

# NEWS



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## HRH The Duchess of Cornwall calls in on The Silver Line Helpline

The Duchess of Cornwall made her inaugural visit as royal patron to The Silver Line Helpline in Blackpool, where she met staff and volunteers and chatted to callers.

Her Royal Highness was hosted by Dame Esther Rantzen, President and Founder and the Chief Executive Sophie Andrews, and was given a tour of the Helpline which receives more than one call every minute from lonely and isolated older people up and down the country.

Her Royal Highness became Patron of The Silver Line – the only free, national and confidential helpline for lonely older people that is open every day and night of the year – in the summer, coinciding with her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

During her visit she participated in an arts and culture ‘Silver Circle’ – which brings together a number of people on a conference call, akin to a virtual coffee morning – where callers were discussing their favourite childhood books, revealing that one of hers was *Black Beauty*. She added however that she could never finish it as it reduced her to tears: “I would read up until when Ginger died (one of the horse characters and a friend of Black Beauty) and cried so much I had to give up.” Other much-loved books they discussed included *White Fang*, Enid Blyton’s *Famous Five* and *Swiss Family Robinson*.

The Duchess of Cornwall also took a phone call from 89 year-old Betty Witcher. Betty talked about her poetry and read out a recent one she’d written, ‘A Mother’s Words of Wisdom’. She said “it’s such a coincidence I’m talking to you really – before Remembrance Sunday I sent a copy [of the poem] to Prince William and Prince Harry...and I had a letter back from Kensington Palace [a couple of weeks ago]. It was so lovely and made me feel so proud.” Her Royal Highness answered: “Well, I can tell them I’ve talked to you...it’s such a clever thing to be able to do [to write poetry]. I would love to be able to...if you write another one, will you send it to me?”

Asked by The Duchess of Cornwall how The Silver Line has helped her, Betty said: “they really make [such a difference] – I can call them at any time, and I have even rung them up in the middle of the night...when I can’t get to sleep. Just to talk to someone - it’s so reassuring.”

Finally, The Duchess of Cornwall talked to a group of volunteer Silver Line Friends – who make a regular weekly telephone call to an older person with whom they have been matched – and asked them about their experiences. Wilma, who has been a telephone friend for two years to John, a former champion ball-room dancer and instructor. She related how, after the death of his wife he was so depressed that he had lost all confidence and had stopped teaching dancing. At first he wouldn’t even take her calls, but two years on: “he’s got his Mojo back, I can hear it in his voice. He has taken up Ceroc, a kind of French jive...and he’s thoroughly enjoying life.”

Applauding them, and volunteers more generally, Her Royal Highness said: “Without volunteers this country would come to an end: they are the skeleton of Britain”; she encouraged those considering volunteering to “go for it! You’ll never regret it.”

Concluding her visit, The Duchess of Cornwall congratulated everyone involved for their “fantastic achievement in growing the Helpline so successfully” - supporting many thousands of older people every week, the majority of who speak to no one else sometimes for days and weeks at a time. She added: “making a phone call is such a simple thing really – but the difference it can make is remarkable.”

Launched in November 2013, The Silver Line Helpline has taken over 1.6 million calls from lonely and isolated older people – around 10,000 per week on average. October 2017 was the busiest month in the Helpline’s history, and three thousand more calls were made this November compared to 2016, and call volumes continue to rise as Christmas approaches.

Commenting afterwards, Dame Esther Rantzen, Founder and President of The Silver Line, said: “It was really exciting for everyone associated with The Silver Line to be able to welcome The Duchess of Cornwall today: she seemed so completely involved in our vision of combatting loneliness and isolation among older people. She absolutely understands how difficult it is for a charity like ours to spread the message of awareness, and our desperate need for resources as demand for our service continues to rise. Christmas especially is one of our busiest times, as feelings of loneliness for older people on their own are compounded by seeing everyone enjoying family time and celebrating with friends; we often hear from callers who haven’t spoken to anyone during the whole festive season. We very much look forward to working with Her Royal Highness in the future – and her support in helping us to reach the millions of older people that might need us.”

Chief Executive Sophie Andrews added: “We are delighted to have Her Royal Highness as our Patron: for a young charity which is just four years old, it is a real tribute to all the work of our talented team to have been recognised in this way. Her visit to the Helpline today gave a real boost to staff and volunteers alike who work tirelessly around the clock, every single day and night of the year to support some of the most vulnerable members of our society. More generally, we are very grateful to her for helping us to spread awareness about our crucial work: a lot of our callers refer to us as ‘a lifeline’.”

