

Submission to Loneliness Taskforce

This document is submitted by Ms. Deirdre McNally, social worker, and Ms. Geraldine Healy, senior medical social worker to the Loneliness Taskforce on 6th April 2018.

We are based in Bellvilla Community Unit and the Meath Community Unit respectively in Dublin 8 – services provided by the Community Units include longterm nursing home care, respite and Day Care Centres for older people.

We are also committee members of the Special Interest Group for Aging and Older People within the Irish Association of Social Workers.

Based on our professional social work practice and experiences of working with older people, we would like to outline our suggestions and proposals for consideration by the Loneliness Taskforce.

Thank you,

Deirdre and Geraldine

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Short term

On an individual level, it is important to acknowledge feelings of 'loneliness' - a universal feeling. A public awareness campaign, similar to *#littletings* mental health/Dementia '*understand together*'

campaigns, will provide wider society with an understanding of this issue, its impact on health and strategies/supports for people experiencing this. It's important to acknowledge loneliness – and explore often associated feelings of grief/loss - of spouse, family, friends, mobility and independence

Health and social care professionals (e.g. PHN/GP/SW/OT etc) can play an important role in enquiring about loneliness, acknowledging it and signposting to services/activities that may promote social engagement and thereby reduce feelings of loneliness.

Medium term

Day Centres: Development of additional Day Centres within communities/parishes (consider building on religious/school lands) which also provide well resourced staffing team and wheelchair accessible transport options for older people with mobility difficulties. Day Centres provide a range of services with benefits including social engagement, sense of belonging, health checkups, community information/safety forum e.g. talks from Community Garda

Develop relationships between existing community services and Older Person Services: between primary/secondary schools, existing Community Centres, scouts/guides, libraries etc. Programmes development will create greater opportunities for social engagement, learning etc

Develop programmes that utilise existing skill set of older people – e.g. assisting young people with reading skills and storytelling in local schools, playing musical instruments/singing in residential units

Befriending Services: greater campaigns to recruit and train people interested in volunteering. Also service to be available for some residents in LTC units who do not have any family/visitors.

Friendly telephone call service: greater campaign to recruit volunteers, with support/training available, to ring an older person at home to enquire about their day/week.

Greater resources for homehelp/homecare packages: while their focus is to provide personal and domestic care, their visits also provide social interaction and development of relationships.

Increased respite stay beds: reduce loneliness for older people & reduce pressure on families/carers which may then reduce carer stress/burnout with subsequent early/unplanned admissions to LTC

Greater efficiency with regards to Garda Vetting system: People are interested in volunteering their time/skills with older people but delays in Garda vetting/bureaucracy can lead to disinterest.

Use of assisted technology – training in Skype, provision of laptop/tablets with Facetime may create opportunities for engagement in rural areas and/or for people with mobility difficulties.

Long term

Housing options: Examples include smaller accommodation units with wheelchair accessibility within existing communities; shared accommodation/supported living accommodation – not longterm care; programmes that support house sharing e.g. for students, employees to live with older people