Thinking about loneliness at East London Foundation Trust

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Searching the ELFT website for loneliness gives you the following results…

- **'Partnership to tackle loneliness' (about the 'Groups 4 Health Programme in the Forensic Directorate)**

- **'Getting help in a crisis'**

- **'Providing emotional support close to home'**

- **'Look after your mental health this Christmas'**

- **'A day in the life of a care navigator'**

Fits with some of what's happening more broadly…

As a starting point some frequently quoted facts about loneliness…

- No agreed definition

- A painful feeling that occurs when there is a gap or mismatch between the number and quality of social relationships that we have and those we would like

- Social loneliness = missing a wider social network

- Emotional loneliness = missing an intimate relationship

- Usually described as unwelcome, painful and unpleasant

- Distinct from social isolation and wellbeing

- A fluid experience – can come and go over a short period or last for a longer time

- Over 9 million people in the UK are often or always lonely

Some health risks:
- Loneliness, living alone and poor social connections are as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- It's worse for you than obesity
- Lonely people are more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease and depression
- Loneliness is likely to increase your risk of death by 29 per cent

- An alternative view: 'loneliness is failed solitude'

Inspired by the Jo Cox Commission the government launched a national strategy in October 2018

A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness with three themes:
- Develop an evidence base
- Influence policy
- Hold a conversation to tackle stigma

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness

Articulates a definition:
- 'a subjective unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and that we want.'

To make sure it happens:
- Loneliness Action Group (in place until the end of 2019)
- Action across government
- Minister for loneliness: Baroness Diana Barran, Parliamentary Under Secretary (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) – civil society, youth and loneliness

Proposed to include the following indicators in the Public Health Outcomes Framework 2019/20:
- How often do you feel lonely?
- How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
- How often do you feel left out?
- How often do you feel isolated from others?

Headlines:
- Social prescribing – 'community workers providing tailored support to help people improve their health and wellbeing, instead of defaulting to medicine'
- 'Employer pledge' to tackle loneliness in the workplace
- Partner with Royal Mail to pilot postal workers checking up on people when doing their delivery rounds
- £1.8m for 'new' community spaces

- **Covering the full breadth of public services** the strategy makes some commitments, including mental health support in schools and colleges, and provides a range of suggestions, using examples of work already in place, older women's community housing (Barnet), Men's Sheds, 'chatter and natter' tables (in Costa and Sainsbury's) and the Co-op Bereavement Groups apparently have resulted in 5 weddings!

There is a range of resources and research…

Campaign to End Loneliness: connections in older age provides:
- Resources
- Information and advice
- Publications
- Campaigns (for example in Cambridgeshire and Northern Ireland)
- Suggests measurement tools, e.g.:
  - I am content with my friendships and relationships
  - I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time
  - My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be
  https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org

New Economics Foundation: **The Cost of Loneliness to UK Employers** (2017) considered 4 key pathways:
- Employee health outcomes
- Caring responsibilities
- Reduction in productivity
- Employee wellbeing and turnover
- Costs = £2.5 billion per year (£2.1 to private sector)
  https://neweconomics.org/2017/02/cost-loneliness-uk-employers

What Works Centre for Wellbeing literature review (October 2018) makes recommendations for policy-making
- Focusing on person-centred and tailored loneliness interventions which are designed for the specific needs of a targeted population defined in terms of socio-demographic, vulnerability or types of loneliness, developing programmes to alleviate loneliness across the life course and with due attention to diverse population groups and social contexts and change over the life course
- The promotion of programmes to alleviate loneliness which pay attention to the avoidance of stigma or the reinforcement of marginalisation isolation
- The development of programmes to alleviate loneliness which emphasise meaningful relationships and improved social connections for those who are lonely or at risk of loneliness
- Policy support for conceptual clarity in loneliness work
- Policy support for developing social impact models of the processes and mechanisms by which loneliness interventions work
- Policy support for better evaluations and primary research in the field including measures of costs
  whatworkswellbeing.org

Local Government Association: 'There is strong evidence that loneliness can increase the pressure on a wide range of council and health services.'
- How do you know your council is actively tackling loneliness (2018):
  https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/22.28_-_Loneliness_Must_Know_WEB.pdf
- Combating Loneliness: a guide for local authorities (2016):
  https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/combating-loneliness-guid-24e_march_2018.pdf

