

## **AGE UK CALLS ON EVERYONE TO ‘EXTEND THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP’ AS FIGURES SHOW LONELINESS LEVELS STUBBORNLY UNCHANGED**

With new Government figures showing the proportion of adults feeling often or always lonely remains unchanged in recent years<sup>[i]</sup>, despite the higher profile being given to combatting the problem through initiatives like the Jo Cox Commission, Age UK is urging people to be friendly to older people in their community to mark **National Friendship Day this Sunday** (6<sup>th</sup> August).

Research supports the benefits of intergenerational friendships for old and young alike, but they are still relatively uncommon in the UK and younger people are far less likely to engage with their neighbours than older age groups<sup>[ii]</sup>. New figures from the Government, published in its latest Community Life Survey<sup>[iii]</sup>, show that those aged 16-24 are least likely to talk to their neighbours with only 46% saying that they do this compared to 87% among those aged 65-74 and 88% of respondents aged 75+<sup>[iv]</sup>.

Age UK’s own research shows that a staggering 1.2 million older people in England are chronically lonely and 200,000 older people have not had a conversation with friends or family for an entire month<sup>[v]</sup>. Yet longer days, lighter evenings and – hopefully – warmer weather make summer the perfect time to get to know older neighbours who may be feeling lonely, prompting the Charity to call on people across the age spectrum to extend the hand of friendship to their neighbours over the coming weeks and months.

**Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director at Age UK, said:** “A friendly community benefits everyone and makes a place much nicer to live and work in for people of all ages. The simple act of stopping for a quick chat can brighten up an older person’s day, particularly if that’s the only conversation they’re likely to have, so please don’t be shy, smile and say hello and chances are you’ll both feel better for it.”

**Older people who are experiencing feelings of loneliness and would like to sign up to Age UK’s telephone befriending service should visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/no-one](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/no-one), call Age UK Advice free of charge on 0800 169 65 65 or contact their local Age UK to see what services are available locally.**

Age UK, the country’s leading charity for older people, has put together the following top tips on how to take advantage of the summer months to reach out to older people and help them to beat the isolation and loneliness that plague so many lives.

### **TOP TIPS – Getting to know your older neighbours**

#### **1. Start a conversation**

We all lead increasingly busy lives but summer days see us spending more time outside, whether it’s barbecuing or enjoying hobbies. It might seem obvious but the better weather brings more opportunities to stop and have a chat to your neighbours, in the garden, on the street or at a local shop.

The late Jo Cox MP put it perfectly, “*young or old, loneliness doesn’t discriminate...it is something many of us could easily help with. Looking in on a neighbour, visiting an elderly relative or making that call or visit we’ve been promising to a friend we haven’t seen in a long time.*”

## **2. Look out for older neighbours**

In very hot weather, look out for older neighbours, particularly if you know they aren’t terribly well and/or they live alone. The importance of staying cool and keeping well in hot weather cannot be over-estimated, as older people are often particularly susceptible to heat-related illness. Age UK’s tips on staying cool can be found here: [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk). To order a free copy of Age UK’s information guide *Staying cool in a heatwave*, call Age UK Advice on 0800 169 6565 or download it from the Age UK website.

## **3. Accompany your neighbour to a local summer event**

There are usually more events going on over the summer months in local communities, such as fetes, festivals or county shows. It could be a great opportunity to strike up a conversation with someone in your street to see if they’d like to go too. If this goes well you could arrange a regular time to pop in and have a cuppa with them in the winter months as well.

## **4. Offer to help with a bit of gardening**

Gardening is a great way to get outside and exercise at the same time! It’s also a really sociable activity. Do you know an older person on your street or in your local area who could do with some help in their garden? To get to know them, why not offer to help out with a bit of lawn-mowing, weeding or planting? If you notice that they also need help with tasks like getting to the doctors or going shopping, give them information about their local Age UK which may have services to help.

## **5. Hold a street party or summer get together**

Street parties and summer lunches are surprisingly simple to set up and a great way to get to know your neighbours. Provided the street is closed to traffic (speak to your council about how to do this), you and your neighbours can hold a community event on your doorstep! You just need to borrow tables and chairs, and encourage people to bring out a dish or two that could be shared with the group.

As a seated event, they are also a good way for older members of your community to join in. While meeting new people can be intimidating for anyone, with appropriate support to enable everyone to join in, this type of event can be a great way to get to know neighbours.

**-Ends-**

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<sup>[i]</sup> The Government’s annual *Community Life Survey*, published 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017, reported that the proportion of adults reporting they felt lonely often or always has remained unchanged since collection began in 2013-14 at 5%. The *Community Life Survey* is a survey of adults (16+) in England that explores levels of community cohesion and engagement, published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). This year’s report summarises the results from the 2016-17 survey, which was run from August 2016 to March

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2017. This is the first year that the annual results have been based on data collected using a self- completion online/paper questionnaire rather than via a face to face interview.

<sup>[ii]</sup> *Making Intergenerational Connections*, by Lisbeth Drury, prof. Dominic Abrams and Dr Hannah J Swift, published June 2017 <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/professional-resources-home/research/communities/making-intergenerational-connections-june-2017/>. Evidence shows that young people who experience direct contact with older adults in general have more positive attitudes towards older people, are less likely to stereotype or patronise older people, and are more likely to help them and have contact in the future. Equally, direct intergenerational contact can have a huge impact on the wellbeing of older people.

<sup>[iii]</sup> As in end note i.

<sup>[iv]</sup> Results for this question were similar for men (72% agreed) and women (73%). Source: Community Life Survey 2016-2017, DCMS.

<sup>[v]</sup> Marmot, M., Oldfield, Z., Clemens, S., Blake, M., Phelps, A., Nazroo, J., Steptoe, A., Rogers, N., Banks, J., Oskala, A. (2016). *English Longitudinal Study of Ageing: Waves 0-7, 1998-2015*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5050-12>. Figures extrapolated to national population using 2015 ONS population estimates.