



Link Together

to alleviate loneliness



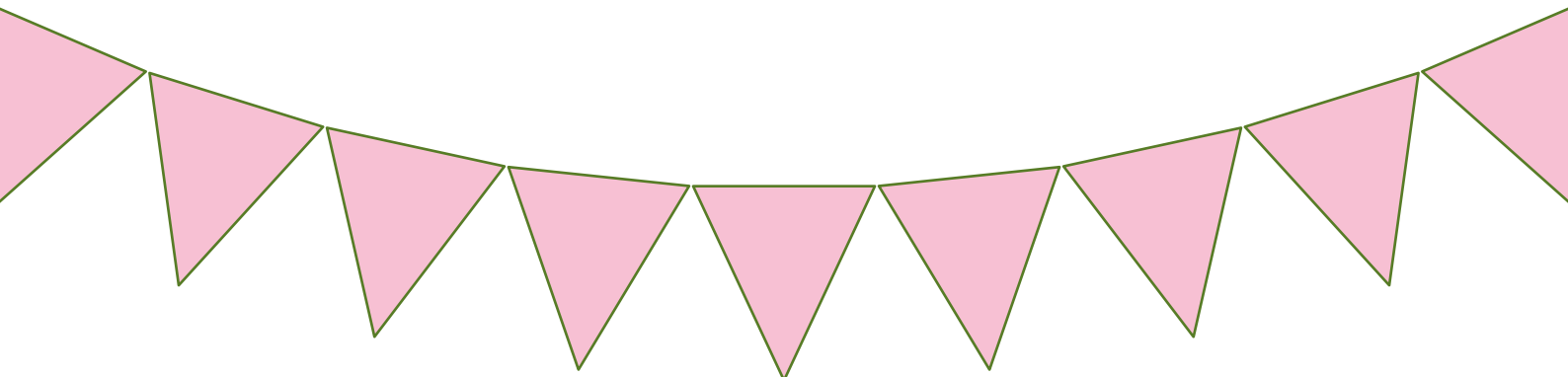
What is effective in combatting loneliness?

While there is no single approach to tackling loneliness, a small number of studies have identified common components of interventions that can help to build social relations and improve personal wellbeing. According to research conducted by the Campaign to End Loneliness, among these are group-based activities and particularly those with a focus on learning and skills development.

Again, there's no 'one-size fits all' type approach, an activity that appeals to one person might not be suitable or feasible for someone else. What is important is to try to understand people's preferences and personal circumstances in order to help them engage in a way that's right for them. It can also be beneficial to try and involve those you are seeking to support in planning and carrying out activities. It follows that a good indicator of a promising initiative is often a shared interest, as highlighted by the Campaign to End Loneliness.

However, without transport opportunities to attend such activities can be missed. While the responsibility to provide adequate public transport predominantly rests with central and local government, local communities (where possible) can help people who need assistance by offering lifts or getting involved in voluntary car schemes or community transport services.

In addition to the benefits of each of the different approaches outlined above, research has also highlighted a link between other specific social activities such as eating with others and the development of local networks and trust. This is an example of one of the 'five ways to wellbeing' - *connect* - developed by the New Economics Foundation and reflected in initiatives such as the Big Lunch and The Great Get Together. Turn to page 2 to find out more about the five ways to wellbeing and how you could use this to inspire change in your WI or even your day-to-day routine.



Five Ways to Wellbeing

The five ways to wellbeing are a set of simple evidenced-based actions, produced by the New Economics Foundation, designed to improve personal wellbeing.



Connect...

Connect with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours. Put time aside to strengthen these relationships and build a supportive social network. The mental health charity Mind suggests speaking to someone in person or on the phone rather than sending an email. Try spending 5 minutes to ask and really listen to how someone is.



Be active...

Find an activity that works for you and suits your level of fitness. Physical activity has been shown to lower stress and reduce the risk of multiple health problems. You could go cycling, running or you could try a low- impact exercise such as stretching, walking netball, gardening, swimming or just going for a walk.



Take notice...

Take time to notice what's going on around you. Research suggests this can help you to recognise and appreciate what you really care about. You could try taking a different route to your office or have a 'clear the clutter' day as Mind suggests.



Keep learning...

Setting goals to learn a new skill or pick up an old one can help to build confidence and improve wellbeing. Why not sign up for a cookery or craft course or, as NHS Choices recommends, visit a museum or gallery to learn about something you're interested in.



Give...

Giving can mean volunteering your time but it can also mean small acts such as offering to help someone you notice struggling with their bags, contacting a friend you know needs support or simply saying thank you. Research has shown that just one act of kindness a week can improve your mental wellbeing and help to strengthen relationships long-term.

