Local Trust
trusting
local
people

A community response to loneliness

A HANDBOOK OF TIPS, ACTIVITIES AND INSPIRATION

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

WHY COMMUNITIES HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY

Social connections are the fabric of our communities. They enable all those day-to-day interactions that provide us with a sense of belonging. And they create the conditions for us to do the things we enjoy and that matter to us most.

Community groups, like the 150 Big Local partnerships located around England, have an important role to play in creating positive communities where social connections can thrive and loneliness and social isolation can be identified and reduced.

Big Local partnerships are already doing lots in their communities to prevent and reduce loneliness and social isolation.

This handbook offers a unique insight into how community and resident groups can address loneliness themselves. It will:

- help to define loneliness and social isolation and examine the impact on individuals and communities

- describe some of the causes (risk factors) and the groups most likely to be affected

- explore key questions you might want to ask to strengthen your impact and reach in your community

- share ideas from Big Local areas and beyond

- give links to relevant organisations and resources.

The material in this handbook is taken from a Learning Cluster for Big Local partnerships, facilitated by freelance evaluation specialists Claire Turner and Sarah Frost, which ran from January 2020 to April 2021. The Cluster comprised eight sessions covering topics ranging from engagement and outreach to intergenerational community connections. It also provided an opportunity for Big Local partnerships to connect with each other and others working in the field to learn and share ideas. Many of these ideas are covered in this handbook.

About Big Local

Big Local is a resident-led funding programme providing people in 150 areas in England with £1.15m each to spend across 10 – 15 years, to create lasting change in their neighbourhoods.

SECTION 1

WHAT IS LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION?

What is loneliness and social isolation?

We all feel lonely sometimes, even if we have lots of social connections. Loneliness is that empty, negative feeling where we yearn for companionship that seems unavailable or out of reach.

Loneliness for social neuroscientist Professor John Cacioppo is a biological trigger, telling us to seek company in the same way that hunger tells us to eat. Ultimately, we are all social creatures. Seeking the company of others protects us from isolation and is vital for our long-term wellbeing.

> **Loneliness can be defined as a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have and those that we want.**
>
> **Perlman and Peplau, 1981[1]**
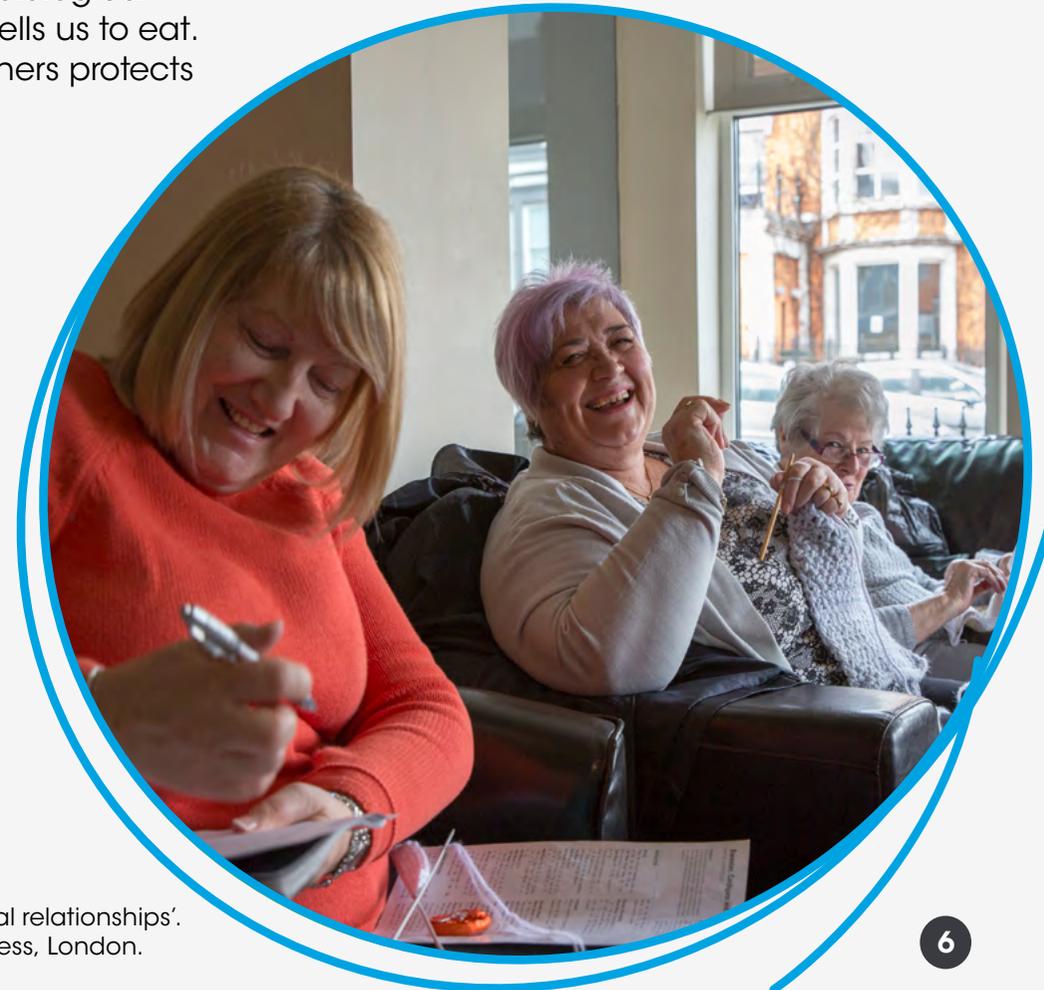
[1] Perlman, D. and Peplau, L. (1981). 'Toward a social psychology of loneliness: personal relationships'. In R. Duck and R. Gilmour, *Personal relationships in disorder*, pp. 32-56. Academic Press, London.

