



ON 25<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2014, THE SILVER LINE HELPLINE CELEBRATES ITS FIRST BIRTHDAY TAKING ALMOST 300,000 CALLS FROM LONELY OLDER PEOPLE IN ONE YEAR

- *Nearly 200,000\* more calls have been received than was anticipated when they launched on 25 November 2013, following a grant from Big Lottery Fund*
- *The single biggest problem is loneliness, and as The Silver Line is the only free confidential helpline for older people which is open 24/7, most calls are made in the evenings, overnight and during the weekend*
- *Today, The Silver Line announces a new partnership with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), to reach out to older people who are cared for in their homes and in residential care, helping CQC respond to any issues or concerns and to identify cases of good practice*

In its first year, the free, confidential helpline for older people has been inundated with calls, far more than they anticipated, the biggest single problem being loneliness. More than half the callers (54%) told the helpline they had literally nobody else to talk to. Esther Rantzen, the Founder and President, says “We knew loneliness existed in this country, but the extent of this epidemic of loneliness and isolation suffered by people over 65 has shocked and alarmed us. Many of our callers ring us on a regular basis because they tell us we are the reason they can get through the day. As one widow told me “Many times I have wanted to give up. Now I have something to live for, so thank you Esther, you have really saved my sanity.”

In addition to the helpline, The Silver Line has trained more than 850 volunteers to become Silver Line Friends, making regular befriending calls to more than 1100 older people. The Silver Line has set up *Silver Circles*, conference calls for several like-minded people who want to chat in a group and *Silver Letters* for people who like to write and receive hand-written letters and who may be hearing impaired.

Sophie Andrews, CEO, says “We believe that older people should be cherished and valued and I’m particularly proud that some of our early callers have now trained as volunteer Silver Line Friends and Silver Circle facilitators, and are providing friendship to others. It has been a busy year but we’ve managed to answer every call with a friendly human voice.”

Patrick Geoghegan, Chair of The Silver Line, says, “It is shocking that older people tell us they are not frightened of dying but they are frightened of dying and not being found. They tell us at least with our weekly calls they know someone will notice if they do not answer, and they also know that someone cares about them. So many of our callers have nobody else at all. The Silver Line, like the best ideas is a simple one. By offering friendship by phone and letter, it has proved to be a lifeline for literally thousands of the most isolated and vulnerable older people in our society.”

But there is a waiting list for callers who need befriending, so Silver Line staff make an additional 1,000 calls a week to keep in touch with one thousand isolated callers who have asked to be matched with a Silver Line Friend. The helpline is urgently recruiting volunteers to become Silver Line Friends, working from their homes, donating an hour a week to befriend older people who otherwise may spend days or weeks on end without speaking to anyone. For information about applying to be a Silver Line Friend, can be found at [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)

A grant from the Big Lottery Fund enabled The Silver Line to launch last year, but the charity now also urgently needs donations from the public to pay for the thousand calls received each day. A special Christmas video starring one of their callers, Leslie, an 87 year retired actor is launched today. Leslie says "I know how crucial The Silver Line is. It has helped me so much. It was when I saw an item about the helpline with someone saying there are older people who go all day, or several days, without talking to anyone that I thought, they are talking about me. That's why I rang The Silver Line."

Esther Rantzen, Founder and President of The Silver Line, said "This Christmas will be a very tough time for thousands of older people on their own. Many of them have families in the UK, but still have to spend the holiday entirely alone with only memories for company. I am so glad that The Silver Line was launched in time for Christmas last year, and I know from speaking to our callers, and reading their letters that we really made a difference. But without help from the public we cannot continue to be there for all the people who need us. There are many good causes these days but I believe at Christmas time we need to remember our older people. They have been neglected and abandoned too long, they deserve our love and respect, and after all, they have earned it."

5% of all calls refer to abuse and neglect, and The Silver Line today announces a new partnership with the Care Quality Commission, to reach out to vulnerable people receiving care in their own homes, or in residential homes.

