

Response ID ANON-8H41-QXC9-A

Submitted to **A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections**

Submitted on **2018-04-30 17:07:09**

Key questions for everyone

1 What needs to change in your community to reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections?

Input your answer here::

John L Bell of the Iona Community once gave a talk where he said (I paraphrase) If you want to introduce a new drug (pharmaceutical) into Europe you have to go through a set of stringent trials and evaluations looking at the side effects of the drug and whether they are acceptable. Only after this has been done will the drug be given a licence. However, if you want to introduce a new technology there are no such safeguards – just go ahead – and yet the implications of these technologies on society are not being thought through or tracked. Many changes are taking place in communities which are side effects of the introduction of new technologies. We wonder to what extent we consider the implications of their introduction.

It is unlikely that we can identify one or two key things that need changing. Rather we need to look for a range of small, low cost, “safe to fail” probes which, we hope will have a positive effect. We need to track each probe to monitor its impact and then put our energies behind those that have positive effects.

One of the first things noted when discussing the concept of community is that we do not feel the same sense of community we once did. Where there used to be a central hub where people would meet and get together, a place for people to find out what was going on, there no longer appears to be such a place readily available to many. As a consequence, people are a lot more disconnected from each other as individuals, and as the community of people they might once have been. This is in part due to how the post-war built environment has been created and subsequent regeneration schemes implemented. The errors of the 1960s are repeated as new housing developments are created with little effort put into creating community spaces or amenities.

The Church of Scotland has designated Priority Areas across Scotland – currently 64 in total. Around half of these are in Glasgow, with the remaining spread across a further thirteen locations. They were determined primarily by using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), supported by the Church’s Statistics for Mission. All of the 64 communities are scored as the most deprived in Scotland using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). All scored in the top 5% across all seven of the SIMD indicators: employment, income, health, housing, education, crime, access to amenities.

Our local congregations and their partners in Priority Areas are often community hubs or anchors where much of the work that takes place has an intended outcome of combatting loneliness and isolation. In our communities we recognise that much needs to change to enable this to happen. Poverty itself is the greatest barrier to a flourishing connected community and it is perhaps more in line with Question 3 that this can be addressed. However based on the experiences of our Priority Areas, we know that much can also change at the local level to create better opportunities for people to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness in their communities.

There are many examples of how this change is happening and we detail a few of these in response to Question 2. What we are sure of is that local people must be involved in creating solutions to loneliness and isolation. We know that people who have experienced loneliness can be leaders in their own communities. It is the sharing of their experiences with others that help to build the relationships that encourage and involve those who are isolated on the edges of their communities to become involved. What needs to change?

- There needs to be support for local people to build on their own strengths,
- more places and activities that can connect up people,
- national strategies to increase wealth,
- more access to and more provision of health care, particularly in mental health services which are a useful indicator to gauge people’s experiences of isolation and loneliness

2 Who is key at local level in driving this change, and what do you want to see them doing more (or less) of?

Input answer here::

The Church of Scotland, being parish (i.e local geographical community) based, has outposts (parish churches) covering the entire length and breadth of Scotland, and these churches host a huge number of volunteers.

We are starting to encourage Asset Based rather than needs based approaches. A needs based approach would be to offer a coffee morning for the isolated and lonely. An Asset Based approach would find ways to link those who feel isolated or lonely with activities and people in their local area, and involve them where possible in deciding what would interest them and helping them becoming involved in its running.

Churches are community hubs and the Church of Scotland’s Go For It Fund and Priority Areas teams are working with churches to create a wide range of activities that focus on building community.

Local people, who have experience of the issue, and local community initiatives are key at neighbourhood level. Already much work tackling social isolation is happening in churches and community buildings in the Priority Areas where we are focused. Initiatives such as:

- café drop in sessions,
- children and family work,
- health projects,
- men’s shed projects,

to name a few are key in building a stronger community and lessening the effects of loneliness.

Another example of this approach is holding regular community meals; several of our Priority Area churches are running these. Others – in relation to the isolation caused by dementia, for both the person and their carer – are initiatives to focus on music and singing. One of our Priority Area churches, Springburn Parish in Glasgow, recently received an award for this work taking 2nd place for Community Initiatives in the National Dementia Awards for their Musical Memories project. This work is founded upon simple values– people building relationships with each other, offering kindness, respect and support in a way that is rooted in showing love for each other.

We would want to see more of this work enabled. What is key to supporting this local level approach, rooted in real people and communities, is of course financial and political support for these local initiatives. Easier access to simplified funding from both statutory and grant making agencies would improve the chances of these initiatives getting off the ground and succeeding and in doing so, tackle the problem of social isolation and loneliness.

3 What does Government need to do nationally to better empower communities and create the conditions to allow social connections to flourish?

