Who we are

> We help people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. We are part of a global voluntary network that responds to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies. We help vulnerable people in the UK and abroad to prepare for and respond to emergencies in their own communities and when the crisis is over, we help them to recover and move on with their lives.

> The British Red Cross is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which comprises:

The International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and 189 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide.

> As a member of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the British Red Cross is committed to, and bound by, its fundamental principles. These are: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

> Volunteers are at the core of the Red Cross. Our motivated and skilled body of volunteers continue to provide help and assistance to those in need, whoever and wherever they may be. The British Red Cross has approximately 4,000 volunteers in Scotland.

> We help people at times of personal crises through a range of activities including transport support, loan of mobility aids and support at home. We also provide first aid services at public events and promote first aid education and training as part of developing community and individual resilience. As an auxiliary to the Government, we support the emergency services during major incidents.

Introduction

The British Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to respond to the committee’s call for evidence on age and social isolation in Scotland and feels that much of the work we do within the area of health and social care promotes social connectedness and tackles isolation and loneliness.

This submission will be based on our experience and the experience of the people we help to support.

Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings

From our experience we believe that social isolation can be felt by people living in either urban or rural settings. That said, in our services which support people to make reconnections with their community, generally the people we help live in more urban areas.
We believe that this demonstrates the difficulties of accessing and identifying people living in more remote areas who are at risk of social isolation, rather than demonstrating the prevalence of social isolation in more remote areas.

Another important point to note is that people who are at risk of social isolation do not necessarily live alone. In our local area coordination service in Midlothian more than half of the people we assist to make reconnections with the community live with someone else.

We feel that this demonstrates that social isolation and critically loneliness can be related to wider factors than the geography of where you live. From our experience social isolation and loneliness is often linked to the emotional, physical and mental wellbeing of the person and means that people can feel isolated even from within a family.

**Impacts of social isolation**

From the experience of the people we support the impacts of social isolation can include:

- Loss of confidence to go out
- Feeling low
- Feeling lonely
- Muscle deterioration from a lack of activity
- Increased mobility problems

However, it may be that the above factors are not only an impact of social isolation but also a precursor to social isolation, although they are certainly exacerbated by it.

For example, an older person who has recently experienced a fall, may not have the confidence to go out following the fall, despite having had an active social life before. This results in them staying at home, further reducing their confidence and ability to go out and ultimately affecting their social connectedness and leading to the person feeling isolated and lonely.

**Best practice ideas**

The Red Cross would like to share examples of support we offer which we believe has a role to play in tackling social isolation.

**Neighbourhood Links**

The Red Cross Neighbourhood Links project which runs in Midlothian helps people with low to moderate support needs to access and benefit from local services or social contact. It supports people to stay at home and remain in their local community.

Coordinators visit the person at home to gain a holistic understanding of the person’s situation and future aspirations. They offer a falls assessment and safety check, a benefits check, and assist with transport, housing and adaptation needs.
Together, the coordinator and the person develop a support plan which empowers the individual to work towards their goals by providing advice, referrals and practical support.

As part of the Neighbourhood Links programme the Red Cross also offers a Buddy Service. The Buddy Service is provided for a maximum of 12 weeks for up to 2 hours weekly. The buddies are PVG checked and complete a training programme which includes adult and child protection, health and safety, lone working, psychosocial support and first aid. Additional training such as dementia awareness, visual impairment awareness and diabetes is also provided.

The buddies can assist and support people with a walking programme, shopping service, home from hospital, carers short break, confidence building, learning and/or regaining skills.

Prior to the end of the agreed period the Neighbourhood Links co-ordinator reassesses with the individual and buddy to determine if the goals have been met and agreement is reached on a way forward. This may include making a referral or signposting to another organisation to provide ongoing support.

The service has demonstrated positive outcomes for the people it supported. In an evaluation of the service between January 2014 and September 2014 the feedback displayed in the chart below was captured. During this period the service assisted 174 with closed cases.

### Client Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased my Independence</td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel safer, less isolated and more confident</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me make an informed choice</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved my health and/or well being</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Local Area Coordination

The community coordinators scheme helps communities and their older members stay connected. It aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness, build community connections, promote health and wellbeing and enable choice and independence.

When the project was started the coordinators undertook an extensive mapping task to identify what was available in the communities they were covering. Following this, a calendar of activities was produced which is continually updated which outlines what is on, when and where, and is used to inform decisions about what a person might want to get involved in.
The coordinator begins with a one to one visit to find out individual's background, interests and goals. They listen to people's needs and concerns and then help to find activities that may suit.

Once the activities have been chosen by the person, the coordinator would then escort the individual to the activity if needed and ensure that there is viable transport, offering transport assistance if necessary.

If the person is interesting in volunteering or wishes to start up a new group the coordinator would assist in finding volunteering opportunities or provide support and links to help the person start a new group.

**Wheelchair Loan**
For someone with mobility problems having the right equipment can mean the difference between maintaining an active life and being isolated.

We provide short-term loans of wheelchairs and other equipment to help people with a short term mobility problem maintain their daily life and retain their independence.

The Red Cross offers the loan of wheelchairs to people with short term mobility issues across Scotland. In 2014, we loaned in excess of 7,000 wheelchairs in Scotland.

According to information that we have received from people who have borrowed a wheelchair from the Red Cross almost 50% of them would have been unable to leave their home without the wheelchair.

From our experience one of the most common barriers to people getting out and making connections is because of poor mobility.

Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy

**Mobility**
At present, someone who has an issue which affects their mobility on a temporary basis is not able to access a wheelchair through either the NHS or local authorities. This can lead to detrimental outcomes as people lose their ability to do normal things like meet their friends, go to the shops, attend appointments and in some cases be discharged from hospital.

Despite substantial investment by the Scottish Government in wheelchair provision, the needs of those with short term mobility issues remain unmet and we believe that this can contribute to an individual being socially isolated.

There is currently no duty on either the NHS or local authority to provide wheelchairs or other mobility aids in the short term.

The Red Cross produced a report, “Making a Move: Increasing choice and independence for people with short term mobility needs” which called on the Scottish Government to:

> Establish a duty on the new health and social care partnerships to meet people’s short term mobility requirement
> Ensure the joint integration boards are mandated to explain how they will achieve this in their local areas
> Adequately resource partnerships to identify and meet these needs.

**Transport**

Another barrier that prevents people from engaging in their community is difficulties in accessing viable and suitable transport. This can be challenging in both rural and urban settings, particularly when it is compounded with the person also having a mobility issue.

We would argue that addressing the issue of transport in tackling social isolation is essential. We believe it is critical that the community planning partnerships which have responsibility for transport is more closely linked to health and social care integration, with recognition of the preventative value of keeping people active and engaged in their community has on the individual’s health and wellbeing and the resilience and wellbeing of the community.

**Effective awareness-raising within communities**

Effective awareness-raising is a challenge and in our projects is often down to word of mouth.

We believe that stronger links with GP surgeries is vital as it is viewed as being the most effective route to get information to the target groups. It is possible that the structures and arrangements that continue to develop from Public Bodies (Joint Working) Act will encourage greater involvement and links between GPs, the community, the NHS and local authorities.

The Red Cross would recommend that as part of the inquiry the new integrated partnerships outlined how they are working with communities to address social isolation.

**Concluding remarks**

The Red Cross welcomes the Committee’s inquiry into age and social isolation and believes that tackling social isolation brings huge benefits not just to individuals but to communities aswell.

Fiona MacLeod
Public affairs officer for Scotland
The British Red Cross
26 March 2015