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## **Draft Article:**

### **Oxfordshire charities tackling loneliness together**

Loneliness is a normal part of the human experience – a bit like hunger or thirst, it prompts us that we need company. It becomes a problem if and when it persists over time, when it can have a serious impact on physical and mental health for us at any stage of life. People may feel lonely due to changes in their circumstances such as bereavement, leaving home, becoming a parent, caring for someone, problems with mobility or even retirement. Loneliness is not the same thing as solitude, nor is it the same thing as living alone. People can experience it even in a busy, internationally renowned city such as Oxford: others can experience it whilst living with their families in rural areas.

Although the proof of the problem and its effects is undeniable, joined up solutions have so far been thin on the ground. That's why two years ago, Age UK Oxfordshire 'started a conversation' about loneliness in Oxfordshire, one of a series of events around the country that contributed to the Jo Cox Commission (which looked at ways to reduce loneliness). This Tuesday over 300 people representing 50 charities and statutory organisations from all over Oxfordshire came together to continue that conversation and have a joined-up approach to tackling the issue.

The 'Let's talk loneliness: unlocking the power of communities' was a partnership planned by Active Oxfordshire, Archway, Action for Carers Oxfordshire, Age UK Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire Mind, Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF), Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB), Oxfordshire Youth and the Diocese of Oxford. The event was funded by OSAB (Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board) and OCF (Oxford Community Foundation).

The conference was opened by Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester and it attempted to bring about an understanding of the circumstances associated with feeling lonely and looking at what works in supporting people to tackle feelings of persistent loneliness. There was also a series of workshops that gave real-life insights and examples from community groups and charities in Oxfordshire highlighting the ways in which people can build new connections across communities and tackle the issue.

A key theme in the conference was the role volunteering had to play in addressing the problem. Zoe Anderson, one of the authors of the National Lottery Community Fund's new report 'Bringing People Together' summarised the evidence by saying that "volunteering has a double mental and physical health benefit: it helps those receiving support as well as those volunteering".

Penny Thewlis, CEO of Age UK Oxfordshire, went on to summarise the conference by saying that since the original event two years ago, "there has been a huge amount of progress, including an acknowledgement that loneliness is an issue for us

all, at any stage of life, but of course we haven't yet cracked it. Today's event has inspired us all to redouble our joint efforts to alleviate loneliness."

This article was developed in partnership with the Volunteer Centre at OCVA. If you would like a feature about your **community group, charity or social enterprise** in the Voluntary Voice section of the Oxford Times please email: [vol@ocva.org.uk](mailto:vol@ocva.org.uk)

Notes:

Sources:

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/campaigning/jo-cox-commission/>

[https://www.google.com/search?q=diocese+of+oxford&rlz=1C1GCEU\\_en-GBGB839GB839&oq=Diocese+o&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.2728j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=diocese+of+oxford&rlz=1C1GCEU_en-GBGB839GB839&oq=Diocese+o&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.2728j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

<https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2018/05/25/loneliness-among-young-people-can-volunteering-help/>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/824126/TF19\\_013\\_Annual\\_Report-FULL\\_DIGITAL\\_REPORT-0.15.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/824126/TF19_013_Annual_Report-FULL_DIGITAL_REPORT-0.15.pdf)

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/OD701-loneliness-book.pdf>

Content discussed /agreed with / Quotes from:

Zoe Anderson, the National Lottery Community.

Penny Thewlis, CEO of Age UK.

Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester