

Isolation in South Gloucestershire



SGDEN held an event recently for members of the community who were interested in finding out what they can do to help isolated people who they might encounter through work, community groups, through their own families or generally day-to-day.

We asked some questions of those who attended which we would like to share with other VCSE organisations and those to whom isolation is of interest along with suggestions for helping tackle isolation.

Who was interested?

We had attendees from, among others: Morrisons supermarket, Highways England, Boots, St Peter's Hospice, the Big Lunch, local schools and churches, Wiltshire Farm Foods, Age UK, North Bristol Advice Centre, Sense, Healthwatch, AWP, Deafblind, Southmead Hospital, Medical centres, Green Community Travel, and South Gloucestershire CCG.

We also had a number of people who are themselves carers or who have family members who they are concerned might be isolated, as well as a good proportion of people who were unaffiliated with any organisation or volunteer role but were interested members of the community. Of those who filled out our survey and listed their job/voluntary role, around 25% were not attending in a "work" capacity but for their own interest.

What contact did attendees have with isolated people?

Examples of the contact with isolated people that attendees had included through church, generally in the community, family/friends, patients and customers, vulnerable and elderly customers of a home delivery service, service users, through work (e.g. community navigation, nursing, supermarket and other posts), and through voluntary work.

A large proportion of those who filled out the survey had at least some contact with isolated people through work or voluntary roles – some of whom worked for services to alleviate isolation, which of course implies the isolated people they know have access to some form of help, but those who worked elsewhere – e.g. at supermarkets, food providers, and chemists – may have the most potential contact with isolated people who might be "outside of the system". Any future work around isolation could therefore be aimed specifically at those people.

Barriers to tackling isolation

What did the South Gloucestershire residents who attended feel to be the barriers to tackling isolation in our area? Responses included:

- People not feeling able to admit they are isolated, being afraid to ask for help or not wanting to ask for help
- Embarrassment/stigma
- People who are lonely having trust issues which might not be addressed



- Poor mobility and physical and mental health
- People not knowing how to help
- Lack of information, knowledge, support, understanding and awareness
- Collaboration and finding the people who miss out on events
- Transportation (rural area), including reduction in bus routes and changes to routes and schedules
- Lack of volunteers & professionals
- Shrinking statutory services & services being chargeable
- Lack of joined up working & reliance on volunteers/unpaid help
- Mobility of families
- Funding being needed for services which develop and promote social contact
- Lots of information is available, but it isn't always clear how to access. Signposting services exist but could be better joined up

The key themes here seem to be isolated people themselves being able to come forward, more and better information being available, more collaborative working, services and funding, and transport.

Simple actions which individuals could take to overcome some of these barriers might include:

- ✓ promoting [community transport](#) schemes within their community
- ✓ volunteering with isolated people, for example with [Growing Support](#) or [Contact the Elderly](#)
- ✓ think about [how to start conversations](#) with people who might not know how to tell others they feel isolated
- ✓ [inform yourself](#) about loneliness
- ✓ [inform yourself](#) about services and activities which are available locally, to be able to suggest to others
- ✓ volunteering or fundraising for projects which promote or [enable social contact](#)



What are some of the opportunities in our area to tackle isolation?

Suggestions here included:

- More events for isolated residents, creating contacts between residents and volunteers
- Willing volunteers
- Small communities – great overlap and family connections
- Better provision of care services for wellbeing
- Social media used to advertise services & inform people that they can refer others for help
- Businesses promoting healthy living
- Business owners/workers keeping an eye out for customers
- Charitable and statutory organisations working more with commercial organisations
- Statutory support for charitable organisations, and funding being available
- The [First Contact](#) scheme
- Building up of services like Good Neighbours, Men in Sheds, singing groups, knit & natter and coffee clubs
- Existing community groups and support groups
- Partnership working
- Growing awareness of this issue

If you'd like to get involved with our work, please get in touch contact@sgden.org.uk