

# Building Safe Neighbourhoods

Traditional crimes such as burglary and car theft are now much less prevalent than they once were. However, holiday homes in particular are at greater risk from burglary than fully occupied homes. Unfortunately there are new issues on the relentless increase to concern us today. There are new types of criminal activity that have sprung up to replace burglary, and these new crimes require new solutions if they are to be tackled effectively. Prevention is key, and a strong community where people know and look out for their neighbours is an excellent route to crime prevention. First and foremost cold callers are source of issues such as distraction theft or scams. If you get an unsolicited caller beware and alter others.

## ●What are scams?

Scams are crimes where the perpetrator tries to swindle the victim out of money, or out of personal information with a view to stealing their money later. Scam is a slang term for personal fraud. All scams are frauds. Unfortunately scammers are targeting elderly and single people. There is advice on avoiding scams on the AHW web site and also on the AHW Facebook pages.

Another new and increasing area of concern is Loneliness & Vulnerability.

## ●How to tackle loneliness in our community

We all have a role to play in addressing this silent epidemic. As an individual, tackling loneliness starts with these:-

- Making the effort to keep in contact with older relatives and friends
- Being happy to chat – each of us can tackle loneliness by being starting a conversation, whether with a neighbour or in the supermarket queue.
- Being friends to older people living nearby – pop round and see them sometime to make sure they're OK.
- Encouraging your older neighbours to join our local Home Watch group. This way you should get their email address and/or phone number, giving you a way to keep communicating with them. Consider volunteering to help lonely and isolated older people, through the Age Concern Alanzora group.

## ●No one-size-fits-all approach

Age UK has reported that loneliness is intensely and uniquely personal. What works for one person may not work for another. If you identify someone you think may be lonely, try to strike up a conversation with the individual, explore with them what would help and then support them do it. Some people might need support to build their self-confidence, while others may need help to get around, or assistance to enable them to socialise.

## ●Talking about loneliness

It is important to note that there is no single best way of having a conversation about loneliness, because it is an experience which is very personal to the individual, and the person trying to help also has their own specific levels of knowledge, skills and capabilities. Because of this, best advice focuses on relating to the person, rather than specifically what to say or do.

- Before you engage a lonely older person in conversation, know what loneliness is, and what its purpose is. Try to de-stigmatise it. It can be helpful to explain that loneliness is a biological signal, just like hunger or physical pain, and that feelings of loneliness are nothing to be ashamed of. These feelings mean that our biological systems are doing what

they are supposed to do; they are telling us that there is something we need to change about our social world and the way we are interacting with it. It is normal to feel lonely but we need to listen to and act on the signal.

- If you're having a conversation with a lonely person, let them talk. Find out about them, be interested, and accept them for who they are.
- Be empathetic, genuine, and don't judge them.
- Do not patronise the older person or speak to them as if they are a child. The use of an infantilising voice is disrespectful and humiliating and can bring about a self-fulfilling prophecy: older people come to believe they are no longer independent, contributing members of society and assume a passive, dependent role which can reinforce their sense of loneliness.
- Be aware that the solution to a person's loneliness cannot be 'delivered'. It requires cooperation between the individual and their network of family, friends, helpers, neighbours, and others. But just by listening and recognising them, you are helping to alleviate loneliness.
- Don't make assumptions about what older people can do and want to do. Not all older people like playing bingo or knitting!
- As well as developing knowledge about loneliness, preparing yourself, and knowing how to communicate in a way that can foster open, productive dialogue, it can be helpful to have a structure for how to have a conversation with a lonely older person.

One possible structure is called the 'skilled helper' model, devised by Professor Gerard Egan of Loyola University in Chicago – this model can be used either as a series of conversations over time, or in a single conversation, depending on how responsive the older person is. An outline of the stages and steps within the model is outlined here:

•**STAGE 1 (Exploring)** - What is happening?

**Step 1:** Facilitate the person to tell their story, to review their loneliness and what is happening now.

**Step 2:** What is it the person is not seeing? Are there aspects of the problem that are not acknowledged, are there opportunities that are unidentified or unused?

**Step 3:** There may be multiple dimensions to a person's loneliness (multiple aspects of the problem), and multiple opportunities to address them. Help the person to identify the 'right' part of the problem, and the right opportunities – what is it that will make a difference to them?

•**STAGE 2 (Scoping solutions)** - What solutions are there?

**Step 1:** Help the person imagine a different future and feel hopeful about change. How would they like things to be? What would they be doing differently, and how would they feel about it? Are there people who model what they would like to be doing or how they would like to be?

**Step 2:** Help the person select realistic goals that fit the problems and opportunities identified in Stage 1. The goals should be the individual's (not the helper's).

**Step 3:** Help the person identify the incentives in tackling their loneliness: what benefits will they derive? Are there factors that make change necessary?

•**STAGE 3 (Action)** - What do I do?

**Step 1:** Help the person to construct a plan that maps out where the person wants to get to.

In talking about loneliness and helping the person move towards feeling connected to their local neighbourhood, it is useful to be familiar with your local services and support. It can be helpful to discuss local activities, charities, events, community groups.

Once you've made contact with the older people in your neighbourhood, you can signpost them to local services and community activities. Encouraging people to participate in community activities that boost their self-esteem can help build their resilience, and research suggests that it can even make them less likely to fall for scams.

**This advice has been extracted from Neighbourhood Watch in the UK  
and modified to suit members of Arboleas Home Watch**