The importance of community and individual action

“Years ago neighbours knew each other but today you can go weeks without seeing anyone. Be proactive to make a difference” – respondent, NFWI Loneliness Survey 2017

Reaching lonely individuals is challenging. People are naturally sensitive about approaching others out of fear they may be overstepping boundaries. But there are many small and non-intrusive ways to reach out and start the process of building a meaningful relationship with someone, as can be seen on page 4.

However, it is equally important to create a welcoming and inclusive environment that encourages people as far as possible to take a leap and ask for help or

simply speak to someone. Key to this is tackling the stigma associated with loneliness and recognising that some people do not identify with the term lonely. In their practical guide to identifying and talking about loneliness, the Campaign to End Loneliness recognises that sometimes it can be more effective to speak about the benefits of making use of local services and the available support rather than drawing attention to the term in conversation with someone.

The role of government

While a huge amount can be achieved at a local level, the Government has acknowledged that much more could be done nationally too. In January 2018, the Prime Minister announced a series of measures, put forward by the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, designed to help tackle the problem. These included the appointment of Tracey Crouch MP as the ministerial lead for loneliness and the development of a cross-government strategy for England. The NFWI will be monitoring the development of the strategy and will seek to identify opportunities to help shape it, drawing on members' views and experiences shared through our 2017 Loneliness Survey.

While the Commission has drawn to a close, its work is now being taken forward by a new action group, co-chaired by the British Red Cross and Co-Operative Group. The NFWI will be working closely alongside the group to further the aims of the Link Together mandate.

At a national level, we will also look to feed into the Welsh Government's strategy on loneliness and isolation. The final strategy is expected by March 2019, with a draft published for consultation in 2018. For further information about the problem of loneliness in Wales, see the Assembly's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's 2017 report on their inquiry into loneliness and isolation which can be accessed via the Assembly's website.

The role each of us can play - what WI members and non-members told us

In 2017, the NFWI launched a survey to find out what more people think could be done to tackle loneliness. When asked how each of us can play a part, here's what we heard:

*Smile and speak to
your neighbours*

*Be nice. Talk to people. Remember your
neighbours. Remember the people
you've lost touch with. Knock on the
door. Forget emails, Facebook etc. Do the
face-to-face stuff*

*It is difficult to tackle loneliness yourself.
Neighbours can help just by saying
hello to each other. A smile goes a long
way to help someone feel better. A short
conversation at the bus stop can lead to
laughter. Just feeling part of a community
can help so much*

*Be aware of anyone who
might be vulnerable, invite
them to coffee morning or
afternoon tea and make
sure people feel welcomed
if/when they turn up. Be
friendly*

*Take the time to smile and/
or say hello to neighbours/
passers-by. Just one small
interaction can change the
course of someone's day*

*Maintain contacts with
family and friends - don't
move away from your
community in old age*

*Look out for neighbours who might
be on their own, offer to get in some
shopping or other support*

*Get to know your neighbours.
Don't be afraid to speak to
people you pass in the street.
You may be the only person
they have spoken to that day*

*There is no one response to this
question. Often it is the chance
encounter or unexpected happening
that can alleviate lonely situations*

Speak to at least 3 new people a day

What you and your WI can do

1. Watch and share 'The Loneliness Project' film.

If the issue of loneliness isn't on your WI's radar, why not suggest watching 'The Loneliness Project' film, produced by the Campaign to End Loneliness, at one of your meetings. The film provides a glimpse into the reality of what loneliness can be like and could help initiate a discussion amongst your members and local community. Watch it on YouTube here:
<http://thewi.org.uk/the-loneliness-project>.

2. Hold an Alleviating Loneliness Summit.

Take inspiration from Oxfordshire Federation and hold a summit to bring together WI members and representatives of local organisations working to tackle the problem in your area. Why not also invite your MP or AM? A summit is a great way to learn more about the causes and impacts of loneliness and discuss how local community groups can take action. Remember to send in photographs of your event to publicaffairs@nfwi.org.uk!

3. **Get involved in The Big Lunch.** Millions of people each year get involved in The Big Lunch by organising a get together in their community. This year it falls on 3 June. It doesn't need to be big – you could invite a couple of neighbours over for a meal in your garden. To help you get started, request a free resource pack from The Big Lunch website: <https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/register-for-your-pack>. If you don't have time to plan an event for June or can't make 3 June, why not hold an event later in the month or year?

4. **Take part in The Great Get Together.** The Great Get Together is a celebration of all that we have in common, set up by the family and friends of Jo Cox. It takes place between 22 and 24 June. You could get involved by joining an event nearby or by organising your own. To register your interest in receiving information about events taking place across the UK and for tips about how to get involved visit <https://www.greatgettogether.org/>. A range of resources, including a poster to promote your event and a menu of conversation starters, are also available to download from the website.



