

NEWS



‘Helpline Hero’ Sophie Andrews, Chief Executive of The Silver Line, speaking at TEDMED

The Silver Line is thrilled to announce that Sophie Andrews, Chief Executive, has been invited to speak at the prestigious TEDMED conference which takes place on 1-3 November in Palm Springs, USA.

The theme for this year’s conference is *Limitless*, and will interrogate how we can push the boundaries of health and medical knowledge by pooling imagination, creativity and curiosity to help accelerate scientific advances in healthcare. Among the questions being explored is how we can improve ‘health equity’ to ensure that marginalized people – including isolated older people – have better access to the care they need.

Sophie is one of a handful speakers chosen by the 20-strong TEDMED Editorial Advisory Board - comprised of scientists, innovators, and leaders in health and medicine - from the thousands of nominees from around the world, via a rigorous selection process. She has been designated as *Helpline Hero* in the line-up of thought leaders presenting their ‘ideas worth sharing’. Her talk is premised on “the importance of human connection as a social determinant of health” drawing on her experience of addressing loneliness among older people at The Silver Line, as well as her personal story which led her to volunteer for the Samaritans for over 25 years (culminating in her becoming National Chair in 2008-11).

Sophie Andrews, Chief Executive of The Silver Line says:

“What I have learned through my personal experience of calling the Samaritans when I was a young girl going through troubled times, which led me to volunteer for them for over 25 years, through to running The Silver Line, is how powerful a simple connection from one human to another can be.

“In a world dominated by professionalising and increasingly automating and digitalizing every aspect of what we do, the simple act of listening to a person in an empathetic way, without interrupting them and without judgement, can literally transform – sometimes even save – a life.”

Established in November 2013, The Silver Line Helpline is the UK’s only free and confidential 24/7 phone line dedicated to supporting older people who may feel lonely or are isolated. To date, the over one and a half million calls have been made – averaging over 10,000 every week (or one every minute) of which 80% are first time callers. Two thirds of these are made overnight and on weekends, when other services are shut – and people feel at their loneliest and most vulnerable. 90% of callers live alone and over half of them speak to no one else apart from The Silver Line – sometimes for days or weeks at a time.

Sophie 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 extent of loneliness among our older people - October 1st, ironically the celebratory UN International Day of Older Persons, saw a new record for us with 1710 calls received in 24 hours.

“We also recognise that this is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the scale and prevalence of the problem - and one which will only grow in the face of the future demographics and changing demands on the public health and social care needs of our society.”

Shirley Bergin, COO TEDMED says:

“Isolation and loneliness can adversely affect peoples’ health and well-being; putting them at increased risk to many illnesses and early mortality. Understanding the power of personal connection from her own experience, Sophie Andrews uses a simple technology -the telephone- coupled with a caring human being on the other end, to provide a service that is making a profound difference in the health and wellbeing of isolated older people. We’re honored to have Sophie share her story and her work with the TEDMED community.”

Created by TED’s founder TEDMED is the annual health and medicine edition of the world-famous and TED conference. It convenes and curates extraordinary people and ideas across multiple disciplines and cultures, with the aim of accelerating innovation in health and medicine; and to share cutting-edge biomedical thinking and ensure that cross-disciplinary innovation and large scale global public health opportunities are made publicly accessible.

The TEDMED conference will also be live-streamed to a global audience of millions.

Spokesperson interviews, case studies and images available on request.

For further information, please contact Alexia Latham at The Silver Line Communications team: e: alexia.latham@thesilverline.org.uk; m: 07557109755

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

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*)