

LI 29

Ymchwiliad i unigrwydd ac unigedd

Inquiry into loneliness and isolation

Ymateb gan: Prosiect Eden

Response from: The Eden Project

Dear Sirs /madam

We would like to submit good practice community led solutions to reducing loneliness within wales.

Eden Project Communities - The Big Lunch

Eden Project Communities is the home of The Big Lunch, an idea from the Eden Project, funded by the Big Lottery. In 2016 7.3 million people took part in The Big Lunch, the UK's annual get-together for neighbours. This year on 17 and 18 June, as part of The Great Get-Together weekend, we're hoping for even more.

Since 2009, millions of people have been stepping out from behind closed doors to join The Big Lunch; to have fun, share food and enjoy conversations with their neighbours. As a result new connections are made and over time friendships blossom. Neighbourhoods are where we have our homes but we know that for many people, even home can be a lonely place, for anyone of any age.

The Big Lunch works to build connections between people in the places where they live so that neighbours become a vital source of support, rather than a bitter reminder of how lonely we are. The Big Lunch has joined the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, because we believe place matters and working together through this collaboration we can help drive positive social change that will help reduce the number of people suffering feelings of loneliness in their neighbourhoods and homes.

We know:

People make 20 connections on average when they take part in community activities

For 1 in 20 people, talking with a neighbour is the highlight of their day

1 in 8 people involved in community activities go on to exercise together

1 in 8 people involved in community activities go on to do something cultural together

Loneliness is a mismatch between the relationships we have and those we want. It is our internal trigger, letting us know it's time to seek company, just as hunger lets us know it's time to eat.



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.

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 (Holt-Lunstad, 2015).

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.

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.

Even home can be a lonely place. Neighbourhoods are where we have our homes and they affect how we feel. Our neighbours can be both a vital source of support or a reminder of how lonely we are.

There are things we all can do within our neighbourhoods to enable ourselves and others to feel more supported and less lonely.

Earlier this year we commissioned research to look at the value of connected communities.

**The Cost of Disconnected Communities in Wales: £2.6 billion per year**  
Social isolation and disconnected communities could be costing the Welsh economy £2.6 billion every year, a new study has found.

The research has been commissioned by Eden Project initiative The Big Lunch and funded by the Big Lottery to examine the impact of community-led initiatives on societal welfare and on the economy in each area of the UK.

The research reveals the annual cost to public services in Wales of social isolation and disconnected communities, including:





Demand on health services: £427 million

Demand on policing: £10 million

The cost of stress and low self-esteem: £8 million

Disconnected communities are linked to a loss of productivity, with a net cost to the Welsh economy of over £1 billion every year.

According to the research, which was carried out by leading economics consultancy the Centre of Economics and Business Research (Cebr), neighbourliness already delivers substantial economic benefits to Welsh society, representing an annual saving of £2.13 billion in total.

The saving comes from sharing between neighbours, an increase in social connection and reductions in the demands on public services such as healthcare, social care, welfare and the environment.

It also includes the productivity benefits associated with a happier and healthier workforce: a net gain to the Welsh economy of £601 million.

The study shows that an increase in neighbourliness – where members of the community share their time, interests, ideas and resources with each other – helps to ease demand on public services by providing locally run alternatives, such as neighbourhood watch schemes and local litter picks. In Wales, the saving to public services currently equates to £264 million.

It also reveals that neighbourliness has a huge welfare value, with £1.26bn saved each year in Wales through neighbours sharing resources and services such as childcare, pet sitting, DIY and transport, and borrowing tools and household equipment.

Becoming more connected with the community has also been shown to have a positive influence on people's health and the report estimates that social cohesion currently saves £254m in reduced demand on health services in Wales – and could potentially grow to £681m if everyone in Wales got to know their neighbours and became more involved in community activities.

