

ONE STEP OUT!

STEP OUT AND JOIN IN



Loneliness Toolkit for Village Halls

One Step Out! is **Community First's** project supporting rural communities in Herefordshire and Worcestershire to tackle loneliness and isolation.

One Step Out! is about encouraging people to take the first step from home into activities.

This Toolkit is to support Village Halls to action plan and identify achievable actions which have an impact on tackling loneliness and unwanted isolation in their rural community.



Run by:



Community First
Building better communities

in Herefordshire & Worcestershire

Positive engagement at community level is believed to be a major factor in addressing loneliness and isolation in rural communities.

As the hub of many rural communities, the Village Hall can play a vital role in hosting activities that help combat loneliness and isolation across all age groups.

This Toolkit is designed to support Village Halls to plan and identify achievable actions which have an impact on tackling loneliness and isolation.

Loneliness Toolkit for Village Halls

Contents

Introduction	4
Risk Factors for Loneliness	6
Why Village Halls have a role to play	8
What can your Village Hall do to maximise your contribution to the fight against loneliness?	9
Engaging with One Step Out!	10
Volunteers at the Village Hall	12
What to do with volunteers once you have found them	14
Offering Transport	16
Facilities at the Village Hall	18
Getting Connected – as a village hub, are you connected digitally?	20
Publicising Activities	22
Activities at Village Halls	24
Coffee Mornings & Case Studies	26
Other useful organisations	30
Contact us	30
Join the Village Hall Network	31

What is loneliness – and when are people at risk of being lonely?

There is growing recognition that loneliness and unwanted social isolation are serious problems. Everyone experiences loneliness at some time in their lives, for example in moving to a new community or school, after a bereavement or loss, or simply in that fleeting moment of feeling alone in a room of strangers. In these short periods, feeling lonely is like an internal trigger, letting us know it's time to seek company.

However, loneliness can move beyond the short-term, becoming chronic. Then it can start to wear us down with negative impacts on our mental, emotional and physical health, in turn affecting our families, community and wider society. Being rural is likely to exacerbate loneliness due to physical isolation and difficulty accessing services or activities. By tackling loneliness we can alleviate people's suffering and improve the quality of their lives, whilst bringing wider benefits to local communities and society.

“Loneliness” is ‘a subjective, unwelcome feeling of a lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want’¹

Unwanted “social isolation” is defined as ‘an objective state determined by the quantity of social relationships and contacts between individuals, across groups and communities’²

¹Perlman and Peplau (1981). ²Grant, C (2016).

Risk Factors for Loneliness

Everyone can feel lonely sometimes but some factors and events can make us more vulnerable.

For instance:

- Poor or declining health
- Aged 75+ years
- Sensory Loss
- Loss of mobility
- Loss of income
- Relocation, moving to a new community
- Employment changes, retirement
- Bereavement
- Becoming a carer
- Social anxiety at any age

- A study by the British Red Cross reveals over 9 million people in the UK – almost a fifth of the population – say they are always or often lonely. Almost two thirds of them feel uncomfortable about admitting to it.
- The Community Life survey (2016-2017) found that those aged 25 to 34 were most likely to report feeling lonely, “often/always,” followed by those aged 16 to 24.
- In 2018, the children’s charity ChildLine announced that it had seen a 14% rise in the number of children contacting its helpline because of loneliness.
- Over half (51%) of all people aged 75 and over live alone¹.
- Two fifths of all older people (about 3.9 million) say the television is their main companion².
- 17% of older people are in contact with their family, friends and neighbours less than once a week, and 11% are in contact less than once a month¹.

¹Camn P & Joplin K (2011). ²Age UK (2014).

Why Village Halls have a role to play

Experts believe that interventions to address loneliness are most effectively driven from neighbourhood level - Village halls are at the heart of rural communities, they are the communal space and central hub that can be used for a range of activities. Village halls are accessible. Few have significant physical barriers preventing people using the hall. They are also venues without membership restrictions, notices of events are made public and events are usually open to everyone.

Loneliness and unwanted isolation impacts all age groups. Village halls are a community asset for the whole community. They offer a place for young people to organise events for other young people or for people of all ages to mix together. Whilst research highlights that older people rarely travel far from home and feel a higher degree of commitment to where they live, making their immediate locality an extremely significant factor for their wellbeing.



What can your Village Hall do to maximise your contribution to the fight against loneliness?

