Reach Out: May 2016 – April 2017

Background

A growing body of evidence reveals that in addition to being distressing, social isolation and loneliness puts people at greater risk of health issues such a depression, heart disease, high blood pressure and dementia [i]. By contrast, meaningful friendships and social networks can have a protective effect on health and wellbeing[ii].

In 2015 the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee inquiry into social isolation and loneliness concluded the issue was a significant problem in Scotland and should be considered alongside issues like poverty and poor housing as part of the public health agenda. They suggested individual citizens, public services and the Scottish Government take collective responsibility for improving the situation[iii].

It is against this backdrop that in May 2016 NHS Highland launched **Reach Out**; a media campaign aimed at increasing **public awareness and raising the profile locally** of the growing problem of loneliness and social isolation and its potential consequences for health and wellbeing.

The campaign was designed to utilise NHS Highland media channels. A designated Reach Out **Facebook page** and **website** were developed to highlight the issues and encourage members of the public, staff groups and community organisations to take action by pledging to do something practical to tackle this growing problem.

Campaign aims.

1
- **Raise public awareness** of the growing problem of loneliness and social isolation and its potential consequences on health and wellbeing.

2
- Highlight the potential for loneliness and social isolation to affect both the **young** and **old** through the life course and in particular during times of transition, such as moving house or school or on retirement.

3
- A "**call to action**" - Members of the public, staff groups and local organisations are encouraged to make a 'pledge' committing do something to address loneliness. A pledge form is available on NHS Highland's dedicated Reach Out website , Facebook page and social media platforms.

Campaign Highlights

- **The Reach Out Campaign launched in May 2016** at Drakies Primary School Community Café in Inverness. This was the perfect venue for the official launch with a large gathering of pupils and people from the local community. A "Q&A Session" was held by the P7 pupils with queries posed to NHS Highland's Joanna MacDonald, Director of Adult Social Care and Cathy Steer, Head of Health Improvement, about loneliness, its effects and what 'Reach Out' would hope to do. Drew Hendry MP was also there to offer his support to 'Reach Out'.

- **Shona Robison - Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing** endorsed NHS Highland's campaign on its launch day. She welcomed the initiative, explaining: "These days people in Scotland are living longer, healthier and more independent lives thanks to improvements in health and social care. However, this means that loneliness and social isolation has become an increasingly important issue and we must work together to tackle this problem.

- During 2016 both **Highland and Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnerships** pledged their support for the campaign. Representatives from both councils, NHS Highland, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Third Sector and a number of other organisations all agreed to sign up to the campaign.

- Reach Out quickly won the support of the local media with **The Inverness Courier** going on to promote the campaign on a weekly basis across its associated press throughout the year.

- **Ross County Football** Club pledged their support for the campaign and the Ross-shire launch of Reach Out was hosted at the club. At the event their community coaching team and local charity **Connecting Carers** signed a pledge to join the campaign.

- Further launches and awareness sessions were held by **LGOWIT group - Nairn**, **Caithness Drug and Alcohol Forum - Caithness and Kinmallie Free Church – Lochaber.**

Organisational Pledges

Over the course of the year **39** organisations and staff groups supported the campaign – pledging to do something to tackle loneliness and social isolation or using Reach Out signposting resources to support their service users.

Who Supported	Reach Out
Drakies Primary School - Inverness	Home Start MAJIK - Argyll, Bute, Islay, Mid Argyll, Jura, Gigha, Cowal and Kintyre
Cowal Elderly Befriender SCOI - Dunoon/Bute	Hope Kitchen - Oban
Befrienders Highland	Crossroads Caring for Carers - Dunoon
Skye Youth Drop In - Portree	Sutherland District Partnership
Alzheimer Scotland - Bute	Highland Community Planning Partnership
Royal British Legion Scotland - Dunoon	Wick Allotment Association
Invergodon Academy Rock Challenge team	Scottish Waterways Trust - Highlands
Carers Direct Ltd - Argyll and Bute	Merkinch Partnership - Inverness
Unison - Argyll and Bute branch	Contin Community Trust
North Argyll and Bute Carers Centre - Oban	Link Club - Campbeltown
The Hub - Stachur	Scottish Natural Heritage
Invergordon Academy - Rock Challenge Team	Kinmallie Free Church - Lochaber
LGOWIT - Nairn	University of Highlands and Islands
Highlife Highland	Home Energy Scotland - Inverness
HUG/Spirit Advocay - Highland	Caithness Mental Health support group
Lairg Medical Practice	Contact the Elderly - Inverness
Caithness Food Friends and Caithness Voluntarey Group	NHS Highland Technology Enabled Care

Individual Pledges

In addition **91** individuals pledged their support for the campaign - including**:**

Dr Robert Peat:

Director of Inspection at the Care Inspectorate and Executive Advisor to the NHS Highland Board agreed to sign the very first pledge for Reach Out, offering his support to the campaign.

Drew Hendry:

MP for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, attended the launch and pledged his support for the campaign, committing to keep taking forward the issue of loneliness and working across the board to deliver as much change as he could.

