



**Link
Together**

to alleviate
loneliness



NFWI 2017 resolution:

Alleviating Loneliness

“This meeting calls on every WI and the NFWI to work alongside health and social care providers and their local communities to raise awareness of the causes and impacts of loneliness, thus ensuring better identification of lonely people in order to be able to offer them the appropriate support and assistance” **North Cave WI, East Yorkshire Federation**

Loneliness does not discriminate. It can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender and life stage.

Across the age spectrum, it is estimated that more than 9 million adults in the UK are lonely ‘always or often’. Yet many people feel unable to tell someone or seek support. For women, pregnancy and the year after giving birth can be particularly lonely times. A 2015 study carried out by Netmums for AXA PPP Healthcare found that over a quarter of first-time mums say that they are lonely.

Without the necessary support and assistance, loneliness can have a damaging effect on a person’s mental health, physical health and overall well-being. As such, it is widely recognised as a serious public health concern.

Research suggests that people who are lonely are more likely to experience difficulties sleeping, feel unhappy, nervous, have low self-esteem and report low life satisfaction. They are also more likely to suffer from depression and increased stress levels, experience a rise in blood pressure and develop Alzheimer’s. In addition, loneliness has been shown to increase the risk of premature death by roughly a quarter and, in its impact on physical health, has been equated to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

This leads to pressure on local services – older people who are lonely are, on average, 1.8 times more likely to visit their GP, 1.6 times more likely to visit A&E and 3.5 times more likely to enter local authority residential care.

Did you know?

Loneliness is reported by:



28% of new mums



1.2 million people over the age of 65



32% of people with long-term health conditions

However:

75% of people who are lonely do not know where to turn to for support

What is our campaign calling for?

WI members recognise that loneliness is not confined to a specific demographic and believe that anyone who is lonely, or at risk of loneliness, should have access to the support and assistance they need.

At a local level: The NFWI will provide information so that WI members can learn more about loneliness to help them take action within their Institutes and federations and raise the profile of the issue locally.

At a regional level: To influence the development of local plans and strategies, the NFWI will support members to raise the issue of loneliness with: Health and Wellbeing Boards in England; Public Services Boards in Wales and Local Health Boards in Wales.

At a national level: The NFWI will work with the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness and other organisations to raise the profile of the issue.

What is loneliness and how is it different to social isolation?

There is no set definition of loneliness, but it is generally described as a 'mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want.' Loneliness is a subjective emotional state, rather than physical. It is not the same as social isolation which refers to the objective state of having limited or no interaction with others. Although people who are socially isolated are at greater risk of loneliness, not all will

experience feelings of loneliness. Equally, someone who is surrounded by people may still feel alone. Personal circumstances, such as bereavement, poor health, living alone, living away from family, a lack of transport, becoming a carer, or living on a low income can make someone more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness. The potential to be exposed to those risk factors increases with age, and so many older people suffer from loneliness.



How you can take part in the campaign

1. Make sure your WI or federation is open and welcoming. Throughout the WI's 102 year history, members have sought to reach out to others in their communities and further afield, offering a chance for women to come together to make friends, learn new skills and work for change on the issues that matter to them. As the quote from Lady Denman on page 5 illustrates, this is an ethos that stems right from the WI's earliest days. The campaign calls on WI members to continue to reach out to others in our communities, and to continue welcoming new members. The NFWI has put together a basic guide

(below) to inspire WIs and federations to take action within their Institutes and local communities. Even the smallest of changes can have a big impact and help to ensure that members feel well-supported. You could create a buddy system or consider how you could make social events and educational activities more accessible? Let us know what you think of these suggestions and if you have any further ideas on what more WIs and federations could be doing to reach out to members and non-members.

Basic Guide

1. Organising an activity or social event? Think about how you could make it more accessible. A good approach might be to have a representative from your WI or federation who is responsible for checking the accessibility of meeting venues, as the Equality and Human Rights Commission recommends. This can include checking the accessibility of the building and making sure activities are open and inclusive to all.

2. Make small gestures where you can. Could you offer someone a lift to an event on your calendar or call a member you haven't spoken to in a while?

3. Be there for people in times of need. Research conducted by the Co-op and the Red Cross suggests that loneliness can be triggered by key life transitions, such as bereavement, retirement and divorce.

4. Help to create a friendly and inclusive environment by encouraging more members in your WI or federation to get involved in the design and planning of local activities. You could even introduce an anonymous suggestions box for members to share ideas.

5. Welcome guests at your meetings. Offering an opportunity for guests to attend your WI or federation is a good way for them to find out more about the WI.

6. Reach out to new members. Joining any established group can be daunting. Help new members to feel welcome by partnering new joiners, for the first couple of meetings, with existing members who know the ins and outs of your WI.

7. Talk more about loneliness. Would you like to learn more about the impact of loneliness and how to support people who are affected in your community? If so, you might want to invite a speaker to one of your meetings from organisations working on the issue in your area.

8. Promote your WI widely. There are lots of places you could include information about your WI to reach out to people who may not know about the opportunities membership offers. You could put up posters and provide leaflets in places such as libraries, local shops and doctors surgeries. You can also use social media to reach out to women in your local community. Contact the NFWI for more information.