TYPES OF LONELINESS

Everyone's experience of loneliness will be different. For some of us, loneliness is a temporary, transient feeling that comes and goes and is felt more strongly in certain situations or at certain times – perhaps at weekends, in the evenings or at special times of year. But loneliness can also be chronic and ongoing, where we feel lonely all or most of the time.

Broadly, there are three types of loneliness.[2] We may experience different types at the same time.

Community activities usually focus on social loneliness. However, on their own, social activities will not help people experiencing emotional loneliness because they cannot replace the significant person who is missing. People who are emotionally lonely may also benefit from one-to-one support – either through befriending or through talking to people in a similar situation, such as those who have been bereaved or had a relationship break down.

Find out more at: Campaign to end loneliness

Emotional loneliness

The absence of a significant person or meaningful relationship such as a partner or close friend. Sometimes referred to as 'loneliness of the heart', emotional loneliness means we can feel lonely even when we're in a crowd.

Social loneliness

The lack of a wider social network of friends, neighbours, or colleagues. "I see the same people on the street everyday but no one stops to say hello."

Existential loneliness

When we feel entirely separate from other people and have a sense that "Nobody would care if I were here or not".

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION?

Loneliness is not the same as being alone, and loneliness differs from social isolation. Where loneliness is a subjective feeling about how we perceive the quality of our relationships, social isolation can be measured objectively by looking at the number and quality of social contacts we have with individuals, groups and the community.

We may seek solitude and live happily with little contact with other people. Equally, we may have lots of social connections and people around us but still feel lonely.

> **" Loneliness describes the pain of being alone, while solitude describes the joy of being alone. "**

WHO EXPERIENCES LONELINESS?

Most of us will experience loneliness at some point in our lives. Around half (45%) of adults in England say they feel lonely occasionally, sometimes or often, with 1 in 20 saying they feel lonely 'often or always'.[3]

Many more people in your local area may be experiencing loneliness than you assume, and they may not be just 'the usual suspects'. Groups and individuals who are at greater risk of experiencing loneliness include people with disabilities and mental health problems, single parents, people from Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, young people and older people.

3 www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/
lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10

YOUNG PEOPLE

Many young people report feeling lonely. One survey found that 88% of Britons aged 18 to 24 experienced loneliness to some degree and another[4] found that 32% of 16 to 24-year-olds were lonely 'often or always'.[5]

Research by the Co-op Foundation found that young people feel lonely more than any other age group, although this is often a hidden problem as few young people feel confident talking about their feelings of loneliness. Risk factors for young people include difficult life situations and a lack of skills to cope with them, weak social networks and high expectations of those networks.

