This information comes from a purely personal observation, and experience volunteering in my local sheltered housing complex in Bellshill. Speaking to residents, wardens, councillors, some research into North Lanarkshire Sheltered Housing. Assisting the Warden, Eleanor Shaw, in events and general assistance at events.

There are forty one sheltered housing complexes in total in North Lanarkshire, covering the areas of:

Airdrie – 9
Bellshill – 7
Coatbridge – 8
Kilsyth – 7
Moodiesburn – 1
Motherwell – 4
Shotts – 1
Wishaw – 5.

This is a sizable amount of sheltered housing for these areas, however there could be room for improvement in certain areas.

Moray Quadrant in Bellshill, the residents are at an age range of 70 years old to late 80,s, most of them now on their own. Even in sheltered housing there can be, isolation, lonliness and illness.

Losing a partner, housebound due to illness, lack of interest in taking part socially. Other factors are no family, or estranged from family members. This is where the warden, volunteers, befriender, and other voluntary services, come in. bringing everyone together from the beginning, even if they can only manage afternoon tea, in the residents hall, we strive to get them together, even if they can only manage to the hall.

Now, thanks to Eleanor and volunteers, we have a full sociable residency, which means, trips to local restaurants, for lunch, local theatre shows, meetings, old film watching, and anything we can find affordably, and manageable. We are always on the lookout for events.

We also organise local elderly people who reside in their own homes to join us in these events, so they don’t feel left out of anything that is going on in the community. The idea is to make the housebound and elderly people aware that they are not alone, and that there are assistance and activities out there for everyone.
Best practise;
A need for more sheltered housing in some areas.
Liаising with neighbouring communities.
Targeting events and activities, within easy distances.
Bringing the youth and elderly, together, at events, going into schools.
The caring system recognising health needs on a more regular basis.
Regular meetings, maybe quarterly, with the Housing management, discussing housing needs.
Retaining the same Warden in each complex, this is important to residents, who have built up a trust and confidence in this person. There was a plan to move the Wardens around last year, which resulted in a protest from all the residents. Strong pleas to keep the wardens they have. In all of the individual residencies, was the same feeling.

Targeted support;
Housing management.
Caring sector for health needs.
Befrienders, voluntary groups.
Local council.
The most important factor, for the elderly, is clearly to have the care and health care correct from the beginning, so that they have the confidence, and capacity to enjoy the more social part of their life. Also in the home, that everything is in place for the elderly residents to enjoy their home and feel comfortable and safe.

Social isolation in young people.
Youth unemployment, is an ongoing issue in the media, and with organisations striving to help the youth go forward into their working lives. Isolation in youth could be determined in lots of areas.
Education, or lack of, not doing well at school, leaving school and not finding work, or finding work, which could be temporary, very little pay, zero contracts, and no security.
Further education, very little college places, few apprenticeships. Applying for jobs, can prove very difficult for our youth. Online applications, for example, on a jobseekers allowance, how can the youth in this category of seeking work, afford the broadband, never mind the computer equipment to spend time applying for jobs. Some young people who are seriously applying for jobs, use the computers in the local cultural and library centres, and have to pay for this service. So negatives there.
Mental health in our youth is very worrying, suicide rates, drugs and alcohol, also a large problem. These kind of problems don’t stop at working class, unemployed, or the uneducated. Problems like this can apply to University graduates too.

**Best practise;**

More youth projects.
Training and further education possibilities.
Vocational training in the workplace.
Joining young and elderly together.
Free workshops to work.

**Targeted support.**

Employers for more work experience projects
Housing
Further education
Youth groups and committees.

Social isolation also includes Women over 50 and late 50s, who find it harder to secure employment, especially after redundancy, and closure of services and employment where they worked before.

Certainly from the public sector and caring. A role that these women have probably worked most of their working years, now find themselves out in the cold. The online applying system of seeking employment, proves difficult, not only have these women never found the need to use a computer. The cost of broadband, never mind the purchasing of the computer, is expensive when you are unemployed. The same for the youth seeking employment.

Age can be a factor in not being successful in finding employment, although there is not an employer in the country who would admit that. An absence from the work place leaves these women socially and professionally isolated, feeling they are back to the role of housewife or housekeeper if they are on their own. There are many women of that age who are on their own now, and probably caring for their grandchild, and most other women who do not have the luxury of family, and people to look after feel useless.

**Best practise**

An easier path in recruitment
Open interviews to work
Group sessions for women to work
Help with CV,s.
Targeted support

Job centres

Routes to work

Employers

Local groups for women

Finally, I know that the STUC Womens Committee have included this topic in their work plan, and events this year, proof that there is awareness out there, thanks to the lovely hard working women of the STUC Women committee.

Margaret Boyd
Vice chair GMB Equality Forum.
GMB Scotland
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