The following chapters provide advice and guidance on what you can do as a village hall to help fight against loneliness, to make a village hall even more appealing and versatile and well placed to host activities to offer a way out of loneliness.

1. **Engaging with One Step Out!**
2. **Volunteers at your Village Hall**
3. **Facilities at your Village Hall**
4. **Publicising Activities**
5. **Activities at your Village Hall**
6. **Coffee Mornings**

Engaging with One Step Out!

Loneliness is something everyone can identify with, even if we don't want to think or talk about it. There are things you can do within your community to enable yourselves and others to feel more supported and less alone.

One Step Out! is Community First's project supporting rural communities in Herefordshire and Worcestershire to tackle loneliness and isolation. The National Lottery funded project will work with village halls, bringing people together, building connections and creating a sense of rural community.

Engaging with **One Step Out!** is about encouraging people to take the first step from home to activities, a positive way to

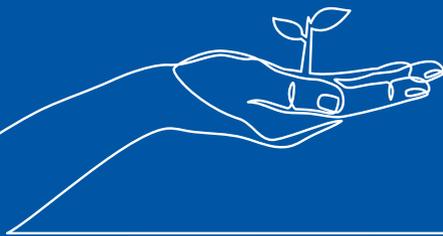
increase social contact and make new friends. We want Village halls to help create vibrant communities where people recognise loneliness exists across all age groups and who want to take action to break down the barriers that prevent people taking the '**One Step Out!**'

Using this tool kit we hope you will be able to support people in taking the first step from home to activities and events in your Village Hall and build better social connections.



Top Tips:

- Sign up to the **One Step Out! Pledge** - By building a community conversation we can all raise awareness to help reduce the stigma surrounding loneliness and highlight the importance of social connections.
- Sign up **Volunteers as One Step Out! Friends**, whether it's acting as a buddy, giving car lifts or helping to run an event. Volunteers are crucial to supporting and strengthening our rural communities response to loneliness.
- Think about how you can adapt or run an event that is themed to tackling loneliness, what about a chatty café or a memorabilia day? Have a look at our 'suggestions for activities' sheet.
- Establish a small committee of volunteers to consider the opportunities to tackle social isolation in your area and how the village hall and others can help. A small group can be a great way of achieving a lot, maybe call it the Village Friends Group. (A simple constitution is available from Community First, although the group could be run as a sub group of the village hall committee).



Volunteers at the Village Hall

You can get a lot from volunteering. Volunteers tell us they've...

"Helped other people by being a role model."

"Increased my knowledge, skills and confidence."

"Had a positive impact in the community."

"Made a difference to others."

"Improved my own health."

"Had fun!"

But, modern life, family pressures and local circumstances get in the way of volunteering. Scarcity of volunteers can hold back village hall activities, but all is not lost!

In finding new volunteers, the personal approach is always best. Remember that people's willingness to volunteer changes in time so keep asking. Volunteering in itself is a great way to generate friendships and social contacts. Ask people to volunteer at events – they may prefer to volunteer instead of participate. Initially they may agree to help out at one event and agree to more later.

Top Tips:

Here are some top tips for finding new volunteers:

Number One Tip:

People are just waiting to be asked!

Number Two Tip:

Be positive; volunteering is great, rewarding, social and fun.

- Consider using existing (or establishing) One Step Out! Friends to support individuals as they engage with new activities.
- It can take quite a lot of courage to simply turn up at an event on your own, in particular if you aren't used to it or are feeling vulnerable. A casual friends scheme can really help reduce powerful emotional and social barriers that prevent people who are feeling isolated joining in with events



What to do with volunteers once you have found them

Look at the tasks that you are asking volunteers to undertake and consider carrying out a simple assessment of the roles. This will enable you to note the skills that are required for each role and match up with what volunteers and what they may be able to offer. This can be a very simple process.

You will need to evaluate if a DBS check is required. Some people coming to activities may be considered to be 'vulnerable'.

It could be very helpful if co-ordinators undertake some basic training. For instance, safeguarding, first aid, interpersonal listening skills or mental health first aid. Please contact Community First to assist with signposting of any training you may require.

Top Tips:

- Ensure that the volunteers you select are suited to the role.
- Say thank you, celebrate all your volunteers work and contributions.
- Don't let the processes become over formal. However, organise work effectively.

Offering Transport

Accessible and affordable transport is key, not only to fostering social connection and independence in older age, but also to enabling the successful operation of other services designed to reduce loneliness and social isolation.

