

NEWS



Loneliness isn't just for Christmas

Phones go mad in March at The Silver Line: more than 48,000 calls to helpline for first time

- **March 2018 sees highest number of calls to The Silver Line helpline since launch in November 2013 - setting new 'records':**
 - *Monthly: 48, 070 – almost an extra weeks' more calls compared to March 2017 (up 24%); and*
 - *Daily: 1859 calls (3 per minute at peak times)*
- **Easter Sunday saw a greater number of lonely older people calling the helpline compared to peak days of Christmas Day (2017) or New Year's Day**
- **Nearly 1.8.5 million calls have been received at UK's only free and confidential 24/7/365 helpline for lonely and isolated older people now into fifth year of operation; and demand for service continues to rise**

13th April, (London): Leading national charity The Silver Line - which supports lonely and isolated older people via its 24/7 helpline and range of volunteer-led friendship services - today announced that March 2018 has been its busiest month ever since its launch in November 2013.

In March 2018 the helpline received 48,070 calls – a huge rise of 24% percent year-on-year^[1] – primarily driven by a surge over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend and also during the wave of extreme weather conditions earlier in the month. However, average daily call volumes were generally higher, and the first week of April continues to show an ongoing rise in service demand with 80% of callers phoning for the first time.

The number of incoming calls on Easter day surpassed those received during peak days over the Christmas and New Year festive period – with 1829 calls received on Sunday 1st April (vs a high of 1773 on New Year's Day, and 1474 on Christmas Day). 6327^[2] lonely older people phoned the helpline between Good Friday and Easter Monday – averaging more than a call per minute.

Commenting on the figures, Sophie Andrews, Chief Executive of The Silver Line said:

"This has been yet another record-breaking month for The Silver Line helpline. We received the equivalent to an extra week's worth of calls compared to last year, and surpassing our previous monthly high of just over 47,000 calls in December 2017. The Bank Holiday weekend was particularly busy – especially Easter Sunday, when we received over 400 more calls compared to Christmas Day – due to a mix of factors.

"We know that for our callers, Bank Holidays throughout the year seem interminably long and lonely – they often describe them as 'a month of Sundays'; and when combined with holiday occasions traditionally focused on celebrating with loved ones, it can be even more challenging for them. We also frequently heard from those calling between Good Friday and Easter Monday that their family and friends had gone away for the long weekend, leaving them home-alone.

"More generally however, these figures underline what we hear from older people phoning us every day: that loneliness isn't just for Christmas – it is their reality all year round."

Meanwhile, The Beast From The East (#1) which wreaked havoc across the UK at the start of the month, saw the Blackpool-based helpline inundated as treacherous blizzard conditions debilitated services up

and down the country. A large number of organisations catering to the needs of older people, including other national helplines, referred people to The Silver Line for support until they were up and running again. This resulted in nearly 5,500 calls between 1st-3rd March^[3] – the worst weather-affected days – and set a new record for the highest number of calls received in a 24-hour period: 1859 on March 2nd^[4]. Sophie said:

“Our staff worked tirelessly around the clock to handle the surge in calls from older people feeling trapped in their homes and isolated during the spell of heavy snow – at a rate of a call every 20 seconds at peak times – allaying their concerns and anxieties, offering practical help as well as connecting them to local services that were still running. This further demonstrates that The Silver Line helpline is quickly becoming established as the ‘fifth emergency service’ for some of the most vulnerable citizens in our society at their time of greatest need – or, as callers often refer to us, ‘a lifeline’.”

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

“Eighty per cent of our callers in March were reaching out to us for the first time, so I am delighted that more and more older people now know about The Silver Line, that we are free, confidential, and that they can ring us any time of day or night, even when all the other services shut down, for instance on Easter Sunday. But I am of course very sad that so many thousands are so isolated and alone that they have nobody else to speak to except us, and no-one to share with them their memories of happier Easters. I hope that all those with older relatives, friends, or service users remember our number, 0800 4 70 80 90.”

^[1] March 2017: 38, 935

^[2] over 1000 more vs Easter long weekend last year (2017: 5322)

^[3]-vs- the typical average of c4500 for equivalent period

^[4] More generally, March 2018 now accounts for the ‘top 3’ days in terms of call volumes since launch – with 3rd at 1828 and Easter Sunday at 1827