Sophie Andrews, CEO says

"Silver Line has been described as *ChildLine for Older People* and we are delighted to mark our first birthday, with this life-saving new partnership. We will work jointly with the CQC to help older people and their families raise concerns about the standard of care they are receiving whether in a care home or in their own homes. One of the first calls to The Silver Line was from a lady in a care home who was too afraid to give her name but did give the name of the care home where the residents had been left without food and the heating turned off. The police were involved and the residents are now safe. The Silver Line is in a unique position to reach and be reached by people who would not otherwise report poor standards of care and neglect and to work with the CQC to better protect the most vulnerable and growing sector of our society – the frail oldest people. We are now exploring opportunities with Care Inspectorates in all the nations. "

Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care at the Care Quality Commission, Andrea Sutcliffe, says:

“I am very pleased that the Care Quality Commission will be working in partnership with The Silver Line to reach the most isolated older people who are receiving care and may need our support and protection. We believe that working together, we will be able to improve the standards of care for older people that may be falling short of the quality they need and deserve. It is also an opportunity to recognise examples of excellence and to highlight best practice to share with others.”

In the words of Silver Line callers:

*“This has been my third Christmas ‘Home Alone’ but this time it was different because of you. I’ve found myself thinking ‘Thank God for Esther Rantzen’s Silver Line’. It’s a wonderful idea and I’m sure it’s helped thousands of people as well as me. I’m a 78 year widow – alone since October 2006 when my husband died. Sometimes I just feel like having a chat and there’s no one at that time I can phone. Now I’ve got Silver Line and I feel I’ve got a whole lot of new friends and have had some lovely conversations. Where did you find such lovely people? I’m enclosing a donation to help you. I feel as though I’ve had more than my money’s worth” Vera, 78*

*My husband died on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2010 (my birthday was the next day on the 24<sup>th</sup>). For the first year I wanted to give up, but gradually I picked myself up and got on with my life, and it is a very busy one. In spite of everything I still have times when I hurt inside. No way could (or would) I tell my family or many friends how I feel. I don’t want to upset anybody. This is my pain but I thought Silver Line maybe the answer so I rang not knowing what would happen. And what did happen was a friendly voice talking to me and making me feel that I am not alone. I was able to talk openly to a complete stranger and all the pent up hurt I feel came pouring out. The lady listened and I felt so secure. That night for the first time since John died, I slept well. I knew I could just pick up the phone if I was desperate. Now I feel that people care and that is a wonderful feeling. You have really saved my sanity – many times I wanted to give up. Now I want to go on living. I will always miss John – we had 50 years together. He would thank you.” Beryl, 86*

**Esther Rantzen said that listening to calls and reading letters from isolated older people have made her realise that there are ways to make sure you are not alone at this vulnerable time in our lives. She said, “The first lesson for all of us, including me at the age of 74, is *Be Nice*. Nobody wants the company of someone who is grumpy, critical or complaining. The second is, *Have Daughters*. Or make sure you and your daughter-in-law get on well. And the third, *Try to create some fun in your life*. The killer question we ask many of our uncomplaining callers who, above all, don’t want to be a burden, is “what do you do for fun?” And many of them tell us, “I haven’t had fun for years. Fun is for young people.” Well, it’s time we put that right, especially at Christmas time.”**

To watch new The Silver Line Christmas film, Visiting Gramps, click onto [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)

**You can donate to The Silver Line**

- by phone, calling 020 7224 2747 during office hours or
- by sending a cheque payable to “The Silver Line Helpline”, Minerva House, 42 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2RY.

**Online donations can be made at**

- [www.thesilverline.org.uk/donate](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk/donate)
- Or text LONE14£5 to 70070 to give £5. If you’d rather give a different amount text LONE14£ followed by the amount you want to give in whole pounds so £2 is LONE14£2

And anyone interested in becoming a Silver Line Friend or volunteer fundraiser can find details on our website [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)

or email [volunteering@thesilverline.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@thesilverline.org.uk)

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For media interviews with the Care Quality Commission’s Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care, Andrea Sutcliffe, please call the CQC press office on 020 7448 9401 during office hours or out-of-hours on 07917 232 143.

