healthwatch
Gloucestershire

Let's talk about social isolation and loneliness in Gloucestershire.

What does it mean to you?

What makes a difference?

What more could be done to help?

September 2021

About us

Healthwatch Gloucestershire is the county's health and social care champion. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care. This summary report and the full report are examples of how we share your feedback.

Background
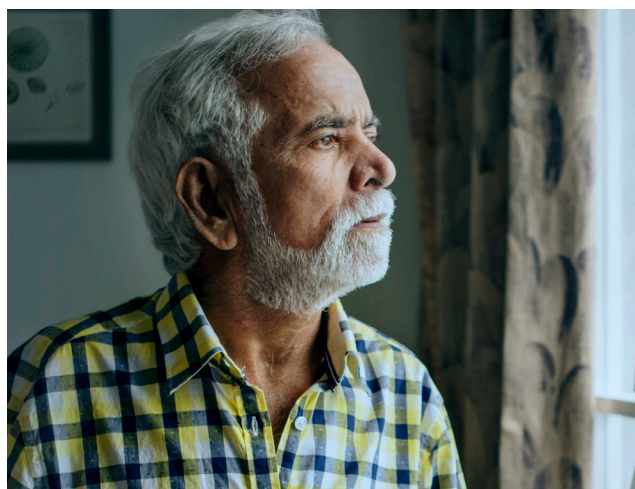
"Widespread research highlights the detrimental effect of loneliness on our health, even suggesting that loneliness increases our risk of death by 26%."[1]

Gloucestershire's Health and Wellbeing Board has identified social isolation as an area that needs attention, so we sought to understand what social isolation and loneliness means for people living in Gloucestershire.

[1] https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/the-facts-on-loneliness/

Our *Living with a long-term health condition in Covid-19* report (Dec 2020) highlighted the impact of isolation in the context of Covid-19, so we took a deeper dive into social isolation and loneliness and published our findings in our full report *Let's talk about social isolation and loneliness*.[2]

While often used interchangeably, social isolation and loneliness have different definitions. Someone who is socially isolated has few or no social contacts and this may be through choice or through circumstance. Loneliness describes the gap between the social contact someone wants, and the social contact they actually experience. While not everyone who is isolated is lonely, it is common for someone who is socially isolated to experience loneliness.

What we did

We asked people to tell us their views and experiences of social isolation and loneliness via an online survey, over the phone or through a creative response. We analysed their feedback and identified key themes. We also identified organisations and initiatives from across the country that are working in the voluntary and community services sector and the wider integrated care system to tackle loneliness and social isolation.

We have shared our findings with Gloucestershire's NHS and social care commissioners and service providers, to inform and influence their work tackling loneliness and social isolation in the county.

Key messages

- Most people told us that they were lonely almost all of the time, frequently or sometimes.

- We identified the Covid-19 pandemic, being single, widowed or divorced, and/or having a long-term health condition, as key factors of loneliness.

- Most respondents said there aren't any opportunities to meet new people in their local area, however, many identified that there are already groups that offer the chance to connect with others. Some people highlighted issues in attending these groups including accessibility, poor transport, and a lack of groups outside of working hours.

- Some respondents identified problems with their housing providers and inadequate financial support as causes of isolation and/or loneliness.

- Many people told us they were dissatisfied with their current relationships, and some told us they have no friends in Gloucestershire (yet have friends elsewhere).

- Many people expressed that they would find it difficult to ask for help, with some identifying the cause as feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed.

[2] https://www.healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/HWG-Social-Isolation-Full-Report-Final.r.pdf (Sept 2021)

Survey responses

We heard from 52 people in total, including 46 people who responded to our survey. 60% of survey respondents (28 people) were aged 55+ and over, 78% (36 people) identified as female and 89% (41 people) were White British. People responded from a variety of areas within Gloucestershire.

