

# NEWS



## Phone ringing off the hook at charity-run national helpline for lonely older people: new figures show record call volumes, rising demand

- **Record-breaking number of calls made to The Silver Line Helpline during December 2017**
- **Busiest ever Christmas week since the charity launched in November 2013**
- **Charity faces huge funding challenges as 10% y-o-y growth in demand for service results in rising operating costs**

The Silver Line – the only free, 24-hour, national helpline for lonely and isolated older people open all year round – today revealed that last month was the busiest in the charity’s 4-year history. The news comes a little over a week since the Prime Minister announced the appointment of Tracey Crouch MP as the new Minister for Loneliness in response to the report from the Jo Co Commission on Loneliness which The Silver Line was part of.\*

In December 2017 the helpline received 47,318 calls – a rise of 10% on the previous year – with the majority of these received between Christmas Eve and New Year’s Day.

Sophie Andrews, Chief Executive of The Silver Line said: “Christmas week 2017 was our busiest ever with over 14000 calls made to the helpline - around 1000 more than last year.

“The greatest spike in calls was on New Year’s Day, with 1773 callers – up 14% on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017.

This is when we typically hear from those older people who speak to no one else for days on end then suddenly receive invitations for a few hours during the festive season and are then left all alone again afterwards. For these people, New Year’s Day becomes an even bigger hurdle as they see another year of loneliness and isolation stretching ahead.”

In addition, the charity’s army of Silver Line Friend volunteers, along with members of the management team and trustees, made over 4700 outbound calls to lonely and isolated older people during the month, with a further 1112 calls made across Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year’s Day collectively.

Sophie added: “In just over four years since we launched, The Silver Line helpline has taken more than 1.7 million calls from lonely and isolated older people. But we know we have only touched the tip of the iceberg in terms of reaching those that need us – over 80% of our more than 10,000 weekly callers are phoning us for the first time. Many of them refer to us as a ‘lifeline’.

“But the growth in demand for our service - which shows no sign of abating as we enter 2018 – in turn means that our operational costs rise too. Currently we need to raise around £15,000 per day in donations just to keep going. It’s the biggest challenge we face this year – and to ensure we can be there for some of the most vulnerable members of our society this time next year.”

-ENDS-

\*The Silver Line's CEO attended the Downing Street reception on 17<sup>th</sup> January; responding to the PM's speech, Sophie Andrews said: "We welcome the government's support in helping to tackle loneliness and combat isolation. While we recognise that it is an issue which cuts across all demographics, the experience of loneliness changes with age. Older people are in the main more vulnerable: the proud, stiff upper lip 'silver generation' are more reticent to talk about their feelings and experiences in the first place, but also generally less able to change their situation – be that due to a lack of transport or frail health - so that their own front door becomes a barrier rather than a pathway to the outside world.

"We also recognise that collective, multi-stakeholder action is needed to help address this most pernicious and debilitating of problems, to which there are no easy solutions. It needs the efforts of all of us in collaboration to provide our older people with the quality of life they deserve and have the right to demand."

See press release for full details: [www.thesilverline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Appointment-of-Minister-for-Loneliness.pdf](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Appointment-of-Minister-for-Loneliness.pdf)

*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 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](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. 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*)