

NEWS



UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 1st May 2018

THE SILVER LINE APPOINTS BEN SUMMERSKILL OBE AS NEW CHAIR

CHARITY FURTHER STRENGTHENS BOARD OF TRUSTEES WITH NEW APPOINTMENTS

1st May, 2018 (London): The Silver Line helpline today announced Ben Summerskill OBE will become its new Chair with immediate effect. Ben was appointed to the Board of Trustees a year ago, and takes over from Patrick Geoghegan OBE who is stepping down having been in the post since 2014¹.

Ben has extensive senior level experience and expertise of working in the charity sector: he is currently Director of the Criminal Justice Alliance – a coalition of 135 charities – and was formerly Chief Executive of Stonewall for over a decade. He is also on the board of ACAS and the committee of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. In his earlier career, Ben was a Fleet Street journalist.

The Silver Line charity runs the only free, national, confidential 24/7 helpline, offering information, friendship and advice to older people who may feel lonely or isolated. Since its national launch in November 2013, it has received more than 1.8 million calls – currently averaging over 10,000 callers per week – the majority of who speak to no one else, sometimes for days or weeks on end. In addition, the charity offers telephone and letters friendship schemes, delivered by some 3000 volunteers.

And demand for its services keeps rising: March 2018 was a record month at the helpline with more than 48,000 calls received – the highest number since its national launch in November 2013; Easter Day also saw a greater number of people phoning than either Christmas Day or New Year's Day.² April is looking similarly busy.

Ben Summerskill OBE said: "It's a huge honour to be asked to chair The Silver Line Helpline. The vast majority of our 10,000 calls a week come out of hours at nights and weekends when there's no other service available to help address Britain's epidemic of loneliness among older people and I'm determined we continue to meet their needs with a service of the highest quality."

President and founder Dame Esther Rantzen CBE said: "I'm delighted that Ben has accepted the invitation to chair this crucial charity which, in just four years, has proved that our staff and volunteers can transform the lives of isolated older people by offering them a friendly voice and a listening ear. Ben has already proved his skill and commitment as a Trustee and, with the demand for our services growing all the time, we all look forward hugely to working with him in the future."

In addition, Eileen Hammond and Andrew Geddes have been appointed as new Trustees:

- *Eileen Hammond:* is an independent Charity Consultant with 40 years' of experience in the charity sector working both within, and as an adviser to charitable organisations. Her in-house career has spanned roles from hands-on fundraising manager, to Director to Chief Executive. Since 1999 she has

¹ Appointed as a Trustee June 2012 and became Chair in January 2014; the helpline was initially piloted in the north on England and the Channel Islands prior to national launch on 25th November 2013

² <https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Loneliness-Isnt-Just-For-Christmas.pdf>

been an external advisor to small or new charities on fundraising and management, and related issues such as governance, strategic direction and development. She has also volunteered extensively.

- *Andrew Geddes:* Andrew has spent 37 years in the ophthalmic business sector, focused on tackling eye conditions that particularly affect older people such as age related macular degeneration, cataracts and glaucoma. He is currently Executive Chairman of the Vision Ophthalmology Group ('VOG'), and Senior Vice President EMEA - Commercial Operations for Glaukos Inc. He is also a patron of Variety.

They join members of the current Board: Dame Esther Rantzen DBE (President and Founder); Jane Ashcroft CBE; Piers Ricketts; Jackie Gittins; Christian Dingwall; Michael Josephson MBE; and Lorraine Jackson.

Meanwhile, Lady (Susan) Chinn CBE – one of the charity's inaugural Trustees – and Rev Rose Hudson-Wilkin (appointed in 2015) are stepping down.

*****ENDS*****

For further information, including quotes from Eileen Hammond and Andrew Geddes please contact Alexia Latham email: alexia.latham@thesilverline.org.uk; or call 07557109755.

Notes to Editors

- Pictures and biographies of The Silver Line's Trustees are available on the website: <https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/who-we-are/people/>

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 1.6 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 talk about present or historic abuse
- HRH The Duchess of Cornwall became the charity's first Royal Patron in July 2017 to coincide with her 70th birthday
- More details on The Silver Line website: www.thesilverline.org.uk