

Key Messages:

VHS Loneliness Seminar at the Gathering 2017

23 February 2017

Introduction

This seminar was an interactive session with one keynote speaker Trevor Owen, and a panel of four third sector organisations; Befriending Networks, Age Scotland, British Red Cross, and the Scottish Volunteering Forum. The aim of the seminar was to discuss what the National Social Isolation Strategy could look like, and give third sector organisations an opportunity to input to the strategy.

VHS's interest in loneliness and social isolation started in 2015 with the [Living in the Gap](#) report, which looked at a voluntary health perspective on health inequalities in Scotland. The report highlighted that chronic loneliness and unwanted isolation compounded health inequalities. We held our annual conference last year: [Loneliness a threat to Scotland's health](#), where we gathered together a range of third sector organisations, academics and representatives from NHS Health Scotland to discuss the issue of loneliness and social isolation. We hosted this seminar to discuss what could be done to tackle loneliness and social isolation and how we can support Trevor Owen and the Scottish Government with ideas and a plan to develop the National Social Isolation Strategy.

Panel Introduction

Liz Watson – Befriending Networks

- Befriending Networks initial interest in loneliness and social isolation came from member services saying they encounter this on a daily basis.
- Developed a roadshow that went round all Health Board areas, aimed at Health and Social Care professionals, to discuss statistics around loneliness and social isolation. The roadshow also helped gather information about how participants felt about loneliness and social isolation.
- Held a [Loneliness Summit](#) based on the research and information gathered during the roadshow. They have also partnered with the Campaign to End Loneliness, to help change behaviour regarding community connectedness.

Paul Okroj – Scottish Volunteering Forum

- Volunteering is a big part of the solution. Volunteers know what is happening in the community and can make connections in communities.

- Angela Constance MSP and Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, has referred to volunteering as the [golden thread](#) that connected several Scottish Government priorities. There is a need to look at how volunteering could help tackle loneliness and social isolation.
- There is also need to look at how a loneliness strategy can influence other strategies and audit their impact on loneliness and social isolation.

Fiona MacLeod – British Red Cross

- British Red Cross became involved in work on loneliness and social isolation when it was raised as an area of personal crisis by the people they work with.
- They established a partnership with the Co-operative whose members voted loneliness as the number one area of concern.
- The partnership is in year one of three and has released a report, [Trapped in a Bubble](#) which shows who suffers from loneliness, the triggers and life course events that cause loneliness to manifest and become chronic.

Derek Young – Age Scotland

- Age Scotland believe that loneliness and social isolation is not just about older people. To tackle the issue, it cannot be dismissed as something prevalent only in one group.
- [Holyrood enquiry](#) looked at the age and loneliness and social isolation. Age Scotland gave evidence which showed that loneliness applies to a range of groups and across a life course.
- It is important to note that many of the life course effects such as bereavement and retirement congregate later in life.

Trevor Owen – Scottish Government

- Loneliness and social isolation is a complex issue that cuts across a range of Scottish Government issues.
- The Scottish Government want to develop a strategy to tackle loneliness and social isolation in partnership with a range of organisations, such as those in attendance today (range of third sector organisations in attendance at the meeting from large intermediaries to small community organisations). The Scottish Government recognises the good work that the third sector in Scotland are undertaking and realises the issue is not a new one. The strategy however, is a new piece of work.
- Loneliness and social isolation came onto the Scottish Government radar through the parliamentary enquiry into the issue.
- It is Trevor's role to take forward a strategy to tackle loneliness and social isolation. The Scottish Government will act as a leader and help bring together different stakeholders.
 - The third sector is a critical partner in the development of the strategy and can play a key role as it is more accessible, works well with statutory services, and is integrated within communities.
 - It is also important for Health and Social Care Partnerships to factor loneliness and social isolation into their programmes of work. The Scottish Government need to mainstream it into other areas of their work including digital, etc.

