



## Social isolation and loneliness in people aged 55 and over in Milton Keynes: the way forward

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## Effects of social isolation on individuals

- individuals lacking social contact carry a health risk equivalent to smoking up to 15 cigarettes in a day
- social isolation is more harmful than not exercising and twice as harmful as obesity
- social isolation puts older adults at greater risk of early mortality, dementia, suicide and cognitive decline
- individuals are at greater risk of developing low self-esteem, depression and loneliness

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## Societal impacts of social isolation

- increased use of health and social care services, higher number of emergency admissions and GP consultations, slower discharge from hospitals
- pressure on financial resources and health services
- deprives communities from their knowledge and experience, and the roles that they could play in communities and neighbourhoods
- 'healthy' older people are more likely to be volunteers and to provide informal care - this increases social connectedness and alleviates pressure on the health services

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## Risk factors for social isolation

- low income
- unemployment, redundancy, retirement
- not having digital skills
- families being globally distributed
- being widowed or divorced
- being in a caring role
- losing the ability to drive
- language barriers
- insufficient access to resources (information, transport)

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## Risk factors in Milton Keynes

- rapidly ageing population
- diverse and growing population of BAME groups
- pace of development in MK
- crucial ongoing transport issues
- neighbourhood changes - commuter town, short-term occupancy
- built environment - centre, housing estates, satellite villages

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## Challenges for the community

- identifying older people who may be vulnerable
- communicating information about local support and initiatives
- diverse age range, needs and preferences – from 55 years to 90+
- paying attention to events in the lives of older people in communities without 'intruding'
- constant change in the funding regime – effects on local libraries, transport, continuity of the initiatives

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## Challenges for older people

- preparing for one's future – by building and nurturing a 'personal convoy'
- being willing to be helped by others
- being open to new connections and friendships
- being open to new services and interests – e.g. getting online
- awareness of local initiatives and support groups

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## Possible solutions

- **One-to-one interventions**
  - visits by community home visitors
  - regular phone conversations
  - visits by neighbours – e.g. Casserole Club
- **Group interventions**
  - e.g. Men in sheds, lunch clubs, coffee mornings
  - inter-generational initiatives – e.g. learning to be online
  - e.g. walking groups, local history society
- **Wider community and neighbourhood interventions**
  - encouraging older people to be volunteers
  - co-design the programmes with older people - e.g. neighbourhood watch programmes
  - age-friendly design of spaces – local neighbourhoods, city centre

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## What could be done in Milton Keynes?

- What are our priorities? (for quick and effective results)
- designing age-friendly neighbourhoods and city-spaces (following the example from Manchester)?
- better utilisation of community spaces – libraries, city centre?
- how could we take help from corporates?

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## What can I (or we) do?

- To reflect and think about our individual roles and how we could help?

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