

# JO COX LONELINESS

start a conversation

## Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time

*A call to action*







Eden Project Communities - one of our partners bringing people together.

## FOREWORD



Seema Kennedy MP and Rachel Reeves MP, co-chairs of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness at a Men's Shed project.

Over the past year we have been proud to chair the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, which Jo set up before her death in summer 2016, to shine a powerful spotlight on the millions of people who are lonely living in our communities.

The Commission was a response to Jo's own experience - of finding herself a fish out of water at university and experiencing deep loneliness, and later of seeing the devastating effects of loneliness in her constituency of Batley and Spen. Jo recognised that loneliness was a huge problem, that it could affect anyone of us, and that its impacts were real and lasting. She wanted to bring new focus and attention to loneliness in our communities, and to encourage action.

Jo's vision for the Commission, as in everything she did, was to break down boundaries. She wanted the Commission to be cross-party, something we've continued, working together as co-chairs since Jo's murder.

And it was to be led by a wider coalition - 13 charities and businesses, handpicked for their expertise, insight and reach into some of the communities most affected by loneliness - united in their desire to drive change.

As we come to the end of this year-long project we feel proud to have honoured Jo's memory with this important work. This year we have reached many thousands of people across the country: young and old, disabled people, carers, men in sheds, children at play, parents, refugees and people seeking asylum, employers and the many people who simply started a conversation or said they were 'happy to chat'.

There is a long way to go in tackling loneliness, but we know that our efforts have helped people talk about their own feelings of loneliness, and think about the people who are lonely in their lives and what they could do to help them. And we have stimulated new debate about the role that government, business and community groups can play.

Jo said that she wanted to "turbo-charge" our response to loneliness - and that's what we have done. This report shares the ideas the Commission has worked on over the past year, and it challenges national government to step forward and lead a renewed push to tackle loneliness. But we know that loneliness will not end until we all recognise the role we can play in making that happen.

Jo always looked forward. She would have said that what matters most now are the actions, big and small, that people take in response to the Commission's work. This is a responsibility for all of us and one we look forward to sharing with you in the weeks and months ahead.

Seema Kennedy and Rachel Reeves  
co-chairs, Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness





The British Red Cross Connecting Communities service supports individuals in their communities. Simon Rawles (BRC).



Happy to Chat badges encourage people to start a conversation.

## IN BRIEF: OUR CALL TO ACTION

We are calling for action from national Government in three key areas.

### National leadership

- A UK wide Strategy for Loneliness across all ages
- A nominated lead Minister
- A Family and Relationships Test for new policy

### Measuring progress

- A national indicator on loneliness across all ages
- Measures of loneliness included in major national studies
- Annual reporting on loneliness
- A programme to develop the evidence around 'what works' in tackling loneliness
- Easy-to-understand messages to help individuals connect with others and avoid loneliness

### Catalysing action

An innovation and spread fund, to:

- Stimulate innovation
- Provide seed funding for communities
- Scale-up and spread promising approaches

**But it is not just Government that needs to act.  
We also believe there is a role for:**

- Metro mayors and council leaders
- Public sector leaders
- Business leaders and employers
- Community and voluntary groups

**And each and every one of us.**



## INTRODUCTION

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness was inspired by Jo's vision that by working together we could make a real difference to the lives of those affected by loneliness. Over the past 12 months, a group of 13 charities and businesses have been working, together with co-chairs Seema Kennedy and Rachel Reeves, to respond to the challenge of loneliness.

In this report we reflect what we have learnt and set out what we, the Commission partners, believe needs to happen next.

**"I will not live in a country where thousands of people are living lonely lives forgotten by the rest of us."**

Jo Cox

## THE COMMISSION'S WORK

The Commission launched with a call to action to 'start a conversation', and through all our work we've encouraged people to connect, and to let others know that they are 'Happy to Chat'. Throughout the year we've chosen to shine a spotlight on some of the different communities affected by loneliness – men, older people, carers, refugees and people seeking asylum, disabled people, children, young people and their parents. And we've also held that spotlight up to the role of business.

Up and down the country, partners have inspired action – from chats in Men's Sheds, to Town Hall summits, from reminiscence cafes, to play sessions for parents. The Commission has prompted moving debates in Parliament and commitments on loneliness and social isolation in the manifestos of the two main parties at the 2017 General Election.

