Social Work Resources Response

1. Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings

South Lanarkshire is the fifth largest of Scotland’s Councils, is home to more than 310,000 people and is one of the largest and most diverse areas in Scotland. The Council covers 180,000 hectares of land stretching from a few miles from the centre of Glasgow to close to the Scottish Border. We have four towns with a population of over 20,000 and a further 23 towns and settlements with a population of over 1,000.

Given the geography of the Council area, it is not surprising that social isolation would feature. In terms of service provision to counteract social isolation, providing in all areas can be a challenge, and getting people involved in community activity that assists break periods of social isolation, by engaging people in meaningful activity can also be a challenge.

2. Impact of social isolation, for instance loneliness, ill-health

The impact of social isolation can have a negative effect on individuals, who having no or limited contact with others can affect their well being. As individuals we all thrive on communication, cooperation and conversation with others, having no one to interact with and the loneliness that can come can lead to ill-health, including mental health problems. Carers living with others who may for instance have a diagnosis of dementia, although they are not alone and have the company of others, this can be an isolating and lonely existence as the stress of caring for people with conditions such as dementia.

Statistically within South Lanarkshire we record the following for one adult only households:

- Under 25s consist of 91,068 of the overall population – it is projected (2010/2015) that 16.2% will be in one adult only households, 7.3% will be lone adults and at least one child.
- 25 to 49 year olds consist of 104,453 of the overall population – it is projected (2010/2015) that 17,590 will be in one adult only households. 10,230 will be lone adult and at least one child.
- 50 + year olds consist of 117,139 of the overall population – it is projected (2010/2015) that at least 32,330 will be on adult only households.
- Long term health and disability may also feature within the 104,407 individuals from 16+ being recorded.
Potentially loneliness and social isolation can have an impact on a wide age range of individuals.

3. **Best Practice and ideas that could be shared across Scotland, including examples of targeted support or initiatives (including housing, health, third sector)**

In terms of targeted support, social isolation/loneliness would not be the only feature identified in an assessment of need for service provision; however it is recognised that preventative, and proactive supports in the community can assist break the isolation, and utilise the assets of local people, tapping into their expertise and skills for the benefit of others.

There are many examples of older people running local lunch clubs, and social clubs in their local communities, new lunch clubs are currently being established within sheltered housing complexes, and ongoing support provided to the many volunteers who run these local clubs.

We have approximately 30 local lunch clubs supporting 400 individuals.

Day Care Services, though not only targeted at social isolation concerns, can however provide a regular source of company, and activity for vulnerable people to socialise. We manage 16 day care centres for older people, offering over a 1000 places per week, and from 6 adult (learning/physical disability) we offer 375 weekly places. We also commission day care places for both older people and adults from the voluntary and private sector.

Support to Carers and the service provided by our Carer support organisations is invaluable, as some of these individuals do feel cut off and isolated due to their caring role. Support is also provided to Young Carers with a range of activity and an organised forum.

In terms of assessments and meeting individuals needs, universal and local sources should be tapped into VASLAN our voluntary sector interface organisation has devised an online search call LOCATOR.

This web based directory locates supports, service, groups within local communities.

Lunch clubs, befriending services, community transport and activity groups are just a few of the things the voluntary sector offers that make an enormous difference to older people’s lives day-to-day.

South Lanarkshire Call line – a phone call befriending service operated by Larkhall and District Volunteer Group, specifically targets older, socially isolated, people across South Lanarkshire. Two volunteers telephone individuals on a daily basis
Monday to Friday. The service currently supports 44 individuals with the capacity to increase numbers, reducing the social isolation experienced. The service has a protocol in place if “no response”, that triggers contact with next of kin and other emergency services if required.

For younger people within South Lanarkshire, Universal Connections (youth club services) are available. Other clubs and activities provided by the voluntary sector and Leisure and cultural service provide a wide range and variety of pursuits and activity.

4. Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy

Good neighbourhood schemes, community councils, existing community infrastructures should be developed further and supported. Befriending – visiting or phone services could be more widely available, better use of technology and raising awareness to its benefits.

How do we bring back a sense of local community, and the value and benefits of supporting local activity?

Local community transport initiatives, particularly in rural communities need to be supported.

All of the above are difficult to sustain during a period of austerity and efficiency activity. The Preventative services are not always seen as a priority.

5. Effective awareness- raising within communities.

Our voluntary sector interface, VASLAN, employs locality officers who raise awareness within specific localities.

Seniors Together provides opportunities for older people to have their say by encouraging them to join and get involved in regular task group meetings, attend the Older People’s Assembly and also our Forward at fifty group.

The Youth Council is made up of young volunteers between the ages of 12 and 25. It provides them with the opportunity to meet and possibly influence the way services are delivered and shaped, by for example the Council, police and the health board.

Gary Lindsay
South Lanarkshire Council
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