EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

AGE AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

SUBMISSION FROM INVERCLYDE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRUST

Inverclyde Community Development Trust has over a quarter century of experience in providing a wide range of services and support to the people of Inverclyde.

Our mission statement is very straightforward: "Create jobs. Remove barriers. Provide services."

We contribute to the overall economic development of Inverclyde by providing or creating jobs for people from disadvantaged groups and areas.

**Trust Volunteering** – A project of Inverclyde Community Development Trust - aims to improve the volunteering experience for organisations and individuals by:

- Breaking down barriers
- Increasing the number and broadening the range of individuals and organisations involved in volunteering
- Encouraging young people to volunteer
- Promoting the recognition of volunteering at local and national policy level

Volunteer Service Inverclyde comprises, alongside CVS Inverclyde, the Third Sector Interface for Inverclyde, together we offer a range of services.

Trust Volunteering also hosts a range of volunteer supported projects –

- **Trust Befriending** – a service for socially isolated individuals in Inverclyde aged 18+ we are contracted by Inverclyde CHCP to deliver this service.
- **Chit Chat** – small group meet-ups for individuals in Central and East Greenock aged 65+ who are at risk of social isolation. This project is funded by Big Lottery.
- **Gie’s Peace** – a pathfinder project researching the history of sectarianism in Inverclyde and developing a community response. This project is funded by the Scottish Government Community Safety Unit via Voluntary Action Fund.
- **Self-Management Autism Project** - Self management and volunteering utilising a co-produced asset based approach
- **Autism Support Pilots**– befriending for adults with Autism and personal development opportunities for individuals with autism or their carer.
- **iVolunteer** – building digital capacity within third sector organisations to utilise social media while providing high quality opportunities for young people.

Following this call for evidence, we facilitated a discussion with health and social care organisations in Inverclyde to gather evidence, share best practice and suggest new approaches to inform future government policy on this issue which have informed the response below. The organisations involved in this were CVS Inverclyde, Drink Safe (Inverclyde Council), NHS GGC Langhill Clinic IRH, TAG (The Advisory Group), West College Scotland, Mind Mosaic and Inverclyde Carers Centre.
Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings

The evidence in our community appears to be anecdotal at present, it was clear that loneliness and social isolation are perceived as critical issues in our community but that a more robust evidence base as to “who is affected and how” requires to be developed.

Impacts of social isolation

There is a wealth of research that evidences the link between social isolation and harm to our health and wellbeing. The research relating to this, helpfully collated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Campaign to End Loneliness (http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/) cites a range of research detailing the mental and physical health impacts of loneliness including: increased risk of depression; high blood pressure; clinical dementia; cognitive decline; higher use of medication; higher incidence of falls; early entry into residential or nursing care and a range of other negative outcomes. This evidence accords with the experience of our own practice. There was also a consensus within organisations that the changing nature of communities has had an impact on social inclusion.

Best practice and ideas that could be shared across Scotland including examples of targeted support or initiatives

Volunteering as a support

Volunteering was recognised as mutually beneficial – providing volunteers themselves with an opportunity to develop routines, make friends, increase self-esteem and confidence and gain a sense of purpose. As well as this volunteers make a special contribution to the delivery of services which can reduce social isolation and loneliness. Volunteer delivered services can be perceived as less threatening than statutory services.

Volunteering provides an opportunity to increase social capital by bringing diverse groups of people together. This can provide opportunities for social interaction, sharing of skills and experience and community knowledge.

Practice Examples

Chit Chat

Chit Chat adopts a preventative approach, aiming to support individuals aged 65+ at risk of social isolation to form lasting friendships. Individuals accessing the service are at risk for a variety of reasons e.g. relocation, bereavement, change in family circumstances and can participate in a range of groups. Activities are community led and supported by volunteers. Ideas for activities are generated by individuals accessing the project.
Case Study

B moved to Gourock with his wife, whom he cared for, who had Alzheimer’s. B’s wife died two weeks before their move. When our project co-ordinator assessed B for the Chit Chat project he told us that he felt he was losing his voice as he hadn’t spoken to anyone for 4 days. B is now attending 3 weekly Chit Chat groups - an art class, software training and a men’s group and has made friends with two of the men. B, who is almost 90 years old, is currently helping us set up a beginner’s ballroom class for other older people as he danced at a competitive level in his younger years.

