

# OUTCOMES

## WHAT PEOPLE SAID

- “ Life can feel sad and empty
- “ When my wife died, gradually I stopped seeing people. It feels like nobody cares or remembers me
- “ It hit me when I saw a couple holding hands
- “ I feel I can't connect – I don't offer help for fear of rejection or expectations.
- “ I get help from services but this can sometimes leave you feeling isolated. Lots of people walking through your home to do stuff for you means family don't come.

## SOLUTIONS PEOPLE SUGGESTED

These fell into 3 broad categories:

### 1. Befriending

One-to-one visiting/support. In people's own homes to begin to build confidence and motivation

### 2. Personal “self-help” strategies

Tips for keeping more active and more involved such as having a dog or visiting a neighbour. Community cafes and luncheon clubs were seen as good ways for people to get out, meet and chat in formally to prevent loneliness becoming chronic

### 3. Join a group

Lots of people suggested various local groups catering for all different tastes and abilities from dancing, arts and crafts, bingo etc

### Example

One woman talked about how lonely she felt when going through cancer treatment. During the many visits to the hospital she began to meet up with another woman going through similar treatment and they became (in her words) “chemo buddies”.

They gave each other the confidence and motivation to get through a difficult time and have stayed friends.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Loneliness is a feeling – it is how we perceive ourselves to be rather than physically being alone
- Older people told us loneliness means different things to different people. Sometimes it is not about having visitors but about who they are. They may miss not seeing close family or friends (who may have died or live a long way away) who know them well, what they like to talk about and things they like to do
- Admitting you are feeling lonely can be difficult and embarrassing.
- There is a clear need to generate social activities in the more rural areas of Rotherham and to make sure information about available activities reaches older people in those areas.
- Our survey showed that there are strong links between loneliness and mental health. People become unable to help themselves as it firstly affects their confidence and motivation which in turn affects their health, and so it becomes a downward spiral.
- The long-term effects of loneliness can be so profound we need to find effective ways to tackle it or the demand on statutory health and social care services will only continue to increase.

## NEXT STEPS

- Share our findings with political leaders and statutory service providers.
- Promote neighbourhood level community development approaches
- Provide meaningful opportunities and support to encourage older people to get involved, to volunteer as befrienders or drivers, for example
- Tackle the barriers that increase people's chances of being isolated, such as transport and making sure older people are getting their benefit entitlements.
- Promote a more positive approach to ageing by tackling stereotypes of older people being seen as a burden and a drain on resources rather than actively being part of the solution.
- Get involved with ROPF to campaign for an Age Friendly Rotherham and support our Vision for 2025 that “Rotherham is a great place to grow older and live in later life”. Contact us to sign up.



# OLDER PEOPLE AND LONELINESS

Report on a survey talking with older people in Rotherham about loneliness, October 2017

Older People's Forum  
Rotherham

Rotherham  
ageUK





# BACKGROUND

## WHO DID THIS STUDY?

Rotherham Older Peoples Forum (ROPF) and Age UK Rotherham established the Rotherham Less Lonely partnership in 2015 to look at the issue of loneliness in older age. The partnership had representatives from RMBC, police and the fire service and had the backing of local MP John Healey.

After 12 months of activities raising the profile of this issue the work of the partnership ended but the commitment to continue working to tackle loneliness in Rotherham did not stop. In January 2017 ROPF secured funding from South Yorkshire Community Foundation to undertake this survey.

## WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Almost everyone will have felt lonely at some point in their lives, it's part of being human, it is a natural warning sign which we need to recognise and then respond to. For many life moves on and the feelings of being lonely soon pass. For some, however, loneliness, becomes chronic and then it can have a serious effect on a person's health and well-being.

Age UK estimates that over 1 million older people are lonely and this increases the risk of conditions such as diabetes, heart conditions, strokes, depression and dementia. It affects confidence and self-esteem making it much harder for an individual to help themselves.

The Age UK research surveyed 1000 GP practices and found that nearly 90% felt that some patients were coming to see them because they were lonely and the problem is likely to be increasing as local transport, services and community activities are cut. We wanted to find out what is Rotherham's older citizens experiences of loneliness, how it might be affecting them and how can we work together to try to change things.



## WHAT DID WE DO?

The group drafted some key questions we wanted to look at and then checked them out with ROPF members at a members meeting. They were:

1. What does loneliness mean to older people in Rotherham?
2. What effect does being lonely have on individual's lives?
3. What can we do together to tackle loneliness?

The cornerstone of all ROPF surveys is that we talk with and listen to older people to capture their views and ideas.