Input answer here::

Government needs to continue to create ways of understanding and listening to people and projects that have direct experience of the issues being addressed and crafting policy that reflects this. The Government needs to see this as part of a bigger picture that is underpinned and connected to alleviating poverty and the indicators of deprivation.

The Church of Scotland would ask that the Government

- Continues to make progress on the Fairer Scotland Action Plan
- Directs more of its resources to the local neighbourhood level.
- Invests in partnerships – long term as well as pilots – to increase stronger social connections. Government has the ability to join up its work across a number of agencies, for example working with NHS Scotland, to address mental/health related barriers to connected communities. We know that social isolation is linked to poverty; both as an indicator and as a driver towards poverty. Government through initiatives such as the pilots for trialling Basic Income have the opportunity to learn more about the links. If they specifically include evidence gathering in relation to the effect of having a basic income on social isolation; they will be able to see the effects of this.

The recent provision of funding through the Scottish Government's Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund demonstrated the value of funding initiatives that seek to tackle or mitigate against the effect of social Isolation. Disappointingly projects were provided with only one year's funding and therefore impact was generally made by already established projects. We believe that sustainable impact can be made through small steps. Experience from Go For It and Glasgow's Third Sector Transformation Fund (GTSTF) would provide evidence of the value of small local projects, supported for a couple of years can make. One example from GTSTF would be Faith in Community Scotland's (FICS) Ageing Well Programme. This started with five pilot projects, which increased to seventeen, that were all local, all volunteer led, all different, with small budgets that delivered activities that increased connectedness and improved health and wellbeing amongst 800 participants each week. FICS provided mentoring support and helped with evaluation and reporting.

The GTSTF has come to an end, but the local projects have not. The natural growth of local projects has allowed them to develop a small budget to match income and secure a more sustainable future for their project. This particular model of working is particularly effective at community level if hosted by an anchor organisation.

Do you want to answer any of the detailed questions?

Detailed questions

4 Do you agree or disagree with our definitions of (i) social isolation and (ii) loneliness? Please provide comments, particularly if you disagree.

Input answer here::

Social isolation refers to paucity in the quality and quantity of the social relationships that a person has at individual, group, community and societal levels.

5 Do you agree with the evidence sources we are drawing from? Are there other evidence sources you think we should be using?

Input answer here::

It would be good to use a source of evidence which references social isolation and new parenthood- We can see you have referenced young mothers but in fact 1 in 7 mothers experience a perinatal mood disorder. This is one of life's biggest transitions and we underestimate the effect it can have on many people. The Government was recently criticized for its response to maternal mental health and it might help underline the need for further action. The Church of Scotland through CrossReach, can evidence the difference that good and sensitive support makes to young mothers, and sometimes fathers, at this challenging time in their lives. The Church of Scotland also can evidence the impact of Isolation and loneliness on the farming community through its Chaplaincy to farmers

6 Are there examples of best practice outside Scotland (either elsewhere in the UK or overseas) focused on tackling social isolation and loneliness that you think we should be looking at?

Input answer here::

Projects such as the one in the eastern Netherlands where students get free lodging for living in a building where they provide support to older members of the community. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/intergenerational-retirement-home-sees-students-live-alongside-the-elderly-1.2136659>

Examples in England where they are starting to try out intergenerational care homes mixing pre-school children with the elderly

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/elderly-children-intergenerational-care-home-nightingale-house-a8271876.html> . In London and Manchester the "Cares Family" <https://www.thecaresfamily.org.uk/#videos> link young professionals to older people in social settings helping tackle social isolation and loneliness through intergenerational activities and befriending.

There are some good digital initiatives being used which demonstrate that although people are connected, they may still be lonely. Sometimes using digital communication is the only way to access a community of interest, but it is no final substitute for face-to-face engagement. However in instances where face-to-face connection is not possible, a good example of online connection and support would be PND and Me (www.pndandme.co.uk) an online chat and support forum for people experiencing depression and anxiety after childbirth. There is a recognised health inequality in the provision of services across Scotland and mothers have taken to the web to support each other and to lend advice and guidance through this forum. While this is perhaps no substitute for face-to-face conversations, these forums are increasingly important in a more digitally connected world. CrossReach is working with the Digital Health and Care Institute to develop an online counselling platform which will be secure and discreet for those needing more specialised support.

We would also highlight creative arts /playlists for life as best practice examples for reducing social isolation and dementia. There is good research on this topic as highlighted by this article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jun/02/art-speaks-music-dementia-effective-therapy>

CrossReach run Heart for Art, funded by Life Changes Trust as a support and community based intervention for those with dementia and their carers and it has had great outcomes in terms of tackling isolation. It is part of the dementia friendly communities research /funding initiative captured in this video

www.youtube.com/watch

7 Are you aware of any good practice in a local community to build social connections that you want to tell us about?

Input answer here::

Genesis Project – Kirkliston Parish Church, Edinburgh. Increases the integration of families moving into the local area from new housing developments, creating a strong sense of belonging and community. Reduces isolation and improves wellbeing of mothers of young children and increases confidence, self-esteem and resilience of young people.