We have brought together business leaders, community activists, academics and innovators to share their experience and wisdom. And we have also taken our message to the wider public – generating wave after wave of media coverage, from radio phone-ins to broadsheet features, from blogs to tweets. Thousands of 'Happy to Chat' badges have been requested and 9 million people joined the annual Big Lunch celebration through 90,000 Great Get Together events in June.

## OUR VISION

In Jo's maiden speech she argued that we have *"more in common than that which divides us"*. Our vision is of a future in which these bonds of common humanity are valued and strengthened, not just in adversity but in the everyday. Where it doesn't take a crisis to see communities coming together. And where we value the strength of our relationships, as a nation, within our communities, and as individuals, as much as our economic standing.

As our society changes there are new risks to our relationships and more that could separate us – more pressures at home and work and at school, less time to meet together and get to know each other, more opportunities to judge quickly, and greater drive to emphasise difference over unity. But there are also new opportunities to grow and nurture links between individuals both online and in person, to create new communities across boundaries and borders, and to create space for people to connect.

The Commission's work has sought to start a conversation about how we can ensure that our future is one of connection, kindness and community, not isolation, separation and loneliness.

## FUTURE ACTION

Tackling loneliness is a generational challenge. Each and every one of us will need to come together – as individuals, in our communities, with civil society organisations, businesses, schools, employers and with government – to play our part in taking forward Jo's vision for a less lonely, more connected, world.

Next year our partners will take forward our spirit of collaboration:

- The British Red Cross and Co-op partnership will create a new Action Group to bring together organisations working on loneliness and take forward our calls to action.
- The Campaign to End Loneliness will lead a public campaign, and build on the loneliness movement with charities, local authorities and businesses across the UK.
- MPs will continue their work through a new Parliamentary Group (APPG) on loneliness.
- And all of us can continue to be 'Happy to Chat', combatting loneliness one conversation at a time.



Action for Children – Cape Hill Children's Centre – A new mum attends a Stay and Play session run by the charity.



## Craig's Story

*"It helps to fill the gap. It makes me feel part of the community."*

Craig is a 47-year-old father of one who lives in West Bromwich. In 2012 he separated from his partner and the mother of his son. Having been a 'hands on' dad, he initially only had access to his then-three-year-old son for two hours a week – an experience he describes as **"like having your heart ripped out"**. After a court battle, he gained more access to his son, but the loneliness remained an issue.

Craig explains, **"When it first happened, for the first two or three months, I was sitting around the house, and you're just sort of slumped. I was living by myself. I was used to having my son running around my feet. The house was so quiet. You feel so lonely."**

**"I ended up losing most of my friends too – it's not just me and my partner who split – it was my friends too because there was so much animosity and they ended up feeling like they'd done something wrong."**

Fortunately, Craig's life has been transformed by a decision he made to volunteer with Action for Children – who he'd met through taking his son to Stay and Play sessions before the separation, and who had supported him through the custody battle. He's now been volunteering for more than five years, alongside his full-time work, and it has transformed the way he feels.

**"For me, it's about putting something back into the community. You don't see many blokes going into those Stay and Plays, and when I first went I often felt like a spare part. I can help put the other dads at ease."**

**"It helps to fill the gap. It makes me feel a part of the community, because wherever I go there will be kids and parents saying 'hello', and over the years my son's been able to play with kids that I've met at the centres too."**

**"It's fair to say that if it weren't for Action for Children I'd probably have been in a dark place now."**





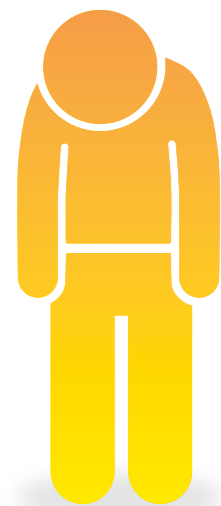
## ABOUT LONELINESS

Loneliness is a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship, which happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want. It is often associated with social isolation, but people can and do feel lonely even when in a relationship or when surrounded by others.

