

CONTACT THE ELDERLY

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Background

Founded in 1965, Contact the Elderly is the only national charity solely focussed on tackling one of the greatest challenges facing society: loneliness and isolation among our rapidly ageing population. Supported by a volunteer network, the charity organises monthly Sunday afternoon tea parties for small groups of older people in the homes of volunteers across England, Scotland and Wales.

With over 500 groups nationwide, the charity provides a regular, consistent and vital friendship link every month to over 4,200 older people, aged 75 and over, who live alone, without family or friends nearby. At the same time, the charity also encourages its more than 6,700 volunteers to find enjoyment and fulfilment in achieving the charity's aim and making new friends.

Contact the Elderly's service model

The Contact the Elderly model is based on a simple yet very effective concept: free monthly tea parties for older people, supported by a network of volunteers, within local communities. The social gatherings bring individuals together and develop fulfilling friendships and support networks – and thereby help to reduce loneliness and isolation.

Contact the Elderly recruits volunteer drivers, hosts and group coordinators to help arrange the monthly tea parties for small groups of older people (up to eight guests per group).

Once a month, each older guest is collected from their home by a volunteer driver, and is taken to a volunteer host's home, where they join a small group for tea, chat and companionship. The group is warmly welcomed by a different host each month, but the charity's drivers and older guests remain the same. This ensures that over the months and years, acquaintances turn into friends and loneliness is replaced by companionship.

The situation facing our older guests

The majority of the people using the service fall into the category of the 'oldest-old': over half (58%)* of those attending tea parties are in their 80s, while 23%* are in their 90s and 1%* are in their 100s. Many have social care needs, due to mobility issues and hearing and visual impairments, and cannot leave their homes without the assistance provided by the charity's volunteer network. Over two-thirds (69%)* of our older guests only receive visits, other than from a carer, just once a week or less, while almost half (44%)* don't know their neighbours.

Network of volunteers

The Contact the Elderly service model consists of a loyal network of volunteer hosts, volunteer drivers and volunteer group coordinators (who help to launch new groups, liaise with all the older guests and other volunteers to ensure the smooth running of the monthly tea parties and maintain links with the rest of the organisation).

20%** of Contact the Elderly volunteers have been with the charity for more than 10 years

83%* of Contact the Elderly volunteers feel happier as a result of being involved with the charity's work, while 89%* feel they are giving something back

Why is the Contact the Elderly model so effective?

- Sunday afternoon is highlighted as a particularly lonely day of the week for older people living alone*.
- Contact the Elderly's groups operate at weekends, when most community services for older people are not available.
- Contact the Elderly keeps its groups small, with the same individuals meeting every month, which means that guests and volunteers make lasting and fulfilling friendships in the personal and welcoming environment of someone's home. 39%** of the groups have been running for more than 10 years, 23%** more than 20 years, 19%** more than 30 years and 5%** more than 40 years!
- The benefits extend well beyond the one-Sunday-a-month gathering, with the long term nature of groups making them an integral part of a guest's life. Real friendships are formed and some volunteers often help older guests with their weekly shopping and transporting them to and from hospital appointments, as well as checking up on their general welfare.
- The Contact the Elderly model helps to address the emotional needs of older people who wish to remain in their own home, but whose diminished mobility makes it impossible for them to maintain regular social contact.
- 80%* feel less lonely as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 80%* feel part of a community as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 81%* feel happier as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 86%* have made friends with the volunteers, whilst 79%* have made friends with other guests
- 63%* feel more confident as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 96%* have something to look forward to as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 30%* have started doing other social activities since joining Contact the Elderly
- 38%* say their general health has improved as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 26%* say they see their doctor less as a result of Contact the Elderly
- With almost 50 years of experience in developing groups nationwide, the charity knows that its regular friendship links provide a real solution to a complex problem: benefiting isolated older people and helping to keep them living independently and out of hospital.

Research methodology

**Statistics based on Contact the Elderly research undertaken among a sample of 2,000 older guests and 2,000 volunteers during 2012. In all instances where an answer was not stated or a recipient stated 'don't know', these were excluded from the figures.*

***Statistics sourced from Contact the Elderly database*