

## **Loneliness Awareness Week 2019: Esther Rantzen calls for volunteers to join her charity helping lonely and isolated older people**

**19<sup>th</sup> June 2019, Battersea, London** – TV broadcaster and campaigner Dame Esther Rantzen is using Loneliness Awareness Week 2019 to make an impassioned plea to people living in London to volunteer for The Silver Line Helpline, which provides vital support for older people living with loneliness and social isolation.

Throughout this week (June 17<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>) awareness will be raised of the growing loneliness epidemic which affects around 9 million people across the UK. One of the groups most affected by this debilitating issue is older people, with studies suggesting there around 1.2 million chronically lonely older people in the country. On top of the psychological impact of loneliness, it has potentially serious health implications which have been found to be akin to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Dame Esther Rantzen set up the charity The Silver Line after experiencing this crippling loneliness first-hand after the death of her husband. The charity, which has been running for just under 6 years and has its headquarters in Battersea, provides a 24/7 Helpline to older people in need of a friendly, supportive conversation during times of loneliness and despair. Since launching, demand for the Helpline has been overwhelming, with the charity receiving nearly 2.5 million calls already.

Currently, most of these calls are answered by a team of paid staff, but now in an effort to meet the growing demand and ensure the sustainability of the charity for many years to come, the organisation is planning an ambitious drive to recruit volunteers to help answer calls at Volunteer Hubs around the country. One of the first of these Hubs is being launched in the heart of Battersea at The Silver Line's London Headquarters, and the charity urgently needs volunteers to sign up as it gets ready to launch the exciting new project.

Charity founder Esther Rantzen commented: "We need to create a volunteer force who can answer this tsunami of calls. Therefore, we are now recruiting volunteers, initially in the London area, to help us. We have already piloted this approach. We know volunteers have a huge amount to offer and can be easily trained to provide information, friendship and advice. We need a few daytime hours each week to answer older people most of whom have absolutely nobody else to have a conversation with, to help them feel, as one caller told us "that I am a member of the human race again".

"We are offering volunteers in London the chance to make a real, tangible difference to the lives of isolated and vulnerable older people, who turn to us, principally because they are suffering loneliness and isolation.

"It's rewarding, you will make a difference. We will train you. It's important work and extremely fulfilling as well."

If you live in Battersea or within commutable distance and are interested in giving your time on a regular basis to help lonely and isolated older people, please email: [volunteering@thesilverline.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@thesilverline.org.uk)

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