

LI 25

Ymchwiliad i unigrwydd ac unigedd

Inquiry into loneliness and isolation

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Gwasanaeth Gwirfoddol Castell-nedd Port Talbot

Response from: Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service



**Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service**

*Supporting, promoting and developing the local voluntary sector*

**Cyngor Gwasanaeth Gwirfoddol Castell-nedd Port Talbot**

*Cefnogi, hyrwyddo a datblygu y sector wirfoddol leol*

### **Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Inquiry into loneliness and isolation**

1. Neath Port Talbot CVS is the County Voluntary Council and a Charitable Company set up to promote, support and develop the Third Sector in Neath Port Talbot. This response provides examples of the causes of isolation and loneliness, as well as projects which address these problems.
2. The Social Services Volunteering Scheme provides volunteer befrienders to reduce loneliness and isolation for adults with long term physical disabilities and older people. This service has seen a massive increase in referrals from Social Services, from 62 in 2015 to 156 in 2016. The increase in need appears to coincide with the reduction in provision of local authority services such as day centres, which has left many people who previously used these services without companionship or opportunities to socialise with their peers.
3. The Family Support Volunteering Project matches volunteer befrienders with vulnerable families to provide support with issues such as low self-esteem and confidence, social isolation, and coping skills. A high percentage of the referrals involve single parent households where domestic violence has resulted in low self-esteem and mental health issues. Anxiety and depression have led to withdrawal and isolation which impacts upon the children's quality of life. Many families live in isolated communities offering few social opportunities for single parents who lack confidence and this is exacerbated by limited public transport from rural areas to access social facilities within the towns.
4. The Community Links Project, funded through the Big Lottery Fund AdvantAGE Programme, aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of older people primarily over 65, by reducing social isolation, through volunteer befriending and new initiatives to meet unmet need. Reviews with the

beneficiaries of one to one befriending highlighted that 94% felt less lonely, 76% reported improved health and wellbeing, 76% reported their confidence had improved, and 100% reported an improvement in quality of life as a result of the project.

5. Through the Community Links Project, a number of initiatives were developed that provide examples of the way loneliness and isolation can be addressed. Furry Friends developed from an informal group of dog walkers that extended its membership and support network through social media. The initiative has encouraged physical activity, facilitated new friendships and introduced older people particularly to Facebook. The group has over 190 participants, with over 50% being older people. Members of the group have increased their social interaction and experienced a positive boost to their health and wellbeing.
6. A lunch club was developed in a valley community with attendees having access to free community transport as a lack of transport was cited by many as a contributing factor to isolation.
7. The Big Sunday Lunch was developed with NPT Homes around their sheltered housing complexes as it was recognised that, despite living in sheltered housing, many still felt isolated and missed Sunday dinners and sharing a meal with others. The initiative brought people together on a monthly basis and aimed to develop ongoing social networks. Free transport was provided to reduce the barriers to involvement. 100% of those completing a quantitative survey stated that their social interaction had increased, with 91% establishing a circle of support.
8. The following case studies highlight the impact the Community Links Project has on individuals. B was 85 years old when he met his volunteer. The death of his wife and deteriorating health had led to increased isolation; having to give up driving because of epilepsy also compounded his situation. Despite trying to stay positive, B found himself feeling very down on occasions. Having a volunteer has done him “the world of good.” The increased activity has improved B’s mobility and he no longer has to use a stick whilst out. B said “I think it improves everybody if you can get out of the house and meet people. You come back to the house and feel more light-hearted.”
9. D started volunteering at an Amman Valley nursing home when he was 85 and had recently lost his wife, having been her carer for many years. He and his wife had been very active in the community. D knew that he was still missing her, but felt that he now needed more purpose to his life. D is a very sociable, chatty gentleman as well as a Welsh speaker, skills and

qualities that he was able to bring to his volunteering. D was initially placed to visit a resident of the nursing home on a one to one basis, but it became apparent that D knew many of the other residents, and he began to visit up to fifteen residents, spending more than three hours there, enabling them to use their language of choice. D felt volunteering gave him a “lifeline.” In turn, he has become an invaluable asset to the nursing home, and has continued volunteering since the project ended.