Oxfordshire Federation's Loneliness Summit, 2018



A 'Solidarity Quilt' knitted by members of Shoreditch Sisters WI displayed during their Great Get Together event

What you and your WI can do

5. Mark World Kindness Day. Following the success of last year, the NFWI is encouraging members to mark 13 November 2018 with an act of kindness. You could get involved by:

- Creating a flower arrangement to give as a gift and start a conversation. To guide you through the process, the Food and Garden Committee are producing step-by-step photo and video guides. For more information about the NFWI Friendship Flowers project and to register your interest in receiving the photo guide when it's ready, please email e.breeds@nfwi-unit.org.uk.
- Volunteering for a local charity to assist with art or craft related projects. To search for opportunities nearby, you could use Do-it, the UK's national volunteering database, which can be accessed at <https://do-it.org/opportunities/search>.
- For more inspiration, have a look at some of the ways in which WIs and federations took part in World Kindness Day in 2017 on pages 7 and 8.

6. Get inspired by our checklist. To provide members with additional practical steps that can be taken in their Institutes and federations, the NFWI has built on the basic guide included in the 2017 Link Together campaign pack and put together a checklist of suggestions. This includes lots of ideas you can adopt to make sure your WI or federation is open and welcoming to all. Take a look on page 9 and see how many you can tick off!



Members of West Ealing WI



Hot Peppers WI cake stall. Photo: Gemma Dewson



Bryncethin WI held a picnic on the green as part of the Great Get Together in 2017

How WI members got involved in World Kindness Day 2017



West Horsley Evening WI paired members at random by drawing raffle tickets from their 'handbag of kindness'.



Chadderton WI left gifts around Greater Manchester for people to find.



Bee Moor WI crafted thoughtful Christmas tree decorations.



Baldock & Clothall WI borrowed a box of materials from their libraries Reminiscence Collection to share with residents of a local care home.

East Chinnock WI held a tea party with craft demonstrations, including embroidery and crochet, in their village hall.

Make sure your WI or federation is open and welcoming to all

Checklist

- ☐ Hold activities and meetings in the evenings or weekends as well as during the day
- ☐ Appoint someone to welcome newcomers on arrival and settle in
- ☐ Encourage members to mingle more in meetings, not always sit with their friends
- ☐ Pay a visit to a neighbouring WI or one you don't know to remember what it feels like to be new to the WI
- ☐ Set up a buddy scheme
- ☐ Encourage members to personally invite friends and neighbours along to activities that are open to all
- ☐ Encourage members to share their interests to help identify new potential activities of interest to those who might be less involved
- ☐ Dedicate a time during one of your meetings to consider what more your WI or federation could be doing to tackle loneliness
- ☐ Follow up with members who miss a meeting
- ☐ Set up an email group to help members keep in touch outside of meetings and activities
- ☐ Organise a WI open evening and encourage people to attend a meeting as a taster session
- ☐ Get involved with local community events such markets, shows, craft fairs and festivals. Why not set up a stand?
- ☐ Get involved on local social media. If you are comfortable using this method of communication, showing an involved and friendly 'face' of your WI can be very engaging
- ☐ Appoint a federation representative to be responsible for equality and diversity
- ☐ When planning events, consider disabled access, how easy it is to find, public transport, travelling time and distance

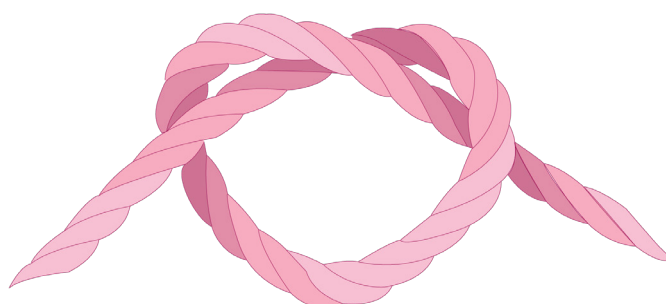
"It takes an incredibly brave person to take themselves to a group on their own. Try to remember your first day in a new office"

– respondent, NFWI Loneliness Survey 2017

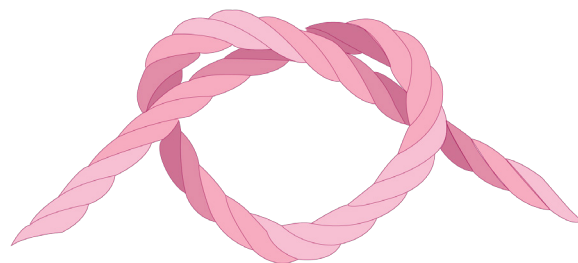
Have your voice heard and make a real impact on local, national and global issues by campaigning with the WI.

Our campaigns bring WI members together to take action and achieve change in policy and practice on issues we all care about.

#WILinkTogether



The WI is here to inspire you
The WI is everything you want it to be
The WI is what you make of it



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Contact us

National Federation of Women's Institutes
Public Affairs Department
104 New Kings Road, London, SW6 4LY
Tel: 020 7371 9300 ext 238
www.theWI.org.uk
publicaffairs@nfwi.org.uk

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