

NEWS



One (call) borne every minute in August at Helpline for lonely older people

Call levels at The Silver Line soar during record-breaking month

- **August 2017 busiest month ever for The Silver Line Helpline (0800 4 70 80 90) since launch in November 2013 - Helpline has now received over 1.5 million calls**
- **Calls received at a rate of more than one per minute, and average daily calls volumes outstripping those for Christmas week 2016**
- **August 5th record day for the year with 1634 calls received in 24 hours**
- **Urgent appeal for donations to cope with huge ongoing demand for service**

5th September 2017, London: The Silver Line, the charity dedicated to supporting lonely older people with its around-the-clock helpline and friendship services, today announced that August has been its busiest month since launching in November 2013.

The charity also announced that The Silver Line Helpline - the only free, national, confidential 24/7 helpline offering information, friendship and advice to older people - has now taken a milestone 1.5 million calls in just under 4 years, as demand for the service continues to rise.

August 2017 broke a new record with over 45,000 calls received – at a rate of more than one per minute – up by around 1200 on the same month last year. Of these, 12,368 were made during the weekends, averaging 1546 calls per day for every Saturday and Sunday in August. Saturday August 5th – one week into the ‘official’ summer holiday getaway – became the busiest day of the year so far with 1634 calls taken in 24 hours.

Alan Walsh, Head of the Helpline says:

“While we often associate older peoples’ loneliness with the dark, cold winter months, and Christmas in particular, we hear from callers that summer can be an equally challenging time.

“The Helpline typically receives around 10% more calls during July and August from people whose family and friends have gone away – along with the usual faces that they see day in, day out such as the postman, or shopkeeper or their GP, turning their local community into a ghost town.

“As well as being left ‘home alone’, for a lot of our callers summer can also be a poignant reminder of happier times spent holidaying with their nearest and dearest, which compounds their feelings of loneliness and isolation.”

The average number of callers per day during the month was 1452¹, rising to 1500 for last week of August - outstripping the surge in daily call volumes seen over Christmas week 2016 which left the Helpline unable to answer around a third of the 15,000 calls made between 24th December and 2nd January.

¹ Average number of daily calls over a year is c1400

And with demand for the service – and so, its operating costs – continuing to grow, The Silver Line’s leaders are urgently appealing for public donations ahead of Christmas to ensure the Helpline can keep running. In particular, the charity – which relies entirely on voluntary funding – needs to raise £1.42 million to pay for the unique and vital night-time and weekends service, which alone accounts for over two-thirds of all calls (when other services are closed).

Chief Executive of The Silver Line, Sophie Andrews says:

“While August has been the busiest month of the year for us – and indeed since launch – we know that it will only get busier as we approach Christmas.

“Last Christmas the Helpline was overwhelmed by the number of callers – which exceeded our most generous projections – and unfortunately left 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.

“All the signs are that Christmas 2017 promises to be yet another record for us – sadly – but in order to cope with the anticipated spike in call volumes, and avoid a repeat of last year’s scenario, we urgently need further funding.”

In addition to the Helpline, during August the charity’s army of volunteer Silver Line Telephone friends made around 4000 outbound calls per week to lonely older people² signed up to The Silver Line’s telephone friendship scheme.

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

“I knew there was a need for the Helpline but to answer over one and a half million calls in such a short space of time is desperately sad.

“Sadder still is that the number of calls to the Helpline continues to rise unabated as we continue to uncover the epidemic of loneliness among our older people.

“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 really need someone to talk to and confide in.

“But as demand for our services grows we urgently need donations to help us support those who need us most.”

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.

To make a donation to The Silver Line, go to the website www.thesilverline.org.uk/donate.

-ENDS-

Spokesperson interviews, case studies and images available on request.

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Note to Editors

About The Silver Line

² Free to both the volunteer and ‘Silver Liner’(as beneficiaries refer to themselves) with costs covered by the charity

- 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*)