The FAST (Future at St Andrew's Clermiston) Project, Edinburgh. Addressing social isolation offering Support Groups on child care, active play, healthy living and budgeting, providing an art group for adults with learning difficulties, cookery group for those recovering from mental illness, and a friendship group for those recovering from stroke.

St Paul's Youth Forum, Blackhill's Changing Health, Glasgow. Enabling local young people to lead healthier lives, by providing weekly: physical activity and cookery classes. Also visiting schools and doing detached work.

St Rollox Community Outreach, Glasgow. Support for local residents, refugees and asylum seekers. Aim to help and advise those adversely affected by destitution and sanctions. Aim to help those on low incomes and those who are lonely and new migrants to improve their language skills.

Tulloch Net, North Perth. Providing a drop-in centre for those experiencing social isolation and poor health outcomes. Helping people to see themselves as assets to the community. Providing a listening service and training others in being listeners.

The Living Well Project Befriending Service, Aberdeen. Reducing isolation among older people by recruiting, training and matching volunteers to visit and befriend them; also accompany them to the shops/for coffee.

Hilton Youth Project, Inverness. Reducing social isolation by providing bi-weekly Toddler Groups, mentoring for Primary School children, weekly children's outreach events and Messy Church.

Faith in Community Scotland's Ageing Well Programme: Funded by GTSTF, supported the establishment of a variety of local initiatives whose aim is to reduce isolation and improve connectedness and health and wellbeing among older people. The full evaluation of GTSTF can be found at

https://www.voluntaryactionfund.org.uk/index.php/download_file/view/1035/159/ local projects established include: Granary Keep Fit, Carntyne Young at Heart, Cranhill Young at Heart, Ruchazie Chancers, Come & Sing Café, Springburn Musical Memories, Cake & Company, Wellpark Potting Shed, Adult Music Class (Milton Art Project), Recycled Teenagers in Possilpark, Al-Furqan Ageing Well, Knightwood Baptist Friday Lunch, Yoker Super Seniors, Yoker Men's Shed, Rainbow Daycare Therapies and Maryhill Memories and Maryhill Musical Memories

The Eric Liddell Centre at Holy Corner in Edinburgh has built an excellent reputation for its work supporting elderly people, with a particular emphasis on people living with dementia. This project came about when local churches came together to provide an asset that would benefit the community. For some, it meant sacrificing their building towards a common cause; for others it meant financially supporting the work. Without a willingness of local Churches and community to work together, using what resources were locally available this most important project in the fight against isolation and loneliness would never have been established.

A typical example of an suburban parish would be Morningside Parish in Edinburgh. As there is little community space in the area, The Church provides accommodation for around 125 local organisations over the year, many of which touch on issues relating to loneliness and social isolation simply by providing meeting spaces for a wide range of community as well as church groups, covering all age-ranges.

There are many instances of good practice, in fact, probably too many to mention, but the Musical Minds group in Dalbeattie Parish Church in Dumfriesshire, where music and singing groups are provided for people with dementia; Daisy Chain, a group for very young children and their parents in Govanhill (a CrossReach venture) – most of the parents are refugees and migrants – would be another. The Edinburgh Weekend Club is organised by Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees and mainly supports refugee families who have found themselves settled in Edinburgh. It is mainly Syrian families who come along and the activities provided by the project allow families to stay connected with each other. This peer support is vital in helping people cope with the trauma of finding themselves stateless and separated from family and friends.

Food Train was established in Dumfries to help older people in a rural community who were isolated and unable to shop for groceries as they had lost their car-driving partner or were themselves no longer able to drive on account of age or infirmity. The project receives regular grocery orders, delivers and put the groceries away. It is befriending with a shopping bag. Food Train have expanded their operation to other areas including Glasgow. They also offer a handyman service so that older people can have access to practical support. Meal-Makers is also part of the franchise. Older people can have someone come to their home who will cook a meal.

The Church of Scotland is committed to making use of its assets for the benefit of the wider community. In Ruchazie in Glasgow, the worshipping community is small and joins with a neighbouring congregation. Normally this would result in the closure of a building. The church buildings in Ruchazie are well used by the local community, and are the only easily accessible community buildings in the area. Despite there being no visible congregation the church has been prepared to continue to provide staff to run the buildings and associated activities for the community, including café, dementia group, two lunch clubs a youth club and a job club. Without the physical and financial presence of the church this community would be significantly diminished.

In Edinburgh's South Side, after a union between Greyfriars and Kirk O'Field Parish churches, rather than redundant buildings being sold for development, it was decided to invest in the building and turn it into a community hub. The office space in the building is already the office base for a number of organisations and the main sanctuary has been turned into a "village square" where local people are welcome to come in and study, catch up with friends or escape from the bustle of city life.