“The Big Lunch study reveals that the financial benefits to individuals and wider society are enormous, highlighting more reasons than ever for communities to come together. Getting to know your neighbours through an initiative like The Big Lunch will bring you joy and happiness, and will also help you, Wales and the UK as a whole to save money.”





The report is a combination of qualitative research and quantitative data – the latter garnered via a survey carried out by Cebr for the purposes of the study.

The survey found that, on average, 97% of people in the UK believe that community projects have a positive impact on society as a whole, and 96% believe that the cost of running key community services is higher if the community is not connected and if people are lonely or socially isolated.

Cebr director Oliver Hogan said: “With our report we have established the cost to society of disconnected communities. Our starting point is that community involvement can act to reduce loneliness and isolation and encourage positive change within communities. There is a lot of existing research on loneliness, so this study was shaped to provide a perspective on the costs imposed on society by disconnected communities.

“We found that, by increasing social capital, reducing isolation, and enhancing social inclusion, community activities and events lead to improvements in health, educational performance and socioeconomic circumstance. As such, they can help redress the balance between the need for and provision of public services and reduce the demands on those services. However, an element of the overall improvement in societal welfare also translates into productivity gains, both to the Welsh and to the UK economy through a happier and healthier workforce.”

### Why The Big Lunch is great for communities

Over 70% of attendees feel The Big Lunch is good for the community  
94% of attendees believe The Big Lunch will have a positive impact on their community

88% of organisers feel better about their neighbourhood as a result of hosting a Big Lunch

65% of people who organise a Big Lunch go on to do more in their community

74% of people who do The Big Lunch feel an increased sense of community

38% of people who do The Big Lunch feel a surge in their own self esteem

The Big Lunch is one of the most significant and well known initiatives of the Eden Project, an educational charity working to connect people with each other and the living world.





Started in 2009 and made possible by the Big Lottery Fund, The Big Lunch is an annual event held in June encouraging people to have lunch with their neighbours in a simple act of community, friendship and fun. Designed to build stronger and better connected communities, the initiative aims to improve the lives of the individuals involved while also easing the demands on public services and delivering productivity gains to employers.

In Wales, over 185,000 people took part in The Big Lunch in 2016. Samantha Evans, the Eden Project's Community Network Developer in Wales, said: "We wanted to understand the impact of community-led initiatives like The Big Lunch, outlining the benefits to individuals' health and well-being, and the economic impact too. Existing research suggests that people feel happier, safer and more content when they live in connected communities and know their neighbours.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and the commitment the Assembly is making calling for an inquiry into loneliness

Yours Sincerely

Tracey Robbins

Eden Project Communities

UK Delivery Manager

Tracey joined Eden Project Communities early 2016 from her previous role as Policy and Research Manager for Neighbourhoods at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

For 5 years Tracey led the Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme, for JRF, a place based action research programme working with local people to explore what causes and reduces loneliness within four different neighbourhoods across 2 cities and more importantly to do something about it.

Tracey's career has focussed on asset based community development approaches, health wellbeing and social care within the voluntary and community sector for 20 years. Using action research and participatory technics to work directly with individuals and groups to bring about change, develop opportunities and redress imbalances.





Many of those years were voluntary, becoming a practitioner as well as an advocating the needs of communities, on local, regional, national and international forums.

For 9 years she has worked voluntary with individuals, communities and organisations to develop, co-ordinate and manage new initiatives - working locally to meet the needs of communities and strategically in developing and evaluating services.

Tracey has also blogged about her experience on loneliness and helps offers to connect with this ever increasing issue. More information including a free resource pack to down load can be found here:

<http://www.thebiglunch.com/>

<http://www.thebiglunchers.com/index.php/2016/03/home-can-be-a-lonely-place-but-not-if-you-open-your-door-to-the-big-lunch/>

<http://www.thebiglunchers.com/index.php/2016/05/with-a-big-lunar-lunch-everyone-can-come-to-the-table/>

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/neighbourhood-approaches-loneliness>

You can follow Tracey on twitter @TraceyJRobbins