Find out more at:

Tackling youth loneliness and Lonely not alone

OLDER PEOPLE

The number of over-50s experiencing loneliness is increasing and expected to reach two million by 2026. The number of older people living alone is also growing; over half (59%) of those aged over 85 and 38% of those aged 75 to 84 live alone. Two-fifths of all older people say the television is their main company and half a million older people go at least five or six days a week without seeing or speaking to anyone.[6]

Find out more at:

The cares family and Age UK

[4] The Co-op with the British Red Cross (2016). *Trapped in a bubble: an investigation into triggers for loneliness.*
[5] https://assets.ctfassets.net/eua7b5q6or8q/1pcX29wfVuOoouCGWkyqoc/4cce48d22c4a9ce7d7ef69318f90a91a/Co-op_foundation_youth_loneliness_report.pdf
[6] www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/the-facts-on-loneliness

CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS

Loneliness can have many different causes and can be triggered by many different factors, which vary from person to person. These can be at the individual level, connected to personal circumstances, or at the community or wider societal level.[7] Understanding these factors will help you identify those at risk in your community.

1 INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Our circumstances, experiences and personality may make us more vulnerable to loneliness. We may be more likely to experience loneliness if we:

- are widowed or divorced
- live alone
- are a single parent/carer
- live in residential care
- have poor health and/or a long-term illness or disability
- have a mental health problem
- are in certain age groups (older and younger people)
- are living in poverty or on a low income

- have experienced sexual or physical abuse (and find it hard to form close relationships with other people)
- are aged 75 or over
- are from a BME community and live in an area without others from a similar background
- are LGBTQ+
- are a woman (women report feeling lonely more frequently than men).

For some people, life changes or transitions, such as bereavement, divorce or relationship breakdown, moving to a new area, retirement, changing jobs, starting university, becoming a carer or giving up caring, can lead to loneliness.

2 COMMUNITY LEVEL

Loneliness can relate to physical barriers in the environment. For example, lack of transport can prevent people building and maintaining social connections.

A lack of green and public spaces to meet in or local groups to join can mean there are limited opportunities to socialise and connect with others. If we live in areas with high levels of deprivation and where crime is an issue, fear of going out can lead to loneliness.

3 SOCIETAL LEVEL

Financial and other inequalities may mean people are more likely to feel lonely. They may be unable to access social activities or take part in paid-for activities due to financial constraints. They may feel excluded from activities due to a disability, long-term health problem, their gender, race or sexual orientation.

People from BME backgrounds have been found to be more at risk of experiencing discrimination, bullying and disrespect which are triggers for loneliness; barriers to accessing support here may include lack of confidence, lack of free time and affordability.[8]
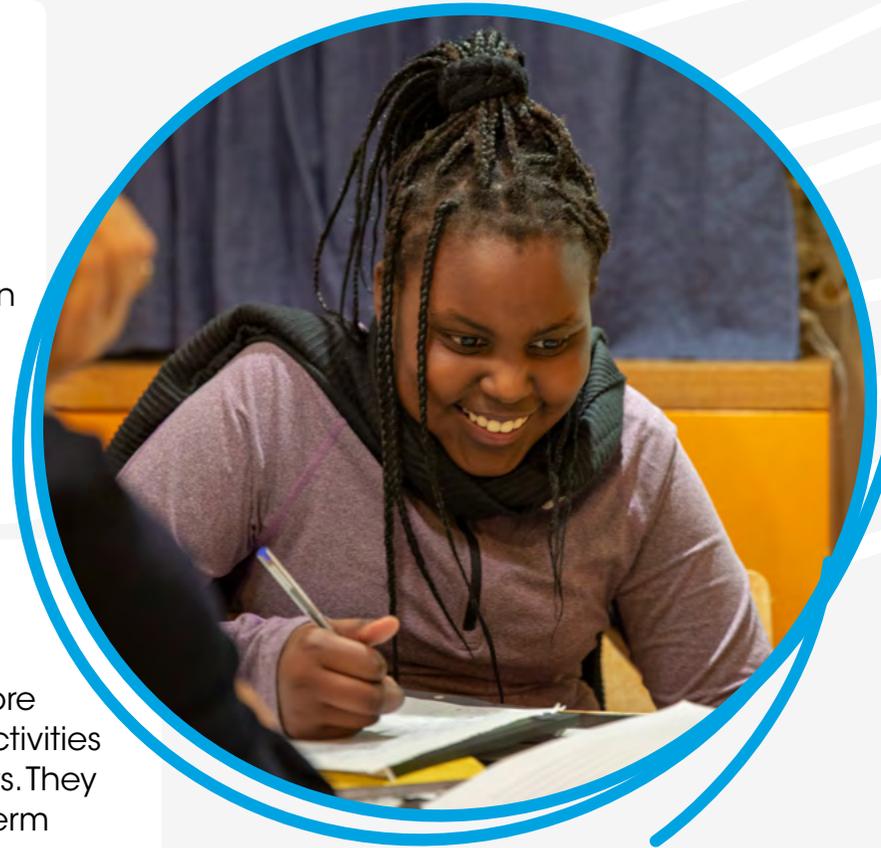
[8] www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/barriers-to-belonging#Key%20findings