8 How can we all work together challenge stigma around social isolation and loneliness, and raise awareness of it as an issue? Are there examples of people doing this well that you're aware of?

Input answer here::

In terms of raising awareness CrossReach has collaborated with the University of Strathclyde Social Work Department to conduct a piece of research into stigma and childhood. It was funded by the Insight Institute and looks at the experiences of children with a variety of challenges (ethnicity, poverty, disability, family circumstances) and how stigma can affect their feelings of inclusion and ability to succeed. This will be the focus of the CrossReach fringe event.

The Grey Cakes initiative launched by CrossReach last year, for church groups and beyond both highlights the stigma of mental health, and encourages people to get together and talk about it. The campaign was listed as a finalist at the Institute of Fundraising Awards last year.

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news_and_events/news/2017/moderator_and_hrh_the_princess_royal_launch_the_crossreach_grey_cake_campaign

New research by King's College, London published on 24th April 2018 has highlighted the impact on the mental health of young adults who were out of work.

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/ioppn/news/records/2018/april/depressed-inactive-and-out-of-work-%E2%80%93-study-reveals-lives-of-lonely-young-adults.aspx>

The Church of Scotland National Youth Assembly has also been active identifying loneliness, ask questions like "how do we know who's lonely?" It is not something an individual is likely to advertise about themselves, so how do we know who needs us to reach out and take that first step? This then led to the Church's young people wondering what might help a person who struggles to leave their house or interact with others. By labelling events or groups and

specifically marketing them for those affected by loneliness, this was seen as putting people off and increase the effect of loneliness by stigmatising them through unhelpful "labelling". It is important also to see that everyone's experience of isolation is different, and everyone's needs are different, so there needs to be variety in what's offered to these groups. As friends and neighbours, it can be difficult to know how to reach out to those around us who are lonely, as loneliness and social isolation is not always evident. Even when it is, how do we get passed someone's front door to be with them if they don't answer when we knock? If they don't answer the call of a friend, are they going to take it upon themselves to go out and find themselves a community?

In work situations, particularly in social care, it can be easy to identify the lonely, for example residents in care homes who don't get visitors, or who can't (or won't) get out. However recognising this and solving this situation are not the same thing. The National Youth Assembly talked about what happens when a person stops attending clubs or societies etc. Who follows up when a person hasn't been seen at the golf club for a few weeks? How long does an absence go unnoticed, and who is there to check how someone is?

9 Using the Carnegie UK Trust's report as a starting point, what more should we be doing to promote kindness as a route to reducing social isolation and loneliness?

Input answer here::

One example of community that was talked about by the Church of Scotland Youth Assembly was of the ways people banded together during the recent snowstorms. We saw many places both in our own streets and towns where people worked together to dig each other out of snow-bound homes, checking in on neighbours and getting messages for elderly or infirm neighbours. However it did raise the question "where is this during the rest of the year?" Why is it the case that it takes drastic weather for people to come together and show community spirit? How can we make this a less rare occurrence, and more a regular event. The concept of kindness resonates with the teaching of Christ and consequently the Church of Scotland is an active participant in the Kindness Innovation Network facilitated by The Carnegie Trust UK.

10 How can we ensure that those who experience both poverty and social isolation receive the right support?

Input answer here::

The Church of Scotland has designated Priority Areas across Scotland – currently 64 in total. Around half of these are in Glasgow, with the remaining spread across a further 13 locations. They were determined primarily by using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), supported by the Church's Statistics for Mission. All 64 communities fall within the 5%; the top ranking for deprivation. That is, all of them scored in the top 5% across all seven of the SIMD indicators: employment, income, health, housing, education, crime, access to amenities.

The Church of Scotland as a whole and through the work of Priority Areas in particular has a focus and bias towards the poor. We see this as a gospel imperative and have prioritised the Churches resources to that end. Working with partner organisations like the Poverty Truth Commission, Faith in Community Scotland, Scottish Churches Housing Action to name but a few; we work alongside local congregations and their local partners to help build flourishing communities. The Church and Society Council recently held a "Speak Out" survey, where over 10,000 participants told us what was important to them and what our priorities should be over the next 10 years in Scotland. We know there is a direct link between poverty and social isolation, loneliness and deteriorating mental health. We know this because ministers and parish workers up and down the land, in cities and in rural settings are dealing with the fall-out. We are also aware because commissioners of the Poverty Truth Commission who have lived experience of poverty have told us. Finally we know because volunteers who are engaging with people using food banks have told us and we know from volunteers who meet people about the increasing number of community meal events run up and down the country.

