

# Social isolation and loneliness

## in the South Hams



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# Survey background

We had already identified a need for more support for socially isolated people in the South Hams via evidence from social prescribers, community groups and partners. This led to the development of our first community link worker role.

## But we needed to do more to support our residents and groups:

- The South Hams is one of the top 10% most rural districts in England.
- Our seeming affluence masks our rurality issues: fragmented service provision, poor transport, housing, seasonal employment, an ageing population, people moving to the area to retire.
- Deprivation data weighting is based on concentrated areas of population.

As an older person I feel out of place and superfluous in the, now, younger and less friendly, local community.

Loneliness is defined as a subjective and individual feeling, which results from the perceived gap between a person's desire for social connection and their actual experience of it; whilst social isolation is an objective measure relating to the number of contacts that people have and/or have the opportunity to have; which is about the quantity, not the quality of relationships.

I often feel alone and don't really feel like I belong to my community. I'm aware of So Social but I'm not sure what's available and my health condition and transport is an issue for me. Being with other likeminded people would help me and I'd like to see a music appreciation group.



# Working with and for our voluntary groups

## Our face-to-face surveys involved:

- hosting small events/workshops
- attending community activities and groups
- some door-to-door surveys
- going to community shops, post offices, libraries, cafés and pubs.

## Our remote surveys included:

- an online survey using SurveyMonkey—publicised on the Facebook pages for South Hams communities and other sites
- papers copies distributed to residents (with the help of our community groups).

I have severe ME/CFS so I'm limited in my ability to leave the house. What would really cheer me up would be having someone who could come by sometimes to help me with informal tech. help for my phone and laptop. I'm so dependent on them, but there's lots I don't know and it would be so helpful to have someone teach me things.

The biggest cause of isolation and loneliness, for myself, is not to do with connection to my community, it results from being single, so having no close partner in my life.

More access to instant mental health support for loneliness through having no family support. Happy to be assisting in the creation of such a service. [I'm] not old enough for Age UK.

More for under 18s and more support for arts, drama type of activities that are more affordable in our community.



Due to our team capacity, it was not possible to undertake the more intensive face-to-face work in all our communities. Therefore, we actively targeted specific areas to ensure we had a mix of rural parishes, parishes near amenities, and towns.

- Of the 223 respondents, 176 were female; 44 were male; two preferred not to say and one respondent was non-binary. The identified genders for both online and face-to-face respondents were very similar.
- Of the respondents who chose to answer this question, 98% identified as white, white British or British. Two respondents—who identified themselves as ‘white’—said that language was a barrier to attending activities. For information: 2% of the South Hams population identified as non-white in the 2021 census.
- The majority of respondents were aged 50-74 (42%), followed by the 75+ age group (40%). 7% of respondents were aged 25 and under, while 11% were aged between 26-49 years.
- The living situation for the majority of our respondents was either living alone (49%) or living with family or friends (47%). However, 4% were living with others, not family or friends.

More choice of activities. I would like to be more active and try things like wheelchair tennis, golf, horseriding, sailing. All these are available here if you are able bodied and well-off.

### What could make a difference?

*Some of the feedback from the survey included:*

- Having somewhere to talk to someone.
- Some friends.
- Activities for young people where they can be in a small group and supported.
- Social event organisers e.g. pubs to offer tables for groups of people wanting to come on their own to an event.
- Friendly people.
- Someone to visit for an hour.
- Being with other like-minded people.
- Daily visits.
- More support in home for lonely elderly.
- Home visits for housebound residents.
- Bereavement support group.



My mum, dad and Senco have helped me get involved in groups and activities. I'd like to see a drama group maybe.

## Online

# A snapshot of loneliness and social isolation

## Face-to-face

52%

Over half of online respondents said they felt lonely 'more often than not' or 'often'. This is in stark contrast to those engaging in activities.

