

Notes from the LOPSG Participants Meeting - 28 May 2008

Combating Loneliness and Isolation

Q1 (a) How can access to the internet help combat loneliness and social isolation, particularly for less mobile and housebound older people?

- For the computer literate, the internet is a modern way of keeping in touch
- Going shopping
- Furthering hobbies
- Sharing photographs
- More choice for housebound individuals rather than being dependent on others
- Finding local clubs and helplines
- Joy of doing something
- Meeting people with similar interests
- Benefits of the internet are not widely known by isolated and lonely older people
- Speedy and reliable exchanges with family here and abroad
- Using a webcam
- Online banking
- Organising activities
- Helping concentration abilities
- Exercise for stiff fingers of older people
- Intellectually challenging

(b) Do you have any examples from your own personal experience?

- I have used computers to do research into family trees and language courses.
- I use the computers at the London Older People's Resource Facility
- A friend was unable to write letters due to arthritis but has now mastered using a computer
- My cousin had a stroke and using a computer has aided his recovery
- Contacting friends and relatives
- Using the computers at my local library
- There is free computer tuition at Arsenal Football Club
- I contact my family and can find any information I need on the internet
- Tuition, especially one to one and in the home raises confidence
- Producing a newsletter and sending it to a wide group of people

(c) What are some of the problems that may be encountered by older people in getting access to the internet?

- Inability to afford a computer hardware/software and pay for internet access charges on a small pension
- Not being computer literate and no access to advice or training
- Visual problems
- Technical failures can raise blood pressure!
- Dangers of being exploited by unscrupulous purveyors of goods and services
- Failures destroy confidence
- Computer jargon
- Ageist bias that older people can not succeed with computers
- Cons by IT repairmen
- The internet and new technology tends to internalise people's lives within their homes and risks reinforcing loneliness. It is healthier to get out and about.
- Internet and computer relations are no substitute for a warm touch, face to face contact and a shoulder to cry on
- Low confidence to learn on new skill
- Emails can become an intolerable burden

- Time implications
- Transport to the venue where internet facilities are
- Lack of supply to meet the demand of all those who want to use public facilities
- Inadequate volunteers to help at computer drop-ins
- Computers have to be updated
- Lack of telephone line
- Getting the relevant programmes

Q2 (a) What do you consider are the main causes of loneliness and isolation for older people and how can we work towards helping people in this situation?

- Older people of our generation are very private people and sometimes youngsters do not want to get involved.
- Relatives have moved away
- Lack of respect for older people
- Depriving people of inter-generational contact, which could promote mutual respect, liking and active socialising
- Failure to educate young people to listen and learn from older people
- No children
- Bereavement of partner and friends
- Trauma of leaving a long term home
- Financial problems
- Cultural/religious/social issues
- Bias against older people
- Rising costs e.g. expensive cinema/theatre
- Confidence issues, for example, being embarrassed by hearing difficulties
- Feeling ignored and irrelevant
- Organisations need to give more information to people before they retire
- Not using younger people's language
- Inability to live active, healthy lives
- Lack of creative and cultural stimulation
- Cuts in lifelong learning
- People are not prepared enough for retirement
- Problems of mobility and transport
- Depression and mental health conditions
- Language constraints
- Closure of day centres and clubs
- Many older people live in homes as their families have to work and cannot look after them, and their friends become their family
- Inability to gout due to physical frailty, disability or illness
- Loss of workplace, interests or contacts
- Shyness, timidity
- Relationship breakdown
- Not having a support network
- No longer being economically active
- Poverty
- Fear of crime
- Not having kept up with work colleagues
- Not wanting to admit that loneliness is a problem
- Younger families all need to work so there is no one around
- Neighbours too busy or not interested
- Self-help
- Patient confidentiality is often a handicap to the user
- Relocation

- Advertise friendship clubs
- More notices in doctor's surgeries and the supermarket
- Have a pet
- More work and volunteering opportunities for young people to work with older people
- Reduce VAT on telephone bills to 5%. This would help older people who just have a telephone
- Organisations should be more welcoming

(b) Many carers feel very isolated. What can be done to help remedy this situation?

- If nobody was prepared to care for loved ones it would cost this country a fortune
- Carers should be offered more support, funding and respite
- Offer opportunities to meet with other carers and share experiences
- Not enough time off
- Include carers in the planning and provision of care
- Provide a space in the home so carers can enjoy private time
- Lack of community support
- Encourage carers to make themselves known
- Trips organised by local councils to bring carers together and show appreciation
- Recruit more volunteers
- Encourage carers forums
- Help carers in their absence to care for loved ones
- Free holidays for carers
- Ask a soap opera to feature an older person and their carer to illustrate the issues

Q3 (a) Do you have any examples of how joining in creative activities such as music, dance, and drama have benefited you and people you know?

- Getting involved in local cultural activities can provide a sense of purpose, even if it is making tea
- Encourage independent living
- Develop new skills and gain knowledge
- Stimulate self confidence
- Breakdown cultural and social barriers
- Developed sense of community and achievement
- I joined a soft-furnishings class and meeting with other creative people
- A friend suffered from Alzheimers and after attending a lunch club, started to lead a singing group. This activity helped them stay out of residential care for several years.
- Exercise helps fight against depression
- A friend has mobility problems but she still has a wonderful time at dances for older people
- I write poems, songs and scripts which help express my feelings
- Joining a dance class led to me becoming a volunteer and now I am involved in LOPSG
- The benefits are socialising and making new friends
- Sport is beneficial for asthma and arthritis sufferers
- Leads to positive mental attitudes
- Positive benefits of Age Concern day centres
- I am involved with the Recycled Teenagers and have built up a support network of local friends
- I feel valued when taking part in activities
- Physical and social benefits of Walking for Health groups
- Mentoring and engaging with children and young people
- Practically and creatively fulfilling the role of grandparent
- Inviting family and neighbours to join you in regular theatre and film outings
- I attended tap classes in my fifties which felt good but I was forced to give it up due to ill health
- Playing cards, drinking tea and eating cake with my friends is very enjoyable
- Chair dancing
- I have seen an 85 year old discard her walking stick after three tai chi for arthritis sessions

- Dancing has increased my flexibility
- Improves mood
- Improving communication skills after debilitating stroke
- Going to lectures keeps me intellectually active
- Creative writing
- Reminiscence
- Drama made me feel isolated! What about history, walks, art, cinema, language, cooking, health talks, DIY, woodwork?
- The Arts Depot in Finchley had numerous creative classes like sketching outings and photography with a minibus to bring frail and disabled older people. It is heartbreaking that a large proportion of their funding has just been withdrawn.
- Drama can bring people together, keep you active and address topical issues
- I belong to the Proteas Quadrille Dancing Group and have benefited from socialising, exercising, gaining self confidence, self expression and entertaining others.

(b) In what practical ways can creative activities that bring older people out of social isolation be encouraged and made possible?

- Disabled older people participating in adapted dance
- Organising holidays for older people
- Maintain/improve funding for lifelong learning
- Take activities to where less mobile people are
- Live contact essential – IT is no replacement
- Older men are much more reluctant to take part in older people's events than women. There is evidence to say there are larger numbers of isolated, depressed men. How can we break down this barrier to older men's inclusion?
- Restore day centres and lunch clubs
- Extend link-age pilots to other boroughs
- Many sports centres have off-peak prices for older people
- Join a U3A group
- Form an art group
- Bring back reduced cost or free adult education
- Lobby for older people to pay half price council tax in the UK
- Unfortunately classes may be arranged but sometimes stop due to lack of interest
- Advertising is essential
- Improve transport
- Taking activities to people in their own homes