THE IMPACT OF LONELINESS ON INDIVIDUALS

Loneliness and social isolation are damaging to individuals and communities. At the individual level, loneliness and a lack of social connections can impact our mental and physical health,[9] wellbeing, relationships and employment. It can also affect how we view and experience our community.

LONELINESS AND HEALTH

Having few social connections has a significant impact on health, increasing the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke and premature death. It has a worse health impact than obesity and a similar effect to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Loneliness weakens our willpower and makes it harder for us to control our habits and behaviour. In more serious cases, it can lead to drug and alcohol abuse. Lonely people are less likely to eat well, more likely to be overweight, are at greater risk of dementia and more prone to depression. Low levels of social interaction are also linked to bulimia and are predictive of suicide in older age.[10]

If we are lonely and isolated, we are more likely to:

• be inactive, eat less well and be overweight

• develop harmful habits such as smoking or drug/alcohol problems

• have difficulty sleeping and experience poor sleep quality

• have low self-esteem and limited coping mechanisms

• have more exposure to stress

• withdraw from engaging with others and be less likely to seek emotional support.

9   www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/threat-to-health/

10 www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_lonely_society_report.pdf

THE IMPACT OF LONELINESS ON THE WIDER COMMUNITY

As well as having a significant impact on our individual health, loneliness is a huge public health concern, presenting a greater risk to population health than all the risks associated with obesity, physical inactivity, and air pollution.

People who are lonely tend to use more health and social care services. They visit their GP more often, and they are more likely to have an emergency admission to hospital, readmission to hospital and to enter institutional care.

Research by Eden Project Communities found that social isolation and disconnected communities could cost the UK economy £32bn every year due to demand on services such as health and policing and loss of productivity. Conversely, neighbourliness resulted in significant economic benefits to the UK, with a total annual saving of £23.8bn.

Social relationships and networks promote health and wellbeing through:

- giving individuals a sense of belonging and identity

- sharing knowledge on accessing health and support services

- influencing behaviour through positive support to exercise, stop smoking, reduce alcohol intake and access support when needed

- offering social support with work pressures and life changes such as becoming a new parent, bereavement and retirement.

Find out more at:
What works wellbeing

13

SECTION 2

HOW COMMUNITIES CAN HELP

This section aims to give you some practical ideas on how to improve social connections in your community and provides some examples and links to useful resources.

KEY QUESTIONS

Many Big Local partnerships are actively working to prevent and reduce loneliness and social isolation in their communities. These are the sorts of questions they have found helpful when planning their activities:

a) How is loneliness and social isolation experienced in the community? Who is most at risk?

b) How do we identify and reach out to people at risk?

c) How do we put social connection at the heart of everything we do?

d) How do we ensure that our social activities are inclusive and accessible to all?

e) How do we reduce stigma and make loneliness everyone's business?

f) How will we know that we have prevented and reduced loneliness?

KEEP, STOP, START

A simple framework for reviewing and planning activities in your community. It could be helpful to consider the following questions:

WHAT SHOULD WE KEEP DOING?

WHAT SHOULD WE STOP DOING?

WHAT SHOULD WE START DOING?

Whatever you plan to do, here are some important things to consider:

BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR PURPOSE

Is it mainly to address social loneliness rather than emotional loneliness, or do you want to do both? These usually need a very different approach. Are you trying to prevent or to reduce loneliness or, again, do you want to do both?

MAKE EVERY CONNECTION AND CONVERSATION COUNT

This is something we can all do all the time. Build in time for people to connect at all your community activities. For example, if you are running an exercise class, schedule in time for a cuppa and a chat afterwards.

WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO HELP?

You may want to target a particular group who you feel is most at risk. Or you might want to increase social connections across your whole community through inclusive activities open to all.

INCLUDE EVERYONE

Whether you are targeting your social activities on a particular group or opening them up to everyone, it's important to think about inclusion. Make it easy for people to get involved. Think about different people's needs and ensure activities are accessible to as many people as possible. Remember that you may create unintended barriers to involvement through how you publicise activities. Online advertising, for example, will not reach everyone, and some venues may be inaccessible or inappropriate for your potential audience.

Be More Us

The Campaign to End Loneliness's project, Be More Us, focuses on making time for chance meetings and conversations. We all know that these everyday encounters can help people feel they belong to their communities.

Find out more at: Be more us

The Relationships Project

The Relationships Project believes that when relationships are nurtured, valued and prioritised, people are happier and healthier, businesses are more successful, and communities are stronger and more resilient. Its mission is to make it easier for every organisation, service and place to put relationships at the heart of what they do. They produce evidence and practical tools to help with this.

Find out more at: Relationships project

PRACTICAL IDEAS

In this section you will find some ideas and examples of things Big Local partnerships have been doing to prevent and reduce loneliness.

IDENTIFY PEOPLE WHO MAY BE LONELY OR ISOLATED

The stigma around loneliness can make it difficult to find the people you want to reach. The following ideas could be helpful for your community:

- **Recruit community connectors:** In most communities, there are people who are particularly well known and trusted. These could be people with a particularly strong local profile and network, perhaps GPs, hairdressers, shopkeepers or postal workers. Find ways of supporting your 'community connectors' to reach out to local residents who are most at risk of loneliness.

- **Be positive and optimistic:** Avoid negative language in your communications. Who wants to come to a Loneliness Club?!

- **Use creative publicity:** Find different ways to draw people in, such as offering refreshments. Think about the people you want to reach and understand how they might receive information. Posters and social media are a great start, but lots of information is still shared through word of mouth.

- **Don't forget one-to-one contact:** Some people face greater practical and emotional barriers to participating in group activities. It's not just about offering activities that people are physically able to do; many people need to be in the right 'headspace' to socialise. One-to-one interventions, like befriending or buddying schemes, can be helpful here, especially if the aim is to help people access social activities rather than making the befriending a goal in itself.

Find out more at: Befriending

> **"** We wanted to reach the most socially isolated people who are rarely seen… We hope it's going to influence the Borough-wide strategy on older people. People over 65 are struggling and we're determined to do something about that **"**
>
> **Polly, Wick Award**

Wick Award Big Local
COMMUNITY RESEARCH

The Wick Wise project was established by the Big Local partnership in London's Hackney Wick to train and support older residents to identify and reduce loneliness in their community. These volunteers interview people about local issues in their own homes and in community spaces and involve local experts. This research informs what happens locally and provides an opportunity to introduce older people to local projects and activities.

Find out more at: Wick Award

East Coseley Big Local

POM-POMS 4 LONELINESS

This creative project has given people in East Coseley something to talk about and made them smile! As part of the Just Start Talking project, people from across the community have made pom-poms and 'pom-bombed' the local area. Not only have the pom-poms been a conversation starter but they have also raised awareness of loneliness and isolation locally, encouraging people to talk and take action.

Find out more at: Pompoms for loneliness and Twitter

CONNECT AROUND SHARED INTERESTS

Activities that focus on shared interests and hobbies have much more chance of strengthening social bonds than those that simply focus on reducing loneliness. Shared interests are more likely to involve social contact continuing outside any Big Local event, helping people build and sustain relationships that go on to have a life of their own. Some types of activity have been found to have a particularly positive impact on wellbeing:

- Body-based activities such as singing and dancing encourage feelings of togetherness.
- Engaging with nature and green spaces helps us feel connected to something bigger than ourselves.

These types of activities, alongside the use of outdoor space such as parks, are an important part of a community response to loneliness.

“ The initiative works on so many levels. For those who feel like they are contributing to their community through making pom-poms, those who enjoy getting out and about through 'pom-bombing', and then for each person who finds one. **”**

Shona, East Coseley Big Local

20

Ramsey Million Big Local

THE DOGS MEET COMMUNITY CAFE

The idea for this dog-friendly community café came from people attending an employability and training project for the long-term unemployed run by Ramsey Neighbourhood Trust. The project was keen to get more people involved, particularly those with mental health issues, and thought it might be easier if people could bring along their dogs. This has proved to be the case! Dogs provide a fantastic talking point, a way into a conversation.

