

Loneliness is a health issue that increases the risk of dementia

Befriending is a vital health service

30th September 2015, Dublin This International Day of Older people on October 1st, ALONE is highlighting the fact that loneliness is a health issue with far-reaching consequences.

Sean Moynihan, CEO of ALONE said, “As an organisation that works with vulnerable older people, we interact first hand with the effects of loneliness every day. I don’t think that people are aware just how devastating loneliness can be for your general health. Not only can loneliness lead to depression, but it is also a predictor for dementia, cardiovascular disease and decreased immune system responsiveness. Loneliness is twice as dangerous to the health of an older person as obesity, and is as damaging as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.”

Moynihan continued, “In ALONE, we regard befriending as a vital health service and our free Befriending Service provides this necessary companionship for isolated older people. All of our volunteers are trained to a high standard, Garda vetted and they are supported by experienced mentors”.

“Earlier this year, we realised that a national group was needed, to deliver training, establish quality standards and ensure transparency across befriending services nationwide and in response we founded Befriending Network Ireland. Already, more than 40 organisations have come together to combat loneliness on a national scale” said Moynihan.

Moynihan concluded, “We receive no day-to-day government funding for our services which provide a lifeline for thousands of vulnerable older people. Befriending is a preventative health measure and given that mental health problems have an estimated overall economic cost of €3 billion per annum, we would implore the government to take a better look at this key health service.”

Hosted by ALONE, the network envisions a society where vulnerable people experiencing loneliness and social isolation have access to quality befriending services to improve health and well-being. Through this network ALONE provide support, advice and training to befriending organisations across the country.

This International Day of Older people on October 1st, ALONE encourage any older person looking for a Befriending Service in their area to get in touch and call 01 679 1032. Similarly, if there are any befriending organisations looking for advice and support they can contact ALONE.