Other national initiatives…

BBC's Loneliness Experiment (with Wellcome Collection) 2018: survey of 55,000 participants worldwide (self selecting)
- Young people are the group who feel loneliest
- People who are discriminated against are more likely to feel lonely
- 1/3 people often or very often feel lonely
- Being alone is not the same as being lonely
- People feel ashamed about being lonely
- People who feel lonely score high on empathy, have on average lower levels of trust in others, have more on-line friends, report poorer health
- 41 per cent said loneliness can sometimes be a positive experience
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/2yzhfv4DvqVp5nZyxBD8G23/who-feels-lonely-the-results-of-the-world-s-largest-loneliness-study

5 things people say loneliness is:
- Having nobody to talk to
- Feeling disconnected to the world
- Feeling left out
- Sadness
- Not feeling understood

Some questions:
- How do we think about prevention rather than cure?
- Is there too much emphasis on the individual rather than the wider context?
- What is the role of psychological interventions (group, community or online)?

Loneliness: what characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely? (Office for National Statistics 2018)
- 5 per cent of adults in England reported feeling lonely "often" or "always"
- The following reported feeling more lonely or were at particular risk of feeling lonely more often: younger adults (16-24 years) rather than older age groups, women more than men, those single or widowed, people in poor health or with "limiting" conditions, renters more than homeowners, people who feel that they belong less strongly to their neighbourhood and those who have little trust of others in their local area
- Three profiles at particular risk:
  - Widowed older homeowners living alone with long-term health conditions
  - Unmarried, middle-agers with long-term health conditions
  - Younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10

9 ways to feel less lonely:
- Find distracting activities or dedicate time to work, study or hobbies
- Join a social club or take up new social activities and pastimes
- Change your thinking to make it more positive
- Start a conversation with anyone
- Talk to friends or family about your feelings
- Look for the good in every person you meet
- Take time to think why you feel lonely
- Carry on and wait for the feeling to pass
- Invite people to do things without fearing rejection
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3nDZXgD7Fz7lBGc3YSQV9jr/nine-ways-to-feel-less-lonely

Loneliness and faith

FaithAction and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society
Right up your street: how faith-based organisations are tackling loneliness (July 2019)
https://www.faithaction.net/resources/get/download-id/19289/

- …faith communities can provide a space for communication and connection: a social marketplace. More often than not, the faith groups themselves are players in such markets, providing not only religious services that are often open to all, but also more social opportunities such as parent and toddler groups and lunch clubs…when it comes to addressing loneliness and isolation, the physical placement of faith organisations and the purpose of faith communities themselves mean that they are 'right up your street'!
  At FaithAction and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society…we are making the case for faith in the public square, and the benefits that society reaps from the involvement of faith groups in public life…Faith is not a fad or an emotion – it is a way of life, and often a daily choice. It will of course not be for everyone, nor will it solve every problem, but if faith groups can make themselves available and welcoming, and if people are willing to engage with them, there is fellowship available.
- Recommendations:
  - National initiatives aimed at tackling loneliness to intentionally include faith communities and faith-based organisations.
  - Public services promoting social connections, those mapping local activities, and those involved in social prescribing to actively consider what faith groups in their area have to offer.
  - Faith-based organisations to articulate what they are doing to tackle loneliness, and ensure that others working on the issue locally know about it.

Civil society

The Marmalade Trust pledge: "it's ok to say I'm lonely"
- Inspired by childhood memories of the comfort provided by Paddington Bear and established by an OT the Trust
  - Identifies lonely people through an established referral network
  - Actively raises awareness about loneliness to reduce the stigma, encourage people who experience it to come forward and influence positive action to alleviate it. The UK's first Loneliness Awareness Week was launched in 2017 (and the third took place in June 2019)
  - Supports those isolated to attend a Christmas Day event, to reacquaint them with socialising and making friends.
  - Runs friendship projects that include one to one support to help people build confidence and make their own friends, join clubs and generally reach out to the community
  https://marmaladetrust.org/about-us/

Social relationships at work = '*social glue of any workplace*'

- **42 per cent of us don't have a single friend at the office** (although British people work some of the longest hours in Europe)
https://www.relate.org.uk/policy-campaigns/our-campaigns/way-we-are-now-2014/work

- **Feeling lonely at work: investigating the consequences of unsatisfactory workplace relationships** (The International Journal of Human Resource Management 2012)
- In comparison with their non-lonely colleagues, lonely employees will experience lower quality relationships with their supervisors or leaders and less sense of belonging to the organisation so that their performance will be poorer
https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.665070

- **"Generally, organizations perceive such emotional and social issues [as loneliness and social support] as personal problems** and not directly effective on organizational operations. Studies about loneliness in the workplace are limited but findings support direct effects on outputs such as performance, motivation etc."
Öznur Gülen Ertosun & Oya Erdil (2012) The Effects of Loneliness on Employees' Commitment and Intention to Leave, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 41, 469 – 476

