



## No Holiday from Loneliness

- **The Silver Line charity warns of summer time blues epidemic among older people as record numbers of holidaymakers leave town**
- **24/7 Helpline receives 7% more calls in week 1 of holiday season – and typically 3-4 thousand more per month in July and August**
- **Urges family, friends and the wider community to ensure older people left home alone have a support network in place – and crucially The Silver Line number: 0800 4 70 80 90**

*London, 31st July 2017.* With schools now broken up for summer the Great British Getaway has begun in earnest: the first Friday (21<sup>st</sup>) alone saw a record 2.4 million travellers take to the skies and another 2.5 million cars hitting the roads on the busiest day of annual mass exodus.

But as holidaymakers desert town in their droves, The Silver Line, a leading UK charity which supports older people feel lonely or are isolated, predicts a record demand for its services during the summer from those who are left home alone.

Chief Executive of The Silver Line, Sophie Andrews says:

“We have already seen a 7 per cent rise in the number of callers to our 24/7 Helpline in the past week, and they tell us that they dread the seemingly endless weeks ahead with their families and friends away on holiday.”

The Silver Line Helpline – the UK’s only free, national, confidential helpline open 365 days a year – typically receives between three and four thousand extra calls per month over the July and August (around 10% more than the monthly average). Last year, August 7<sup>th</sup> saw a new yearly high in the number of calls to the Helpline - over 1,600 in a 24 hour period (which included its one-millionth call since launch) - out-stripping the previous peak on New Year’s Day 2016.

Alan Walsh, Head of The Silver Line Helpline says:

“Even if they do have friends and family nearby, for many older people the ‘summer ghost-town’ phenomenon means the usual familiar faces or people they are in daily contact with suddenly aren’t around – their GP gets in a locum, their postman and local shopkeeper are replaced by holiday cover, while their favourite radio DJ or TV presenter are substituted with stand-ins – and this can compound their sense of loneliness and isolation.”

The Blackpool-based Helpline offers callers information, friendship and advice, or just someone to chat to around the clock (and crucially overnight and weekends and when other services are shut). It also acts as a single national point of contact to signpost callers to local organisations that can offer additional support and/ or to social activities in their area “all of which can help alleviate feelings of – as our summer callers often report - ‘being stranded with nowhere to go and nothing to do’.”

In addition to the Helpline for which it is best-known, the charity also offers a range of personalised, one-to-one friendship services – including a regular weekly telephone call (currently around 4000 calls are made weekly) and/ or a pen-pal style exchange of letters. These are delivered through an

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army of around 3000 volunteer Silver Line Friends, who are carefully matched to an older person based on mutual interests, and are free to both parties.

“At this time of year in particular, we often get calls from family and friends of older people - who are going away or extra-busy at work with colleagues on holiday - who want to ensure that there is a support network in place when they can't be there to check in on them. Our friendship services can provide this back up and give those concerned 'nearest and dearest' peace of mind that a Silver Line Friend can step into the fold when they aren't around...or even when they are!” says Sophie.

Dame Esther Rantzen, Founder and President of The Silver Line adds:

“We should all look out for older people in our community who have left behind during the summer escape – and who, as members of the proud 'stiff upper lip' generation, are often hesitant to reach out. In the first instance we can stop and have a chat with them on the street, maybe offer to pop in for a cup of tea, or to help them with their shopping. And where appropriate refer them to services such as The Silver Line who can support them around the clock.

“While we at The Silver Line cannot cure the summertime blues, we also hear from our callers that just having the reassurance of knowing they have someone to chat to at any time of day or night can go a long way. So whether you are home or away for the summer, remember to give any older people who might need it The Silver Line Helpline number: 0800 4 70 80 90.”

**\*\*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 around 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.
- 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.

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- 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*)