Our churches and their partners in Priority Areas are often community hubs or anchors where much of the work that takes place has an intended outcome of combatting loneliness and isolation. In our communities we recognise that much needs to change to enable this to happen. Poverty itself is the greatest barrier to a flourishing connected community. However based on the experiences of our Priority Areas, we know that much can also change at the local level to create better opportunities for people to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness in their communities.

One Community of interest that is particularly vulnerable to becoming socially isolated would be those caught up in the Justice system and their families.

CrossReach has many years' experience in supporting offenders and their families through Visitor Centres. Faith in Community Scotland's Faith in Throughcare Initiative helps ex-offenders reconnect with their families and community. People who are supported in their journey through and beyond the justice system are therefore less isolated and better equipped to re-engage with the community.

11 What do we need to be doing more of (or less of) to ensure that we tackle social isolation and loneliness for the specific life stages and groups mentioned above?

Input answer here::

We would highlight main life stages:

- Youth,
- Young adults,
- Middle age,
- Old age

These life stages apply to single people as well as those who are in different form of relationship.

Transitions in Life:

- change of school,
- change of home,
- university,
- parenthood,
- change of job,
- loss of job,
- bereavement,
- going into hospital
- going into residential care.

Relating to church attendance, the Church of Scotland National Youth Assembly felt that there was a correlation between the decrease in church attendance and the upwards trend of isolation and loneliness. Tying in with its first point where the church has somehow moved away from being a central hub for people to

gather, and where community spirit was perhaps at its strongest, we note that this is not often the case. This is why we felt churches should make the most of their spaces and open them up to their communities. The Church should also advertise the facilities and groups that meet in church accommodation through the week to boost community spirit.

For children and families who experience homelessness and temporary accommodation this is often accompanied by changes or gaps in schooling for children. The transition from one school to another can be a difficult one and is not always supported as well as it could be. Often there are other concerns and challenges for the family and children, for example domestic abuse, poverty, debt issues etc. which can add to the social stigma of the move. Some schools have good policies which include buddy systems for welcoming new starts but there are inconsistencies in approach and this could be improved, including specific help to assist the child or young person to develop new friendships, and for the parent to meet other parents. One particular group of young people who have more school moves than others are "looked after" children who might move schools due to moving between relatives or placements. Some of these moves may be positive but nevertheless involve a transition which is often largely unsupported and in many cases can be sudden. Looked after children report nationally that they find it hard to keep in touch with their friends when they become looked after away from home. "Seasons for Growth" is a programme which helps children make sense of endings and beginnings but again is not offered widely. How can we get communities, including faith communities, to be more aware of "new" families and to encourage a warm welcome rather than feeling that they should keep out of the way?

Many children and young people in Scotland do not attend mainstream school. This may be due to trauma, emotional or behavioural difficulties, learning or physical disabilities. Children and young people have told us that this makes them feel isolated and lonely. They do not have the same opportunities to participate in extracurricular or after school activities; they don't walk to school with others from their neighbourhood and they "feel different". Although there are fewer specialist schools there is still a significant number of children who experience this. Better connections with local mainstream schools would be of benefit with children and young people being able to link in for activities, sports etc.

Teenagers and young people who become pregnant, whether planned or unplanned also can struggle with the transition to parenthood, in particular where their peers are not in the same position. It can be more challenging for a younger parent, male or female, to join local groups or activities, and where there is a charge this often excludes them if they are on a low income or benefits, for example mother and baby swimming classes at a local authority pool can still cost around £5 per session. CrossReach provide a variety of services including counselling with the aim of improving perinatal mental health. It is noted that fathers as well as mothers report feeling isolated and alone following the birth of their baby and feel guilty for not living up to society's expectations of happiness on the birth of a baby. The traditional network of extended family that are available to help has largely eroded. A young person having a baby today may have both working parents and working grandparents (or may have neither) There are gaps in support networks for young families in particular.

One demographic in particular that the Youth Assembly talked about at some length was men over fifty. There's an awareness that men are less likely to be open and share their feelings than women, and men of this age group can be particularly vulnerable to isolation because of this. While women are in general more likely to meet up over coffee or go to a women's group, men are not so much involved in such social activities. The culture of men not talking can make it difficult to define what friendship is. At what point does a work colleague become a friend? Again, the problems of addressing this are not easily found. This in some way explains the growth of Men's Sheds. "Women talk face to face, men work it out side by side" is a strapline often used by Mens' Sheds. This Australian phenomenon is becoming a popular new activity within churches across the land.

12 How can health services play their part in better reducing social isolation and loneliness?

Input answer here::

Our The Church of Scotland Youth Assembly commented, "With regards mental health and social isolation, it was noted that there were services available in Edinburgh and Perth to support people suffering poor mental health; and yet the likes of West Lothian and Fife have no such services available. This, we felt, is an issue to be addressed, that there should be places open and available across all regions to help people struggling with these issues."