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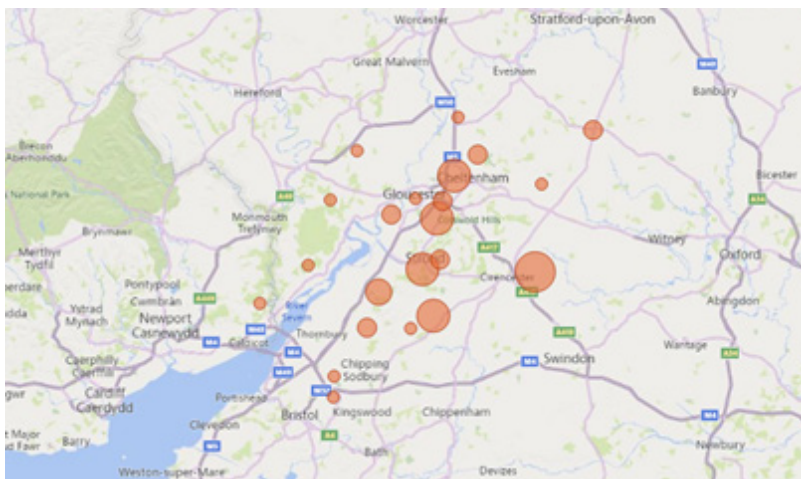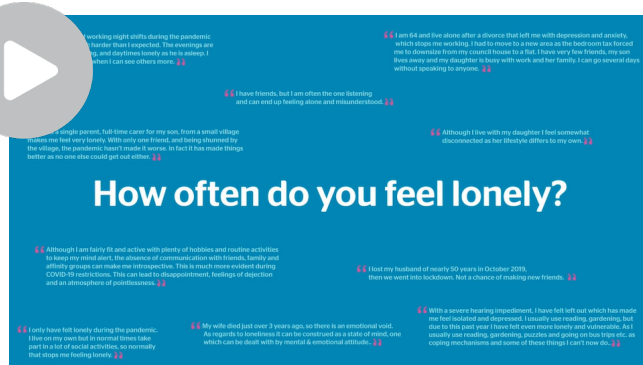

How often do you feel lonely?
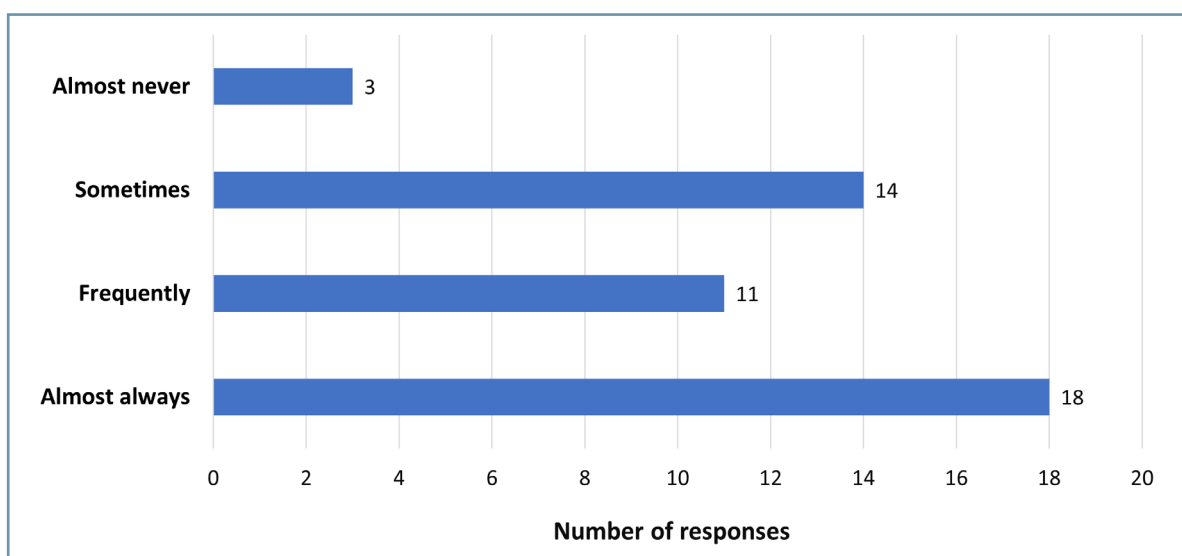
For full data analysis and demographics, see our full report.[3]

Tell us more...

