

CONTACT THE ELDERLY

www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk

For further information contact:
Kellie Smith, Communications Officer
Tel: 020 7420 5814
Email: kellie.smith@contact-the-elderly.org.uk

Background

Contact the Elderly, established in 1965, is the only national charity solely focussed on tackling one of the greatest challenges facing society – loneliness and isolation amongst our rapidly ageing population.

With over 400 groups across England, Scotland and Wales, the charity provides a regular, consistent and vital friendship link every month to almost 3,400 older people over the age of 75 who live alone and isolated, without family or friends nearby.

At the same time, the charity also encourages its almost 5,400 volunteers to find enjoyment and fulfilment in achieving the charity's aim and making new friends.

Contact the Elderly's service model

The Contact the Elderly model is based on a simple yet very effective concept – that of monthly tea parties for older people and volunteers within their community, which brings individuals together, develops fulfilling friendships and support networks – and thereby helps to reduce loneliness and isolation.

Contact the Elderly recruits volunteer hosts and drivers to help arrange the monthly tea parties for small groups of older people (up to eight guests), aged 75+, who live alone and are isolated.

Once a month, normally on a Sunday, each older guest is collected from their own home by a volunteer driver, and is taken to a volunteer host's home, where they join a small group for tea, talk and companionship. The group is warmly welcomed by a different host each month, but the charity's drivers and older guests remain the same. This ensures that over the months and years, acquaintances turn into friends and loneliness is replaced by companionship.

Network of volunteers

The Contact the Elderly service model consists of a loyal network of volunteer hosts, volunteer drivers, volunteer coordinators (who ensure the smooth running of the group and maintain links with the rest of the organisation), and the older guests themselves.

20% of Contact the Elderly volunteers have been with the charity for more than 10 years.

Why is the Contact the Elderly model so effective?

- According to Contact the Elderly research undertaken in 2011, among its guests and volunteers, Sunday afternoon is highlighted as a particularly lonely day of the week for older people living alone.
- Contact the Elderly's groups operate at weekends, when most community services for older people are not available.
- Contact the Elderly keeps its groups small, with the same individuals meeting every month, which means that guests and volunteers make lasting and fulfilling

friendships in the personal and welcoming environment of someone's home. 41% of the groups have been running for 10 years or longer, 27% more than 20 years, 22% more than 30 years, and 4% more than 40 years!

- Contact the Elderly research reveals that the benefits extend well beyond the one-Sunday-a-month gathering, with the long term nature of groups making them an integral part of a guest's life.
- Contact the Elderly research has shown that guests' preferences are to stay near their home and have volunteers take them out for a treat, visit them and provide basic support when needed. Therefore the Contact the Elderly model helps to address the emotional needs of older people who wish to remain in their own home, but whose diminished mobility makes it impossible for them to maintain regular social contact.
- 86% feel less lonely as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 83% feel part of a community as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 86% feel happier as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 95% have made friends with the volunteers, whilst 85% have made friends with other guests
- 61% feel more confident as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 98% have something to look forward to as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 27% say their general health has improved as a result of Contact the Elderly
- 22% say they see their doctor less as a result of Contact the Elderly
- With almost 50 years experience in developing groups nationwide, the charity knows that its simple regular friendship links provide a real solution to a complex problem - benefiting isolated older people and helping to keep them living independently and out of hospital.

"Knowing I can refer some clients on to the group, once we've completed a piece of work and their mood and self esteem have improved, can be a real protective factor in their ongoing psychological well-being and quality of life. These friendship groups are particularly relevant as social isolation can be such a risk factor for depression. Contact the Elderly has been a real lifeline for some people I have worked with."

Michelle Hamill, clinical psychologist

February 2012