**\*Note for Editors: Fact file about The Silver Line 25 November 2014**

- 275,000 calls received by Nov 2014
- 850 volunteers matched to 1200 older people plus 1100 keeping in touch calls taking place every week
- 68% of calls are after 6pm or at weekends
- 40% callers male / 60% female
- 34% callers between 60-69, 23% between 70-79, 18% between 80-89, 5% are over 90 but this age group are twice more likely to call us than any other group (as a percentage of the over 90 year old population)
- 67% of callers contact us because they are lonely or isolated, 88% live alone and 54% say they have no one else at all to speak to (other than us)
- We have 160 staff at the helpline working on a 24/7 rota
- We work in partnership with Age Scotland to deliver the service in Scotland between 8am-8pm Mon-Fri

## NEWS RELEASE embargo: 0001hrs Tuesday 25 November 2014

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The objectives, for which the Charity was established, are to promote the protection of older people and in particular:

- \* to set and up and maintain telephone lines or other means of communication or correspondence to assist older people in danger, suffering isolation, or being abused physically, sexually, mentally or financially;
- \* to help older people who are in danger or in need of financial, medical, protective or like assistance and to give such older people advice, guidance and comfort; and
- \* to befriend and support isolated older people.

The Silver Line is a unique national service that provides three key functions to support older people:

- \* a sign posting service to link them into the many and varied services that exist around the country;
- \* a friendship service to combat loneliness; and
- \* a means of empowering those who may be suffering abuse and neglect and, if appropriate, transferring them to specialist services.

There are many different statutory and voluntary agencies able to provide assistance in tackling isolation and loneliness and its effects. The Silver Line does not aim to duplicate or replicate existing services, it enhances their effectiveness, by providing a single point of contact; a place to turn; for older people to obtain information that will connect them to or help them navigate existing statutory or voluntary services in their local community. For those older people who are lonely, Silver Line Friends provide a telephone or letter based friendship service. Identification of suspected abuse or neglect and referral to specialist or statutory organisations takes place where necessary and appropriate.

The Silver Line Helpline, contacted by telephone, 24/7 365 days each year, uniquely offers one single Freephone number, nationally known to be the single point of contact. National publicity and an easy-to-remember number ensure that the name and the number are at the forefront of people's minds when they don't know where to turn for help. Callers to The Silver Line Helpline are answered by trained staff who in addition to providing information, undertake a simple assessment. We identify the callers' needs and signpost them to appropriate information, statutory service or voluntary support in their local community. We also explore whether the caller would benefit from regular contact with a volunteer known as a "Silver Line Friend" who makes weekly contact with them.

Our electronic database connects to existing information about services and support that is currently available. There is so much excellent work being carried out that could and should support older people, if only they knew of it. This allows us to put older people in touch with the provision they need.

If the caller is identified as having limited existing support networks and is lonely or isolated, The Silver Line Friends service will be offered. For those callers with hearing difficulties or a preference for writing, a separate friendship service is offered.

All referrals from the helpline are managed internally by a specialist team of trained staff who contact each person and assess the best type of support that can be provided. This may be a weekly telephone or letter contact, or even a weekly telephone conference call to discuss similar interests with a small group of people. There may even be an option to receive a number of the services outlined above (in combination with each other).

Our gentle assessment call with a trained member of staff enables a decision to be made as to whether the Silver Line caller can be referred to the friendship service straight away or if more specialist support is needed. We believe this enables us to offer the very best care to our callers as well as supporting volunteers and ensuring that we do not damage either callers or volunteers by matching people with complex or emotionally challenging needs. We also support volunteers who may notice a change in needs of the caller they are supporting and may want some extra advice and support. In addition we have introduced a "keeping in touch" call into the process which means that callers receive a weekly call whilst they are in process of being matched to a volunteer – this means that callers have a regular contact from us which is especially important during times where they may be high demand for our friendship service. Our callers will not be left without any contact during this time.

Once matched, The Silver Line Friends (volunteers) provide a booked telephone or email / letter befriending contact once a week. Volunteers are DBS checked and all calls are recorded and basic notes relating to each contact are made. Volunteer managers support the callers and volunteers and ensure both parties are happy with the pairing. A review takes place every 12 weeks (at a minimum).