Hosted in a local cricket club, The Dogs Meet café trains volunteers in supporting customers and in animal first aid. A volunteer who is confident in dealing with dogs is always on duty.

Find out more at: The Dogs Meet café

> **"** The Dogs Meet cafe has been so important to me since I was widowed, I can go along with my dog and chat to like-minded people. My dog knows when it's Tuesday, he's all ready to leave the house to go the dog café! **"**

Activity

STEP INTO THE CIRCLE IF...

This activity can be a good icebreaker, a way to connect people with similar experiences or skills – or just to find things in common!

- **Invite participants** to stand in a circle.

- **Read out a series of statements** beginning "Step into the circle if…" (eg you like chocolate, you wear glasses, you enjoy time alone sometimes, you have children at X school, you love gardening).

- **Invite participants to step into the circle** if they think the statement applies to them. They can choose to move closer to or further from the centre depending on how true the statement is for them.

- **Once they have stepped in**, invite them to look around to see who has also stepped in and to make a mental note of people **they might want to connect with** later.

- Invite your participants to **step out of the circle**.

- **Read out your next statement**. (Once people have the idea, you can invite others in the circle to make their own statements.)

ACTIVITIES THAT HELP PEOPLE FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE

Focus on valuing people, rather than solving their problems. Volunteering can give people meaning and purpose, reducing loneliness while improving the wellbeing of both volunteers and the people they support.

Look carefully at people's skills, knowledge and experience, rather than the support they might need. Most of us like to think of ourselves as givers, rather than receivers, of help. Skills-sharing sessions encourage people to identify things they want to teach or share and things they want to learn. This not only helps get things done, but also helps people build new connections and relationships.

Mablethorpe, Trusthorpe and Sutton-on-Sea Big Local
MEN'S SHED

Mablethorpe Men's Shed encourages men to get together to socialise, learn new skills, work on practical projects and have fun. Some of the wooden craft items created, including those built to order for local businesses, are sold to help fund the project. The aim is to create a welcoming place where working together makes it easier for men to discuss emotional issues and helps reduce loneliness and social isolation.

Find out more at: Mens Shed

> " The Men's Shed was set up because we realised men on their own didn't really have access to hobbies and contacts socially. It has been a fantastic success and has become a great part of the community. "
>
> **Valerie, Mablethorpe Big Local**

Activity

SKILLS-SHARING

- **Invite people** to take two post-it notes.

- On one, ask them to **write their name** and **one thing they'd like to learn**.

- **On the other**, ask them to write their name and **one thing they'd like to teach or share**.

- **Invite everyone** to stick their post-its under 'teach' and 'learn' headings on the wall for all to see.

- Try to **find skills that match**.

Activity

HEAD, HEART AND HANDS

Invite all participants to work in pairs. Ask one person to draw a stick person on a piece of paper, then ask their partner to write or draw their own strengths and skills relating to the head, heart and hands of the sketch:

- **Head: knowledge**, eg local history

- **Heart: things they care about,** eg litter, the environment

- **Hands: practical skills**, eg gardening, bike maintenance, woodwork, DIY

BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Events at street, neighbourhood or community level can be a good way to encourage a sense of belonging. But often the difficulty is sustaining the connections made beyond one-off conversations on the day.

A key factor in the success of many Big Local partnerships has been to ensure that events are genuinely open to everyone in the community. So think about who is usually missing from your events. Who should you make a special effort to include? The way you describe an event is very important; for example, those without children may think that a 'family fun day' is not aimed at them.

More structured and active community involvement can be a great way to connect people. Coming together to solve a shared problem or to speak out about a shared issue (sometimes called an 'asset-based approach to community development') can create social cohesion and strengthen our communities.

The places and spaces where we come together to connect, both formally and informally, are also important. Make good use of your 'ordinary' spaces, such as cafes and parks, to widen your reach.

