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Ymchwiliad i unigrwydd ac unigedd

Inquiry into loneliness and isolation

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Gofal Cymru

Response from: Care Council for Wales



Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, National Assembly for Wales

Inquiry into loneliness and isolation

Care Council for Wales response

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1. The Care Council for Wales is a Welsh Government-sponsored body responsible for the regulation and development of the social care workforce. In April 2017 we will merge with the Social Services Improvement Agency (SSIA) to become Social Care Wales with an expanded remit which includes research and improvement.
2. Since 2015 we have been responsible for commissioning training materials on the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, which has enabled us to develop a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Therefore, our response will concentrate on the current policy and the new legislative framework for delivering care and support, including services to tackle loneliness and isolation.
3. SSIA recently published a report called *The Anatomy of Resilience: Helps and Hindrances as we Age*¹. The report found that “loneliness and isolation impact significantly on both physical and emotional health” (p11). The report notes that “it is important to distinguish loneliness from isolation, since they require different interventions: to tackle isolation, our approach might be to boost the number of contacts, for loneliness it may be more about boosting the quality of relationships” (p44). The report cites evidence that there are “greater risks of loneliness and isolation for men, people living alone, those who have been recently widowed, and for much older people” (p45). It is important to note that older people are not the only group affected by this problem.
4. We believe that it is important not to classify loneliness as a social care problem and the sole responsibility of social services departments. Rather, we believe that it is a challenge for all

¹ [The Anatomy of Resilience: Helps and Hindrances as we Age](#), Social Services Improvement Agency, Cardiff, October 2015

of us, and that policies and actions are needed in communities and across services and sectors. For example, community networks (both geographical, interest and digital based) and the voluntary sector has an important role to play, as well as a range of public services including health, housing and leisure.

5. The Well-being of Future Generations Act should help in this regard, by encouraging co-operation across departments, partners and communities. Furthermore, the Social Services and Well-being Act encourages co-operation between communities, health, social services and the voluntary sector with its focus on:
 - prevention
 - person-centred care and support
 - care and support which looks at a person's assets
 - information, advice and assistance
 - staff skilled in the art of 'what matters to you' conversations.
6. The Social Services and Well-being Act is also important because of the importance it places on a person's assets. These assets include their social circle and community, which are crucially important when looking to tackle loneliness and isolation.
7. The Care Council has worked on the national training plan to support implementation of the Act. In particular it has produced materials on person-centred care and support and the importance of what matters to the person receiving care and support. We have published these resources on our [Social Care Legislation in Wales Information and Learning Hub](#).
8. The Social Services and Well-being Act requires local authorities to assess the care and support needs of their populations. Loneliness and isolation have been picked up as an issue for older people in these assessments. As a result, we expect to see each of the social services regions addressing the issue through the regional area plans which stem from the assessments.
9. In tackling loneliness and isolation it will be important to consider the role which individuals, their friends and family, their community and local voluntary groups, and digital / interest communities can play. As loneliness is a societal problem it is important to consider a broad range of responses. Charities such as Cruse and Age Concern organise befriending schemes which have the potential to counter the worst effects of loneliness.
10. The importance of community resilience is referred to in our recently published [Strategic Plan for Care and Support at Home](#). One of the key areas identified for action is that care and support at home needs to be built around communities. The strategy states that:

“Carers and families play a critical role in providing care and support at home. It's often a role that's not seen and can be lonely ... We need to fully understand the resources in our communities. We need to support local communities to make the most of their strengths and connections. We have to use them, and build on them, to support health and well-being, particularly for the most vulnerable.”
11. There are a number of other ways in which local communities could help tackle loneliness. For example, they could consider 'asset maps' which show which services and resources are available within a community. Local authorities will commission information, advice and

assistance services to help citizens to find support they need. These could cover a range of services from information about community activities to counselling services for those bereaved. [Dewis Cymru](#) currently has local information for North Wales, Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil and information for other areas will be added soon. A number of local authorities have introduced 'community connectors'. They work with individuals, groups and organisations across their local area to make it easier for people to find out what's going on and how they can get involved in social activities that could improve their wellbeing.

12. The Social Services and Well-being Act will also encourage local authorities to maintain and develop strategic support for voluntary sector services.
13. In summary, in tackling loneliness and isolation, society as a whole needs to place an emphasis on what communities and individuals can do, building community resilience and using the opportunities for co-operation provided by new legislation.