Connecting the system:
Why a systems-wide approach to loneliness is needed

Wednesday 6 November 2019

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Supported by

Agenda

- About us

- Risk factors for loneliness

- Promising Approaches

- Focus on psychological factors and interventions

The Campaign to End Loneliness
Our vision

We believe nobody should be lonely in older age. We believe that loneliness is not inevitable. People of all ages need connections that matter.

The Campaign to End Loneliness
About us

- Founded in 2011 by Independent Age, Sense, RVS, Age UK Oxfordshire and Manchester City Council

- Brought attention to the issue of loneliness by demonstrating its impact

- Supported by the National Lottery Community Fund to expand our work to talk to new audiences and work in new communities

Risk factors
Individual factors

Transitions
- Transitions in life pose a significant risk of loneliness: bereavement, illness, disability, retirement, sensory loss.

- Loneliness can be experienced at any age but there are more of these transition moments as you get older.

Psychological factors
- Mental health problems and social cognition

Risk factors
## Communities and psychology

Communities:

- Transport, amenities such as toilets and community buildings, and housing

- Not living near family

- Fear of crime and high population turnover

- Deprivation

The range of interventions:

- **The Promising Approaches Framework**

- Developed for Age UK and the Campaign to End Loneliness

- Aim to offer direction for local authorities looking to act

- Has been used to inform local strategies in communities throughout England

- A way of understanding the role played by different types of intervention

- Demonstrates the "web" of support needed to support people at risk of, or experiencing loneliness

- Does not cover every form of intervention that could be made to combat loneliness – e.g. culture change
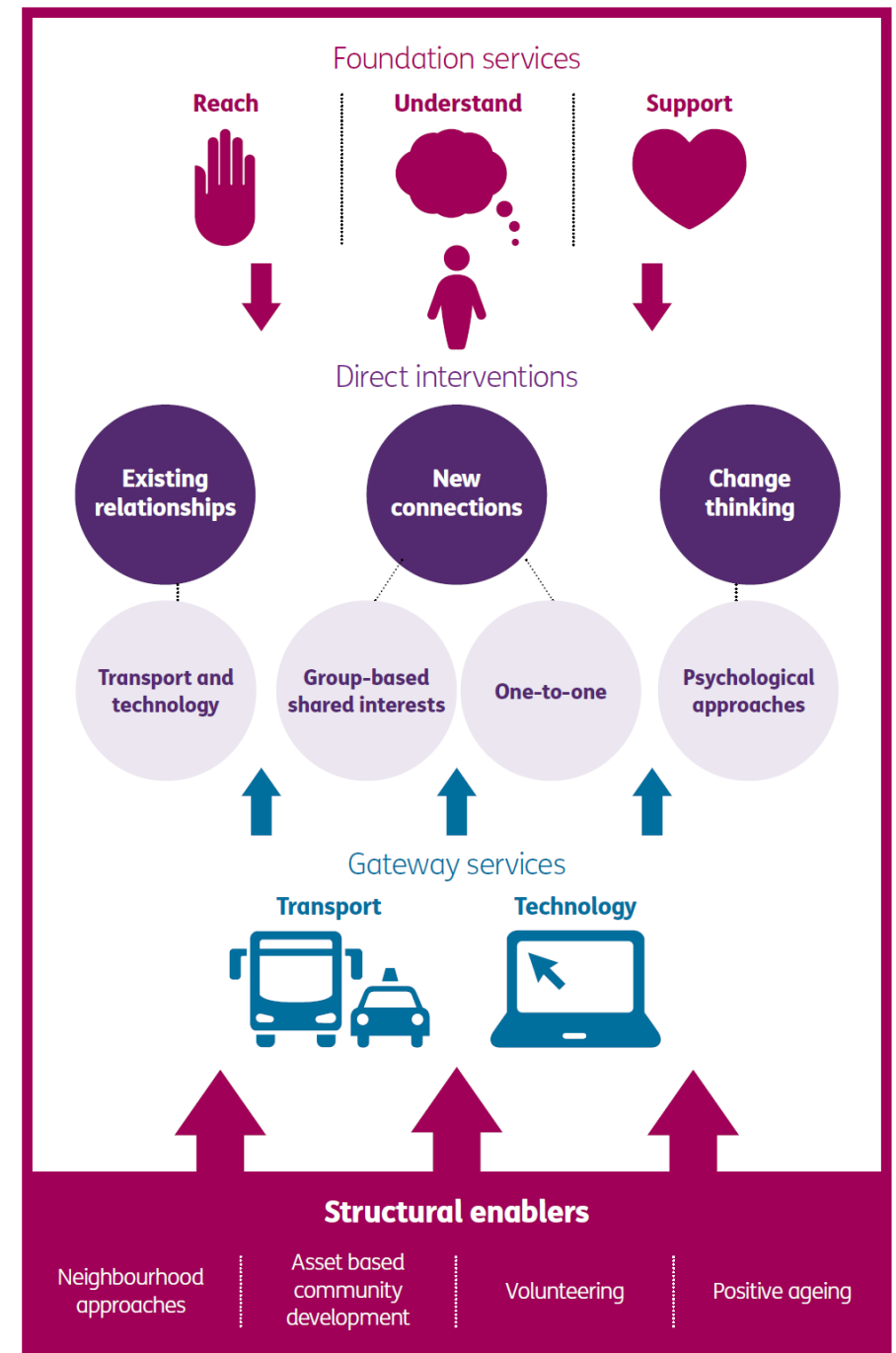
Foundation Services