2. Share your experiences and ideas on how to tackle loneliness. The NFWI is working with the Jo Cox Commission to identify potential actions that can be taken at a local or national level to combat loneliness. We're asking members who would like to share their stories or suggestions to take part in our short online survey, which can be accessed here: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/33GSYWH>. The survey will be open until 31 October 2017. Alternatively, you can send us your feedback using the the tear off slip that was included in the June 2017 mailing.

3. Contact your MP to find out if they are holding a Loneliness Summit. The Jo Cox Commission is encouraging MPs to hold a Loneliness Summit in their constituency over the summer or during the autumn. The aim is to bring people and organisations together to network and share best practice. We're encouraging members who would like to attend a Loneliness Summit to contact their MP and ask them whether they are taking part. To find your MP and their contact information, enter your postcode at www.parliament.uk.

4. Take part in World Kindness Day – 13 November. A small act of kindness can go a long way to brightening someone's day. Here are a few ideas for how you can get involved:

- Make a pledge to do something kind for someone

else on World Kindness Day to show them that you care. Could you offer to make someone a cup of tea, pay someone a compliment or volunteer your time in your local community? Do-it is the UK's national volunteering database and can help you to find opportunities near you – simply type in your post code or town at <https://do-it.org>. You could also hold a pledge event to highlight how the members of your WI or federation are taking part in World Kindness Day and taking action to support people who may be lonely. Why not decorate your event using our bunting template which you can fill in with your pledge of kindness?

- Link Together. Demonstrate your solidarity with people who are lonely and help to raise awareness of the issue by linking arms or holding hands with the members of your WI. If there's a place in your community, such as a coffee shop, post office or library that brings people together, why not link together there? Don't forget to take pictures!
- We would love to hear about what your plans are for the day. Let us know at publicaffairs@nfwl.org.uk. Also, promote your event by inviting along local press and using the template press release which can be found on the Link Together page of the WI website.

Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

In memory of Labour MP Jo Cox, MPs launched a Commission in January 2017 with the aim of raising public awareness of loneliness as a problem that can affect anyone and identifying ways to combat it. The Commission, which is Co-Chaired by Seema Kennedy MP and Rachel Reeves MP, is working in partnership with a number of charities including Action for Children, Age UK and Alzheimer's Society and seeks to inspire conversations, however small, across the country in 2017. The Commission will be considering what role local and national Government can play in tackling the problem that Jo Cox had long campaigned on. For more information about the Commission, please visit: <https://www.jocoxloneliness.org/>

‘Our Institute meetings should be centres not only of the many forms of war-work which we shall be asked to undertake, but of neighbourliness among ourselves and among the visitors whom war has sent to live among us. I hope that W.I. members will welcome any Land Army girls who come to their village and will do their best to prevent these volunteers...from feeling lonely or friendless’. -Lady Denman, the first National Chairman of the NFWI

5. Ask local health services to make loneliness a priority. Health and Wellbeing Boards, which operate across all local authorities in England, have a responsibility to assess the health and wellbeing needs of their local population and set out how these will be addressed in plans called Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies. We are urging members to contact their local board to find out what they are doing to combat loneliness. Ask them what action they are taking, or planning to take, to ensure that people who are lonely in your area are identified and supported to access the appropriate services.

Contact the Public Affairs Department to request a template letter that you can adapt. To find out how to contact your local board, visit the Kings Fund Health and Wellbeing Boards directory (<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/health-and-wellbeing-boards/hwb-map>). Don't forget to keep the Public Affairs Department up to date with any feedback you receive!

If you live in Wales, you might want to write to your Local Health Board or Public Services Board. Local Health Boards have a duty to carry out a population needs assessment and publish it. Public Services Boards are also

responsible for producing Local Well-being Plans which will be published during 2018. We are urging members to write to their local Public Services Board and urge them to take loneliness into account when developing their plans. You could also contact your Local Health Board and ask them about the measures they have in place (or action they are taking) to help identify and support people who are lonely or at risk of loneliness. If you would like to receive a template letter to help you get started, please contact the Public Affairs Department.

Each Public Services Board and Local Health Board in Wales has their own website with information on how to contact them. For the full list of Public Services Boards please visit the Welsh Government website (<http://gov.wales/topics/improvingservices/public-services-boards/?lang=en>). For information on how to contact your Local Health Board, click on your Local Health Board using the NHS Wales directory (<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/ourservices/directory/LocalHealthBoards>).

6. Spread the word! Promote the campaign on social media by using the hashtag #WILinkTogether. Don't forget to let us know what you get up to as part of the campaign.

the**WI**

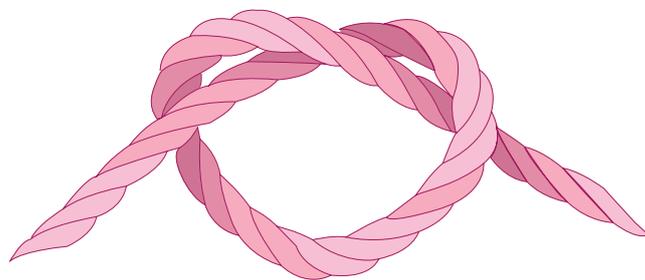
**On World Kindness
Day, I pledge to**



#WILinkTogether

Link Together
to alleviate loneliness





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Contact us

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