Oxfordshire based charity The Archway Foundation, dedicated to the alleviation of loneliness, is pleased to announce that CEO Sheila Furlong has been awarded an MBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours list.

Sheila has been involved in the Oxfordshire charity from its early beginnings in 1982. Helping to draw up its vision and scope, first as volunteer and now for over 20 years as CEO, her guidance and inspiration have lifted thousands of people in the Oxfordshire area from the despair of chronic loneliness.

Chair of the Trustees, Chris Taft says ‘Ahead of the current awareness of the impact of loneliness, Sheila has long recognised how for some individuals it is almost impossible to regain social interaction after trauma or personal difficulties. Her work has transformed the lives of individuals and the general perceptions of loneliness in Oxford and the surrounding area. Her commitment to improving the lives of those suffering extreme loneliness extends far beyond the expectation of her role as CEO.’

Archway’s service users are known as Friends rather than clients or customers. Sheila brought this change into being after consultations with the volunteers and users on how to make the service more inclusive, reflecting the emphasis and ethos that she has nurtured.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic began Archway has been fully operational even as social groups have been prevented from meeting. Archway has implemented telephone support of over 180 Friends through staff and volunteers, and a creative approach has ensured that the service has continued.

The Foundation is delighted that Sheila has received this recognition. Sheila’s commitment has made a massive contribution to the alleviation of loneliness for many years. Her impact and inspiration in bringing the problems of loneliness to a wider context has been ahead of its time and as a result Sheila is recognised locally for her expertise and experience in this field.

Sheila says ‘While it is a surprise and an honour to receive this award, I am just one person in a small but dedicated team of staff and volunteers whose commitment, care and dedication ensure that Archway continues to reach, listen, understand and connect with adults of all ages struggling with loneliness and its associated mental and physical challenges. It continues to be a privilege to be a part of this work in bringing relief, acceptance, hope and opportunities for supportive human contact and meaningful connection.’

This award is greatly welcomed as the charity marks its 40th anniversary in 2022.

You can find out more about Archway’s work in tackling loneliness, and how to get involved, at [www.archwayfoundation.org.uk](http://www.archwayfoundation.org.uk)