



## **H.R.H. THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL BECOMES PATRON OF NEW CHARITY FOR OLDER PEOPLE, THE SILVER LINE HELPLINE**

To coincide with her 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday, The Duchess of Cornwall has agreed to become Patron of The Silver Line Helpline, a charity launched by Dame Esther Rantzen in November 2013. The Helpline offers information, friendship and advice to older people around the clock and all over the UK, with its free, confidential service which is open 24/7.

Dame Esther said "We are absolutely thrilled to have Her Royal Highness's support for our work and we would like to wish her a very happy 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The Duchess has an understanding and empathy for older people who are so often forgotten and undervalued in today's busy world. She cares about them, and values them as we do. It is a real accolade for a young charity which is not yet four years old, and a tribute to the work of our team that we have been recognized in this way. We know that we transform the lives of people, many of whom spend their lives in solitary confinement in their homes, never asking for help from anyone else because they have too much pride, and don't want, as they tell us, to become a burden."

The Silver Line has already received nearly one and a half million calls from older people around the country, and in addition reaches out to 3000 isolated and vulnerable older people with friendship calls from trained volunteers, The Silver Line Friends. In addition, staff seek to link callers with resources in the community.

Sophie Andrews, the CEO, said "To have the support of The Duchess of Cornwall for our crucial work will assist us enormously to spread awareness of the charity's services, so that we can reach out to all the vulnerable older people who need us. Our callers tell us we are a life-line, restoring their confidence, and reassuring them that they are valued. The Patronage of Her Royal Highness will help us send a message to lonely older people that we as a society genuinely care about them, and we look forward enormously to working with her."

Professor Patrick Geoghegan, Chair of the charity, said, "I have spent my career working to help older people, firstly in the NHS and now as Chair of this crucial new charity. We at The Silver Line believe that there is no "sell-by date" for older people, we treasure them as a crucial resource of life experience and unique memories. The Patronage of The Duchess of Cornwall will strengthen us in our work, and assist us to spread that message, that loneliness is a killer destroying not only quality of life, but mental and physical health. We are determined to work with other charities to fight the nation's epidemic of loneliness blighting the lives of millions of older people.

## **Note to Editors**

### **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.
- The Silver Line Helpline was launched in November 2013, and to date has received over 1.45 million calls, of which 80% are phoning for the first time each month
- Currently, the helpline receives on average 10,000 calls per week
- 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 cost of calls to the helpline, and The Silver Line's other friendship services, are paid for by the donations it receives.
- 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)

### **Current research and statistics on loneliness**

Research over decades has found a fairly constant proportion (10-13 per cent) of older people feeling lonely often or always – that's over 1 million\* older people currently (\*TNS survey for Age UK Apr 2014)

12 per cent 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 per cent of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week, and 11 per cent are in contact less than once a month (Campaign To End Loneliness Evidence Research 2003)

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.

15 cigarettes - Loneliness can be as harmful for our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

### **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 per cent. It is associated with higher blood pressure and depression, and leads to higher rates of mortality-comparable to those associated with smoking and alcohol

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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.

As a result of these health impacts, lonely individuals:

- visit their GP, have higher use of medication, higher incidence of falls and increased risk factors for long term care
- undergo early entry into residential or nursing care
- use accident and emergency services independent of chronic illness.

### **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**

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)

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