Find out more at: Connection Coalition

The Friendly Bench™

The Friendly Bench™ aims to tackle loneliness, social isolation and build cohesion using purpose-built outdoor social spaces that reconnect people back to their own community. These are places for people to meet, chat, connect with nature, participate in community-led activities, and build friendships and a sense of belonging. The project's benches include safe, accessible mini-community gardens, integrated seating and sensory planting. Each Friendly Bench is independently managed, funded and run by its own voluntary group.

Find out more at: The Friendly Bench

The Big Lunch

The Big Lunch celebrates community connections, gives thanks to neighbours and communities, and enables people to get to know each other a little better. Promoted by the Eden Project, [11] it takes place annually on the first weekend in June. Events can be big or small – the main thing is that people come together for food, friendship and fun. Anyone can organise a Big Lunch and there are free resource packs to help.

Find out more at: The Big Lunch

LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

A learning conversation aims to find connections between the skills and passions of each individual and the needs of the wider community. In pairs, invite people to talk around the following questions:

- What would you love to do if three of your neighbours were willing to help?
- What do you care about enough to take action in your community?
- What skills, gifts and passions could you tap into to help make this happen in your neighbourhood or community?

Adapted from ABCD Toolkit

TRANSITIONS AND LIFE EVENTS

We know that transitions, life events and certain times of the year can be triggers for loneliness. Anticipating the need for support and intervening early can help people cope at these times and help prevent loneliness and social isolation. Sharing experiences through group-based activities can also provide a forum for mutual support.

Apples and Honey Nightingale

Apples and Honey Nightingale, a children's nursey located on the same site as a care home for older people, is an example of how the design of buildings and outdoor space can bring different generations together. The children and adults share gardens and there's a children's playground, open to the wider public, on site. All this enables regular social interaction between the generations, such as children putting on shows for care home residents.

Find out more at:
Apples and Honey Nightingale

INTERGENERATIONAL APPROACHES

It is important to think about people across the life course when planning and delivering activities. We know that young people and older people experience loneliness but we must also not forget those in midlife.

Of course, it may sometimes make sense to target social activities at a particular age group. But there is evidence that deliberately bringing different ages together can be extremely positive, improving social connections through sharing spaces, skills and experience throughout the community. Young people can help older people get online and adult volunteers can help children read in schools, for example.

Find out more at: United for all ages

Grace Mary to Lion Farm Big Local
BIG LOCAL LITTLE VOICES

Big Local Little Voices brings together young people aged eight to 16 who wouldn't usually spend time with each other to work alongside adults in the Big Local partnership. The aim is to break down barriers between young people in the community and adults working and volunteering for Big Local. Young people have formed new relationships and a sense of self-worth through the project and have contributed much to the area. They have also set up their own enterprise business printing Big Local Little Voices merchandise.

Find out more at: Big Local Little Voices

Youth Focus: North East (funded by the Co-op Foundation)

For some young people, the big days of the year, like national holidays, and Mother's Day, trigger and increase feelings of loneliness. Youth Focus: North East has focused on these moments as a way of raising awareness and supporting conversations about loneliness.

For example, they held an alternative prom for those who missed out on their own school prom because they didn't fit in, had no one to go with or were not allowed to go. The young people were loaned dresses and suits free of charge and volunteers helped with hair and make-up.

Find out more at: Youth Focus NE

> **❝ BLLV is one of the most significant community outcomes to emerge from our Big Local, providing hope and confidence for our young people now and for the whole community in future years. ❞**
>
> **Helen, Grace Mary to Lion Farm Big Local**

29

RECOVERY AND RECONNECTION: LEARNING FROM COVID-19

We know that COVID-19 has exacerbated inequalities and risk factors for loneliness and social isolation. It has also affected the way communities have been able to respond. But there have been positive outcomes. There has been a huge amount of community activity in response to the pandemic; it seemed to give us 'permission' to reach out to our neighbours to offer support.

Although there remains a digital divide, digital technology has also played its part in helping people stay connected. As we move towards recovery, it will be important to learn from our communities' responses to loneliness and social isolation and look at how we can sustain the positive ways of working.

- As restrictions ease, there may be some digital or online activities that you want to keep. A blended approach – online and face to face – could help people who find it difficult to get out and about in the evenings or in bad weather to connect, for example.

- Many people will be desperate to reconnect face to face; others will be more reluctant and will need more time and support to make that transition. It is important to acknowledge the psychological impact of the pandemic and address any anxieties and concerns.