- **Implications of flexible work arrangements, ACAS Research Paper 2017**: *"I miss, of course, when I'm working at home, the human part...Of course, it's fine when I don't have to travel across the city and spend more than one hour on the way. But sometimes, it's really better to see each other ... And you will get more information sometimes, you know, the gossip"*
https://www.acas.org.uk/media/4901/Flexibility-in-the-Workplace-Implications-of-flexible-work-arrangements-for-individuals-teams-and-organisations/pdf/Flexibility-in-the-Workplace.pdf

- **'A moment away from the desk is a moment well spent'** (Analysis for Nespresso Dr Rachel Lewis, Kingston Business School 2019)
- 84% of employees believe that social connections at work boost work quality and are linked to weight loss, mental wellbeing, reducing loneliness, and job satisfaction and engagement as well as organisational outcomes such as motivation, commitment, turnover, performance, innovation and creativity
- Relationships are formed and maintained by conversation – and even these are very useful but:
  - Nearly ¾ of employees admitted they didn't know their colleagues well
  - Increased pace and work pressures mean we take less time out to talk
  - Increased flexible working and technology use has made it harder to have these conversations
  - Technology has been shown to increase the risk of miscommunication – which can harm relationships
- AND we don't value social conversations at work anyway!

Some things happening in other parts of the health service…

Loneliness the public health challenge of our time: the Mental Health Foundation and Age Scotland (2017) recommends:
- Investment in community services to reduce and prevent hospital admissions
- A "Welcome Home Box" for every discharged patient
- Building relationships of care between care staff and older people
- Placing social prescribing front and centre in primary care
- Investing in community transport to keep marginalised older people connected
- Reaching out to older people who are not connected to the internet
- Phased retirement and greater support from employers
- Treating older people as assets to society
- Tackling poverty and inequality in later life
- Promoting inclusion for LGBTI older people
- Social inclusion for ethnic minority older people including asylum seekers and refugees
- Research to be conducted on loneliness and on a continued multi agency effort to tackle it mentalhealth.org.uk

- **NHS England** highlights West Yorkshire and Harrogate's Looking Out for our Neighbours' campaign involving 300 local groups handing out 30,000 packs with a focus on simple acts of kindness: https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/03/jo-cox-foundation-backs-campaign-to-end-loneliness/
- **The Long Term Plan** talks about employers having a 'key role in supporting their staff to stay well and in work' referencing 'Thriving at Work' and 'Disability Confident' as well as the Campaign to End Loneliness framework: https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/nhs-long-term-plan.pdf

- **Loneliness and health**: Aparna Shankar *Health Psychology June 2017*: Considerable evidence exists about the role of loneliness as a risk factor for poor mental and physical health including an increased risk of developing dementia and chronic diseases, and a higher rate of mortality: https://oxfordre.com/psychology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.001.0001/acrefore-9780190236557-e-122

Some initiatives highlighted by other London Trusts to tackle loneliness:
- Appeal for BME volunteers to support mental health patients (2017): https://www.slam.nhs.uk/media/news/appeal-for-bme-volunteers-to-support-mental-health-patients
- The Advocacy Project Choir to address social isolation and loneliness established September 2018: https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/news/advocacy-project-choir/
- Open Dialogue approach to family therapy and support conference (2018)http://www.beh-mht.nhs.uk/news/haringey-mental-health-conference-opens-up-a-dialogue/279
- Greenwich Counselling and Information Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich MIND http://oxleas.nhs.uk/services/service/greenwich-counselling-informat/?q=loneliness

Some of the things happening in the local authority areas where the Trust works…

Bedford
- Strategic Priority for safeguarding vulnerable older people includes commitment to alleviate loneliness and isolation: https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Files/Older_People_Strategy_final_2013.pdf
- Working with partners is a commitment in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2018-23):https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Social%20Care%20Health%20and%20Community/Bedford%20Borough%20Joint%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing%20Strategy%202018_final.pdf

Central Bedfordshire
- 'Feeling lonely can have a serious impact on your mental health' links to things you can do, libraries, leisure centres and support: http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/health-social-care/adults-older-people/activities/lonely.aspx

City of London
- Social Wellbeing Panel to learn more about how to reduce loneliness and hear about activity that is successful elsewhere: https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/Documents/social-wellbeing-strategy-2017.pdf

