

# Connectedness in Our Communities

A study on social connectedness

## ACUMEN and RAMH

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Aspiring Communities Fund



## Background

We wanted to find out how people experience social isolation and loneliness in Renfrewshire and to find out how to build connectedness. We wanted to work with people most at risk from social isolation. To do this we worked in partnership with a range of Renfrewshire support services and designed a 6 month project called **Connectedness in Our Communities**.

## Aims

- ▶ To gather information about people's experience of loneliness and social isolation in Renfrewshire
- ▶ To work with people most at risk of loneliness and social isolation
- ▶ To understand what promotes social connectedness in Renfrewshire
- ▶ To generate ideas about how to build social connections in Renfrewshire

## Objectives

- ▶ To hold events where local people, agencies and groups could come together to share knowledge, experience and ideas about building social connections
- ▶ To speak with individuals and groups about their experience of loss, loneliness and social isolation and their journey into social connectedness
- ▶ To distribute a questionnaire through a wide range of support services, groups and events across Renfrewshire to understand how people experience social isolation and loneliness.
- ▶ To identify key ways to build social connectedness.

## Key Findings

1. Getting information about services to people when they need it, is key to supporting people who are lonely or socially isolated.

'If only I knew then, years ago what there is out there'  
ACUMEN member

2. Informal and formal peer support and word of mouth can help people overcome barriers to accessing support.

'A lot of people don't have the confidence to enquire themselves about things, they need help. Anyone I speak to now I always give them information, give them a number, tell them to speak to their doctor or go to RAMH or a group'  
John, Connectedness Champion

3. Loneliness  
can affect  
anyone at  
anytime.  
People want  
places to meet  
and talk that  
are accessible,  
open and  
supportive.

*I was in my last year of uni and a lot of things  
got on top of me. I felt very lonely and I felt no  
one understood.*

*I knew of certain organisations but I didn't think  
they would be helpful for me. I didn't think I was  
as lonely as other people. I didn't want to waste  
their time...*

*I think it's a common issue for people studying  
and people my age. Stigma is a big barrier for  
people talking about loneliness at Uni*

*What works?.....Supporting people to come to  
groups, giving them that one-to-one time,  
helping them build their confidence to come  
again.*

*I think a big place where everyone could go,  
somewhere all inclusive would be great.*

**Cassie, Social Connectedness Champion**

## What is Loneliness?

**Loneliness** is a feeling experienced when there is a difference between an individual's felt and ideal levels of social relationships. (4)

## What is Social Isolation?

**Social isolation** refers to the quality and quantity of the social relationships a person has at an individual, group, community and societal level.

Social isolation and loneliness are not necessarily linked, as people who are socially connected can feel lonely and socially isolated people may not feel lonely. NHS (2018)

In 2015, the Scottish Parliament held an inquiry into age and social isolation. This inquiry identified social isolation and loneliness as a major public health issue.

Lonely people are more likely to experience heart disease, dementia and depression (1)

Loneliness is likely to increase your risk of death by 29% (2)

Loneliness is as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes a day (3)

## STAGE 1

**'You can be working,  
you can be living with  
people but you can still  
feel lonely, you get  
stuck in a rut, it takes a  
bit of help to get out of  
it, but you need to  
know where to go.'**

*Recovery Renfrewshire*

- ❖ Identified steering group of agencies in Renfrewshire including Renfrewshire Foodbank , Renfrewshire Citizen Advice Bureau ,ROAR, LEAP, Renfrewshire Carers, Active Communities, Renfrewshire HSCP, Linstone Housing.
- ❖ Held meetings to discuss, design & scope of project and apply for Aspiring Communities Fund .
- ❖ Identified key groups most at risk of social isolation.
- ❖ Worked with Steve Scott (Psychology Graduate) to design a questionnaire looking at the prevalence of social isolation/loneliness in Renfrewshire. The questionnaire was based on the UCLA Loneliness Scale which is a commonly used measure of loneliness.
- ❖ Pilot study of questionnaire. Which resulted in the questionnaire being reduced from 20 to 10 questions. An additional question was created in order to capture data on what would make a real change to individuals' situations.

