Spreading the word
Generating media coverage

Generating media coverage about the issue of loneliness in older age in your region is a great way of raising awareness, and getting your local newspapers on side could lend a good deal of support to your activities. Just take a look at all the coverage from Yorkshire Post. This is an excellent example of a partnership between and charity and newspaper that can generate change:

- Loneliness a major public health challenge: Jan 2015
- Yorkshire Post Loneliness Campaign Feb 2015
- Double Victory in the Yorkshire Post’s Loneliness Campaign Feb 2015
- Toasting the First of Many: The Yorkshire Post Loneliness Campaign inspires new Friendship Lunch Feb 215

Journalists are always looking for interesting stories so don’t be nervous of contacting them. Try and build a relationship with a particular journalist if you can. Also remember that if what you’re doing becomes well-known, journalists may contact you for a quote on a relevant story. Be prepared for this and make sure your key messages are agreed beforehand. You don’t need to give a response straight away – let the journalist know that you will come back to them ASAP with a quote. This will give you time to think through your response more carefully. Does anyone in your group have previous experience of working with the media? Find out what the people in your group are good at or enjoy doing; this could help you find appropriate roles for people.

For an example press release, click here
Top tips for successful press releases

- Ask other members of your group if anyone already has warm contacts in the press
- Include ‘Who, What, Why, When, Where’ in the first paragraph
- Keep sentences short and the release brief
- Keep it timely: try and tie your press release to something like an event or consultation. This will make it more relevant
- Include a quote from a local person and try to make sure the quote incorporates your key message
- Use a case study where possible and ideally have a case study available to speak with a journalist if necessary
- If you hold an event, send some photos or invite a photographer (get permission from attendees to have their photo taken)
- Call the news desk to check they received your press release and to see whether they need any more information

If they don’t use the release, don’t be put off. They know about your campaign and may well be more interested next time. Keep them up to date with regular press releases.

Local radio

Another good opportunity to get noticed is to get a slot on the local radio. This could simply be to talk about your campaign or to promote an event you are running. You could make initial contact by sending them a press release or even phoning into a talk show.

Letters to the editor

Another option for getting information about loneliness into the press is by writing to the editor and getting your letter printed on the letters page. Why
not ask all your contacts and allies to do the same? You can find a template to use here.

Printed materials

Posters and leaflets are a good way of getting your message across or to invite people to an event. They could be left in GPs surgeries, libraries or community centres. There is a cost associated with this though so think carefully about how you want to use them and whether there is a better way of getting your message across. You can download a template poster and leaflet from our website.

The internet

Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter or a blog, can be a great way to spread awareness about how you’re planning change in your local area, provide an easy way for supporters to get/keep in touch and interact with each other or co-ordinate events. These tools can be a great way to spread the word and keep people in the loop.

However, a successful social media campaign requires time and effort – the web is crowded and it takes dedicated work to make an online campaign successful. Think about what your objectives are before you start. Also, remember that whilst lots of older people are happy using the internet, there are still plenty of people who don’t have a computer and are not comfortable using social media. If you are looking to involve people of all ages across your activities, you shouldn’t rely on online communication.
Petitions

Yes, it’s been done before. But if a lot of people sign up, petitions can be a really powerful tool and make it clear that the community is behind you. Think creatively about how you can maximise the numbers of names on your petition; you could release a press release, attend events, and even stand in the street asking people to sign.

Events and publicity stunts

Holding an event could be a great way to raise awareness of what you’re doing and gain allies, as well as great hook for media coverage, but before setting out to do this, have a think about the aims of your event. What do you want to get “out of it? Events could be a simple public meeting, an event in a community hall with some speakers with the public invited along to ask probing questions, or a publicity stunt in the street using actors, designed to make a splash in the media. Do remember to get the relevant permission/insurance if planning an on-street event from the council.

Since the event I have arranged a meeting with one of our Wellbeing Officers to see about setting up a Life Cafe in the town and also we’ll be setting up an Older People's Alliance within the county.

Attendee at local campaigning event