

Loneliness Awareness Week 2022



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Written by Jo Linton

This Loneliness Awareness Week we would have loved to have shared one of our customer's experiences of loneliness with you, but not many older people want to admit to being lonely. This is why I am doing this article on behalf of North Tyneside's older population.

Who gets lonely

No face encapsulates loneliness. People with the biggest smiles and the best laughs can be lonely, even in the midst of a crowd. We all get lonely, it is a natural human emotion, but loneliness is different. When we are younger we have careers and family to juggle. There never seems to be enough time to do anything.

Press pause. Imagine taking those things away. It might be blissful for the first few weeks but the novelty will soon wear off. The TV becomes the only voice that you hear. Two-fifths of all older people (about 3.9 million) say the television is their main company. You look forward to the odd visit from someone.

The Marmalade Trust has found that 500,000 older people can go five or six days each week without seeing or speaking to anyone at all.

Causes of loneliness

Loneliness can have many causes:

- Situational, such as moving home, retirement, or a new job.
- Life events like bereavement, relationship breakdowns or parenthood.
- Workplace loneliness, if you are not getting the right level of connection.
- Emotional loneliness can happen in relationships and families, where you have people in your life but don't feel close or understood by them.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us experienced loneliness and isolation. This gave us a good insight into how loneliness affects older people. Many older people we speak to are still cautious about returning to normal community activity and are limiting social interaction with groups for the fear of becoming unwell.

Making connections

For the last six months, I have been working as a Digital Coordinator. I have had the pleasure of being invited into older people's homes to help them with their technology. Working face to face with people is the best part of my role with Age UK North

Tyneside, and I have met some wonderful customers.

Technology is a huge contributor to older people feeling isolated and cut off from society. With the majority of processes going online, many older people feel their independence has been taken away.

However, technology can also be a positive factor in addressing loneliness. It can provide easier access and connections through video calls and social media. Age UK North Tyneside continue to address the Digital Divide by providing digital support groups.

Something that I wasn't expecting from my Digital Champion visits, is that they performed a dual purpose. Not only was I helping people to get to grips with technology. I was also providing a befriending visit to many older people who didn't see anyone due to their lack of mobility and ability to leave their homes.

I loved my home visits and it often felt more like visiting a friend rather than going to work. I only wished that I had the time to provide more help. Customers needed help with basic things that I would have loved to have done if I had the time. Things like moving a side table, hooking up a loose curtain, moving a plant pot, going to the shop for an item, helping tidy the garden, or sorting out some stuff for the charity shop.

The majority of home visits were made as customers were housebound. [Research by Sense](#) has shown that up to 50% of disabled people will be lonely on any given day. The people I visited rarely saw anyone and were experiencing loneliness. They never thought to reach out to anyone as no one likes to admit to being lonely or wants to be a burden. Thankfully, through my digital role, I was able to put many of my customers in touch with the Age UK North Tyneside Befriending Service and the VODA Good Neighbours project. This meant that additional support could be provided.

I wish that I could split myself into a million pieces and visit many more older people, but loneliness is not an issue which can be tackled alone. The number of over-50s experiencing loneliness is set to [reach two million by 2025/6](#). This compares to around 1.4 million in 2016/7, a 49% increase in 10 years.

We need to tackle loneliness together. So if you, like me, want to make a difference and love that feel-good factor of helping people. Set yourself a challenge.

Pledge 50

This year is Age UK North Tyneside's 50th Anniversary and we are asking everyone to 'Pledge 50'. Get your thinking cap on and decide what you would like to pledge to make a difference to older people in North Tyneside. Here are a few ideas to get the ball rolling:

- 50 hours of volunteer befriending
- 50 minutes helping someone
- Speak to 50 people who live alone
- Plant 50 sunflowers and give them away to brighten someone's day
- Bake 50 cupcakes and share them with 50 isolated, older people.

Age UK North Tyneside are proud to be working alongside other partners to tackle loneliness as part of [The Campaign to End Loneliness](#).

[VODA Good Neighbours](#) supports volunteers to carry out tasks for vulnerable residents at no cost.

VODA Happy to Chat gets people in North Tyneside talking to each other over a cuppa and a biscuit with groups in [Wallsend](#) and [Whitley Bay](#).

We can't fix the problem of loneliness alone, but we can do it together.

With thanks to Age UK North Tyneside: view their services, events and activities [here](#).

Related Links

- [The Marmalade Trust](#)
- [VODA Good Neighbours](#)
- [Whitley Bay Happy To Chat](#)
- [Wallsend Happy To Chat](#)

- Campaign To End Loneliness Article
- Sense - Loneliness Research Blog
- Campaign To End Loneliness Facts and Figures
- Age UK North Tyneside



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