

**FAITH IN OLDER PEOPLE**



**CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GUILD**



in collaboration with

**ACTION OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND**



**THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN COMBATTING LONELINESS AND ISOLATION  
PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE**

**4<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

**Church of Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN**

**Faith in Older People and The Church of Scotland Guild** recognised the importance of how congregations and individuals adapt to changing needs and expectations as congregations age whilst sustaining intergenerational cohesion.

The project, which is supported by **Action on Churches Together in Scotland**, aims to bring together representatives of all denominations to consider the major issues affecting older people and how the churches can respond to them.

The first issue that has been identified is the response to the issues around '**loneliness and isolation**'.

## Introduction

In May 2017 an ecumenical group came together under the auspices of Faith in Older People, The Church of Scotland Guild and Action on Churches Together in Scotland to discuss the critical issues of loneliness and isolation and the role of the churches in combatting them.

It was clear from this discussion which encompassed a presentation on the proposed Scottish Government Strategy that there was more to do to progress ideas and to influence the strategy and to gel as a group.

The importance of not working separately from other groups in the community was emphasised and considering what services were available which could be complementary; what might be developed in collaboration and where signposting could be valuable.

**The aim of the day** was to share information with a range of voluntary sector organisations and to consider questions raised in relation to the formulation of the strategy by the Scottish government. The format of the day was a mixture of presentations and roundtable discussions.

We were pleased to welcome several voluntary sector organisations which have been very involved in the discussions about the development of a Scottish strategy. They gave inspiring presentations and the articles they provided, following the conference, are contained below.

Alternativity	Helen Cook
Chest Heart and Stroke	Paul Okroj
Silverline	Moira Gallagher
Befriending Networks	Sarah Van Putten
Roar- Connections for Life	Nicola Hanssen
Inspiring Scotland	Andrew Macgowan

# INSPIRING SCOTLAND

## Realising the potential in our Communities

**Andrew Macgowan**

The Link-up Programme is at the forefront of the work in a community setting of Inspiring Scotland. The aim is to deliver change for individuals and communities and an opportunity to change the landscape in terms of how we fight poverty and disadvantage across Scotland. Tackling isolation and loneliness is one element of this work.

Andrew told us the story of one of the people who got involved with Link Up through its worker. Through a gradual and supportive process she became involved in the activities and then became involved in organising them. The Link worker provided a supportive relationship which helped to build confidence, self-belief and self-esteem. This approach had made Inspiring Scotland consider how complex social problems were being dealt with and even with funding the problems were not shifting.

It was felt that the problem was two-fold:

- Expensive, top-down, single issue systems when the problems needed a holistic response.
- Things were done to people, but little was done to build their capabilities and capacity, creating a dependency which often lasts for generations.

It has been recognised by the State and others that individuals and communities need to be part of developing solutions and being enabled to take responsibility. The emphasis needs to be on asset based working and community empowerment.

The approach of Inspiring Scotland was to start by getting local people to know and trust each other through doing the things they chose to do so that social connections were built which could develop into relationships and support networks. It was important to use the varying skills and motivations in the group to build participation.

There are 10 current projects which have a worker, a small budget for activities. The worker needs to be skilled in developing relationships and enabling people to feel confident in bringing their ideas forward and being supported to put them into action. The worker should not see individuals as victims to be saved or issues to be resolved but as contributors to finding solutions and having a conviction about empowering people.

Key elements are:

- The local people's agenda
- Freedom to take risk and be flexible in responding to the local context
- Take time to let things evolve
- Turn ideas into action as fast as possible
- Proactively overcome personal and institutional barriers

The key learning that has been derived from this approach:

- Driven by individuals therefore arguably more sustainable
- Change driven from bottom-up rather than top-down with an expensive system response.
- There are economic benefits from this approach.

Important to invest in the fundamentals

**CONNECTING** people

**BUILDING** their capacity to help themselves and each other

**SUPPORTING** the above to happen – not leading but facilitating. Connecting, building skills, nurturing

Create an **EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENT** in which people take control

These are the foundations for change

**Helen Cook – Alternativity**

## **ALTERNativity**

Twenty years ago two women founded the charity *ALTERNativity* –strapline “Just God, Simply Christmas”. They were fed-up with the over- commercialisation of Christmas, and the pressure which resulted in debt for many poorer families. With the Magnificat at the centre of their approach they looked at issues around Christmas in relation to injustice, inequality, exclusion, and celebration. The charity produced resources for schools and groups, to enable them to explore these issues creatively. The charity grew, and today we still seek to empower people to make choices which are fun, challenge the pressures of commercialisation, avoid the trap of debt and improve the quality of life, especially for the poorest. Our resources can be found on our website at [www.alternativity.org.uk](http://www.alternativity.org.uk)

Over the years – funding permitting – we have employed a group worker to work with three groups of women (in priority areas) to explore celebrating Christmas while avoiding debt. These groups have been documented and validated by an external authority, and always provide us with material to inform new resources.