Hackney
- Healthier City and Hackney Fund Key Priorities: Tackling loneliness in under 50s: awareness raising and campaigns on prevention, identifying the 'hidden' sufferers (e.g. people in employment and full time education), exploring stigma, the impact of culture, self-help, peer support and co-production, mapping the social value of local assets such as libraries, green spaces, clubs, specific community approaches and technology based initiatives: https://hackney.gov.uk/healthier-city-and-hackney-fund
- Hackney CVS makes some interesting recommendations about connections between people using services and the people working in them, the cohort who aren't most at need and gap analysis of local provision: http://hcvs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CH-Appendix-2-Profile-of-social-isolation.pdf
- Hackney Carers Centre group for older men gets some television coverage: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-london-47955848/london-loneliness-hackney-brocals-help-men-find-friends
- Connect Hackney Ageing Better has a researcher in post to explore loneliness:https://www.connecthackney.org.uk/uncategorized/researching-loneliness-and-isolation/
- London Civic Innovation Challenge and Hackney Council (2018) focus on isolation to *Making London the Most Socially Integrated City in the World:* https://www.civicinnovation.london/about
- Pets against loneliness project: https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2018/02/23/pet-project-hackney-volunteers-tackle-old-age-isolation-dogs/

Some of the things happening in the local authority areas where the Trust works…

Luton
- JSNA (2015): section 11.7 on social isolation and loneliness – similar themes to Tower Hamlets (below): https://www.luton.gov.uk/Community_and_living/Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/JSNA/JSNA%202015.pdf
- Desire to raise the profile of loneliness in health inequalities plan: https://www.luton.gov.uk/Health_and_social_care/Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/Health%20inequalities%20strategic%20plan.pdf

Newham
- JSNA (2016-18): page 62 under 'social contact' in adults update but nothing for CYP: https://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Health%20and%20social%20care/AdultJointStrategicNeedsAssessment.pdf
- Project with West Ham Football Club – 'any old irons': https://www.newhamrecorder.co.uk/news/west-ham-project-helps-combat-loneliness-1-4803171

Tower Hamlets
- Cllr Denise Jones, 'advocate for older people', includes loneliness brief
- Ageing Well Strategy: https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Adult-care-services/Supporting-adults/Ageing_Well_Strategy.pdf
- Findings from a community participatory project (2015-16) cover a wide range of themes: mental health, physical health, feeling safe, housing, family relationships and life experiences, community activities and social networks, culture, faith and cohesion, environment and infrastructure: https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Public-Health/Community_Perspective_on_Loneliness.pdf
- Action on loneliness in care homes (2016): https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Public-Health/Magic_Me_Action_On_Loneliness_in_Care_Homes_Public_Report.docx.pdf

The GLA Survey of 6,601 Londoners (June 2019)
https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/survey-of-londoners-headline-findings
- 81 per cent of people 'very' or 'fairly strongly' belong to London – 75 per cent to their local area
- Higher among BAME residents
- 60 per cent report high or very high personal well being but 52 per cent in most deprived neighbourhoods – lowest rates among social renters and disabled people
- 75 per cent think their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together
- 8 per cent of people say they are often or always lonely and 27 per cent feel socially isolated – this is more likely for 16-24 year olds

Loneliness and mental health

UKRI Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/research/epidemiology-and-applied-clinical-research-depa/projects/loneliness-and-social-isolation
- Launched in December 2018: (Phase 1) Understanding how loneliness and social isolation relate to mental health (Phase 2) what interventions work best?
- Funding calls for interdisciplinary research projects (1st in autumn 2019)

Objectives include:
- Creating links across areas and disciplines
- Mapping evidence and research on key questions
- Commissioning small research projects
- Establishing an effective PPI voice
- Developing early years' work
- Engaging public

Key questions:
- What are the impacts of loneliness and of social isolation on mental health in the general population?
- Is intervening a potential means of preventing mental health problems and improving outcomes?
- What is the impact on people living with mental health problems?

University of Sheffield project on interventions to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/sites/psychiatry/files/lsinetwork_interventionsreviewloneliness_cg.pdf
- **Types of intervention**: facilitating social interventions, befriending, psychological therapies, health and social care provision, animals, leisure and skill development
- **Do they work?**: 'While evidence is variable, majority of activities are at least moderately successful' and solitary interventions can be effective
- **What makes interventions successful?**
- Must be adaptable to local context and setting
- Involving older people in the design and implementation = more likely to be successful
- 'Doing' things accumulates more social contacts than watching or listening, involves action and creativeness and is often directed towards a (common) goal