## What We Did

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### STAGE 2

**'It's just the first step, pushing yourself. You maybe don't want to go, you're shy, but if there's somebody there a worker or friend, it can help''**

**John (Social Connectedness Champion)**

- ❖ Distributed questionnaires across Renfrewshire using Social Media , Survey Monkey, face to face meetings and two consultation events.
- ❖ Partner agencies including RAMH, LEAP and Renfrewshire Foodbank distributed questionnaires and encouraged stakeholders to complete
- ❖ Public Consultation held in Johnstone Town Hall on 31<sup>st</sup> October 17
- ❖ Identified social connectedness champions to support the work of the project
- ❖ Held a final public consultation meeting at The Wynd Centre in Paisley, March 2018 to report back on the findings and to hear individuals responses to the results.
- ❖ Produced a short film to chart the progress of the project.



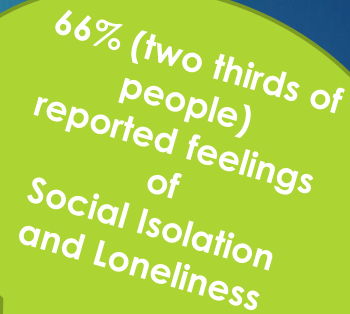
## What Did we Find Out?

- ▶ There is a strong link between mental health and wellbeing and feelings of social isolation and loneliness
- ▶ People who experience social isolation and loneliness tended to suggest that they wanted greater intimacy with people rather than a larger social network
- ▶ The stronger the feelings of social isolation the more likely people were to say they wanted greater intimacy
- ▶ In our research people under 25 reported as twice as lonely as the over 65's, although this was based on small numbers of respondents
- ▶ Significant barriers to social connectedness or intimacy in relationships were fear of stigma, of being judged, of not being made welcome or feeling like people won't be accepting.
- ▶ Other barriers include difficulties accessing information, not knowing where to go, difficulties taking the first step and trying new things, or feeling unsafe in the environment



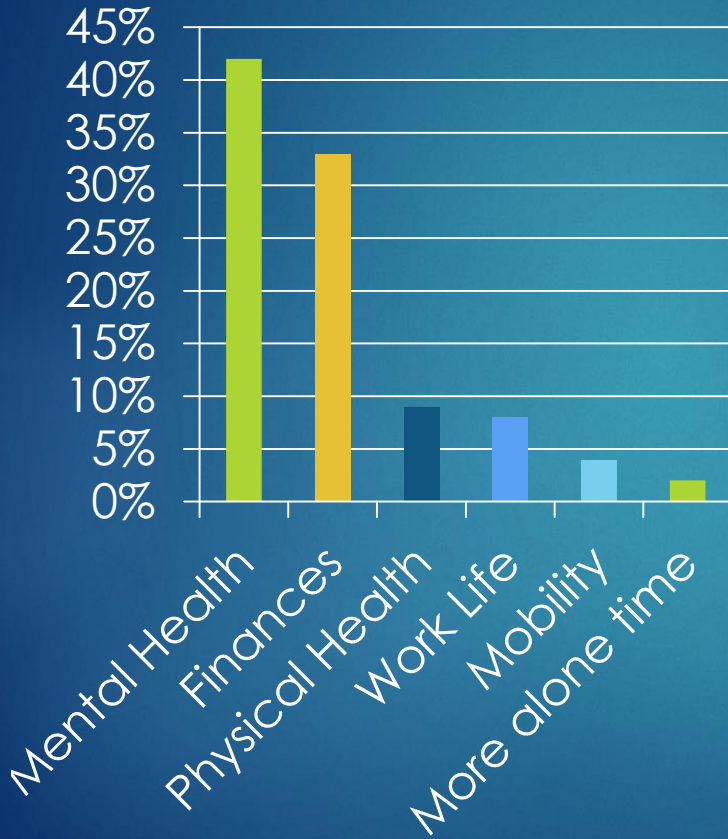
## Questionnaire Findings:

- ▶ 300 questionnaires were fully completed
- ▶ Ages ranged between 18 and 81
- ▶ Average age of respondents was 42
- ▶ 74% of respondents were women, 26% men
- ▶ Age 30-50 reported as the loneliest
- ▶ Under 25's being twice as lonely as over 65's
- ▶ The highest loneliness scores came from those identifying mental health problems as a barrier to social connectedness.



**66% (two thirds of people) reported feelings of Social Isolation and Loneliness**

We asked: WHAT WOULD IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS?



**MENTAL HEALTH:**

Out of the 300 respondents 127 people said mental health was the main barrier to social connectedness, of these 80% scored high on the loneliness scale and 79% said they would like greater intimacy in their relationships.

## We asked people: 'What would a well connected community look like'?

- ▶ People would have good access to information and support when they needed it
- ▶ Spaces and groups would be open, non-judgemental, empathetic, kind and low cost.
- ▶ People would have easy access to safe, non clinical or informal support in their community where they could meet with others and share experiences and stories of hope and recovery
- ▶ A well connected community would be; confident
- ▶ Healthy
- ▶ Active
- ▶ Non judgemental open and empathetic and have good knowledge of mental health
- ▶ There would be improved infrastructure, safe pavements, roads and good lighting
- ▶ Green spaces, free or low cost and accessible venues

## We asked People: *what works?*

- Peer Support
- Increasing community and individuals confidence
- Stress Management
- Work, Respect, Tolerance
- Activities at Weekends and evenings
- People being open
- Money advice
- Meaningful Relationships
- Meaningful Activities
- Mental Health Awareness in the community
- More Childcare and Support for Carers
- Confidence with strangers
- Improving health and wellbeing

# Summary

- ▶ This short term study in Renfrewshire engaged a wide range of individuals in the subject of promoting social connectedness
- ▶ We found out that two thirds of respondents to our questionnaire had experienced loneliness and isolation. The more lonely people felt, the more they looked for increased intimacy or connections with people.
- ▶ We found out that the barriers that prevent people from being more intimate or socially connected are fear of stigma, of being judged and not being listened to. Of struggling to get access to the right information and support at the right time.
- ▶ To promote social connectedness people want peer led support, access to a diverse range of community activities, and clear information to access the activities that are already out there.
- ▶ Importantly people want their communities to be open and honest and non judgemental, aware of the effects of loneliness, isolation and poor mental health.

## With Thanks

ACUMEN and RAMH would like to thank all the participants who gave their time and their stories to contribute to this study.

Special Thanks to Steve Scott.

This report was co authored by *Steve Scott, Rachel McLean and Fiona McCrae*

***The full Connectedness in Our Communities report can be found on the RAMH website.***

Are you feeling lonely or do you want to know more?

Please see below for useful links and practical support

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/loneliness/#.WqKcPP1FDtR>

<http://www.healthscotland.scot/tools-and-resources/the-place-standard-tool>

<http://www.webofloneliness.com/>

<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/campaign-end-loneliness-glasgow/>

### Useful Numbers

**Silverline**  
**0800 4 70 80 90**

**RAMH First Crisis**  
**0800838587**

**Mind**  
**0300 123 3393**

**Breathing Space**  
**0800838597**

**Samaritans**  
**116123(Freephone)**

# References

- 1) Valtoral et al, (2016) (James et al, 2011)
- 2) Holt Lunstad (2010)
- 3) Holt-Lunstad (2010)
- 4) NHS Scotland (2018). Social Isolation and loneliness in Scotland:  
<http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1712/social-isolation-and-loneliness-in-scotland-a-review-of-prevalence-and-trends.pdf>



