in themselves, or indeed to help others do the same. Many cited reasons such as poverty or disability as barriers. We need to find ways to remove these barriers to enable people to help themselves and other people.”

Andrew Barnett, Director, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK, said: “While social media has revolutionised the way we communicate with each other, loneliness remains a serious risk to our well-being especially in later life. This research reaffirms the support we are providing through the campaign to raise awareness of, and help address, this problem and help us all connect better in our complex world.”

Organisations and people who feel very strongly about combating loneliness in older age can show their support for the Campaign to End Loneliness, get actively involved in the work of the Campaign in local areas in the Campaign's new projects in 2012. Become a supporter and combat loneliness in older age, visit www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/support-us/

-ENDS-

Notes to editors:

The report:

"Listening to You: a baseline report from the Campaign to End Loneliness" contains the findings of a 2011 survey of over 1,500 adults aged over 40 on the issue of loneliness. This report provides an important reference framework for the upcoming projects of the Campaign, and the results will also be used to measure the success of future work.

*This case study has been anonymised, and originally appears in the report above.

Loneliness and health:

Loneliness is bad for your health: researchers rate loneliness and social isolation as a comparable risk to lifelong smoking (Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB (2010) 'Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review', PLoS Med 7(7): e1000316).

Background to the Campaign to End Loneliness

About the Campaign:

The Campaign to End Loneliness aims to maintain and create connections in older age and was launched in 2011 by four founder partners: Age UK Oxfordshire, Counsel and Care, Independent Age and WRVS. It is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Three upcoming pieces of work by the Campaign will pursue the theme of working together to combat loneliness in local areas:

1. In February 2012, with the Local Government Association's Ageing Well Programme, we will create and promote a briefing sheet for local authorities on what can be done in local areas to tackle the loneliness that is experienced by many older people.
2. A local project focusing on health and wellbeing interventions to combat loneliness will be launched in 2012.
3. A corresponding "guide" to reducing loneliness in older age will be created with and for those working with older people.

More information about the Campaign can be found at:

www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk

The founder partners: recognise the importance of working together and with others to combat loneliness: a complex, very personal and often hidden issue which has knock on effects across health and wider society. These founder partners are:

Independent Age is a unique and growing charity, providing information, advice and support for thousands of older people across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It has recently merged with two other older people's charities, *Counsel and Care* and *Universal Beneficent Society*, to provide a broader range of services than any of the charities could provide separately. The merged charity, which is called Independent Age, provides:

- An information and advice service for older people, their families and carers, focusing on three vital areas:
 - Social care, including care at home, in hospital and residential care
 - Welfare benefits
 - Befriending services and other social support.

This national information and advice is integrated with:

- Local support, including:
 - Practical help with forms, assessments and other issues

- One to one and group befriending schemes

We use the knowledge we gain from providing our services to help influence policy and practice. For more information visit www.independentage.org

WRVS provides practical help through the power of volunteering, so older people can stay independent and live the way they want. WRVS is one of the largest volunteering charities in Britain powered by 45,000 volunteers who regularly provide practical help to over 100,000 older people in their homes, communities, hospitals and during emergencies. To find out about volunteering with WRVS visit www.wrvs.org.uk

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity with over 40 years of experience in promoting the well-being of older people throughout the county of Oxfordshire, and helping to make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience. To find out about more visit <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire/>

The Campaign is supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support transnational work tackling contemporary issues in Europe. The purpose of the UK Branch in London is to connect and enrich the experiences of individuals, families and communities with a special interest in supporting those who are most disadvantaged. In 2008, the Foundation launched an initiative on ageing and social cohesion. Our support of the Campaign to End Loneliness represents a core development of our work in this area which we hope will contribute to a growing understanding of the impact of demographic ageing on our society. For more information about the work of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in the UK please visit www.gulbenkian.org.uk