13 How can we ensure that the social care sector contributes to tackling social isolation and loneliness?

Input answer here::

See above regarding intergenerational work. Don't put lonely isolated people into lonely, isolating boxes.

The Self Directed Support Act and The Human Rights based standards can and will make a difference. However social care is also a highly regulated environment and whilst regulation is clearly important it can cause a challenge to those working in the field as it contributes to a culture where prevention of risk becomes a focus rather than risk enablement. A culture of risk enablement would allow people to take part in activities which they really want to/are motivated to do, rather than the 'safest' activities. Ensuring that regulation is aligned to the aspirations of choice and control will help those working in the social care sector to help those engaging with it to participate in the most meaningful activities for each individual and optimise opportunities to combat loneliness and isolation. A healthy social care sector, able to combat loneliness and isolation, will be supported by a healthy funding environment. Many people who access services need the opportunity to build good relationships with those who work with them in a support role before they can go on to build relationships in the wider community. However many services are subject to insecure short term funding which means projects come and go and the good relationships being built up both with individuals and the wider community disappear with them. The current culture of tendering for services can also cut across positive relationships being built up as work transfers from provider to provider often with a slightly different focus or more constrained financial envelope, which means some elements of support are dropped. Ensuring a robust funding environment which maximises the potential for building longer term trusting relationships will help the social care sector to succeed.

14 What more can we do to encourage people to get involved in local groups that promote physical activity?

Input answer here::

Guidance and support for people is important. Something like the BBC programme that looked at people's body ages and then helped them as they worked to change that. We could also encourage more GPs to use social prescribing as an alternative to medication. Organisations like "Paths for All" provide a network of small local walks led by local volunteers, sometimes just walking as part of a group is easier for folk than going into a room and feel cornered. Again small steps work best.. It would be our experience that encouraging people to volunteer improves their physical health and because they are kept busy, helps them improve their sleep pattern.

15 How can we better equip people with the skills to establish and nurture strong and positive social connections?

Input answer here::

Work with young families and young single people as they start to both start to learn to socialise and also as they start to build their own sense of self identity and worth.

We have heard of one retired head teacher who said that the best age to counter poverty is in the 0-2 age group, and then added "or even earlier than that". Working with families as they prepare for parenthood may also help. It is also important to note that working with those not in relationships should not be overlooked.

16 How can we better ensure that our services that support children and young people are better able to identify where someone may be socially isolated, and capable of offering the right support?

Input answer here::

Members of the Church of Scotland Youth Assembly told us, "in terms of younger people and isolation, there's a real issue prevalent with the online community we find ourselves a part of. We touched on there being no sense of identity, Although connected 24/7, is the life we see on screen the life that's true to reality? How do we determine if a person we meet and chat to online is a "real friend"? Particularly prominent in the gaming community, where individuals are interacting for lengthy periods of time through a screen via virtual personas, how do we know the person we're talking to/playing against is the person they really are? And can we class an online interaction a real relationship if the two people never meet face to face? Once again the question of how to reach out to people and offer a chance of socialising in an outside community setting is brought up. If a person has interacted so long through screens, how can we help integrate them into society, if this is something they would even want?"

CrossReach have been using the Gifec wellbeing indicators (SHANARRI) to promote the concept of "wellbeing" in children and young people and how this can be assessed and outcomes improved. The indicators include feeling nurtured, included and respected. Staff who work in projects for children and families will use the wellbeing indicators in their discussions with children and their families and will try to capture progress as outcomes improve. We believe that more community groups could use this approach in their work with children and we have created "Calamari Shanarri" who is an octopus with the indicators on legs which can be removed for play and discussion. The knitting pattern has been published on the CrossReach website and Cal has now been knitted across Scotland from Shetland to Stirling and used by church groups, brownies and child minders. We think this is a great example of helping people to talk about when they might feel isolated and in need of support. The picture below is of two Calamari Shanarri's knitted in Dumfries!

The challenge is responding to needs, in particular in complex situations, where families have various difficulties for example. Providing communities with the opportunity to develop their own groups and facilities is very important, families prefer to be involved with local people rather than services. Perhaps local authorities and other organisations should be asked both to ensure and report evidence that their "universal" services such as leisure facilities, libraries and parks are used equally across society, evidence would tend to indicate that this is not always the case. There is a need for outreach and targeting to ensure that those who are disadvantaged and isolated are aware of what is on offer and can take advantage of it. Providing free swimming over the summer or free sports sessions is a good example of this but recent cutbacks may have impacted on availability. It can be very difficult for young people who might be connected in a variety of ways via social media to both identify and to talk about feeling isolated if they are struggling to make connections in their local community with friends of their own age. Social media could be used more to explore the issues of isolation and loneliness, as it has very successfully promoted the need to talk about mental health recently.