Chit Chat is also successful at supporting and signposting individuals to other services in the community. 20% of clients accessing other services e.g. falls prevention, financial fitness, Technology

Befriending Case Study

There is significant research which outlines the benefits of befriending as an intervention. Evidence, such as that detailed in the publication “Befriending, Loneliness and Social Isolation in Older People” (2010) reports the unique impact made by volunteer befrienders on the wellbeing of individuals affected by isolation and loneliness. “Wellbeing is affected by isolation, loneliness, and concerns regarding physical health. This is mitigated by the emotional support of receiving visits, having something to look forward to and the knowledge that someone has chosen to visit them (as opposed to being paid to do so)”

Case Study

M befriends an 47 year old individual with Lyme Disease by providing 2 hours a week social support. J who receives the service had the following to say of her experience:

“My befriender always has new ideas and crafts for me to try. It means I continue doing it during the week... My befriender has always been kind and understanding to me, and very importantly patient in listening to me.

Having a befriender has helped me relate to others and make friends more easily. I have felt more confident even though it has been very frustrating with my speech I know it is ok to use my iPad to speak to others.

I would not hesitate to recommend the scheme to anybody who is lonely or isolated. It can be such a lifesaver”

Digital Solutions

Digital exclusion can impact on individuals across the life journey but appears to be particularly prevalent in older people. The Scottish Government Digital Inclusion Strategy (updated 2014) advises that over 53% of people who lack basic digital skills are aged over 65. The Calouste Gulbenkian foundation commissioned Independent Age to do a study into how technology can prevent and alleviate loneliness where
their study of four examples of ‘good, sustained practice’ highlighted the link between ‘digital exclusion’ and ‘social exclusion’ (Independent Age, 2010). Linked in with this, there is evidence that one of the two main reasons that 55-74 year-olds use the internet is to keep contact with other people (Ofcom, 2010).

**Case Study**

Software Training Pilot - after a successful taster session with EE at their Greenock call centre clients expressed an interest in ongoing opportunities to use tablets and social media. As no opportunity existed locally for this activity in a flexible way which suited the needs of the individuals Chit Chat engage we worked in partnership with Software Training Scotland to develop a pilot to enable older people to have better social connections, be more independent and become more active in the community. Following a successful pilot, using the evaluations carried out with older people, social enterprise Access Technology Scotland successfully secured funding to deploy this facilitated learning opportunity to another 42 older people in 2015.

**Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy**

**Community led approaches** – co-producing solutions with communities.

**Strategy and partnership** – helping organisations and individuals to understand loneliness and that everyone has a part to play in reducing its effects. This can be informed by drawing on existing good practice and evidence within communities. At present in our community there is no strategic direction or accountability for decreasing social isolation. Therefore, workers and organisations are unable to take ownership of discussion and actions.

**Preventative focus** – focusing on individuals who are not yet socially isolated but are at risk, particularly at time of transition or change in social circumstances e.g. bereavement, retirement, change in responsibilities e.g. caring, children, and illness.

**Criteria** - At the facilitated discussion, organisations reflected that strict and inflexible criteria may mean that individuals fall into gaps where they cannot receive the correct support.

**Assessment and Social Prescribing** - It was also conceded that highlighting loneliness in assessment processes and social prescribing are key elements in reducing social isolation.

**Innovation** - At the session it was agreed that while there are lots of excellent community activities, however current provision not adequately addressing the issue of loneliness. Innovative and collaborative approach need to be developed.

**Effective awareness-raising within communities**

**Intergenerational practice** – Intergenerational events and projects provide opportunities to increase intergenerational understanding, build social capital and share experiences.
More spaces to talk about loneliness – a shared meaning of loneliness and social isolation needs to be developed, this could be addressed by creating more safe spaces to talk about the issue.

Meaningful awareness raising - opportunities for communities to come together to develop initiatives to reduce stigma and break down stereotypes – not just through information giving about loneliness, but creative activism.

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