Report of: Senior Commissioning Manager
Subject/Title: Multi-Faith Conference 13th November 2019

Report Summary

The Multi faith Conference held on 13th November 2019 was a great success with over 140 people attending from different faith and voluntary communities. We also held a market place of commissioned services. We are looking to build on this successful event and maintain momentum. Special thanks go to the Diocese of Chester and local faith leads, who were key contributors.

Background

The conference came about to celebrate Multi faith Week across the country. A steering group was set up to determine a theme, which was pertinent to Cheshire East citizens. The group agreed that Loneliness and Isolation was a key priority in all areas, including Neighborhood Partnership groups.

About the Day

Councillor Mick Warren, Portfolio Holder for Communities for Cheshire East Council opened the conference:

“Loneliness is a sign that something needs to change. Loneliness harms us as individuals and it harms our neighbourhoods and communities. Research has shown that lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Anyone at any age can be lonely — even busy people, even you — whether alone or in a group, at work or at home with family.

Lonely people are often excluded from the opportunities many of us take for granted. They may find their self-worth; confidence and trust reduce, decreasing their access to new opportunities and to meeting new and different people in ordinary everyday situations. And yet it is from these that we develop new relationships, experiences, insights, interests, hobbies and hopefully new friendships.

Loneliness, like confidence and fragility, can come and go, often taking us by surprise.

Isolation however, is often where there is no choice but to be alone. Some people seek solitude, but few choose to be lonely or isolated, primarily because it isn’t good for us.

In this room we have a wealth of expertise all working towards the same goal, making a difference for those who need it but do we know who does what? We are here to look at what we can do together to tackle loneliness and isolation.
So today’s conference is how we can become more joined up and to work together to tackle loneliness and isolation."

The attendees had the opportunity to hear some amazing stories of support the faith community offer, within their parishes. The speeches were so inspiring and at times, the audience were rather emotional, especially after watching a couple of short videos.

List of speakers at the conference:
- Pastor Edwards - TLC (Lighthouse Centre) Crewe
- Dr Barbara Philips - Refugees Welcome
- Marc Levy - Jewish Leadership Council
- Elaine Reynolds & Anne Latham - Middlewich Good Neighbours
- Emily Gunnion - The HOPE Centre
- Linda Webber - Congleton Street Pastors
- Waterways Chaplaincy Video - https://www.chester.anglican.org/social-responsibility/chaplaincy/
- Sonia Bassey - Cheshire East Council Public Sector Transformation
- Emal Haidari - Absolute Interpreting and Translations Ltd
- Catherine Cleghorn – St Andrew’s and All Saints with St Peter’s, Crewe
- Ameera Fletcher / Emma Thomas - CRE8 Macclesfield
- Kirsty Thorpe - Wilmslow United Reformed Church
- Cheshire Agricultural Chaplaincy Video - https://www.agchap.com/blog/meet-and-eat

Comments
“Well done everyone for bringing people together with engaging and interesting discussions”

“It was great to hear about other services/support from both speakers and other attendees”

“Hearing about the amazing work being undertaken by a wide variety of organisations”

The attendees commented that the speeches were so powerful and engaging that they felt passionate that more of this type of networking was needed.

A short video presentation of the conference / https://animoto.com/play/JB0mUP1t0nTt0RlsDiTjuQ (best to copy & paste the link into Google Chrome)

Following on from the speeches 2 workshops were facilitated:

Workshop 1
Map the Gaps
People were asked to highlight the issues of loneliness and isolation that they are aware of in Cheshire East area. In groups they recorded on post-it notes, areas where support is limited or lacking, in their neighbourhood town. They identified needs/gaps in provision and displayed this information on a large display map. The idea behind this was to demonstrate that local knowledge people have is vital intelligence. It also visually demonstrated the “need hotspots” that we address in workshop 2.
Main Gaps Identified:
- Good Neighbour’s Schemes
- Young People (Crewe/Congleton/Macclesfield)
- Transport (Isolated/Rural Locations)
- Cultural Barrier (Language & Context)

Workshop 2
Priority Focus
Following on from the findings of workshop 1, the audience were asked to work together in teams and come up with solutions or ideas to tackle loneliness and isolation. The first stage was to record their ideas on the outer layer of the table-plan. Groups then moved to the next table and tackled how they could work in partnership with others. A short-list was recorded on the next layer of the table-plan. Groups were asked to be honest about issues they could genuinely commit to working together on. Next, groups were asked to move to the next table and record the top three ideas to demonstrate that in working in partnership, would be the most effective and exciting as a group. Finally the facilitator was asked to come up and write their table’s three priorities. Everyone in the room then voted on the overall top three projects where we can come together to work on as a shared outcome of the conference.

Three main priorities identified:
- Sharing assets, skills, knowledge, intelligence by networking;
- Flexible and shared relational transport schemes;
- Occupy and use empty community spaces (shops) for pop up community
  - Community Celebrations/ Street Parties.

