

ALONE's Christmas Press Release

COMPASSION ALONE IS NOT ALWAYS ENOUGH.

ALONE ENCOURAGES PUBLIC TO VISIT OLDER PEOPLE LIVING ALONE DURING CHRISTMAS.

ALONE calls on people to "share the Christmas spirit" and provide companionship this Christmas.

ALONE is calling on members of the public to spend some time during the Christmas period to provide company and support for older people living alone. The charity notes that many older people find Christmas time a lonely and isolating period and a huge difference can be made by simply visiting an older person living alone. ALONE works on the ground with older people every day to provide them with support, and sees the number of calls for assistance and support increase dramatically during the winter period.

During the Christmas period ALONE volunteers will distribute food hampers to hundreds of older people in need. On Christmas Day, the volunteers will also bring hot Christmas dinners to older people living alone. The charity will be distributing other items such as blankets generously donated by companies to ensure warmth and nutrition. 120,000 older people live alone in Ireland, with approximately 10% of these in need of assistance or companionship.

Each year, the charity highlights the effects of isolation on older persons, which can be wide-ranging, and can have knock-on effects on the health of the older person at risk. The World Health Organisation rates loneliness as a higher health risk than lifelong smoking, with researchers also linking a lack of social interaction with the onset of degenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's. ALONE combats isolation and loneliness via its network of almost 200 volunteers and its small, dedicated team of staff who provide companionship, support and housing to older people in need.

ALONE has had a huge response to its Christmas campaign "Compassion ALONE is not always enough", encouraging the public to remember older people in the community who are living alone and who may be in need of assistance or company.

It has also received tremendous support for the 'Twelve Faces of Christmas' Facebook campaign, a series of photographs by Jason Clarke Photography – www.facebook.com/ALONE-Ireland.

"Time costs nothing, so please give generously," said Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE. "At this time of year, it's vital that the public are reminded about the negative effects that isolation can have on certain older people. It's very easy for people to get caught up in their own lives at Christmas time, and we're asking that people remember that a simple visit to an older person can make a huge difference to their wellbeing, as they may be desperately in need of some company."

He stressed that the vast majority of older persons are not at risk, but one in ten are a priority for the public. He commented, “Not all older people in the community are in need of support, we support the group of between 10 – 15% of those who are at risk of isolation, and we need to be sure that these people are factored into people’s plans at this time of year. The public have been very generous and thoughtful in the past, and this year we’re encouraging people to support us in our work and be aware of the needs of older people living alone in the community.”

ALONE receives no Government funding, it is solely funded from donations from companies and members of the public. ALONE service users come from among the one in ten older people who are in need of support. The charity provides a volunteer befriending service to 200 older people, an emergency response service dealing with 30 crisis interventions monthly, and offers 100 homes with lifetime tenancies in a supportive environment for older people at risk of homelessness. Older people in need of assistance or advice can contact ALONE on (01) 679 1032.