



# NEWS

14 January 2017

## CHARITY HELPLINE OVERWHELMED BY CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR CALLERS

- Thousands of calls for help from lonely older people had to go unanswered
- Desperate older people who were completely on their own waited for up to 20 minutes to get through
- Charity urgently appeals for more money to cope as demand keeps rising

The Silver Line – the only free, 24-hour, national helpline for lonely and isolated older people – say they were overwhelmed with calls for help and friendship across Christmas and New Year.

In the period between Christmas Eve and January 2, the charity received over 15,000 calls from older people.

But the helpline was only able to answer two-thirds – leaving over 5,000 callers entirely on their own when they desperately needed someone to talk to – at a time most of the nation spends enjoying the company of friends and family.

And staff at The Silver Line say there's no sign of demand easing off as the January blues bite.

The charity urgently needs more donations to enable it to meet the rising number of calls and to ensure the service remains free and accessible to their older callers, who are some of the most vulnerable members of society.

The Silver Line's Founder, Dame Esther Rantzen, said:

*"It is tragic that so many older people could not get through to us and were entirely on their own. Despite all the campaigns and appeals for people to look after lonely older neighbours this Christmas, our helpline was overwhelmed by calls, and we simply did not have the resources to answer them all.*

*"We're the only dedicated support for isolated and lonely older people available at night times, weekends, and holidays when other services for older people are closed.*

*"Even though we geared up for a peak time, we just couldn't answer every call – we had over 1,600 on the January 2nd Bank Holiday alone.*

*"We desperately need more donations so we can recruit more helpline staff to cover night times, weekends and early mornings when we get the most calls."*

The Silver Line's analysis shows that some callers waited for almost 20 minutes because they were so desperate to speak to the helpline team.

Dame Esther added:

*“We offer friendship, so we don’t want to limit the length of a call – it lasts as long as the older person wants to speak to us.*

*“This intense loneliness is particularly poignant over Christmas and New Year, which should be a time of celebration.*

*“I spoke to one caller, an older lady, Dorothy, who has no family, lives alone, and had spoken to nobody for four days, throughout Christmas. When I spoke to her she was still in her night clothes – as she told me: ‘I have nothing to get dressed for’.*

*“Even after Christmas itself, as we move into 2017, there’s no sign of a fall in the number of calls – loneliness continues to be a reality for older people every day of the year.*

*“We are asking the nation to help by texting ALONE to 70555 to donate £5 so we can answer every plea for help from the lonely older person who picks up the phone to us.”*

The Silver Line also made over 300 calls to support older people who were totally alone on Christmas Day and had asked the helpline to call them, and a further 200 on New Year’s Day.

Two-thirds of calls are made at night times and weekends, when no other helpline is available specifically for older people who may be lonely, isolated or confused.

The cost of calls to the helpline (0800 4 70 80 90) are paid for entirely by donations to The Silver Line, and are free for the older people who call. People can also donate through the website: [www.thesilverline.org.uk/donate](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk/donate)

Research by Anglia Ruskin University concluded that The Silver Line is successful in accessing the loneliest and most socially-isolated people.

### **Notes to Editors**

- Dame Esther is available for interviews.

### **About The Silver Line**

- The Silver Line (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.
- As well as running the helpline, The Silver Line has 3,000 volunteers who make regular friendship calls, or exchange letters with older people.
- 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.
- More details on The Silver Line website: [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)

### **For more information contact**

Kevin Mochrie  
Head of Communications  
kevin.mochrie@TheSilverLine.org.uk  
Tel: 0748 301 5955

Hannah Rogers  
Media & Information Officer  
hannah.rogers@TheSilverLine.org.uk  
Tel: 020 3794 7902