10. Neath Port Talbot CVS undertook a small public survey on loneliness and isolation at Neath Port Talbot Hospital in October 2016. Respondents felt that living on the outskirts and in rural areas meant that there was little information on what is happening in the local area and the broader county and region. A lack of available public transport, especially in the evenings, to access social activities was also identified as a cause of isolation and loneliness. It was felt that widows/ers and those experiencing bereavement were vulnerable to loneliness and isolation. Older people were also mentioned as being at risk of feeling lonely and isolated, as a result of a reduction of cessation of family contact. Those with chronic conditions or limited mobility were also felt to be at risk of loneliness and isolation. Respondents also felt that loneliness and isolation could impact on any age group.
11. In terms of addressing the problems of loneliness and isolation, the respondents felt that improvements to public transport could be a possible solution along with coffee mornings for the recently bereaved, volunteer befriending, and the improved provision of information on local services and activities. There was also a feeling that if providers of domiciliary care were allowed and able to spend more time talking and communicating with people who are isolated and lonely, that this would be of benefit.
12. The views of 40 service users over 50 years old experiencing mental ill health were collected during the period October 2015 to January 2017. The closure of community services has led to an increase in isolation and loneliness. If the courses and groups that are still active ran more frequently and for longer, people would feel more involved and connected. People felt there were not enough services, especially out of hours, in Neath Port Talbot. Peer mentoring or befriending were recognised as providing a way to move away from isolation and towards entering into groups and social activities. Five service users stated that daily support with daily living tasks would help them with their mental health issues. Lack of motivation, isolation and being unable to do daily tasks left them feeling depressed and disempowered. Having practical help within the home and support to go to appointments would improve their mental health and reduce isolation.

13. People felt that a lack of free counselling services, lack of understanding of mental health issues, a lack of interest, and no-one willing to take time to listen to service users caused further isolation and loneliness. 25 people felt in order to get proper support with their mental health they needed to be in crisis. Anxiety, depression, loneliness, low self-esteem and low confidence affected people but were not being seen as a priority by the 'system'.
14. Transport is frequently raised as an issue which exacerbates loneliness and isolation. Neath Port Talbot has valley communities where access to public transport is poor especially for those with mobility issues. Even in urban areas people have difficulty accessing transport as in many instances they cannot get to the bus stop. There are two community transport providers in Neath Port Talbot, which provide a number of different services. Community transport is provided to enable older people, many of whom live alone, to access the weekly Croeserw Bingo Group in the Afan valley. This social activity reduces isolation and keeps attendees mentally active. Other examples include weekly shopping trips, where individuals have door to door service and assistance with their shopping; "Eat, chat and shop", where individuals are picked up, taken shopping and then go for a meal somewhere on their way home; and dedicated swimming sessions, where the pool is hired for private use and transport is also provided.
15. Isolation isn't limited to older people. There are also lots of young people that lack the confidence and ability to access services, many of whom do not have access to transport. The Neath Port Talbot CVS BBC Children in Need Project provides volunteer befrienders who support to vulnerable young people aged 16-18. The following examples highlight the impact of volunteer befriends on young people.
16. 17 year old C was referred by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Due to a past incident, C was too frightened to leave her home and was suffering with anxiety and depression. When she turned 18, her support with CAMHS ended and she was referred to adult services. This caused further anxiety as C found it difficult to get to her appointments. A volunteer provided a listening ear for C to be able to offload her worries. Together they went to appointments and C has now been able to go on to college and get herself a part time job.
17. J lives in the Afan Valley. He suffers from depression and anxiety and has been home schooled for a year. Other than a younger sibling, he has no engagement with any other children. His mum, who also suffers with poor mental health, does not drive and public transport is an issue for residents

of the Afan Valley. There is also little community activities for them to engage with locally. The family appear to be isolated due to their location.

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