Foundation Services

These identify, understand and support people – many do all three

- Identifying people who are lonely, and outreaching to them
- Understanding why they are lonely and what would work for them   them
- Supporting them to access these services (more than
-     "signposting")

They work – in Age UK's *Testing Promising Approaches* programme:

- More than 70% of people who said they were lonely sometimes or frequently reduced their loneliness scores
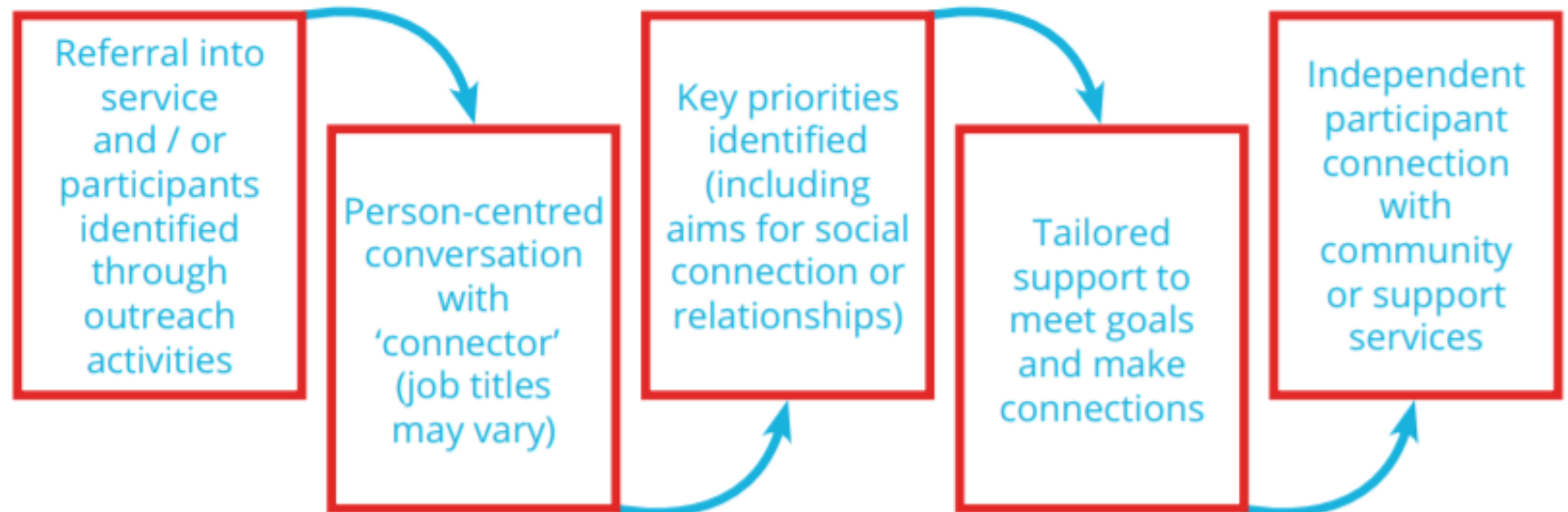- Nearly 90% of people who were frequently lonely reduced their scores