Loneliness affects people of all ages and from all backgrounds – from the school child who struggles to make friends, to the new parent coping alone, to the older person who has outlived her friends and immediate family. Feelings of loneliness affect us all at some point, but being lonely can become a serious problem when it becomes chronic – a day-to-day reality which, over time, can grind us down, affecting our health and wellbeing and damaging our ability to connect with others.

**“Young or old, loneliness doesn’t discriminate.”**

Jo Cox



**Over 9 million** adults are often or always lonely.

(British Red Cross and Co-op)

**43%** of 17 – 25 year olds using Action for Children services experienced problems with loneliness.

(Action for Children)



**Over half** of parents (52%) have had a problem with loneliness with **21%** feeling lonely in the last week.

(Action for Children)



**50%** of disabled people will be lonely on any given day.

(Sense)

For **3.6 million** people aged 65 television is the main form of company.

(Age UK)



Over the years, studies on loneliness have reached different conclusions about the levels and overall distribution of loneliness across the UK and among different groups. Studies have found relatively consistent levels of chronic loneliness among older people – with between five and 15 per cent reporting that they are often or always lonely. However, we have much less robust data on loneliness among children, young people and adults of working age.

Some recent surveys have uncovered levels of loneliness across all ages that are worryingly high. What we don’t yet know is if this is a sign of a growing problem, or because efforts to breakdown the stigma of loneliness are working, making people more willing to acknowledge their loneliness. Whichever it is, there is much to do.

**38%** of people with dementia said that they had lost friends after their diagnosis.

(Alzheimer’s Society)



**58%** of migrants and refugees in London described loneliness and isolation as their biggest challenge.

(The Forum)

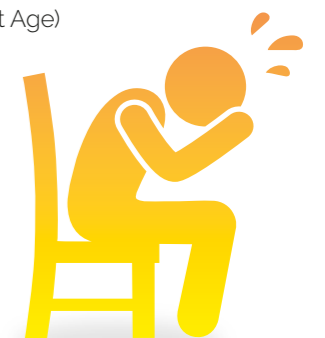
**8 out of 10** carers have felt lonely or isolated as a result of looking after a loved one.

(Carers UK)



More than **1 in 3** people aged 75 and over say that feelings of loneliness are out of their control.

(Independent Age)



More than **1 in 10** men say they are lonely, but would not admit it to anyone.

(Royal Voluntary Service)



While most of us will be lonely at some stage, the evidence suggests that some life transitions – such as moving home, changing schools, coming to the country seeking asylum, leaving the armed forces, developing a health condition, leaving care, becoming a carer, becoming a parent, changing jobs or leaving work, experiencing family breakdown and bereavement – can act as triggers for chronic loneliness.

As well as the risk created by transition, there are also some characteristics that appear to leave people more vulnerable to becoming lonely than others. For example, the evidence suggests that levels of loneliness are higher among disabled people, people who have

mental health issues, those who are in poor health, those who live alone, the oldest older people, carers and people from some (but not all) minority ethnic communities.

The evidence is growing that loneliness has serious consequences not only for individuals' wellbeing but also for their health and the economic stability of wider society.

**"If nothing is done loneliness will inevitably take its toll on the entire healthcare system."**

Helen Stokes Lampard, Chair Royal College of GPs



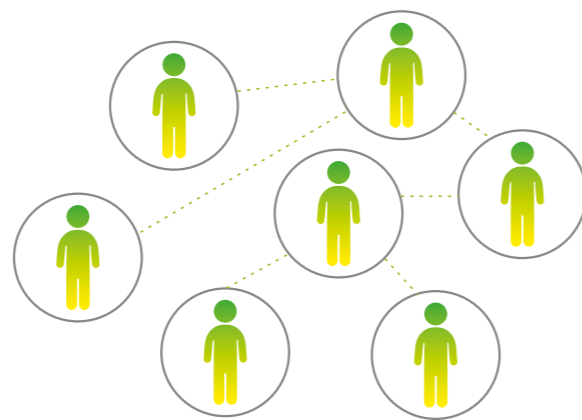
Three out of four GPs say they see between **1** and **5** people a day who have come in mainly because they are lonely, and one in ten sees between six and ten such patients daily.

(Campaign to End Loneliness)



Loneliness costs UK employers **£2.5 billion** per year.

(Co-op)



Disconnected communities could be costing the UK economy **£32 billion** every year.