Three years ago we received funding for a group worker. Out of this came evidence – surprisingly to us – that loneliness was to these women, more of an issue than debt. This, alongside feedback from Guild Meetings and meetings with other interested organisations, indicated that people (all ages and even in families) are feeling increasingly isolated and lonely. With help from the Rowntree Foundation, Families Outside (who work with prisoners’ families), we spent time exploring firstly: is loneliness more acute around Christmas; and that was a “Yes!” Then secondly: why is loneliness more acute then?

The result of our work is a pack - "Loneliness... who cares? Simply connecting at Christmas." There is no one-size-fits-all solution for those trying to alleviate loneliness. Instead we offer resources which could facilitate an event or series of events, to help explore and better understand loneliness in **your** community, or group. The format is workshop based, and we hope to update the pack each year using feedback and suggestions from those who have used it.

The stories people shared with us touched us deeply –

The single parent who said,

*"It's harder at Christmas as everyone else appears to be having a better time than you."*

The young woman on her own who said,

*"Loneliness is the ding of the microwave meal for one."*

The older woman who said

*"I don't want to burden my family or friends... I can't really take my husband there – he is too demented."*

We hope churches, groups, communities will be empowered by our pack to explore what they can do to make life better for some isolated and lonely people at Christmas.

We have also produced the Family Box -fairly traded box (diameter 5"/12 cms) with a page for each day in December – on one side are activities for children, on the other something for adults – ideal for grandparents to share with grandchildren!

Again, they are available via our website. [www.alternativity.org.uk](http://www.alternativity.org.uk) . On our website there will be daily Advent Reflections from the beginning of December.

**Helen Cook, Trustee of ALTERnativity.**

**Paul Okroj and Hilary Stevenson – Chest Heart and Stroke**



**Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland working together to combat loneliness and isolation**

Paul Okroj, Director of Strategy & Communications and Hilary Stevenson, Head of Advice and Information from Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland attended the Faith in Older People and Church of Scotland Guild conference about combatting loneliness and isolation. CHSS were delighted to join together with a number of organisations from across Scotland to discuss what impact the third sector can have on improving the lives of those affected. Paul Okroj said, "We thoroughly enjoyed the conference and it was great to identify different ways that we can all work together collaboratively towards the same goal. It's not about one single organisation but about working in partnership to help support those people in Scotland who are both isolated and facing loneliness."

CHSS has a vital part to play in addressing these issues within Scotland as we already support many of the people most at risk.

Our Peer Support Groups offer people a wide range of support including exercise, social activities and an opportunity to talk with others who may understand how it feels. All group members have a say in how the group is run. The groups are a great opportunity for people with our conditions to come together and share their experiences.



*Fiona Dickens, peer support Fisherrow*



*Edie Garlick, CHSS Advice Line Nurse*

Our award-winning Advice Line service provides free, confidential advice, information and support for people living with lung disease, heart disease and stroke. In addition, we give advice to families, carers, and health and social care professionals across Scotland. The Advice Line nurses can also provide details of local support services and groups as well as information about help with practical and money issues such as grants, benefits advice, and travel insurance. We want to make sure no one feels alone.

We also provide Rehabilitation Support Services which offer advice, support and practical help to people to get their lives back on track after a stroke. For example, we help people living with communication difficulties after stroke, which is e hugely important in preventing isolation, and in helping them to regain their confidence and rebuild their lives.

We have some 1,500 volunteers who work in our support services, and across fundraising and our shops. In recognition of the huge investment we put into supporting them we recently received our fourth Investors in Volunteers accreditation. Thankfully, wider acknowledgement of the detrimental effect loneliness can have to a person's health and wellbeing is increasing. The Scottish Government have announced their national strategy with tackling loneliness a core focus for the third sector and beyond. In September a National Summit on Loneliness in Scotland was held in Edinburgh, sponsored by the Scottish Government and Befriending Networks. In November, Voluntary Health Scotland's annual conference will focus on tackling the issue. It is positive that organisations, experts and policy makers are coming together to ensure Scotland wakes up to its hidden public health issue and tackles this complex challenge together. For this reason CHSS are extremely excited to be working in collaboration with Faith in Older People, the Church of Scotland Guild and the many other organisations to combat loneliness and isolation.