14%

70%

Over two-thirds of online respondents said they 'hardly ever/never' or only 'occasionally' feel they belong within their communities. 24% of face-to face respondents feel they only 'occasionally' belong within their communities, whilst 7% feel that they hardly ever/never feel this way.

31%

67%

Two-thirds of online respondents said they 'hardly ever/never' or only 'occasionally' feel have someone to rely upon. This is in comparison to just 15% of face-to face respondents who feel they only 'occasionally' and just 2% who 'hardly ever/never' have no one to rely upon.

17%

78%

Two-thirds of online respondents 78% said they 'hardly ever/never' or only 'occasionally' engage with community groups. This is in comparison to 44% of face-to face respondents.

44%

## What could make a difference?

- Clubs to be more proactive reaching out. If someone initiates an interest. Follow it up. Arrange to meet them in person at the club.
- Having more people I could call on for help, like collecting an emergency prescription lots of other groups but an accessible list would help.
- An advocate to motivate me to connect with my community more.
- Social event organisers e.g. pubs to offer tables for groups of people wanting to come on their own to an event.
- Town/parish councils to help with this more.
- More support in community to reach more people.
- A community hub once a week.
- Free sessions and evenings or weekends where you can bring your children along.
- Maybe a local café regular meet-up.
- [I'd like to] meet people in my village.
- Better disabled access and free of charge.
- Accessible transport.
- More 1-2-1 support/clinics for adults.



39%

The top barrier to engaging with activities or groups for online respondents is **mental health**

The top barrier to engaging with activities or groups for face-to-face respondents is **transport**  
(top overall barrier for both groups)

42%

### Other barriers

Cost

Health condition

Times

**Also:** Carer Lack of time Nothing of interest  
Groups not well advertised Poor English Working  
Old Age Motivation Volunteering elsewhere  
Bullying Neighbourhood

I know of a few groups but none I use much, as transport and anxiety are an issue for me. My local GP advised me of the Modbury coffee morning which I now attend. I think having more friends would help me and I'd like to see more arts and craft groups.

[I need] help with anxiety.

Living in a small hamlet with no facilities will become more of an issue the older I get, particularly if I was no longer able to drive. Improved transport system needed.

We are very lucky in this area because [Kingsbridge] Age Concern put on quite a few activities, but we could always do with more.

More mental health/peer support.

Someone to take me in car.



# What next?

## Transport

- We are starting work on a transport survey to identify areas of specific need in the South Hams.
- This will involve working with parishes and groups throughout the South Hams.
- We will then map provision against need – to really evidence need, not just for public transport but community transport.
- We will then work with communities on identified gaps and support our community transport organisations.

## Mental health

- We know there is very little face-to-face mental health support in the South Hams, so we need to work with a range of partners to assess what work is needed and how this can be undertaken
- We hope to increase our community link working team as our current role is over capacity.

## THANK YOU!

- Blackawton Community Shop
- Chillington Art Group
- Chillington Oil Group (buying collective)
- Chillington Village Shop
- Chillington Zen Yoga
- East Prawle Knit and Knatter group
- Dementia Friendly Parishes around the Yealm
- Devon Communities Together
- Devon County Council's Communities Fund
- Ivybridge Food Hub—Feeding Devon
- Kingsbridge Care Hub
- Kingsbridge Library baby group
- Loddiswell Spar Shop
- Modbury Coffee Morning
- Follaton Community Centre, Totnes
- SoSocial, Ivybridge
- South Brent Coffee Morning
- Slapton Community Café
- Slapton Community Shop
- South Pool Village Hall
- St John's Church warm hub and cafe
- Stoke Fleming Community Shop
- The Clay Factory Art Playground
- The Dove Project
- Wembury Coffee Stop
- Yealmpton and Brixton Community Friendship Project
- Youth for Christ, Ivybridge youth club at the Methodist church

South Hams town and parish councils for publicising the survey to their communities.

Our residents for engaging with this project.

Our dedicated team at South Hams Community Action.

