



**The Loneliness Campaign  
North Yorkshire**

# Executive Summary

## Be Social, Be Well: A Strategic Framework for Tackling Loneliness in North Yorkshire

There is an increasing amount of research about loneliness, yet loneliness and isolation continue to exist throughout the UK and remain a challenge to both identify and address. The Loneliness Campaign North Yorkshire is a project led by Community First Yorkshire and involves a number of key public, private and VCS partners including local authorities, health commissioners and providers, and emergency services. Together we have developed a North Yorkshire Strategy for tackling loneliness which highlights aspects of loneliness specific to the county, and presents a framework for action to address loneliness.

## Key findings include:

- Approximately 6% of North Yorkshire residents aged 16 or over (around 30,000 people) experience chronic loneliness, with a further 39% (approximately 198,000) feeling lonely often or some of the time.<sup>1</sup>
- Loneliness can have a negative effect on physical as well as mental health; reducing loneliness can improve longevity.<sup>2</sup>
- Although there are different types of loneliness, everyone can experience it, regardless of age, gender, geography, race, religion, sexuality or other factors. However, some groups are more at risk than others, such as people who live alone, younger adults (aged 16-24), and those with long-term health conditions.
- Loneliness can be triggered by life transitions, including bereavement, divorce, change of job or school, becoming a parent and children leaving home.
- Structural factors, such as the lack of availability of access to community activities, spaces, transport and services can contribute to people's feelings of social isolation and disconnectedness. This can be a major contributor to levels of loneliness in rural communities.
- People who have many social connections can still feel lonely. For some people, the cause of loneliness is a lack of *meaningful* relationships in their lives, although the number and intensity of relationships will differ from one person to another. Helping people build meaningful connections is important.
- There are lots of services and activities taking place across North Yorkshire which can help prevent loneliness. However, there is a stigma associated with loneliness, which can prevent people from seeking support. Reducing stigma may help people receive earlier intervention, engage in activities and therefore reduce the risk of them becoming chronically lonely.
- Friendly, kind and caring communities that enable a range and sufficiency of activity to respond to some or all of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*<sup>3</sup> can play an important part in preventing feelings of loneliness.
- Tailoring approaches to individuals or groups will encourage people to engage with available services.



<sup>1</sup> Figures extrapolated from 2017/18 Community Life Survey ([www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-2017-18](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-2017-18)) and percentages based on North Yorkshire adults aged 16 and over according to 2017 population estimates.

<sup>2</sup> Holt-Lunstad, J. (et al) (2010), *Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review*

<sup>3</sup> The Five Ways to Wellbeing are: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give – see [www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-ways-to-mental-wellbeing](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-ways-to-mental-wellbeing).



## Background

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the prevalence of loneliness across the UK, highlighted by organisations such as the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission and the publication of *A Connected Society: A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change* by the UK Government in late 2018. The impact of loneliness is significant on both individuals and for the wider society, at national, local and community level, not least as a result of the potential effect on people's wellbeing. Many studies have found links between loneliness and poor health outcomes, including dementia and premature death.

At the end of 2018, Community First Yorkshire was awarded with £99,555 to produce a strategy and deliver The Loneliness Campaign for North Yorkshire. Supported with additional funding and in-kind support from Community First Yorkshire, North Yorkshire County Council and Defra, the two-year project builds on the recommendations from the national strategy and Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, as well as on the local recommendations in the North Yorkshire Public Health Director's 2017 report, *Healthy Transitions – Growing Old in North Yorkshire*.

The initial phase of the project involved bringing together a range of partners representing different groups from society from the voluntary, community and charity sector, as well as North Yorkshire County Council, North Yorkshire Police and NHS colleagues. Collectively, we contributed

to the development of a North Yorkshire-wide, all demographic, strategy for tackling loneliness, which is supported by an action plan agreed by partners. This strategy and plan was endorsed by the North Yorkshire Health and Wellbeing Board and is now available to read in full on the Community First Yorkshire website.