To contact CHSS Advice Line Nurses call 0808 801 0899 (**FREE** from mobiles and landlines).

For more information about CHSS visit our website: [www.chss.org.uk](http://www.chss.org.uk) or to discuss joint working please call us on 0131 225 6963.

## Moira Gallagher – Silver Line

# The Silver Line, Scotland - 0800 4 70 80 90

**Founded by Dame Esther Rantzen, The Silver Line is a simple concept** – a free helpline for older people, available 365 days-a-year, 24- hours-a day, where you can ask about local services, talk in confidence, get some friendly advice, or simply have a chat. Silver Line Founder Dame Esther said:

*“Since the death of my husband Desmond Wilcox, I know what it is like to feel lonely – and so I also know what difference it makes to speak to a friendly voice.*

*Many of the people who call The Silver Line have led fascinating lives but now find themselves alone, often because they have lost a partner or loved one.”*

*“There is still a stigma to admitting you are lonely, but I believe we should all be honest about our loneliness, so that others can help”*

Callers to The Silver Line can also choose to be matched to a Silver Line Friend, and receive a regular friendship call. They can match the caller to a volunteer who shares their interests to ensure they suit each other and there is no cost for the call.

Other popular services that are offered include:

- ‘Silver Letters’ an exchange of regular letters and correspondence. This letter friendship service was created in response to the people who said they enjoy communicating with people by writing letters.
- ‘Silver Circles’ - a group call where people discuss things that interest them with a wider group.
- ‘Silver Connects’ – This team of experienced staff and volunteers provide support, advice and a voice for older people to express their views and challenge anything they are unhappy with.

Moira Gallagher Nations Manager, Scotland advised:

*“Just under 70% of calls to the helpline are made at night or weekends when other services are often not available. Since the helpline was launched in November 2013 we have received over 1.5 million calls from lonely or isolated older people, about 10% of those calls from Scotland and we expect, as word spreads, that the number of calls received will continue to grow year on year. The Silver Line already has over 4000 trained volunteers and further recruitment will commence later in 2017 with information on the website.*

*It is important too for older people to know that there is no cost to the caller, or to the volunteer, for any of our services”*

Whether you are interested in using The Silver Line helpline, know someone who would benefit from it, or would like to support us by volunteering, or with a donation, Call 0800 4 70 80 90 or go to the website [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk) to find out more.



Sarah Van Putten – Befriending Networks

## Befriending Networks



Befriending offers supportive, reliable relationships to people who would otherwise be socially isolated. The results of befriending can be very significant. Befriending tackles loneliness and social isolation, and can provide people with a new direction in life, opening up a range of activities and leading to increased self-esteem and self-confidence. A report on the results of an epidemiological survey was recently published in Lancet Public Health. In the research, both social isolation and feelings of loneliness were identified as factors increasing the risk of a premature death. This study joins the growing body of evidence on the negative impact social isolation and loneliness can have on individual's physical and mental health.

It is encouraging to note national responses to this issue. The Scottish Government is at the early stages of developing a National Social Isolation Strategy "to ensure a holistic approach across government to problems of loneliness and isolation". This, plus the aim of the Jo Cox Foundation to bring communities closer together, and the work being undertaken by the Campaign to End Loneliness, provide a national strategic and policy framework within which befriending is an important component.

Befriending Networks has been closely involved in the development of the Scottish Government Strategy and has close links with the Campaign to End Loneliness. Befriending Networks is the national intermediary for befriending organisations and projects across the UK and beyond. We have approximately 270 members providing befriending for; children and young people, families, people with mental ill-health, people with learning disabilities, and older people, amongst many others. Several of these members are projects within faith based organisations. We provide support, guidance and training to members. We also manage the Quality in Befriending (QiB) Award, the only award in the UK specifically tailored for befriending services. It is appropriate to services of all kinds and is valued by referrers, befrienders, commissioners and funders.

We work on our members' behalf to promote the benefits of befriending to local and national government, to raise awareness of befriending services, and to co-ordinate the contribution of the sector in addressing social isolation throughout our communities. Annually we manage National Befriending Week which aims to raise awareness of befriending and the impact it has on individuals and communities.