There is still significant stigma in society for various reasons which impacts on a range of people, including travelling families, those who live in poverty and for children who are looked after. In terms of looked after children, raising awareness of the challenges they face and the need to support them, their families or carers would be of enormous benefit. Foster Carers often report that people respond negatively to children who are noisy or struggle in a public setting. Looked after young people often lack the social skills to successfully navigate an event or gathering. Greater societal understanding of the trauma and challenges these children may have faced might improve how well they are welcomed and supported rather than excluded and stigmatised.

17 How can the third sector and social enterprise play a stronger role in helping to tackle social isolation and loneliness in communities?

Input answer here::

Volunteering lies at the heart of the activities of third sector organisations and some social enterprises. Our experience in the church would be that volunteering improves health and wellbeing and in many cases our volunteers would also see their volunteering as service, part of their worship and duty to God. Motivation may vary from person to person but those who volunteer often find a sense of meaning or value in what they do, often an unintended consequence. More people taking up volunteering opportunities would certainly help reduce social isolation and loneliness. Different models and hooks are needed depending on the target group. What might interest a younger person may not be attractive to an older person and different barriers will prevent participation. The third sector needs to explore what the barriers are and think creatively on how they might be overcome. There is also a question of scale or size. Smaller, more local organisations will have fewer resources available to invest in supporting the recruitment and retention of volunteers. Strong local networks can help with this and the sharing of expertise and knowledge within the sector.

18 What more can the Scottish Government do to promote volunteering and help remove barriers to volunteering, particular for those who may be isolated?

Input answer here::

Supporting potential volunteers to access good quality training and support as well as dealing with the issues of a 'blemished' PVG are known to be helpful interventions in promoting volunteering. CrossReach runs a recovery volunteers programme that gives potential volunteers, previously isolated due to drug or alcohol misuse, a mental health problem or experience of homelessness access to a bespoke training course. It covers areas of training designed to boost confidence and self-esteem as well as report writing, data protection and professional boundaries. Recovery volunteers then go on to offer peer support to those who are facing more immediate challenges and who themselves are now isolated because of these. This has proven to be a successful model. Blemished PVGs, which are a regular occurrence for this group, can be a barrier to progressing both with volunteering and paid employment and good guidance to employers in how to deal with these, but maintain safe recruitment of volunteers might be a helpful development.

19 How can employers and business play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?

Input answer here::

Information on local amenities etc. when people relocate for work. Possible "buddying" system helping people to connect to like-minded others in their new communities (for example, singing in choirs, drama groups, walking groups, befriending groups, environmental groups and the wide variety of church-based groups, and groups that often use church premises but are not faith-based).

20 What are the barriers presented by the lived environment in terms of socially connecting? How can these be addressed?

Input answer here::

The concept of place-making appears to be an alien concept to private housebuilders. The regeneration errors of the past are not being learned from. Most housing associations engaged in new-build are still attempting to include community benefit this does not appear to be the case with private estate builders. Many of these new estates are the same size as a small village – except they have few if any amenities. Is the planning process robust enough? Should checking sufficient community benefit, Parking bays and lawns are not “community spaces” as one recent house building company claimed.

New housing estates need to have some form spending on social capital infrastructure. These will include:

- places of worship,
- playing fields,
- community halls
- shops
- libraries

The problem with new community halls is that if they are located in new housing estates there will be no ready-made groups to fill them, as everyone in the area is new. Support for existing community groups to have “off shoots” in these new areas would be one suggestion.

21 How can cultural services and agencies play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?

Input answer here::

There are good examples of the Museums Network providing innovative support for people living with dementia, some local authority leisure providers like Glasgow Life and Land and Environmental Services provide taster classes or short led park walks. Targeting specific at-risk groups is also helping. Working in partnership with local third sector organisations would be another good example.

Partnership working is certainly one way in which organisations can be more effective in their reach and impact. Through the Fairer Food Fund, Yoker Parish Church has embarked on providing community meals as a means to build a more cohesive and inclusive community and reach out to those at risk of becoming socially isolated. Key partners in this venture have been the local bowling club and local pub. Both local organisations were aware of an increasing fragility and disconnectedness in some of their patrons and were keen to work with the church in exploring ways in which they could offer additional support to people they knew were becoming more at risk. The community meals have been a success.

22 How can transport services play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?

Input answer here::

The Church of Scotland Youth Assembly told us “Public transport was one other thing we talked about. When building sheltered housing, or similar residential accommodation, practical things like the position of bus stops needs to be considered. An example was given of a site in Lothian where a sheltered care unit had been built, the nearest bus stop to which was a fair distance away, up a hill – not exactly practical for residents to get out and about. Praise was given to the Edinburgh tram system which is disabled friendly with accessible stops and plenty of room in carriages. Similarly, it was thought that the general availability of bus passes for the elderly and disabled was very good, and goes some way to encourage people to use public transport and to get out and about. Issues were raised about some buses which have space only for one wheelchair; how are two wheelchair using friends supposed to enjoy a day out together if they can’t travel together?”