- It is important to note that we are not starting from scratch as there is a lot of work that the third sector is undertaking, and the Scottish Government already have a number of programmes running:
 - £20m Community Empowerment Fund
 - £500,000 has been given to 36 organisations to help tackle loneliness and social isolation and the Scottish Government is looking at the learning to see what works.
 - Funds are being made available for certain projects such as Men's Sheds.
 - Developing Link Worker Programmes
- The Scottish Government wants to look at what works and incorporate it into the strategy and scale it up as well as looking at genuine areas of innovation. This needs to be developed with the third sector from the ground up.
- Jeane Freeman MSP and Minister for Social Security is the lead minister for developing the National Social Isolation Strategy and is interested in bringing together a range of stakeholders in late spring to discuss this. If you would like to be involved then please email Trevor Owen: Trevor.Owen@gov.scot

Question and answer session

Janice Malone – Macmillan

- Macmillan are keen to engage on loneliness and social isolation strategy. The issue is at the forefront for Macmillan not only in terms of a cancer perspective but also a wider health perspective such as malnutrition and missing appointments.
- Volunteering is really important.
- Happy that this is being discussed in terms of wider demographics but stigma around loneliness should also be addressed.

Salena Begley – Family Fund

- Social isolation has been raised by families in the context of the Mental Health Strategy. Families, carers, children with disabilities and their siblings all can suffer from loneliness or social isolation. A loneliness and social isolation strategy can be really beneficial.
- It is also important to note that volunteering works two ways and that volunteers benefit from their volunteering as well as people using the service.

Paul Okroj

- It is hugely encouraging that the Scottish Government wants to develop a strategy in a way that highlights good work and takes learning from it.
- It is also important to look at how you measure success and identify when it is best to intervene.

Trevor Owen

- Stigma – the parliamentary enquiry picked up on this and identified language as being an issue. Some people do not know that they are lonely or socially isolated and that they need to seek support, or even where to find support. This needs to be looked into and tackled carefully.
- Important to look at the barriers that people face.

- The First Minister commented that there is a need to think outside formal bureaucratic structures and be more innovative.

Liz Watson

- The Befriending Networks roadshow provided an opportunity for Health and Social Care Professionals to network and exchange information about what is happening in different areas. There is a need for these type of networks to be set up and for them to be maintained

Derek Young

- It is positive that loneliness and social isolation is being recognised as a public health issue.
- Stigma – loneliness and social isolation is a hidden issue. People suffering from loneliness and social isolation are not engaging with services so they are falling through the gaps.
- Maybe there could be a role for services such as the Fire Services to be better trained to recognise loneliness and social isolation when they are doing the fire safety checks in people's homes.

Fiona MacLeod

- Trevor mentioned that loneliness and social isolation can be tackled through innovation and new sectors and organisations being involved. So as well as the statutory services, the third sector, business and social enterprises should be involved to help innovation flourish.
- Important to explore digital support and other areas to identify what is happening and working at a local level.

Heather Yang – Volunteer Edinburgh

- There is a phone line project based in Volunteer Edinburgh that signposts older people to local activities. They have received over 1000 calls in the last 2 years.
- Recognise it is hard to get to people who are lonely unless you go to each and every home, but that is impossible.
- Volunteers are hugely helpful but loneliness and social isolation also impacts them.

Alan McGinley - Arthritis Care

- It is also important to consider the informal aspect of tackling loneliness and social isolation and the innovation that is already taking place. In addition to the golden thread there is the hidden thread, for example, in America McDonalds is becoming a hub for social interactions to take place on people's own terms.

Norman Craig – Samaritans Volunteer

- A caller said to him "The only people who come to see me are paid to do so". Stigma is an important issue to tackle.

Nicola Hansen – ROAR

- The terms loneliness and social isolation make people uncomfortable, people like to talk about connections.

- Mutuality and reciprocity is important, and there needs to be a cultural shift to allow this to happen. People's view that "our home is our castle" means people are unable to reach out and engage.
- It is also important to look at when services are reaching people and when people will be ready to engage with services.

James Jopling – Samaritans

- There is a campaign 'See Me' maybe there should be a campaign called 'Meet Me'.

Final words from panel

Trevor Owen

- The Scottish Government need to cast a wider net and engage with a range of organisations and services.
- The idea of organisations like the Fire Service receiving training to play a better role in recognising loneliness and social isolation is very interesting.

Derek Young

- The terminology needs to change and we need to think more about social connection and belonging. Being a part of something.

Fiona MacLeod

- There needs to be a social movement or national campaign to tackle loneliness and social isolation. This will give people a reason to care and get involved and will also tackle stigma.
- Research shows that there is a willingness to engage with the issue, should build on this.

Paul Okroj

- Volunteering, Volunteering, Volunteering

Liz Watson

- We are speaking from the same page in this room with the campaign idea 'Meet Me'

For further information contact:

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