Community Pledge
Sonia Bassey, Deputy Director of Public Sector Transformation Programme asked, as part of her presentation, that the audience commit to a community pledge to do one good deed. Some of the pledges included:
- Apply to volunteer
- Putting neighbours bins out
- Join a Neighbourhood Partnership to continue discussions from this conference
- Talk to any isolated /lonely people and let them know about activities in their area (offering to go along with them at first)
- Spend quality time with a lonely person
- Chatty benches across our parks in CE
- Smile at a stranger
- Make unique and new conversations with people in my community
- To assist homeless/vulnerable person
- I will use my position in the council to make life safer and better for our diverse communities
- Encouraging all adults to chat to young people, parents sit and watch a TV programme together, take a breath and see if young person is ‘vulnerable’ not ‘bad’
- To make my job a success as a community connector
- Share funding idea with blind/partially sighted bowlers at Barnies
I will come and visit a community group and talk to members about loneliness and isolation
Work on digital detox in school
Visit housebound in community
To sit and have a cuppa and chat with elderly and single neighbours
Engage with all communities to see where social isolation exists
Keep in touch with elder relatives more often
Check with elderly neighbours over Christmas
Not to ignore the needs of the community

Closing comments from Nichola Glover Edge, Director of Commissioning, Adult Social Care Commissioning

“Thank you for all coming today and putting so much drive and enthusiasm into the event. Today has been a great opportunity to meet people who work tirelessly within our communities to tackle loneliness and isolation but today has also enabled you to network with everyone, see what we commission, listen to the amazing work already happening out there and how we can do things better. Everyone has a part to play in preventing loneliness, so kindness matters. Isolation can make people feel very fragile so a friendly welcome can be the difference between making a real connection or withdrawing again. As we aim to support whole communities, we can all help to improve people’s perception of themselves, the people around them and the places where we live.

As the Director of Commissioning and the People Directorate for Cheshire East Council today has just emphasized the challenges and barriers that we still have around this difficult agenda. It is so important that we work collaboratively and share the knowledge and work that is currently happening within our VFCFS. Commissioners from the local authority and our Clinical Commissioning Groups need to feel confident that the services they commission avoid duplication and are efficient.

Many organisations, working to address loneliness and social isolation, are operating at a small scale and are funded for short-term projects, and may not even be on a commissioner’s radar, which why today has been so important.

While services offered by larger national charities are undoubtedly a crucial part of the picture it is important that smaller providers do not miss out on innovation and the chance to take a risk on pilot approaches.

Early Help Community Grants is an opportunity for you all to think how you could submit an application for the grant; you could do this in isolation or work collaboratively to submit something.

Today has allowed you to start to map and scope of what is already out there in Cheshire East and this will be the start of what needs to happen next.

- Join things up / prevent duplication
- Link up with other groups or organisations
- Look at the Early help Community Grants
- Set up a forum so we don’t lose the momentum
- Consider the significant role of your Town & Parish Councillors and their understanding of the local area and support that may be available
- Pooling resources and intelligence across organisations and developing new partnerships may increase the benefits for those who are hard to reach or isolated”

Nichola stated that the conference delivered so much wealth, knowledge, drive and commitment of what is happening in our faith communities. We need to engage more and develop partnerships that will address the needs and priorities agreed today.
Key findings from Evaluation Forms

140 people attended the conference overall. We received 54 completed Evaluation Forms and a further 30 emails congratulating CEC on such a positive, interacting and informative conference.

From the numbers below you will see that it was an extremely successful conference where the majority of people found the speakers engaging and informative, they enjoyed the 2 workshops and the networking sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you rate the design and content of the conference?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good - 74%</td>
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<table>
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<th>How useful did you find the conference overall?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Extremely Useful - 53.7%</td>
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<tr>
<th>How do you rate the venue?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good - 31.5%</td>
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Comments

“Well done all of you - it was brilliant!”

“All day was really interesting and engaging”

“Very interesting the number, range and resourcefulness of voluntary and social enterprises in place across towns and regions of Cheshire”

“This is one of the best conferences I have attended the speeches and videos were awesome, my goodness Loneliness and Isolation is such an emotional roller coaster. The time went so quick.”

Suggested themes for the next Conference

- Transport & Disability Support
- Health and Wellbeing
- More opportunities for networking at a local level
- Effective communication and engagement
- Mental Health
- New upcoming projects/groups
- Youth conference to help focus and empower
- Intergenerational dialogue and support

Next Steps

Following the feedback analysis we will deliver:

- We will hold 1 conference per year
- We will feedback on any outcomes and developments from this conference
- Feedback at next conference on any developments that have taken place since this conference
- A list for all Neighbourhood Partnerships will be provided with dates of meetings for the year ahead.
- The next conference will have a time slot to allow a Q&A session from the speakers of the conference.
- More opportunities for Networking
Attendees from the event recognised the need for more networking at a more local level. What many people don’t realise is we already do this with our Neighbourhood Partnerships.

**Neighbourhood Partnerships** bring together a range of partners including the Voluntary, Community and Faith (VCF) sector, Police, children’s centres, schools, Youth Services, Youth Offending Team, local elected members and businesses.

The purpose is to understand local priorities based on local intelligence. We work as a partnership to create local projects that impact on those local priorities. Agencies and local residents work collaboratively to create and tailor projects to suit that community.

We have 14 Neighbourhood Partnerships across Cheshire East. Each of them serves an area across the borough where we have identified a need to reduce health inequality.

1. Poynton Area Community Partnership
2. Bollin Partnership (Wilmslow and Handforth)
3. Congleton Connected Communities Partnership
4. Holmes Chapel Connected Communities Partnership
5. Longridge and Shaw Heath Neighbourhood Partnership
6. Upton Priory Neighbourhood Partnership
7. Weston Neighbourhood Partnership
8. Moss Rose Neighbourhood Partnership
9. Hurdsfield Neighbourhood Partnership
10. Sandbach Connected Communities Partnership
11. Alsager Partnership
12. Middlewich Partnership
13. Crewe Partnership
14. Nantwich Partnership

We would encourage anyone with an interest in helping to address the health and social issues of their area to attend. You can find the action plans and contact details for all NP’s on our [website](#).

**Access to Information**

The feedback received and used to form this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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