-ENDS-

*Spokesperson interviews, case studies and images available on request.*

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### **Note to Editors**

#### **About The Silver Line**

- The Silver Line Helpline (0800 4 70 80 90) is the only free, national, confidential helpline open every day and night, offering information, friendship and advice to older people over the age of 55
- Launched in November 2013, the Helpline has received more than 1.5 million calls to date – currently averaging 10,000 per week, of which 80% are phoning for the first time
- The UK’s top 3 ‘loneliest places’ for older people based on call volumes to the Helpline from across 45 regions are: Lancashire, Essex and West Midlands (further information re full ‘rankings’ available on request)
- Two thirds of calls are received overnight and on the weekend, when other services are shut (and which often refer their callers to The Silver Line on their afterhours answerphone message)
- The Silver Line also offers personalised, one-to-one friendship services, delivered by an army of around 3000 volunteer Silver Line Friends. These include Silver Line Telephone Friends, Silver Letters and Silver Circles
- The cost of calls to the Helpline, and The Silver Line’s other friendship services, are paid for by the donations it receives; the charity relies entirely on voluntary income
- 68% of callers contact the helpline because they are lonely or isolated, 90% live alone, and 54% say they have no one else to speak to
- Around five per cent of older people calling the helpline report present or historic abuse

- HRH The Duchess of Cornwall became the charity's first Royal Patron in July 2017
- More details on The Silver Line website: [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)

## Background Information on Loneliness

### Current research and statistics on loneliness

- Research over decades has found a fairly constant proportion (10-13%) of older people feeling lonely often or always – that's over 1 million older people currently (*TNS survey for Age UK Apr 2014*)
- 12 % of older people feel trapped in their own home (*TNS survey for Age UK Apr 2014*)
- 6 per cent of older people leave their house once a week or less (*Age UK Loneliness Evidence Review, Jul 2014*)
- 17% of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week, and 11% are in contact less than once a month (*Campaign To End Loneliness Evidence Research 2003*)
- A Campaign To End Loneliness survey found 84% of elderly people say they felt lonely some times while 13% feel lonely all the time (*June 2016*)
- In 2016, 7.66 million people lived alone in the UK. 3.64 million (48%) were people aged 65 and over (*ONS 2016*)
- *Age UK: Loneliness: in figures*
  - 200,000 older people have not had a conversation with friends or family for a month. -
  - 3.9 million older people agree the television is their main form of company.

### Implications

- Being lonely has a significant effect on individuals' health: a recent systematic review of research found that loneliness can increase the risk of premature death by 30%. It is associated with higher blood pressure and depression, and leads to higher rates of mortality-comparable to those associated with smoking and alcohol consumption. It is also linked to higher incidence of dementia, with one study reporting a doubled risk of Alzheimer's disease in lonely people compared with those who were not lonely. See also recent research by Brigham Young University <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/08/lonely-die.aspx>
- According to a paper by *Social Finance (Jul 2015)* which reviewed existing evidence on the impacts of loneliness:  
When compared to a population of older people who are never lonely, older people who are always or often lonely can be:
  - 3.4 times more likely to suffer depression;
  - 1.9 times more likely to develop dementia in the following 15 years; and
  - Two thirds more likely to be physically inactive, which may lead to a 7% increased likelihood of diabetes, 8% increased likelihood of stroke and 14% increased likelihood of coronary heart disease
- Drawing on specific studies, some from the UK and others from overseas, when compared to people who are never lonely, older people who are lonely are on average:
  - 1.8 times more likely to visit their GP\*;
  - 1.6 times more likely to visit A&E;
  - 1.3 times more likely to have emergency admissions; and
  - 3.5 times more likely to enter local authority-funded residential care
- Other outcomes include:
  - The increased likelihood of requiring domiciliary care;
  - The increased likelihood of anxiety\*\*;
  - The increased likelihood of developing chronic lung disease;
  - The increased likelihood of developing arthritis and mobility impairment; and
  - A direct increase in claiming benefits including Attendance Allowance for mobility-related assistance.

### Mental Health

- Research from the Royal College of Psychiatrists estimates that 85% of older people with depression receive no help at all from the NHS. Furthermore, those that do receive help are six times more likely than younger people to receive drug treatment rather than alternative support such as talking therapies. Yet research shows that the highest prevalence of depression is found in those over 75, and more generally affects 22% of men and 28% of women aged 65 or over.

**Stigma and pride re talking about it**

- Nine out of ten respondents to the 2016 Campaign To End Loneliness survey (above) said they were scared to admit they were lonely due to the stigma attached to it.
- A recent survey for the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness found that 57% of older people who identify themselves as lonely admit to never having spoken about it, with around three quarters saying close friends and family would be surprised or astonished to hear they feel lonely. 82% agreed it was easier to talk about loneliness using anonymous confidential services like The Silver Line. (*Gransnet, March 2017*)