

Ageing Better Middlesbrough

Core Learning Summary

Loneliness and Social Isolation: Where do we start?

Social isolation and loneliness are not the same thing.

Social isolation means not having contact with others. Loneliness is a feeling, a sadness that you lack the relationships that matter to your life. Whilst they may well overlap, they are not the same.



Some people are happy being alone.

Ageing Better Middlesbrough has tried to let these people be.

Some people feel lonely when they are alone.

Ageing Better Middlesbrough has tried to bring people together by letting them know what's going on, and by organising group activities.

Some people are happy if they are with others.

Ageing Better Middlesbrough has supported people to come together, including giving one-to-one support to build confidence.



Some people feel lonely, even in company.

Ageing Better Middlesbrough has reflected this in offering one-to-one support and enabling people to access psychological therapies.

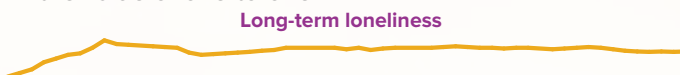
The strength and impact of feeling lonely affects people differently and varies over time.

Many, if not most people experience loneliness at some point in their lives.

Some people experience loneliness on a temporary basis. This may relate to things that are going on, or have recently happened, in their life. Ageing Better Middlesbrough has shown the value of helping older people overcome bereavement.



Other people experience loneliness on a long-term basis. This may relate to other problems they have, or to things that happened long ago. For these people, Ageing Better Middlesbrough has shown the value of one-to-one support that is person-centred and not time limited.



Older people are not a single group.

Everyone's an individual; people are not 'all the same'. Ageing Better Middlesbrough has tried out a range of different approaches to foster inclusion and meet people's needs: information-sharing, community development and engagement, digital inclusion, one-to-one support, 'age friendly activism'; all have had value to different groups within Middlesbrough's diverse older population.

Loneliness and Social Isolation

What can we do?

Key recommendations from Ageing Better Middlesbrough's experience include:

Everyone



HELLO

Be aware and be kind

The smallest of efforts – smiling and saying 'hello' - can be hugely helpful to lonely people - even if they don't show it! Be observant of the community around you and put yourself in others' shoes. Being lonely is sad, and people may not always welcome you. Don't be put off by adverse reactions; always stay kind.

Community groups



Be welcoming and be understanding

Could you do more to encourage lonely people to come along? If they do, could you take steps to overcome new people being 'put off' at the door. Could someone welcome them in? Could you consider matching them up with someone to give them confidence? If they are hesitant, don't judge their reasons.

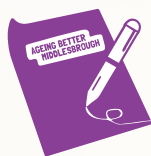
Service providers



Be caring and be flexible

Whatever your remit is, make people feel 'cared about'. Simple actions like a weekly telephone call can make all the difference. Think of ways in which your service could help those experiencing loneliness. Could you bring people together? Could staff make a regular telephone call to someone alongside their other activities?

Commissioners



Be knowledgeable and be realistic

Understand the evidence. Recognise that 'over-specified' contracts can struggle to deliver person-centred goals. Know that there are different intensities and timelines to loneliness. Be aware that if you fund a standard time-limited package, your contractors may not be able to touch those whose loneliness is chronic or intense.

Alison Jarvis, June 2020

Nothing in this summary is ground-breaking but that does not mean that its content is commonly known, still less, routinely practiced. Taking on board these straightforward messages could make ageing in Middlesbrough better.