



Shocking Survey reveals “Britain’s too busy to care about older people”

In a new survey launched today by The Silver Line, the helpline for older people, shocking figures reveal that 53,000 calls received in the first six months were from people living alone who said they have *absolutely nobody else they can talk to*. In a focus group of 100 callers to The Silver Line, one third said even their doctors were not easy to talk to. And more than two thirds said they are reluctant to ask their own families for help because they don’t want to be a “burden”. The Silver Line is open every day and night, and most calls to the helpline (78%) are received after 5 p.m. and over the weekends, when other services close. Many calls are made at night. Today The Silver Line is calling upon busy Britain, doctors, families, shopkeepers, carers, neighbours, to make time for our older people. And even if they are too busy themselves to listen to older people, to refer them to The Silver Line 0800 4 70 80 90, as the one free, confidential friendship line which is open 24/7.

- 100,000 calls to The Silver Line Helpline (since it was launched in November 2013) reveal that Britain is too busy to find time for older people
- Most callers to The Silver Line (89%) live alone and 53% say they have no one else *at all* to speak to other than The Silver Line
- 78% of callers ring after 5pm or at weekends when there is no other free or confidential helpline available to them - and these are their loneliest times

The Silver Line asked 100 of these callers to respond to a series of questions about the daily experiences of Britain’s loneliest older people. Loneliness is recognized as a serious threat to physical and mental health. And yet:

- Nearly half (48%) often spend more than a day without talking to anyone
- 11% often spend more than a week without talking to anyone
- 30% say that even their doctors are not easy to talk to
- 20% are not in touch with their families or have no family. Of the rest (80%) half only speak to their families once a week or less
- 68% are reluctant to ask for help because they don’t want to be a burden to others

Sophie Andrews Chief Executive of The Silver Line says: “In six short months 100,000 calls to The Silver Line have proved that our helpline is a crucial service for Britain’s lonely older people.”



Professor Patrick Geoghegan OBE, Chairman of The Silver Line says: “It is vital that we spread awareness of our phone number and our service to the thousands of isolated and vulnerable older people who are too proud to ask for help. Our founder Esther Rantzen’s vision to create a “ChildLine for older people” is a simple concept – the first free and confidential, 24 hour helpline available every day and night of the year, offering information, friendship and advice, linking older people to local groups and services, and supporting those who are suffering abuse and neglect”.

Esther Rantzen CBE, President of The Silver Line says: “Silver Line is already having a transformational effect on the lives of thousands of older people and a huge and unmet need has been revealed. The shocking fact is that Britain has become too busy to find time for our older people. Even our doctors, our carers, our high streets and our families fail to recognise that what older people need is time to talk, time to listen, time to value them. Silver Line callers say that being encouraged to ring The Silver Line made all the difference.

“Older people are brushed aside. They haven’t got time for us. Anything that is old and has lost its use, we throw it away. That’s how we have become now. Sometimes I go to bed and I don’t care if I wake up again.” Clive, aged 70

“Of what use are we anymore? With our own age group we are valued, but not with anyone younger. The Silver Line is a marvellous thing. Talking is so important. After using The Silver Line I felt so much better. I felt as if years had been taken off me. I’d never felt like that before.” Ivy aged 85, who often goes more than a day without talking to anyone.

“No one has time for pensioners. I don’t see a soul. Everyone is at work.” Donald aged 71, a widower and disabled.

Patricia aged 78 says *“I’d rather pay someone than ask my children for help. They’re too busy.”*

Esther Rantzen will be presenting more comments of callers to The Silver Line, assisted by Bob (92) and Dorothy (83) at the charity’s conference to mark the first 100,000 calls today in London.

Esther says “Families are busy, and may live many miles away. Carers have no time to stop and have a conversation. So many of our callers are completely alone, they have ceased to expect that they could ever enjoy life again, in fact they have almost forgotten what fun means. Modern Britain has no room for them.”



“Shopping for basic groceries, for example, used to be fun for many older people. My own grandmother used to spend every morning going from shop to shop, being asked about her family, having conversations. You just try it at the next supermarket checkout, and see what happens. One caller, Susan, told us that in her village they have lost the Post Office and the village shop so now she goes to the supermarket, and even then they have installed machines, so the whole process of shopping can be done without exchanging a word with another human being. And that’s without the extra impersonal method, of on-line shopping.

So wake up, busy Britain. Make time for our older people. I have used the term “Solitary confinement” to describe their loneliness. It can take so little to break down those prison walls, as Diane, 92, told us, “It would be fun if I could just be wheeled along the sea front.” Is that too much to ask?

A little time taken out of our busy days is such a simple gift, but it could save a life. Derek is 79. He, like Diane, is a regular caller. He told us “I feel like a prisoner in my own home. That’s where The Silver Line has helped. The weekends used to be murder without The Silver Line. At the weekend I’ve got nobody but the Silver Line. About a week ago I’d had enough. I couldn’t go on. I phoned the helpline and I talked and talked and they got me out of it. That saved my life. I couldn’t have gone on without it. I’ve got nothing without it.” “



Esther Rantzen CBE
President of The Silver Line



Bob Lowe, Community Champion
Filmed for BBC’s Sport Relief 2014



Dorothy Masters,
Community Champion



For interviews and case studies contact The Silver Line team:

Sarah Caplin, Director of Development and Communications, 07770 746471

Note to Editors:

Esther Rantzen's vision to create a "ChildLine for older people" is a simple concept – the only free 24 hour helpline, available every day and night of the year, where you can ask about services in your area, talk in confidence, get some friendly advice or quite simply have a chat. And for people who would appreciate a regular call from the same person every week we offer Silver Line Friends who are volunteers and share our belief that a simple connection with another human being can make a difference. The pilot was funded by Comic Relief and independently assessed, following which a grant from the Big Lottery made the national launch of The Silver Line possible in November 2013. This grant covers half the running costs of the first two years of operation. The Silver Line therefore depends on charitable donations from members of the public and other grant-making organisations to cover the cost of its service.

- *£5 pays for a call with an older person who may not have spoken to another human being all week*
- *£50 pays to recruit and train a volunteer Silver Line Friend*
- *£100 pays for an older person to be befriended for one year*

If you would like further information please go to The Silver Line website

www.thesilverline.org.uk or ring our helpline on 0800 4 70 80 90 (from a mobile call 0300 4 70 80 90)

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 Just Giving: www.justgiving.com/silverline or via BT My Donate: www.mydonate.bt.com/charities/thesilverlinehelpline or by phone: 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

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