

NEWS



Helpline for older people braces itself for surge in calls on longest night of the year

- **21st December set to be busiest night of the year so far for The Silver Line Helpline as it provides solace for the Winter Solstice**
- **Night-time can be the worst time for those who need someone to talk to: two-thirds of all calls to the 24/7 helpline are made overnight and at weekends**
- **And the charity is expecting busiest-ever 'festive fortnight' as other services close down for Christmas and the New Year**

The Winter Solstice on Thursday (21st December) is set to be the busiest-ever time for The Silver Line Helpline since it launched in November 2013. Two-thirds of calls to The Silver Line – the only free, national, confidential helpline open every day and night – are made at night-times and weekends when people are feeling even more alone and vulnerable.

Sophie Andrews, CEO of The Silver Line, says: *“Over ninety percent of our callers live alone, with over half of them saying they have no one else to speak to apart from The Silver Line – and that nights can be the worst times of all when they feel most alone, worried and needing support. They tell us that this is when they really need someone to talk to but feel they can’t call family or friends in the small hours. Similarly, the other support services they rely on are closed – indeed many of them refer callers to The Silver Line on their out-of-hours answer phones.”*

The Longest Night of the year also heralds the start of the 'festive fortnight' when the helpline expects to reach a record number of calls, as other services shut down for the holidays and nearby friends and neighbours leave town. But with calls already coming in at a rate of more than one every minute around the clock, the charity is in urgent need of funding to ensure it can meet the accelerating demand for its services.

Sophie adds: *“This October was our busiest month since the helpline was launched four years ago – we received just over forty five thousand calls – while in November we had three thousand more callers than for the same month last year; that’s a year-on-year rise of around ten per cent.*

“And as we approach the peak 'festive fortnight' – Christmas Eve through to New Year’s Day – the rate of calls is accelerating: so far in the first two weeks of December, we’ve taken over twenty five and a half thousand calls; that’s already ten thousand more than for the peak 'festive fortnight' last year.

“However, this ever-growing demand for our service also means that our running costs are rising steeply. Last year, due to a lack of resources, we were unable to answer around a third of calls from older people who really needed someone speak to, and we are desperately keen not to have a repeat of this scenario.

"To that end, we are in a race against time to raise the vital funds we rely on - around £14,000 per day just to keep going, and entirely via public donations - which is a huge challenge and getting harder all the time."

Founded by Dame Esther Rantzen, The Silver Line Helpline operates around-the-clock, 365-days-a-year and provides, support, friendship, advice, and signposts callers to other resources in their community which may be of interest or benefit to them.

A further 1,500 'keeping in touch' calls are made every week – ensuring the wellbeing of the older people the charity supports - and even more of these will be made to those that will be alone on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day, including by Dame Esther and Sophie alongside the management team. In addition, the charity's army of volunteer Silver Line Friends makes around 4000 weekly outbound calls to lonely older people signed up to The Silver Line's telephone friendship scheme.

Dame Esther Rantzen, the charity's Founder and President says: *"When we launched the helpline four years ago, we chose to do so at the end of November – just ahead of the Christmas period – as we knew that this is a particularly challenging time of year for vulnerable and isolated older people.*

"We hear from older people who are home alone and speak to no one else for days on end – even family; their feelings of loneliness are heightened because of their poignant memories of celebrating the season with loved ones in times gone by, as well as all the media focus and imagery around having fun with others. Sadly, for them Christmas is just another day to get through: loneliness is their reality every day of the year."

She adds: *"Just five pounds – the cost of a Secret Santa present - will pay for a chat that can have a transformative effect on an older person's life. We are often referred to as a 'lifeline' by our callers. Please help us be there for them around the clock, and especially at this time of year."*

TO DONATE: The Silver Line relies entirely on donations and urgently needs more funds to keep up with rising demand for its services. Just £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 while £250 will pay for one caller to be supported by the Helpline and their own Silver Line Friend for one year.

Find out more at: <https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/donate/> ; if you are an organisation interested in supporting the charity and its work, please email info@thesilverline.org.uk or call the head office: 0207 224 2020.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING: please visit <https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/>.

-ENDS-

Spokesperson interviews, case studies and images available on request.

For further information, please contact Alexia Latham at The Silver Line Communications team: e: alexia.latham@thesilverline.org.uk; m: 07557109755

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

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*)