

# Cross Party Group on Older People and Ageing

3 February 2015, Conference Room 24, Tŷ Hywel

## Note of Meeting on Combating isolation and loneliness

Attendees	Apologies
Mike Hedges AM - CHAIR	David Fitzpatrick, Sustain Wales
Ryland Doyle Researcher Mike Hedges	Cathrin Manning, Red Cross
Jackie Radford AMSS Aled Roberts	Andi Lyden, Carers Trust
Iwan Williams, Older People's Commissioner's Office	Robyn Miles, UK Government Affairs & Policy, Glaxo Smith-Kline
Lynda Wallis, Vale 50+ Strategy Forum	Lorraine Morgan
Robin Moulster, BASW Cymru	Raja Adnan Ahmed, RCP
Marion Lowther, Contact the Elderly	John Davies, National Old Age Pensioners Association of Wales
Karyn Morris, RVS	
Manel Tippett, RCP	
Andrew Bell, SSIA	
Phyllis Preece, National Pensioners Convention	
Rebecca Thomas, Age Cymru Sir Gâr	
Andrew Bell, SSIA	
Angharad Thomas, Old Bell 3	
Sandra Roberts, VCVS	
Janet Pinder, Deafblind Cymru	
Phil Vining, Age Connects Cardiff	
Gerry Keighley, Age Cymru	
Laura Nott, Age Cymru - SECRETARY	

### Welcome and introductions

Mike Hedges AM welcomed everyone to the meeting and called out the apologies.

### Matters arising from previous meeting

There were no matters arising from previous minutes.

### Presentation by Rebecca Thomas, Age Cymru Sir Gâr

Rebecca Thomas gave an overview of the West Wales Befriending Scheme which is providing support for older people across Wales who are isolated and vulnerable. The scheme is taking place in Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Sir Gâr.

Since 2012, the Big Lottery put forward £20 million to tackle isolation and loneliness across Wales with 29 new schemes - 20 of these were befriending projects. The Welsh

Government publicly said that social isolation has been associated with higher risks of mortality, posing a similar risk to health such as smoking.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) define befriending as: 'A relationship between two or more individuals which is initiated, supported, and monitored by an agency that has defined one or more parties as likely to benefit. Ideally the relationship is non-judgmental, mutual, purposeful, and there is a commitment over time'. The JRF research concluded that whilst befriending is not a mechanism for 'tackling the root cause of disadvantage', it can 'ameliorate the worst aspects of isolation and exclusion from community participation' and can 'make a valued and valuable contribution to people's lives.'

Case study: 'Betty' was socially engaged with her community until her husband had a stroke, she then became a carer for her husband which left her socially isolated. She later had a stroke herself. The befriending project supported her to socially engage again with her community by providing a volunteer who got alongside 'Betty' and took her along to a local group where she could meet others each week and develop new interests, such as engaging with crafts and taking part in the LIFT seated exercise scheme. The impact this had on 'Betty' was to raise her confidence and improve her mental and physical wellbeing.

Early indications demonstrate that Befriending schemes are reducing the impact on existing services such as health and social care.

The West Wales Befriending Scheme has been funded for 5 years which allow staff and volunteers to establish relationships. The befriending schemes have an amazing number of volunteers which drive the project, clearly demonstrating that there is a value to these projects. Many of them are over 50, so the project acts as a preventative service for volunteers as well as beneficiaries.

Case study: 'Mrs Jones' struggled with nutritional needs - a volunteer provided her with support to get the best food. The scheme ensures that the right volunteers are partnered up with the right beneficiaries. By engaging as part of a group information on the local community services can be more easily disseminated.

More research needs to be done –

- befriending is simple but not simplistic
- volunteers are cost effective but not cheap
- It is very important to get the right volunteers to match the right people
- Befriending is helping older people make the most of later life, and these practical examples have demonstrated its making a significant impact.

## Questions

**Mike Hedges AM** – everyone moves once, but some people move into an entirely different area and then the children move away and then they themselves become vulnerable and isolated. A lady I met used to go to her local shop everyday as this was the only person she would speak to all day.

**Phyllis Preece** – people need to be educated, prevention is better than a cure. We need to be prepared for isolation and loneliness. I feel people like me are forgotten about. When my husband died suddenly, I hadn't prepared myself for the feeling of loneliness I had.

**Lynda Wallis** – within our forum we look at drinking and older people – linked to loneliness, at home alone. Some people don't speak to a sole for 3-4 days, if you don't get visited, you get forgotten.

**Janet Pinder** – a gentleman who has a 'girlfriend' in Nigeria is sending her lots of money – its vulnerability and social isolation.

**Lynda Wallis** – what happens after the Big Lottery funding stops?

**Janet Pinder** – some relationships will continue with volunteers

**Mike Hedges AM** – older people become vulnerable with scams as this might be there only chance to speak to someone.

**Sandra Roberts** – research shows that social isolation leads to depression, with people being 12 times more likely to die if there is no social circle. A recent report showed that 5-12% of older people are lonely, when in fact it is much higher than that, 39%, which is not published.

**Phil Vining** – the NHS spends a lot on diabetes – they should also be looking at costs of loneliness as a health factor.

**Mike Hedges AM** – too much money is spent on hospital rather than prevention

**Marion Lowther** – last year we did our own report on isolation which resulted in Glenda Jackson funding a project about social interaction and the importance of it.

**Robin Moulster** – there is a new piece of legislation, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, asking and answering questions such as, 'How do people get signposted early?' and 'How well are health services integrated?'

**Iwan Williams** – schemes such as 'Meals on Wheels' provide interaction with customers, but with a loss of transport and public services there is an ongoing concern that this service will soon be cut. The Ageing Well in Wales programme is focusing on 5 key areas, with isolation being one of the priorities, led by Sally Rivers. It's currently looking at intergenerational work, using Skype and living together to break down the barriers.

**Phyllis Preece** – strength is in numbers – we all need to take information back from this presentation to make a difference.

**Rebecca Thomas** – we all need to work together more. The Befriending Scheme is cost effective and now thanks to BIG lottery's investment we have 'up-skilled' staff and volunteers and we don't want to lose that expertise.

**Lynda Wallis** – we need to realise the importance of loneliness and isolation, with more money given to fund preventative schemes to save millions.

**Robin Moulster** - Local Authorities and Health Boards population needs assessment – they can't keep doing more of the same – what change can happen?

### **Recommendations / actions**

- Mike Hedges AM raises a Statement of Opinion about combating isolation and loneliness
- More publicity about the problem – especially in the South Wales Evening Post mentioning Mike
- Mike Hedges AM to hold a 30 minute short debate on isolation and loneliness on the 4 March. A briefing paper to be put together by Laura Nott and Rebecca Thomas.

### **Dates of next meeting**

13 May, 14 October 2015 and 10 February 2016