This year the theme for the week, 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> November, is **Befriending Builds Communities** and we are delighted by the Parliamentary Motion, put forward by Monica Lennon MSP, recognising National Befriending Week and the work of befriending organisations. During Befriending Week we hold our AGM and national conference. The title of this year's conference, in Edinburgh on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, is '**Befriending and communities: The role of relationships in building a stronger future**'.

At time of writing there are still a few places left so to book [click here](#). We would be delighted to meet you.

If your Church or faith group are considering how to go about establishing a befriending project and would like some information Befriending Networks may be able to help. We can provide some information and support and there are a number of resources freely available on our website. So please get in touch.

**Muriel Mowat, Membership Office** [info@befriending.co.uk](mailto:info@befriending.co.uk) [www.befriending.co.uk](http://www.befriending.co.uk) temporary phone: 07741 109408

## Nicola Hanssen – Roar – Connections for Life

**Roar** – *Connections for Life's* mission is to 'connect lives and promote health and wellbeing in later life.' We operate throughout Renfrewshire, supporting over 1000 older people annually with 160 volunteers and 10 staff. We see a correlation between enabling people to stay mobile, on their feet and able to reduce their risk of falls or fear of falling with enabling people to stay connected, less isolated and able to participate in their communities longer. Over the past two years we have won a series of awards and accolades because of our innovation in designing preventative services. We are one of a network of organisations, including Faith in Older People, who are engaging with the Scottish Government as they develop a national strategy to Tackle Loneliness and Social Isolation.

It is impossible to minimise the complexity or individuality of the personal experience of health damaging loneliness. In Roar we are increasingly working with people in their 80's and 90's, many, if not all have had full and rewarding lives (few appear to make it to this age if they haven't had a health beneficial level of concerns for our younger lonely edition) Through declining friends and, in increasing cases, old people have found be a terrible reality that few really important that we identify transition times. The silver lining and reach this cohort of people, boost their mobility and be supported to join a group, all the social skills to make new and with people of all networks. For this groups the to remain socially connected decline) is maintaining their able to walk, get into a car or bus the toilet. This ability is being numbers of hours people spend deterioration in their sit to stand the nerve-end messages being sent from the soles of their feet to their brains and the unsteadiness and related fear all this generates. Without intervention, the most likely outcome is a fall, which just perpetuates the cycle into frailty and loneliness. But this is not an inevitable part of ageing! There are simple home and group exercises that make a massive difference to strength, balance and confidence. Roar has developed a #Stop1st Falls whole systems approach which recognises that firstly we need to campaign to motivate older people and their families to take a more solution focussed approach to falls prevention, we work with a range of partners to assess people and their homes to help identify and reduce risks, we deliver a whole network of fun places to go – making staying mobile and connected a reality and we have a toe nail cutting and footwear checking service as this is no longer provided by the NHS.



connectedness and my will need to wait for another health, loss of partner, sons and daughters older themselves alone. This must have planned for and it is people at these difficult is that when we do identify and where we are able to confidence, so that they can activity or class, they have connections with their peers generations in Roar biggest threat to their ability (apart from cognitive ability to stay on their feet, and get from their chair to undermined by the vast sitting, the rapid ability, the sluggishness of

**My message is stay mobile – stay connected.**

**If you would like more information please visit our website [www.roarforlife.org](http://www.roarforlife.org)**

**Nicola Hanssen, General Manager Roar, Connections for Life Ltd**

## Emerging themes

Underlying all the presentations and the work of the individual organisations was an emphasis on 'kinder communities'<sup>1</sup> which could be supported through a community development approach which empowered individuals and worked on a local level. The essence was trust and confidence building enabling a sense of purpose, participation and connectedness in which individuals could develop skills and a sense of belonging.

## The Roundtable Discussions

The discussions were based around issues to be addressed in the national strategy taking the following definitions:

- Social isolation refers to the quality and quantity of the social relationships a person has at individual, group, community and societal levels.
- Loneliness is a subjective feeling experienced when there is a difference between an individual's felt and idea levels of social relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Carnegie UK Trust: Kinder Communities: The power of everyday relationships 2016 Zoe Ferguson

## Question 1

What do you think the Scottish Government should do on a national level to tackle loneliness and isolation?