23 How best can we ensure that people have both access to digital technology and the ability to use it?

Input answer here::

We are aware of some projects which take IT cafés out to rural areas: people drop in for support for their digital connectivity issues. The establishment of Silver Surfer clubs either at Libraries or community hubs is doing much to help an older generation keep connected with friends and family, but lack of funding for libraries, and their closure in many areas, is a matter for considerable concern. There is perhaps a partnership opportunity here for local congregations to develop the use of their buildings.

Any other comments

24 Taking into account answers to questions elsewhere, is there anything else we should be doing that doesn’t fall into any of these categories?

Input answer here::

Being alone and being lonely are two different things. One can be alone without being lonely, and one can be lonely in a crowded room. Loneliness is, therefore, a state of mind, an emotion brought on by feelings of separation from other human beings. The sense of isolation is very deeply felt by those who are lonely. The Hebrew word translated “desolate” or “lonely” in the Old Testament means “one alone, only; one who is solitary, forsaken, wretched.” There is no deeper sadness that ever comes over the mind than the idea that we are alone in the world, that we do not have a friend, that no one cares for us, that no one is concerned about anything that might happen to us, that no one would care if we were to die or shed a tear over our grave. It is in the words of the Psalms of David that Christians find examples of someone like King David grappling with feelings of rejection, failure, isolation and despair. We read that the psalmist almost always turns to God as their only true help! The availability of God to provide fellowship and support when all other help has gone has sustained many Christians in the most trying of circumstances. It is of course within the fellowship of the faith community where people find can find support for spirit, mind and body. For the individual, faith and faith journey are intensely personal and whilst this is true within Christianity; the idea of community and in being part of an interdependent community of faith is a central part of Jesus’ teaching and practice of the church. Furthermore, we are taught through the parable of the Good Samaritan, “to love our neighbours” looking out for those who are different from us, those who are in need irrespective of faith or nationality. It is perhaps this apparent paradox of being alone and yet being part of a community that helps church members connect empathetically with those who feel isolated and lonely. Our faith and understanding of how it is lived out in practice connects to our deepest sense of humanity.

The concept of a society where people find a place of safety, of comfort and of friendship lies at the heart of the work of The Church of Scotland. Across the land, around 1200 local congregations open their doors to connect with all who live in their neighbourhood regardless of their faith commitment. Churches provide activities for all ages and support for those who are vulnerable within the community. At a national level the Church provides specialist services through the work

of CrossReach, the Church's social work arm. This organisation is particularly focussed on the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. Through the work of the Priority Areas Team and Scottish Churches Rural Group there is a focus and commitment to work alongside those communities who experience grinding poverty or in villages and hamlets that find themselves cut off from mainstream services and support. For over 130 years The Church of Scotland Guild has been force for good within Scotland. The local Guild provides practical support for the work of local congregations. At a national level the Guild gives encouragement for innovative projects at home and abroad. At a Parish level, ministers, church workers and elders provide pastoral support within their neighbourhoods. As an institution, The Church of Scotland's reach is truly nation-wide. A network of approximately 1,200 local congregations which is supported by 800 parish ministers, 28,000 elders, 8,046 pastoral care visitors, 33 deacons, 9,000 youth leaders/workers, 28,000 children's workers and an army of volunteers including 20,000 Guild members and 1,800 CrossReach Social Care staff. When combined with the resources and social action programmes of our colleagues in the Roman Catholic Church, Scottish Episcopal Church and other denominations, as well as work done by the interfaith community, this provides a significant number of social activity and support services that are a significant force for good within Scottish society. The impact of local faith communities in combating social isolation and loneliness is an often overlooked when measuring social capital and must be considered when looking at the impact of the voluntary sector. The Church of Scotland has expended significant resources over the last one hundred years in particular to equip the church both nationally and locally to identify those in society in greatest need and to provide support wherever possible. The Church has extensive experience to share, but also recognises that in a fast-changing society, it has much to learn. Caring for those in need is a Gospel imperative and within our organisational DNA and values.

25 Do you agree with the framework we have created to measure our progress in tackling social isolation and loneliness?

Input answer here::

The framework matrix appears to cover most positive indicators

26 Is there anything missing from this framework that you think is important for us to consider?

Input answer here::

Bullying is not the only measure for school children at risk of social isolation or loneliness. It is but one aspect and there needs to be something around how young people are supported through life transitions that can be measured.

About you

What is your name?

Name:

Calum Strang

What is your email address?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

The Church of Scotland

Are you responding on behalf of a community discussion that has taken place?

Yes

If you used our facilitation guide, please upload the Event Registration form here.

Upload:

No file was uploaded

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response with name

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

Evaluation

Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:

Slightly satisfied

Please enter comments here.:

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:

Very satisfied

Please enter comments here.: