



THE SILVER LINE HELPLINE'S FIRST WEEK RECEIVES A DELUGE OF CALLS FROM LONELY OLDER PEOPLE

25 November - 1 December 2013

In the first week of the new national helpline for older people, The Silver Line, almost 8,000 calls were received from older people, 1,500 of them requesting regular befriending calls. As a result, at an event today in the BT Tower, the charity is asking for support so that they can continue to support isolated and vulnerable older people, especially over Christmas. The event is being sponsored by BT who are Founding Partners of The Silver Line Helpline.

It was the aim of The Silver Line's founder Esther Rantzen CBE and chief executive Sophie Andrews that the helpline would be launched nationally in time for Christmas 2013. During the pilot, Esther and Sophie spoke to 65 older people over Christmas 2012 who were utterly alone, many of them seeing or speaking to no one else over the so-called 'festive period'.

An independent evaluation by The Centre for Social Justice showed that during the pilot, the helpline has already succeeded in transforming lives. Joyce wrote, "My life has changed so much for the better. To know someone is always there is fantastic. Thank you for Silver Helpline. I have spoken to such lovely young ladies ... dear Esther, I cannot thank you enough for your kindness in arranging this. I am in my 67th years and no longer feel completely lonely."

Esther Rantzen said today "It is tragic that so many older people feel abandoned and deserted by the country which owes so much to them. The generation that lived through the Second World War, who brought up families and worked hard now desperately need our help to prove to them that they are still valued, and that they are not alone. But to pay for their calls we urgently need help from the public. We must be available 24 hours a day, every day, to ensure we are there for them when pangs of loneliness strike. And although we have received generous grants and donations from organisations such as The Big Lottery Fund and BT, they will only cover half our costs. We will need to raise another two million pounds to cover all the call we expect to receive during our first year.

The stigma of loneliness prevents many older people from seeking the help they need; The Silver Line is now available to everyone who can telephone – at any time - and will provide links to other services available locally under one simple, free, umbrella number 0800 4 70 80 90

Sophie Andrews, The Silver Line's CEO said "We are heartened by the number of people who are offering their help as volunteers, to become befrienders, our Silver Line Friends. We are arranging training for them as quickly as we can, because we know friendship is the most effective cure for loneliness and isolation.

Barbara, 85, is caring for her 87-year-old husband who has Alzheimer's disease. She said: "I know it isn't a crisis so I can't call the Samaritans but I just need to talk to someone about the way I feel."

Janet, 79, phoned to say: "I have just bought myself some new pyjamas. I am about to run a hot bath. I rang just because I wanted to say goodnight to someone."

One caller said that having telephone contact made him feel "part of the human race again". Another described her lonely life as feeling like "I have been shuffled under the carpet to be forgotten".

One old lady called from the toilet in a care home where the heating wasn't working and they hadn't been fed for hours. She was too frightened to give her name but did give the name of the home so the Silver Line was able to get help to her and other residents.

It is estimated that the helpline may receive up to one million calls this year and befriend up to 12,000 older people. The charity will meet the cost of calls but will rely on public support to do so.

- £5 will pay for a call with an older person who may not have spoken to another human being all week
- £50 will pay to recruit and train a volunteer to become a Silver Line Friend
- £100 will pay for one caller to be befriended for one year
- £250 will pay for one caller to be supported by the helpline and their own Silver Line Friend for one year

The Silver Line must raise more than £2 million a year over the next two years to cover the cost of phone calls and volunteer recruitment and training, to respond to all the older people needing the helpline, in addition to the Big Lottery Fund grant.

The Silver Line Helpline has been described as 'ChildLine for older people' and by many of its callers as 'a lifeline'. It will be there, every day and night of the year, to act as the safety net for those who are most lonely and isolated, and may be frightened and unsupported.

You can donate to The Silver Line

by phone, calling 020 7224 2747 during office hours or

by sending a cheque to "The Silver Line Helpline", Minerva House, 42 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2RY.

Online donations can be made via BT My Donate: www.mydonate.bt.com/charities/thesilverlinehelpline

Or text Silver10 to 70500 to give £10. If you'd rather give a different amount text Silver followed by the amount you want to give in whole pounds and without a £ sign, so £2 is Silver2

Branches of Barclays Bank will accept donations over the counter sort code 20-71-82: account 00974692

And anyone interested in becoming a Silver Line Friend or volunteer fundraiser can find details on our website www.thesilverline.org.uk or email volunteering@thesilverline.org.uk

For interviews and case studies contact:

Sarah Caplin, Director of Development and Communications, The Silver Line Helpline

Office: (020) 7224 2020 Direct Dial: (020) 7224 2729 Mobile: 07770 746471