The lack of availability of, and access to, transport services can be a fundamental barrier to social connection. Community transport offers a solution for many communities that would otherwise be left isolated, and is often regarded as an effective and flexible way of meeting the mobility needs of specific individuals and local groups.

The absence of regular public transport in sparse rural communities can be a real barrier to those wanting to join in with activities.

On average, people living in the most rural areas travel 45% further per year than those in England as a whole and 53% further than those living in urban areas.

See more at www.acre.org.uk/rural-issues/transport

Community Transport schemes exist across both counties. Details of the schemes can be found at:

Herefordshire:

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200187/public_transport/164/community_transport/1

Worcestershire:

www.communitytravel.org.uk/

These are excellent schemes but they are stretched and booking a long way in advance is often needed. We would recommend checking on the service that is available in your neighbourhood (because a good service may already exist) but, if necessary, you could develop a small bank of volunteers willing to offer lifts to bring in individuals to events.

Top Tips:

- Join Community First's Village Hall Network. As a member you can receive a free guide to setting up a neighbourhood scheme.

Facilities at the Village Hall

Village halls and community centres are not just a venue to meet but also a set of resources; people, skills and knowledge and building/ facilities/ equipment. Village halls may need to adapt from time to time to meet changing community needs.

With the closure of rural post offices and shops, the village hall might be the only place for people to meet. It is therefore key to make sure the right facilities are available and fit for purpose.

Many people living with dementia can find the physical environment challenging, causing disorientation and distress. Community First have developed a dementia friendly Village Hall Toolkit; a checklist that will help to focus on what is needed for people to easily use the hall.

Making environments more dementia friendly provides opportunities for people to enjoy more independence and greater social engagement. By becoming a dementia friendly village hall, you can gain much broader benefits, for example accessibility for those with hearing impairments or other disabilities.

Top Tips:

- Become a Dementia Friendly Village Hall.
- Book a Community First Village Hall Health Check with our Community Buildings Officer.

Things to consider:

- Ensure that your village hall is accessible.
- This extends to more than ramps, steps and handrails and disabled toilets.
 - It's about lighting, acoustics and signage,
 - Picking out door frames and features in contrasting colours,
 - Installing hearing loops
 - How you are offering assistance to individuals at events.
- See Community First's Dementia Friendly Village Hall Toolkit.

A focus on accessibility can pay great dividends in the fight against loneliness and isolation.

One way of thinking of demand for accessibility is to think of your current users as they get older. As individuals age their needs change, sometimes gradually – current users of the hall will remain active for longer if they are comfortable at events and are confident that the hall remains accessible for them.

Community First can help you with sourcing funding and advice on grant applications for implementing these measures.



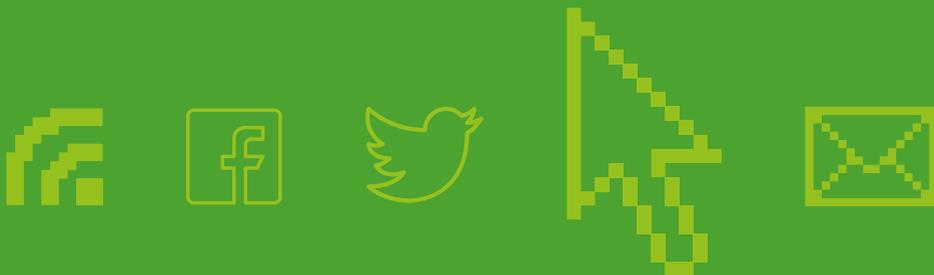
Getting Connected – as a village hub, are you connected digitally?

A village hall can be a key local asset as a digital venue through installing a broadband connection, equipment and offering digital skills training. All of this can add to the viability of the venue and play a key role in creating a strong community.

The link below is a toolkit setting out the case for going digital, what it may involve and also some practical information and resources for venues.

 www.acre.org.uk/cms/resources/digitalvenue toolkitartdigital.pdf

Good sustainable digital links are crucial to rural communities, but it's important to remember that technology alone can't alleviate the feelings of isolation.