- Ensure that there is coherence between national and local approach
- Money should be made available at a local level and not held in centralised pots. This could be at local council ward level
- Health and social care integrated joint boards should be involved in ensuring that the issue is considered in locality planning, particularly in outlying rural areas. The emphasis must be on joint working incorporating the third sector interfaces. Consider what is already happening in practice and support this work if it is effective. No need to reinvent the wheel.
- Policy development in all appropriate areas should incorporate how an impact could be achieved in combatting loneliness and isolation.
- There must be increased communications between different government directorates with funding available from each of them that could be ring fenced for loneliness and isolation.
- Education and information sharing across the board is vital.
- Use St Andrew's day to raise the issue with suggested acts of kindness:
  - Promote neighbourliness
  - Empowering people to know they can make a difference
- It is important for the Scottish Government and Local Authorities not to assume that one solution will fit all situations. There must be a creative approach based on local need and evidence.
- A community development approach working in local communities, empowering individuals is a key element in sustaining development and guiding investment.
- Cross fertilisation between different government departments, local authorities and voluntary sector is fundamental to developing joined up services.
- Could there be a link to commissioning?

## Question 2

### What factors should be considered in finding solutions?

- Remember that churches exist and that they can work on an ecumenical basis with the Scottish Government and others contributing to cohesive communities.
- Use the mechanisms around the church communities to raise awareness, be points of contact
- Find ways of empowering individuals so that they feel they have something to offer.
- Find imaginative ways to seek out those who feel excluded
- Encourage volunteering
- Actively seek partners to implement change – collaboration is essential to ensure optimum use of resources
- Pay attention to locally identified need and support approaches defined by the individuals
- Concern that confidentiality and privacy issues mitigates the inclusion of people who social work or others have identified as having a need – e.g. supporting people over Christmas
- Consider what different organisations can offer in terms of resources – buildings, knowledge, volunteers and so on.
- Decisions must be for the longer term and must be consistent.
- Availability and accessibility of transport a key issue.
- Using Church of Scotland community profiles to help identify areas of need.
- Note changing demography has an impact of people being available to volunteer because they are still employed or undertaking grandparenting duties.

### Question 3

#### What can local communities and congregations do at a local level to make a difference?

- Ensure that congregations have isolation and loneliness on their radar, in discussions in church magazines.
- Congregations need to know what is going on in relation to the issues in their name so that they are proud of it and participate more fully.
- Engage with raising funds as appropriate for community as well as specific congregational activities.
- Let the media know what congregations do in this area
- Know what else is going on in the local area – signposting and collaboration
- Offer different types of services – e.g. good morning service, Parish Nursing, listening chaplaincy
- Voluntary sector organisations could train church members in their activities which would be reciprocal in better understanding what else is happening in that locality.
- Organise activities that would be open to all such as ‘Singing for the Brain’.
- Encourage volunteering but Scottish Government and Local Authorities must be aware that it is not cost free.
- Recognise that there is an inter-generational aspect which could be developed.
- Develop community hubs in churches, libraries, GP surgeries
- Make better use of the resources/information available
- Consider the use of link workers, community connectors and community navigators to enable better sharing.
- Consider partnerships with the commercial sector
- Use of local radio and media to provide information and encouragement to people to make connections.
- Use of church newsletters to provide a range of information/connections

#### Question 4

How do you think increased use of technology could be a solution?

- Concern that it might produce a different kind of loneliness if people are less stimulated to go out and make social contact. Vital not to diminish human relationships.
- IT can offer access to worship; contact with the wider world through email, skype, internet access.
- The various databases need to be clear and appropriate at local level.
- How to spread knowledge of what is available through IT.
- Remember that currently not all older people have access to IT or the ability to use it.
- Churches could have a role, through collaboration, to development IT skills
- There are benefits which should be developed and made available taking people along.

#### Question 5

How would you wish this consultative forum to play a part in the formulation and implementation of a Scottish Government Strategy?

- The church needs to say to Government that it can be part of rolling out any strategy and therefore part of the implementation plan.
- Informing the church of what is happening and seeking their collaboration is important starting with responding to the draft strategy.
- There needs to be clarity of thought as to where churches fit. Are they part of the third sector or are they a separate grouping? At present it appears that there is an assumption that churches are part of the voluntary sector, but the sector does not acknowledge this.
- Churches have a strong role at local level.
- Could the churches take a stronger initiative at national level and encourage work with communities not just congregations

#### Conclusion

It was a very practical and stimulating day. The ideas and proposals outlined in the discussion will be forwarded to the Scottish Government for consideration in the development of the strategy.

Our thanks to the organisations which joined us for the meeting which was very beneficial, and we hope will set a course for further collaboration.

MO'N - Nov. 2017



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