Maureen Watt:

Scottish Government Minister for Mental Health offered her support by signing a pledge to help raise awareness of the issue.

Steven Ferguson:

Head of youth and community at Ross County Football Clubs said: "We are delighted to be involved in the Reach Out campaign. We are holding an event to officially launch the campaign in Ross-shire and we would like to invite people to come along and find out more about how to tackle social isolation and loneliness."

And many more during the year from members of the public!

What was pledged?

Here are just a few examples of the practical things organisations and individuals pledged to do to help tackle loneliness and social Isolation in their communities.

"We hope to establish and support other community gardening groups and give out raised beds to people who feel they can't manage an allotment plot. We hope that, by doing this, people will realise they are part of a community that cares about their happiness and welfare".

"We will endeavour to arrange as many activities as possible which promote the opportunity for social interaction and mental well-being. We currently host a weekly social lunch and art classes. We aim to introduce further opportunities in 2017".

"I will keep in regular contact with friends at home with young babies".

"We pledge to reach out to people who are socially isolated and give them the opportunity to come together to build new skills, learn together, make new links in their own community and take part in social activities".

"All our young people agree to be welcoming to all ages to break down loneliness".

"I pledge to spend more time looking out for my neighbours and will invite them in for a cup of tea and just generally make sure they are ok".

"We will run a community cafe for 8 weeks to create a local hub for our Drakies area. We hope to combat loneliness in our area".

The year at a glance

39 Organisational Pledges
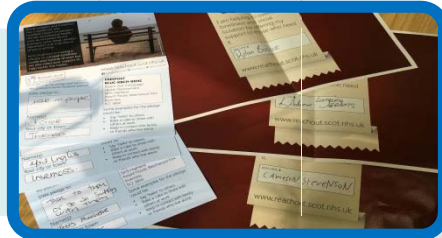
91 Individual Pledges

263 Facebook followers

171 Twitter Followers

May 2016
Reach Out Launch at Drakies Primary School

May 2016
Inverness Courier back the campaign- resulting in weekly news articles

Highland Community Planning Partnership backs the campaign

Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership backs the campaign

Ross-shire launch
Ross County football club and Connecting carers add their support

Mini Launches
Caithness
Lochaber
Nairn

Resources and signposting

As the campaign evolved a number of resources were developed aimed at signposting members of the public and staff to organisations which might be of support to individuals experiencing loneliness or social isolation.

Resources also included information about volunteering opportunities. Volunteering is known to have a number of benefits including improving both mental and physical health.

These resources are available on the Reach Out **website**

and have been circulated to GP practices across Highland. In addition a number of organisations supporting the campaign are now using the resources.

What happening nationally since the Reach Out launch?

Commitment to tackle loneliness and social isolation and its effects of health and wellbeing is gaining momentum nationally and becoming a matter of policy concern in Scotland.

- November 2016: Voluntary Health Scotland took the negative impacts of loneliness on physical and mental health as the theme of its annual conference. At the conference they highlighted recent research, policy developments, and evidence from the third sector about what makes a difference.

- 2016-2017: The Scottish Government committed to tackling loneliness and social isolation, providing a £500,000 Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund (2016-17) intended to support community-based projects tackling social isolation. In addition they committed to the development of a National Social Isolation Strategy which will "*ensure a holistic approach across government to problems of loneliness and isolation*"[iv].

Reach Out – Next Steps

Reach Out will continue with its main aims in mind and in the coming year will maintain the momentum of the first year's success by:

- Supporting NHS Highland Technology Enabled Care who will be promoting the campaign along with its own services at a Highland roadshow. The road show will visit 12 locations across Highland.

- Launching the **Reach Out Florence Service** (Flo for short) - a simple, interactive text messaging service designed by Technology Enable Care. Flo will send text messages to people interested in tackling loneliness and social isolation. Messages will include facts, practical advice and information about services and signposting. The 10 week service if free and people can opt out at any time.

- Driving an increase in Facebook activity and the number of local pledges to tackle loneliness and social isolation.

- Continuing the media campaign which will:
  - ❖ **Continue to raise awareness of the problem of loneliness and social isolation and make the call to action.**
  - ❖ **Showcase examples of local projects which work to address the growing problem of loneliness and social isolation**.
  - ❖ **Promote the Flo Campaign.**

- Evaluating the impact of the Reach Out Project and its impact on local communities.

References

[i] Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB and Layton JB (2010) Social relationships and mortality risk: A metaanalytic review. PLoS Med 7(7)

[ii] Wilkinson, R. and Marmot, M., eds, (2003) *Social determinants of health – the Solid Facts* 2nd ed. Denmark: World Health Organisation.

[iii] Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (2015), Equal Opportunities Committee - *Age and Social Isolation* [Online] Available at:
http://www.parliament.scot/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Reports/EOS042015R05.pdf
Accessed

[iv] Scottish Government (2017) *Universal Periodic Review of human rights in the United Kingdom – May 2017 – Scottish Government position statement* [Online]Available at:
http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/04/5025/15
Accessed