THE MISSING MILLION:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
IDENTIFYING AND TALKING
ABOUT LONELINESS
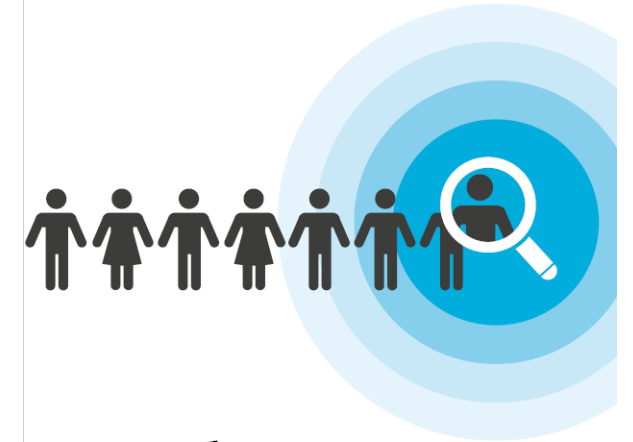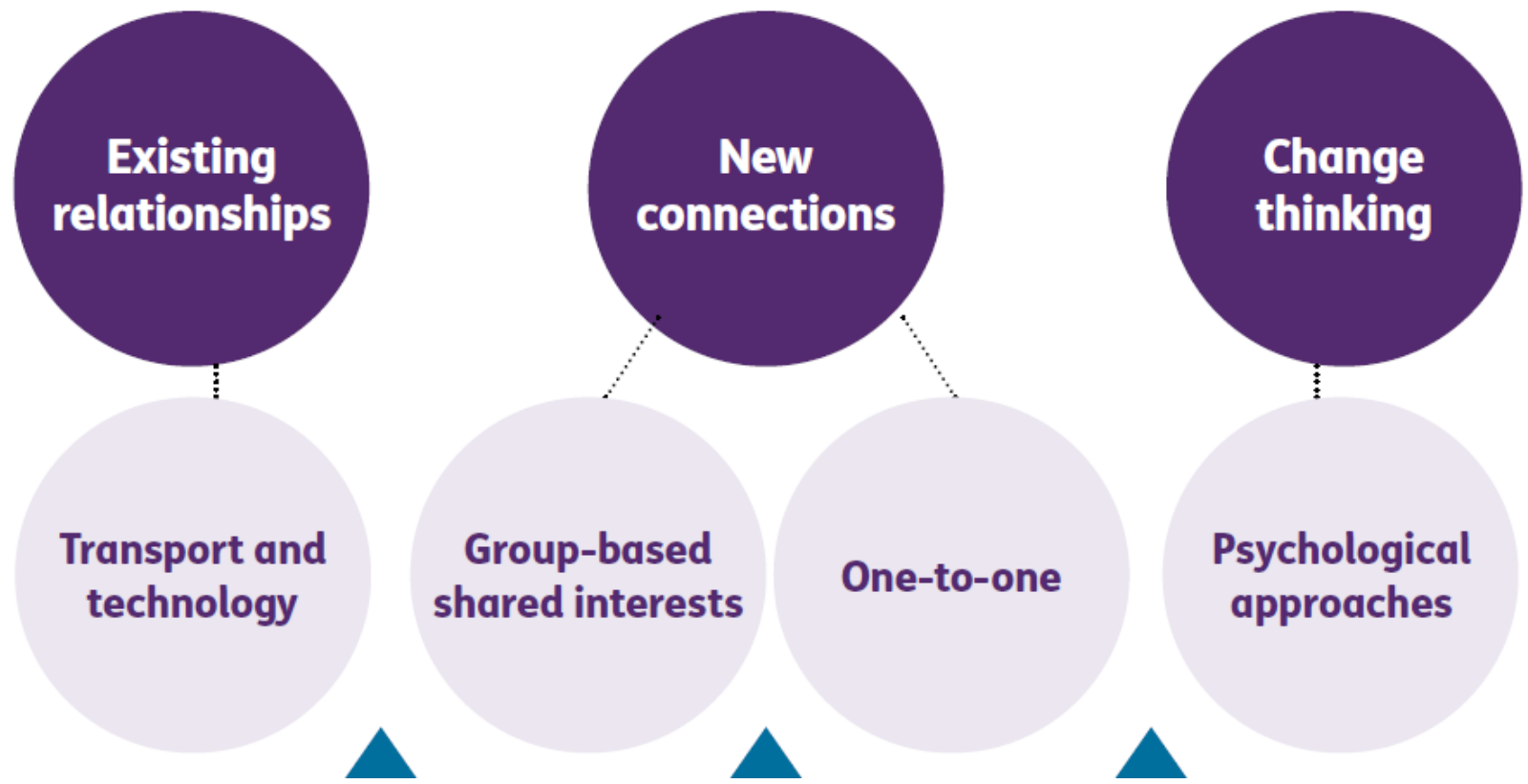
Social prescribing

- Umbrella term for a raft of services – including Village Agents, Community Connector, Local Area Coordinators etc
- Good evidence these are effective in supporting lonely people – as well as meeting other needs

Figure 1. How connector services work

| Referral into service and / or participants identified through outreach activities | Person-centred conversation with 'connector' (job titles may vary) | Key priorities identified (including aims for social connection or relationships) | Tailored support to meet goals and make connections | Independent participant connection with community or support services |