- Some people will feel more lonely and isolated because of the pandemic and there may be groups in the community who feel disconnected. Avoid making assumptions about who is lonely and who is not.

- We saw a surge of volunteers at the beginning of the pandemic. As these members of the community return to their 'new normal', we will need creative ways to recruit and retain volunteers. Flexibility will be important, as will removing any practical, financial and emotional barriers to volunteering.

Wick Award Big Local

COMMUNITY LUNCH

During lockdown restrictions, Wick Award Big Local partnership changed their communal community meals to a lunch delivery service. Volunteers delivered the meals to people who were socially isolated and chatted to them on the doorstep, providing a much-needed sense of continuity. As they head through recovery, most people are planning to return to face-to-face activities and volunteers are offering support, particularly to those who are cautious about venturing out.

Find out more at: Wick Award

> **❝ People were totally isolated and hadn't seen others for a long time. Delivering the community lunches to their doorsteps really provided a sense of connection. ❞**
>
> **Polly, Wick Award**

> **"** We have acquired a large amount of volunteers who have stayed on… and great friendships have been formed. **"**
>
> **Sue**
> **Brereton Big Local**

Brereton Million Big Local

COVID-19 SUPPORT GROUP

While the pandemic has brought many challenges, it has also brought some communities closer together. The approach taken in by Brereton Million Big Local was to try to find people who needed support, which they did street by street. They set up a COVID-19 support group with a coordinator.

Alongside this, they have grown numerous sub-groups – food, crafts, mental health support, phone buddies and gardening – all with their own volunteer co-ordinator.

With a strengthened organisation and wider network of support and activities, Brereton will continue to help people stay connected.

Find out more at: Brereton Million

Devonshire West Big Local

SUPPORT AND SOUP

From late March 2020, for 102 days, Community Stuff cooked delicious homemade soup and delivered it to vulnerable local residents five days a week. The project was about more than soup; it was an opportunity for people to connect and to show those who were isolated that they were valued members of the community. Delivery drivers had regular socially distanced chats with residents, who also received an activity pack each week and extra treats on bank holidays and special occasions. Volunteers also delivered books, jigsaw puzzles, wool and other food items.

Thirty volunteers made this innovative Eastbourne-wide project possible, along with funding from Devonshire West Big Local, Sussex Community Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund.

Find out more at: Community Stuff

> **"** I think the Soup and Support project was godsent. It was so good, so great to know that people outside cared and were actually bringing food and support to our doorsteps. **"**
>
> **Devonshire West community member**

SECTION 3

USEFUL RESOURCES

Here are some additional resources you might find helpful in your community response to loneliness and social isolation.

REPORT/RESOURCE

- Joplin, K. (2020). *Promising approaches revisited: effective action on loneliness in later life*. Campaign to End Loneliness and Age UK.
- *The missing millions: a practical guide to identifying and talking about loneliness*. Campaign to End Loneliness.
- *Loneliness resource pack*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013.
- *Growing together: a guide to intergenerational learning activities*. Yellow Door.
- *Top tips for engaging your community*. Locality, 2020.
- *How to measure loneliness*. Campaign to End Loneliness, 2014.
- *Helping out: taking an inclusive approach to engaging older volunteers*. Ageing Better, 2020.

During the cluster we had input from several experts who shared insight on a number of related topics. We are grateful to the following contributors who have given permission for their input to be shared in this toolkit:

Laura Alcock Ferguson	Co-founder of the Campaign to End Loneliness
Tracey Robbins	Eden Project Communities
David Robinson	The Relationships Project
Ingrid Abreu Scherer	What Works Centre for Well-being
Ella Smyth	The Co-op Foundation
Meena Bharadwa	Locality
Stephen Burke	United for All Ages

JUST THE BEGINNING

This handbook is designed to help you draw attention to the things that matter to you, in your community. Whether you're looking at local issues or national campaigns, remember that using your voice and using your community's power can make a lasting difference.

If you've found this handbook useful, share it with someone else who might too!

SHARE IT

About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places where they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources and decision-making into the hands of local communities, to enable them to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live. We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long-term, unconditional, resident-led funding through our work supporting local communities make their areas better places to live, and to draw on the learning from our work to promote a wider transformation in the way policymakers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

localtrust.org.uk

🐦 @LocalTrust

Authors: Claire Turner and Sarah Frost

Local Trust

COMMUNITY FUND