"The pandemic has undoubtedly fractured society as well as paradoxically drawn those who were close, closer." | "I am 64 and live alone after a divorce that left me with depression and anxiety, which stops me working... I can go several days without speaking to anyone." | "I don't find life as a widow very easy."

Watch our video[4] to see some of the other comments that we received.

How often do you feel lonely?

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³ *Let's talk about social isolation and loneliness* (Sept 2021)
⁴ https://vimeo.com/542758873.

Considerations

We have identified some examples of initiatives happening across the country that are making a difference in their area. These may be effective in helping to tackle loneliness and social isolation in Gloucestershire.

The Portsmouth Playbook

The Portsmouth Playbook[5] is one of a series of playbook programmes designed to look at a place-based approach to health and social care matters in England.

This approach aims to prevent the harms of loneliness and social isolation in the community by strengthening existing structural integration opportunities.

Social Impact Bonds

Social Impact Bonds are a commissioning resource that bring together the public, voluntary and private sectors to tackle social challenges.

Reconnections in Worcestershire

In 2015, Age UK partnered with Social Finance to run Reconnections, a pilot scheme designed to help alleviate loneliness in the older population of Worcestershire. This pilot scheme was the first to use a Social Impact Bond in England to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

People Like Us

An extension of the Reconnections pilot, People Like Us (PLUS) operates in Worcestershire and offers person-centred support to adults aged 18 and over experiencing loneliness or isolation. They support clients in helping build their confidence and independence to access opportunities that help alleviate their loneliness.

Community Circles

Community Circles[6] connect people with their communities by building a support circle around the individual in need. While they are there for anyone who wants to make a change in their life, they are often used to support people experiencing disconnection and loneliness.

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRKKR3cLdws
[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuLCz8sRWN0&t=2s

Looking out for our neighbours

Looking out for our neighbours[7] is a social marketing campaign operating in West Yorkshire and Harrogate supported by the local NHS Health and Care partnership. The campaign helps people feel better in the areas they live by encouraging neighbourly gestures like calling round for a cup of tea to hosting community activities.

Together Network and Places of Welcome

Together Network operates within local churches and alongside local services to maintain community and enable social connections.

Places of Welcome[8] (an initiative within the Together Network) is a growing network of community groups providing people from all faiths with places to connect, contribute their skills and feel safe within their area.

Specific interest groups

Many people told us that they would like to see more social activity groups tailored toward specific interests.

The Glamour Club, Worthing, West Sussex

Defined as a 'great night out during the day' the bi-monthly Glamour Club[9] events run on Saturday afternoons and are priced at £10. Guests are greeted on arrival by a stilt-walking butler and are served afternoon tea by table hosts to a live entertainment soundtrack of classics from the 1940s-1970s.

Information

We also received responses suggesting that a place to find information on existing groups would be helpful. The VCS Alliance and Your Circle are useful directories in seeking support services. Establishing a specific directory for loneliness and/or social isolation support may be helpful.

Social Prescribing

Link workers provide a one-to-one service connecting individuals to statutory services and community groups for recommended support. They also provide support in forming new groups.

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[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoQGPXWu9p4
[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXOSTuzuo2c
[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnun24ukvkM&t=60s

Recommendations

We believe there isn't a 'one size fits all' approach to tackling social isolation and loneliness. Instead, we have shared a range of well supported initiatives happening nationwide that could be effective in Gloucestershire.

Each initiative could be effective on its own, but we suggest that a number of different approaches working alongside each other would be most effective, particularly as we have noted the lack of a coherent approach in Gloucestershire.

For more information

Read our full report[10] for a detailed analysis of survey responses, for more information about the organisations and sources referenced or used to develop our insight on loneliness and social isolation, and to see the response to our full report from NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group/One Gloucestershire.

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[10] *Let's talk about social isolation and loneliness* (Sept 2021)

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