(Big Lunch)



Weak social connection is as harmful to health as smoking **15** cigarettes a day.

(Holt Lunstad)

Organisations, large and small, are offering services to reduce loneliness, from volunteers hosting and driving people to lunch clubs to the rigorously evaluated Reconnections project in Worcestershire. Communities and neighbours are taking action to encourage connection and relationships from organising street parties to setting up a neighbourhood Facebook page.

There is growing interest in discovering whether we can do more to identify and support people going through transition to anticipate and manage, or avoid loneliness by providing practical support. Organisations and academics are also exploring how we can develop psychological approaches to help people build resilience, and think and respond differently to experiencing loneliness.



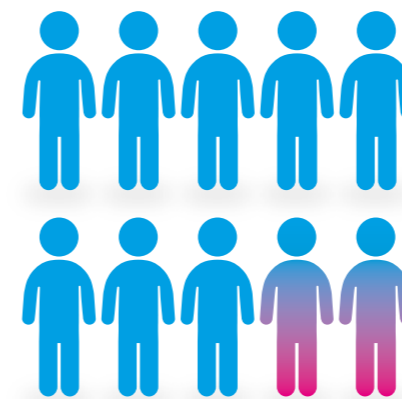
**47%** of Big Lunch organisers report feeling less isolated as a result of the event.

(The Big Lunch)



**65%** of attendees at Big Lunch events feel it reinforced relationships with people in their community.

(The Big Lunch)



**81%** of people agreed that there are lots of actions everyone can take in their daily lives to help those feeling lonely.

(British Red Cross and Co-op)



**£1** invested in tackling loneliness saves society **£1.26**.

(Public Health England)



## Lolita's Story

*"Every aspect of my life has just changed."*

Lolita is 76 and lives in Neath, in Wales. In 2016 she had her third stroke and was left with limited mobility. Discharged from hospital without a care and support package she was unable to get out of the house. Loneliness began to grind her down.

*"After a time, I thought 'I can't be bothered anymore.' I didn't want to have a shower in the morning. I was getting so depressed. I wasn't eating, I was losing weight. I've gone through a lot in my life and always bounced back but this .... every door was closed to me."*

At her wits end, Lolita called the Royal Voluntary Service. She was matched up with a volunteer named Eddie who started visiting once a week to take her out. Eddie's visits helped Lolita feel hopeful again.

*"One day we were sat in a café and Eddie started telling me a story from his days in the Merchant Navy. I could hear this laughter. I looked around, and it was me! And I thought, 'Well, there is hope.' It's raised my spirits and made such a difference."*

Eddie's visits have given Lolita the confidence to do battle with her housing provider to sort out the lifts in her building, so she can get out independently, and she has made plans to join the University of the Third Age. She's clear that Eddie's friendship has made the difference.

*"Every aspect of my life has just changed. All I wanted was the contact with somebody else – and actually it helped that it was someone new. Eddie reminded me that I'm actually pretty good at talking to people – you lose a bit of that confidence when you're in a wheelchair – people talk to you like you're deaf or a bit screwy."*





## OUR CALL TO ACTION

We call upon central government to step up to the challenge of loneliness by taking action in three key areas.

### 1. NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

There is already much being done by individuals, families, communities, charities, business and local authorities, to recognise the challenge of loneliness, and to create new opportunities for connection. However, as the work of the Commission has shown, bringing these actors together and creating a fresh impetus for action can turbo-charge this activity.

There is currently a gap in national leadership on loneliness. While central Government cannot solve loneliness alone, it can play a role in galvanising the key players, catalysing action, assessing and comparing progress, and holding those who need to act accountable.

Already in Scotland and Wales there is a commitment to developing strategies on loneliness. A UK wide strategy focussed on reducing loneliness across all ages and within all communities, led by a responsible Minister in Westminster, could build on these efforts, complementing and amplifying work in the devolved nations, and ensuring that a strong strategic approach is taken in England too.



Seema Kennedy and Rachel Reeves at the Camden Men's Shed project.



Refugees speaking to MPs about access to English classes at our event with Refugee Action in parliament.

#### WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

- A UK wide strategy for loneliness across all ages, led by Government, but built on the insight, expertise and capacity of many others including statutory bodies (NHS, Public Health England, Fire and Rescue services etc.), the voluntary and community sector, and business. This joint national strategy should be underpinned by equivalent strategies at the local level (on the model of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy), with central Government reporting annually to Parliament on progress in reducing loneliness.
- A nominated **lead Minister** to drive action on loneliness across Government, with lead responsibility for the development and implementation of the loneliness strategy.
- Further development of the current Family Test to become a **Family and Relationships Test**, through which new Government policy is assessed not only for its impact on families, but also on connections between individuals and within communities.

#### Case study

#### From strategy to action – Norfolk 'In Good Company'

Norfolk's 'In Good Company' campaign demonstrates how political leadership and strategic commitment can help drive action across all sectors. The campaign was developed at the impetus of the County Council, which had identified a link between loneliness and heavy use of social services. However, the approach taken was one of partnership, with the aim to create a movement against loneliness, right across the County.

The County Council started by convening partners from across the local voluntary and community sector, working with all communities and ages. Together partners developed the 'In Good Company' brand and planned the campaign which has now been operating for over a year. In the first six months of the Campaign the numbers engaging with the campaign on line or in person were equivalent to well over half of the County's population.

'In Good Company' has inspired a wide range of activity on loneliness – from drop in sessions at Fire Stations, to intergenerational projects bringing together younger and older people to share digital skills. In June, 21 of the County's libraries hosted events encouraging people to come together for The Great Get Together weekend; 20 local businesses have applied for the new 'In Good Company' quality mark, 60 new volunteers have come forward to support local organisations; and over 100 individuals have made pledges to act on loneliness.



One of the tens of thousands of Great Get Together / The Big Lunch events in June 2017.



## 2. MEASURABLE PROGRESS

To make sure work to address loneliness and social isolation is effectively targeted we need better data about who loneliness affects and when. The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing provides a rich source of information about loneliness among older adults, but we do not have such robust data about loneliness among children, young people and younger adults. We need to fill this gap so that we can better target our efforts to tackle loneliness, and so we can track progress in reducing it.

We also need more and better evidence about the impact of different initiatives to address loneliness. There are some fantastic schemes around the country, but little consistency from one area to the next about what schemes are most effective. This makes it hard for funders and commissioners to know how they should spend their limited budgets. The Government's 'What Works' centres would be well placed to lead efforts to fill the gaps in evidence.

We also want to ensure that individuals and communities have the tools they need to avoid loneliness. We know that simple 'metrics' such as the healthy eating message of 'five-a-day' can help people better understand the steps they can take to stay healthy. We would like to see a similar approach to encouraging action on loneliness, recognising the wider impact loneliness has on public health. We should also do more to equip people with information about the potential triggers for loneliness and ensure they know where to go for support.

**"There is robust evidence that social isolation and loneliness significantly increase risk for premature mortality and the magnitude of the risks exceeds that of many leading health indicators. [...] The challenge we now face is what can be done about it."**

Professor Julianne Holt-Lunstad

### WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

- A **national indicator** on loneliness across all ages included in national indicator sets - including the Public Health Outcomes Framework - to enable effective monitoring of progress at national and local level.
- **Measures of loneliness** included in major national studies - including the Understanding Society and Good Childhood surveys - to deliver high quality data which can illuminate the wider causes and impacts of loneliness.
- **Annual reporting** on loneliness, looking across a range of data, by the Office for National Statistics.
- Investment in a programme to **develop the evidence** around 'what works' in tackling loneliness across all ages and within all communities, led by the Government's What Works centres.
- **Easy-to-understand messages** to help individuals connect with others and avoid loneliness, developed by Public Health England.

### Case study

#### Using data to target action – 'The Great Wirral Door Knock'

The 'Great Wirral Door Knock' was a local push to identify the 'hidden lonely' within the Metropolitan Borough of the Wirral, which used Age UK's loneliness 'heat maps' to identify communities most in need of support.

The 'Door Knock' concept was developed by Age UK Wirral as part of the *Testing Promising Approaches to reducing isolation and loneliness in later life* programme, in partnership with the local authority's Ageing Well Strategy Group. Heat maps were used to identify communities in which there were likely to be particularly high levels of loneliness, and these were then targeted by an army of volunteers, local councillors and staff led by Age UK Wirral working in partnership with Wirral CAB, Wirral Council, Merseyside Fire & Rescue, Merseyside Police and Merseytravel. The team spent three days knocking on every door in the community handing out leaflets, and signposting people to local sources of support and activities.