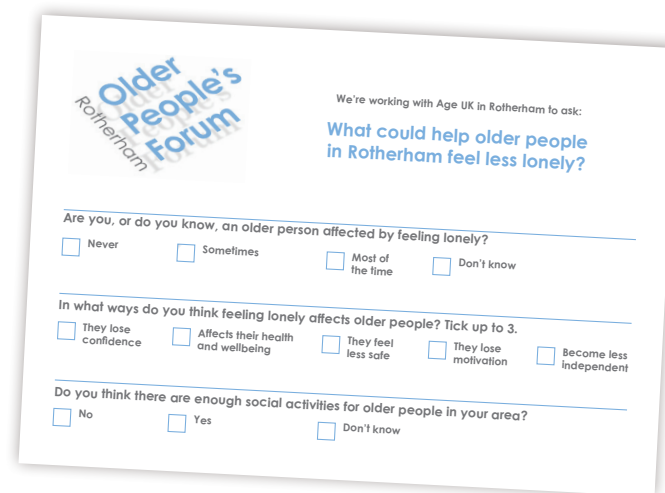
We did this by:

Developing 'conversation packs' – these contained laminated speech bubbles each with a statement about loneliness; large post-it notes; pens and a tabletop "chat to us" banner. These were taken along to different groups around Rotherham to generate conversations about loneliness.

Members meetings – ROPF members discussed the issue of loneliness in a workshop and tried out and fine tuned the conversation packs.

Questionnaire postcards – we designed an A5 sized freepost postcard to distribute as widely as possible across the Borough. The final version took some time to establish as members discussed and debated the wording to try to make sure it was understandable and people would feel comfortable completing it.

The postcards were also completed at Rotherham show in September, at Older People's Day in October, and distributed widely by a number of ward councillors.

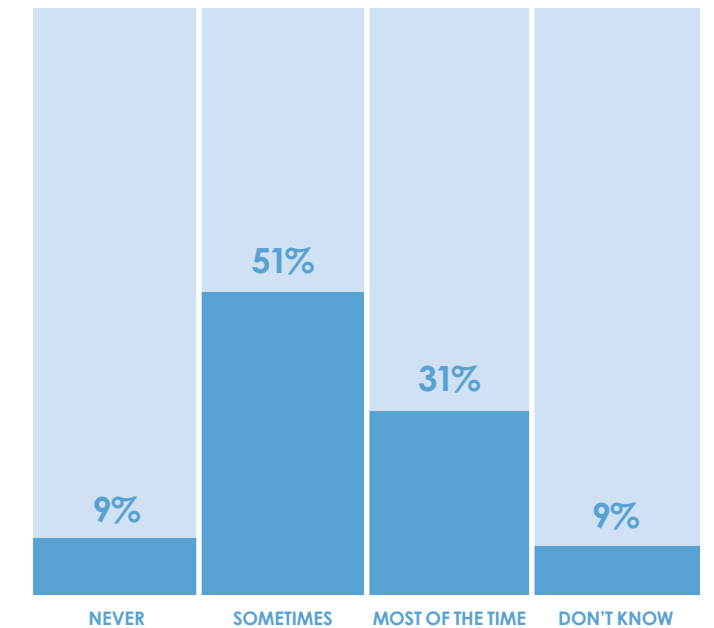


# RESEARCH

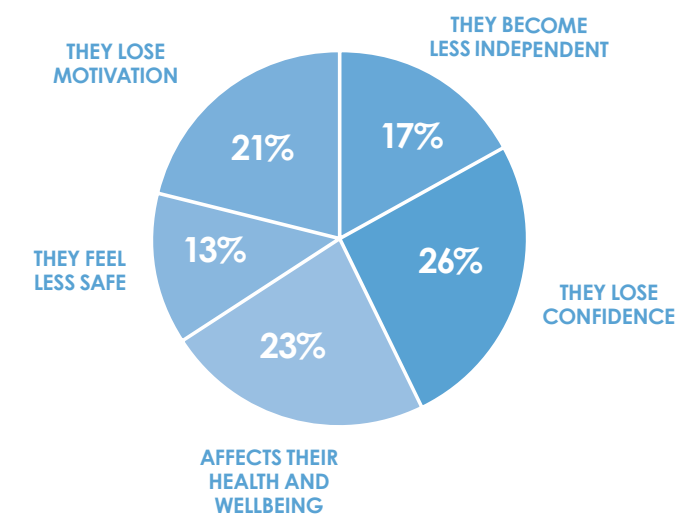
## WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

- 173 people completed the postcard questionnaires
- Talked to 8 different groups; approximately 80 people
- Most people who responded to our survey said they feel lonely often or always.
- The survey showed that loss of confidence was the most important effect (26%) followed by loss of motivation (22%) and health and well-being (22%)
- There were differences across Rotherham in whether or not people thought there were enough activities in the community. Those in central Rotherham tended to think they were, whilst those in the outline wards to the North and South felt there weren't.
- Feeling lonely was often triggered by a life changing event, such as a change in health or a bereavement.

## ARE YOU, OR DO YOU KNOW, AN OLDER PERSON AFFECTED BY FEELING LONELY?



## IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU THINK LONELINESS AFFECTS OLDER PEOPLE?



## DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ENOUGH SOCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN YOUR AREA?