Direct Interventions

Direct Interventions

- These approaches are most often studied
- We know the criteria for an effective group-based intervention:
  - Targeted towards a specific group
  - Focussed on a shared interest / enabling learning
  - Involve older people in running the group
- Group based interventions include choirs, knitting groups, COPD peer support groups, carers support, men's shed etc etc
- One-to-one interventions – despite mixed evidence – are also crucial - highly valued; and may be critical for the most lonely individuals
- There is strong evidence of the impact of psychological approaches – but these are rarely found

Gateway services and structural enablers

Gateway services

Transport **Technology**

Structural enablers

| Neighbourhood approaches | Asset based community development | Volunteering | Positive ageing |

Beyond *Promising Approaches*

Promising Approaches focusses on:

- The things local authorities should ensure is available in communities
- Support for people at risk of, or experiencing loneliness

But the challenge is broader:

- We need to build 'loneliness proof' communities and prevent loneliness
- Some *Promising Approaches* can be preventative too – e.g. accessible technology and good transport; and structural approaches impact beyond local authorities
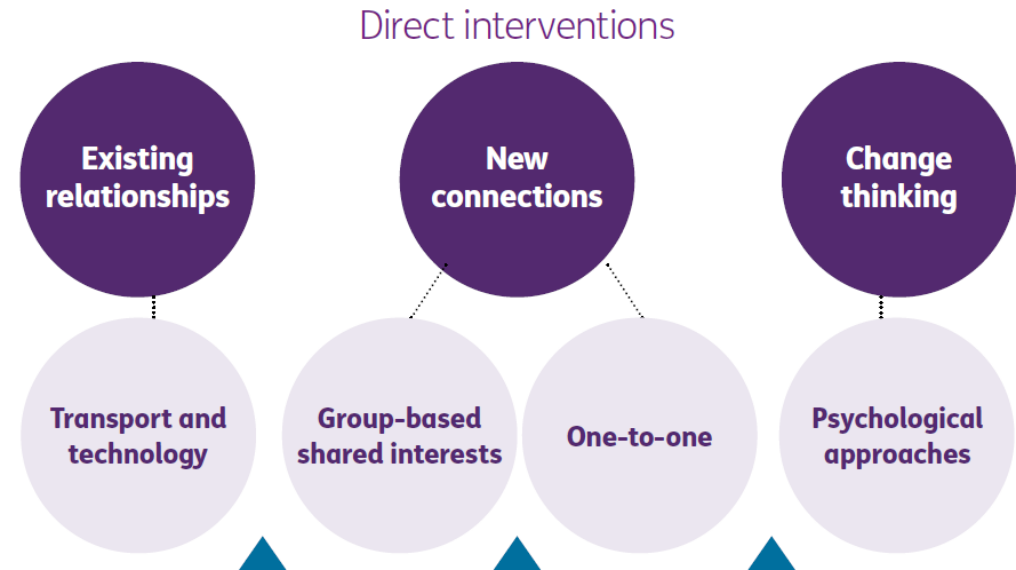- Action is needed to address societal attitudes and individual behaviours

Exercise: Promising Approaches

The Campaign to End Loneliness is looking to refresh Promising Approaches

- Have you used the framework?

- Does it work for you?

- Would you adapt it? If so, how?

Psychological factors and interventions

- Funded by Building Connections Fund to look into the evidence and are working towards going public in early 2020

- Have worked with UCL on the initial evidence review

Direct interventions

Existing relationships

New connections

Change thinking

Transport and technology

Group-based shared interests

One-to-one

Psychological approaches

Contributory psychological factors

Mental health problems

- Depression, anxiety (particularly social anxiety), also eating disorders, suicidal ideation, sleep difficulties and psychosis

- Bi-directional

Social cognition

- The way that information about other people and social situations is processed, stored and applied, for example a fear of rejection, being a burden to others or a distrust of other people. Lonely adults have also been found to be more attentive to social rejection cues.

What can be done

- Strongest research evidence was found for cognitive behavioural interventions.

- The lack of research evidence on other psychological approaches needs to be addressed (eg acceptance and commitment therapy)

- Promising developments, including digital initiatives which are designed to change individuals' thoughts and feelings about loneliness, that are worthy of further evaluation.

- Perhaps the biggest potential is to bring an understanding of the psychology of loneliness into other work e.g. social prescribing, social groups and befriending

Conclusion

- Loneliness is a serious and complex issue
- Taking a systems approach is the best way to address it
- We are finding new ways to tackle loneliness

Contact Us
Slide subtitle supports this

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