The first Door Knock took place in the Mill Park estate - with 1100 homes visited - and 78 referrals to support, seven new attendees at local lunch clubs and six new volunteers for local community organisations. Partners offered support ranging from benefits advice and fire safety checks, to signposting to support groups and social activities; helping everyone from older widows to desperate new mums.

More Door Knocks have taken place since, guided by the Age UK heat maps - with the aim to complete four a year. Each time, the partnership of organisations offering support and volunteers grow.

### Case study

#### Building the evidence on loneliness – Reconnections

The 'Reconnections' service, in Worcestershire, aims to help older people to improve their health and wellbeing by supporting them to overcome loneliness and isolation.

The service, which is delivered by a partnership of half a dozen organisations, led by Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire, works with people aged 50 and over on a one-to-one basis, to help them to improve their confidence and connect with local activities that meet their interests. The service aims to reconnect people into mutually sustainable networks. Around 1000 people have been supported so far.

The programme is funded through a Social Impact Bond, under which social investors, including Nesta, the Care and Wellbeing Fund and Age UK, cover the costs of the service. In turn they are paid if loneliness is reduced. Participants' loneliness is measured at referral and at six and 18 months (using the internationally recognised UCLA scale).

As well as operating a payment-by-results model the programme is subject to rigorous evaluation by the London School of Economics, testing the hypothesis that reducing loneliness will lead to longer-term savings in the cost of public services. Interim findings suggest that effective action to address loneliness can potentially avoid costs of more than £6,000 per person over ten years among people who are lonely most of the time.



### 3. CATALYSING ACTION

While national leadership and clear measurement are critical, ultimately loneliness requires action on the ground.

While there are pockets of great practice, and some fantastic services around the country, there are still too many communities where the opportunities to connect are limited, and too many individuals who are 'trapped in a bubble' of loneliness without the support they need to maintain their relationship or to build new ones.

The solutions to loneliness can be simple, and even low cost, but without funding to help catalyse action too many communities struggle to make the most of the assets they already have. Equally investing a small amount in helping people who are chronically lonely to take the first steps in reconnecting can give them the skills and support they need for a lifetime of connection, but too many people don't have access to this kind of help.

Over recent years a number of funders have signalled an interest in loneliness, investing in initiatives to combat isolation and loneliness in later life. But there is more to do to spearhead innovation on loneliness across all ages and all communities, and to fill gaps in our knowledge, for example around the role

psychological support can play in tackling loneliness. We need to encourage investment from a wide range of funders – across the public, private and voluntary sectors – to ensure that good practice already emerging can survive and spread in these straitened times.

#### WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

Government to work together with trusts, foundations and other funders to create an **innovation and spread fund**, which can:

- **Stimulate innovation** in solutions to loneliness across all ages, backgrounds and communities.
- **Provide seed funding** for communities in need to come together to develop self-sustaining community activities which enable people to connect.
- **Scale-up and spread** promising approaches to reaching out to isolated lonely individuals, offering practical and emotional support to overcome the barriers to reconnection – including community navigators and connectors, social prescribing schemes etc.



Mountaha and Ahmad who arrived as refugees from Syria communicating in sign language.

#### Case study Local communities tackling loneliness together – Blyth Community Allotment

Blyth in Northumberland, which has been identified as one of the UK's loneliest areas, is the site of one of the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership's new Connecting Communities services. Newly appointed in post earlier this year, Blyth's Community Connector, quickly established links across the area, including with the County Council's housing management team, which was already starting to think about how to create opportunities to bring people together in the community.

Through their discussions, a decision was taken to start work on transforming an overgrown and unused allotment in Blyth. Local people were brought together and those who were experiencing loneliness and social isolation were signposted towards the project. One of them was Jacqui.

Jacqui had referred herself to the Connecting Communities service after struggling with loneliness and social isolation. She had originally been part of the group hoping to start up the community garden, but had withdrawn, fearful that her mobility issues, and the scope of the project might overwhelm her.