Insights from June workshop include:
- **'Coping through football'**: emotional and social interaction gained as part of a team leads to challenge to self-stigma – relationship with the physical and social
- **Provisional categorisation for understanding young people with depression**: (i) inability to be with others due to mental health, (ii) non-disclosure of depression leads to social distance, (iii) desire to connect, (iv) feeling different due to poor mental health
- **Lived experience**: 'No one to appreciate you look nice' or 'Too tired to find solutions'

Solitudes Past and Present explores the history of loneliness to address present day concerns:
https://solitudes.qmul.ac.uk
'Loneliness has become a proxy not so much for the contradictions in the social relations of our times, as for the intensifying crisis in the distribution of wealth and the management of public services.'
https://solitudes.qmul.ac.uk/blog/loneliness-the-making-of-a-modern-panic/

The Trust-wide Working Together Group shared the words they thought describe loneliness…

Exclusion and isolation	'Sadness because someone has no friends'	Emotional detachment	Lack of company and friends	Can mean different things to different people
State of mind – you can be alone in a crowd	Impact of past experiences	Lack of self-esteem	Struggling	Illness makes worse
Connections – lack of – social media	'Two friends can be like two eyes' – side by side but not seeing	How people relate	Meaningfulness	Lack of belonging
Is admitting loneliness a problem – feeling judged and exposed if you do?	Impact of physical health – relationship between mental and physical health	If only society was friendly and non-judgmental…	'Suffer in silence' and 'it's none of your business'	Do we depend on others to make us feel lonely (or not)?
Get to the point where the world is against you	Impact of different locations – for example London can be unfriendly but also accepting of difference	**Agreed the following definition:** **Loneliness is the emotional reaction to the lack of meaningful relationships, belonging and connection to community**		
Loneliness is caused by…	• Lack of confidence • Lack of self-esteem • Lack of opportunity	• Culture • Religion • Stigma	• Poverty • Homelessness • Social mobility	• Lack of purpose - in work, volunteering, education – or role in family or relationship (e.g. partner, parent, child, etc.)

They then began to explore solutions through some small-scale projects…

Newham Unity Group
- Using poetry as a way of expressing yourself (e.g. culture)
- To include writing the poetry, having an event to communicate and celebrate, visit schools, etc.
- Should there be an age barrier?
- Need resources, such as computers and phones

Luton and Central Bedfordshire
- Mobile (homemade) cake and coffee mornings on the wards
- Create a relaxed atmosphere
- Perhaps hold it at visiting times to include carers
- Could help PP recruitment
- Hold once a week and rotate around the wards
- Need to teach others to do the baking otherwise a big demand on the capacity of one person

The Lighthouse in Central Bedfordshire
- This is something that works already – how can we expand existing service?

ELFT Loneliness Line
- 24 hour freephone promoted and staffed
- Is this possible?

Tower Hamlets social group
- Facilitated by peer support workers
- Allows participants to engage as much as they want – with traffic light badge system to show how social you are feeling (from 'red' to 'green')
- Aim to build confidence and provide information – as an introduction to the outside world for those who are isolated
- Need to find a free venue – possibly the Recovery College
- Challenge of ensuring sustainability – as it can be hard work
- Facilitation training is available for service users (which may mean that peer support workers are not needed)
- Remember – 'this is not a support group'
- Social groups require fewer rules but 15 people feels like the ideal number of participants

Forensics 'Being socially active'
- Bringing service users together who are feeling socially isolated after discharge
- Rolling programme of activities – games, reading, cooking session, dancing and dominoes with monthly review to check popularity
- Once a week in a venue outside and not near the hospital
- Hopefully it's free but look for donations and have a kitty to provide refreshments
- Choose different group leader each week
- Draw on successful experience of the Bridge Club

Next steps	• **Each Working Together Group to formalise their projects**	• **Think about measures – both satisfaction and how to make a difference**	• **Further reflections on staff conversations about loneliness**

Reflecting on all the above some of the issues to think about…

- **It's not difficult to identify a range of thinking and initiatives in place elsewhere – how would they work for the Trust?**

- **There are connections to other current public sector policy and service development – population health, prevention, integrated health and social care, community health services and neighbourhood model development, primary care networks, etc.**

- **All age groups (and particularly young people) are affected by loneliness – but a lot of service responses focus on older people**

- **There is a strong connection to trust and relationships, feeling part of a community and to place**

- **Many solutions seem to be intuitive so does this make it harder for organisations to tackle - are services or behaviours more important?**

- **Relationships with voluntary and community sector and other public and private sector partners seem to make sense**

- **Need to think about the workforce as well – so how do HR and other policies fit?**