Community First Yorkshire commissioned independent consultants, Skyblue Research Ltd, to research and produce the strategy. Development involved an extensive review of existing literature and research concerned with loneliness and isolation, as well as an evaluation of other similar strategies. The strategy features different personal stories based on lived experience, enabling the conclusions and recommendations drawn from real people's views.

## Making use of the strategy

The strategy is aimed at those working in local services or are part of community groups in North Yorkshire, whose role impacts on individuals, localities or infrastructure. It applies to those working on the ground as well as those in procurement and decision making positions, and applies to community, district and county levels. It will be particularly useful for district councils who want to produce strategies for their areas, as well as local policy makers and service providers.

### Covid-19

Although the work on the strategy was completed before the Covid-19 restrictions were in place, the inspiring response by community organisations and volunteers in North Yorkshire highlights that there is a multitude of people who want to help others, and provide practical and emotional support to those in need. The crisis has helped bring the issue of loneliness to the fore and, in some part, reduced some of the stigma often associated with loneliness.

## Framework to tackle loneliness

The strategy outlined eight key principles for tackling loneliness in North Yorkshire:

1. **An asset based, not deficit based, approach** should be adopted which recognises that everyone has strengths to help themselves and help others. Ensure solutions are based on real lives and involve users in their design.
2. Help people to feel **connected** through small changes and remove practical and emotional barriers that prevent people attending, engaging and participating.
3. Action plans should be **realistic and created with the community**, guided by what people and communities actually want. Seek to support those needs with tools, support and assistance for different people experiencing loneliness and isolation.
4. Assume that delivery can, and should be, **collaborative and system-wide**. The strategic framework should be embedded in existing services and practices, both rural and urban, and used to join up complementary investment.
5. **Address all age groups** and, in particular, life transitions but be prepared to focus resources to help those at greatest risk of, or already experiencing, chronic loneliness. Recognise that needs may vary in different localities, especially urban and rural.
6. Commission interventions and/or develop activities that **learn from best practice**; add to the evidence base by using consistent measurement approaches to loneliness reduction.
7. Consider both **prevention and alleviation** of loneliness, with a preferred emphasis over time on prevention so that long-term societal and personal engagement and benefits can be achieved.
8. Ensure that people are not stigmatised or labelled as lonely or isolated. Instead encourage loneliness to be normalised, through population-wide awareness and understanding of risk and protective factors.

Drawing from the lived experience of people in North Yorkshire, together with the literature review and research evaluation, a framework was produced which centred on five strategic ambitions and associated priority actions, shown overleaf.

The framework for tackling loneliness, detailed in full in the strategy document (see page 77), seeks to inspire everyone to tackle loneliness, helping to build resilience and make use of existing assets to ensure early intervention and foster a preventative approach. It presents a number of actions based on the strategic ambitions which form the basis of an action plan, to which a number partners across the county are committed. These actions can be used as a checklist to underpin service development and delivery by any organisation looking to reduce loneliness amongst their communities and/or client base.

This collective approach will support shared and equal responsibility for preventing and tackling loneliness and will galvanise assets long-term around the five calls to action to meet strategic ambitions in order to make maximum impact.

**Framework Principles**

Inspired by lived experiences  
 User-involvement in solution design  
 Evidence based interventions  
 Co-ordinated investment and effort

**Governance**

Cross-domain approach similar to national cross-government working (public, private and social sectors)  
 County steering group to oversee measurement of impact and ensure maximum leverage of local, regional and national strategies and assets



**Strategic Emphasis**

Prevention across the life course, focusing on transitions and trigger points for where risk is highest  
 Alleviation with a focus on those (6%) feeling chronic loneliness  
 System-wide – everyone has a role and contribution to make  
 Encourage protective factors

**Action Plan(s)**

Workstreams co-designed with the people of North Yorkshire for each of the five strategic ambitions  
 Districts to develop action plans that reflect what matters most in their localities  
 Working groups in place to implement agreed actions

To find out more or get in touch, please visit [www.communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk/projects/tlc-north-yorkshire](http://www.communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk/projects/tlc-north-yorkshire).



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