However, with practical and emotional support from her Connecting Communities volunteer, Jacqui built her confidence, resilience and independence. She is now secretary for the allotment and actively fundraises on its behalf. Jacqui and the rest of the team have managed to source donations and materials for the garden, so the programme is now self-sustaining. The garden is growing steadily with winter crops being planted and other community groups now also referring volunteers and individuals who want to take part.



British Red Cross Connecting Communities volunteers and beneficiaries working together. Tim Mossford/UNP



## TAKING IT FORWARD

The work the Commission has started does not end here – there is still a long way to go – and everyone has work to do to address loneliness and social isolation in our communities.

There is already lots going on in communities, within businesses, through the voluntary sector, and across local authorities. And beyond that there is a huge reservoir of untapped compassion, enthusiasm and energy to tackle loneliness. What's needed now is to give people the right tools to get to work.

### Case study

#### Business taking action

Co-op's Funeralcare business has almost 50 bereavement groups across the UK. The groups provide support and a place to meet with other people for those who are experiencing loneliness as a result of bereavement. Passionate Co-op Funeralcare staff set up the social groups which are open to anyone who has lost a loved one, regardless of whether their funeral was conducted by Co-op. They have a huge impact on the people they support:

*"We're all bereaved and we all comfort each other... I do find it helps and I've made some good friends. We've done holidays together, we sometimes now go out, we get on so well."* - Beryl

Co-op made a commitment as part of their campaign to address loneliness to expand the network of social groups for bereaved people to provide more people with ongoing care and support. As a result, additional groups are being developed across the UK to support even more people experiencing loneliness to re-connect back to their communities.

### ACTION FOR ALL

While this report has focussed on the action that Government needs to take in leading a UK-wide response to loneliness, we are clear that tackling loneliness involves all of us.

Other leaders also have a critical role to play:

- **Metro mayors and council leaders** need to understand how their communities are affected by loneliness; to identify people who may be particularly at risk in their areas; and to set out plans for local action to address these challenges. Ensuring communities have spaces in which they can come together will be vital. Local communities should demand evidence that their political leaders take loneliness seriously.
- **Public sector leaders** – in the NHS, in the Fire and Rescue Service, in Police Authorities and beyond – need to recognise the crucial role they can play in addressing loneliness. For example, front line public servants are often the only other people some of the most isolated individuals ever see, so these professionals can play a key role in outreach work.
- **Business leaders** have a crucial role to play as employers, but also as service providers, funders and drivers of innovation. Businesses can also play a role in creating communities that foster connections and help people to build relationships – whether that is by allowing their premises to be used for community events, or encouraging staff to make time for a smile and a chat with customers who may be lonely.
- **Employers** – whether in the public, private or voluntary sector – need to consider how they reduce loneliness among their increasingly remote and internet-reliant workforce. Loneliness currently costs employers £2.5bn a year. Practices that support people to have

good relationships in and out of work will lead to more engaged and resilient employees.

But it's not just about our leaders. **We all have a role to play.** Tackling loneliness starts with:

- Taking care of ourselves – We need to **check our relationship balances** at least as often as we check our bank balances, and think about whether we've got the connections we need to keep us going. Is there any more we can do to make sure we maintain the relationships that sustain us, or to build new relationships when others fall away?
- Taking care of others – We all need to think about our **families, neighbours and wider communities**, and consider who may be feeling lonely. What can we do to reach out and help others feel connected – maybe it's as simple as letting people know we are 'happy to chat'?

- Creating **Connection-friendly communities** – Community and voluntary sector groups have a responsibility to make sure that their work helps people to connect and build relationships. This might be about developing new services, and building the evidence for what works in tackling loneliness. Or it might be as simple as making sure everyone feels welcome in your group, and making special effort to help those who might need a bit of extra support to take the first step in joining in.

Jo Cox brought together 13 organisations, determined to make a real change in our understanding of, and response to, loneliness. As the Commission ends its work its members are committed to continuing to work both individually and in partnership to reduce loneliness and to create kinder, more connected communities. But we can't do it alone.

*Will you join us?*



Local mums coming together for Chat and Play sessions run by Action for Children.



Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness partners:



To find out more about the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness please visit <https://www.jocoxloneliness.org/>

The Commission would like to thank the many people who have supported our work and contributed to this report including Kate Jopling for writing this report, Huddersfield Examiner for the cover photo and Tutaev Design for design.