

ALONE notes that during this year, their 35th anniversary, these incidents continue to occur

Dublin, March 20th 2012 ALONE, the charity which provides support to older people in need of assistance, has called on members of the public to be more aware of checking on their older neighbours, and also reminds the public that ALONE can be contacted directly where there is concern for the wellbeing of an older person. This follows the discovery of the body of an older person in Wexford after the person died alone at Christmas. The charity marks its 35th anniversary in 2012. One of the main reasons behind the foundation of ALONE by fireman Willie Bermingham and a handful of volunteers in 1977 was the discovery of eight older people who were found dead in their Dublin homes within weeks of each other during the previous winter.

Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE, commented, “We’re very saddened by the news of the discovery of a body of an older man in Wexford who died several months ago and would like to offer our sympathies to all concerned. We urge the public to ensure that they check on older people in the community at all times of year, not just during cold weather or Christmas time. We are very aware of the isolation of older persons as a continuing problem for our society. Our Community Response service routinely provides emergency assistance to older people whose personal situation has deteriorated to crisis point because they have become isolated. Every week our Befriending Service volunteers visit 200 older people who would otherwise have little or no regular social contact.”

He continued, “This tragedy highlights how the public can easily become disengaged from isolated older people. There is a stigma attached to admitting we are lonely, so people tend not to look for help or support. Approximately 30% of people aged over 65 live alone, and are potentially at risk of social exclusion. As a society, we need to ensure that we are aware of the needs of older people who may be isolated, and where direct support is not practical, to urge that anyone who has concerns about the wellbeing of an older person calls us.”

The effects of loneliness on older people have been characterized as increasing depression; can have a reduction in life expectancy; and it decreases confidence and motivation. Older people on their own may not eat well, and they will not always seek medical attention when it’s required and this can further aggravate problems. The World Health Organisation reports that isolation has a worse long term affect on a person’s health than smoking.

Moynihan concluded, “Tackling isolation and loneliness is something that can be addressed with increased community involvement, and everyone has a responsibility in this regard to be aware of their older neighbours and their needs. The Government also need to ensure that services which are designed for older people communicate directly with the people they serve. This is a growing concern for us in a digital age, that older people are not being considered when new methods of

communication are being employed by State agencies. It serves to further isolate those who are already on the periphery of society.”

Members of the public who have a concern about the wellbeing of an older person can contact ALONE on (01) 679 1032.

ENDS