Top Tips:

- Organise an intergenerational digital activity bringing different age groups together to share what they know. Everyone is bound to learn something new however little or much they know already.
- Create a web page or a social media accounts – such as Facebook or Twitter. This will help to support the hall by publicising your activities.
- Put in WiFi to aid educational classes, accessing online resources and offer digital training skills, a new way to connect people.
- Look at this site for help getting connected:
www.thephone.coop/business/acre/



Publicising Activities

Some Halls are facing a battle to get users involved in the activities of their Village Hall. By advertising activities widely and with a message of welcome to new participants, this will help maximise attendances and the interest in events, classes and meetings. Use as many available tools as you can such as:

- Website – Always include pictures of your Village hall inside, as well as outside, so people can envisage the space. Research shows more people will attend and book a hall from a website with pictures than those that don't, maximising the letting potential of your hall.
- Promote events and activities through Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. This could potentially be a role for a volunteer.
- Email Lists & E-Newsletters – Use themed Issues which can be attention grabbing, though keep it short and interesting

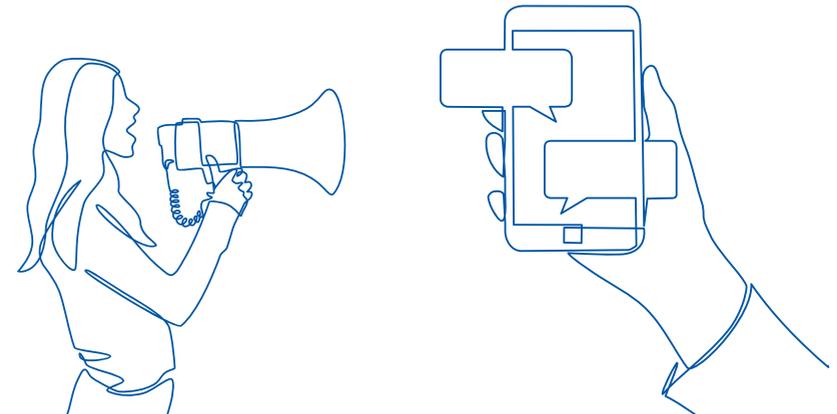
Marketing village halls is as much about securing repeat bookings from existing users as it is about promoting services to new users. The management committee has to consider its willingness and capacity to re-orientate the village hall towards a marketing approach.

Look for new ways of advertising from simple large signs and posters in a local shop to Facebook pages. Word of mouth has always had the greatest role to play. Users, volunteers and activity providers should be encouraged to share their experiences and inform others of the benefits of attending events. Word of mouth advertising offers opportunities for a local chat at the pub, post office or neighbour to invite people to come see and experience what is happening at their local community hub and advertise for new volunteers.

Publicise appropriate activities with significant local organisations – for instance, your local council, GPs and Social Prescribers. (Social Prescribers often work with GPs to signpost people in need to activities to help overcome health or other challenges.)

Top Tips:

- Try to collect photos and stories about past events to help advertise and shout about your successes.
- If social media feels daunting, this could be an opportunity to advertise for a volunteer to manage things such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Social media and a website can help enormously to get the message out more widely and attract new comers.
- Register your interest with Community First for some Social Media and communications training.



Activities at Village Halls

Village halls often provide the only place to meet within a rural community, providing vital and diverse support to improve quality of life, particularly for those who are least able to travel to more distant centres of activity.

The centre can be used for a wide variety of activities, from social clubs, preschool activities, craft and sports sessions to workshops covering a complete age spectrum.

Does your village hall offer what your community might need? Are the activities on offer broad enough to appeal to the widest possible number of people?

You could complete a simple local survey or draw together a plan about what the local needs of your community are and what current provision is available. At Community First, we can help you with this.

Activity providers can help in the fight against loneliness. Do the providers understand and look out for triggers and symptoms of loneliness? Can you engage them in promoting volunteering and other activities at the hall? Consider providing them with information for them to pass on during their sessions.

Village halls provide a space for communities to come together, something ever more pertinent with the rising number of people affected by loneliness.



Top Tips:

- Discuss your community's local need – Despite a rich programme of groups and activities at a hall, perhaps certain groups are missing out! For example, local older people could go weeks without seeing anyone. Equally young people might be isolated but attracted to something new for them. Do you have enough activities for different or mixed age groups?
- Do you host any services or provide links to services that can help people in special circumstances – for instance debt advice, bereavement or disability?
- Contact the local church, parish council and appropriate local groups to keep them informed of your plans and get their support.
- Consider the range of activities on offer at your hall. Is every daytime booked out to a nursery/daycare/preschool? Are activities inclusive for all?
- Every village is different (maybe childcare is a key local priority) but is a large block booking restricting the opportunity for a healthy range of activities to be provided. Can the block booking be reduced in scope – is the physical appearance of the hall dominated by nursery paraphernalia?
- Involve young people in planning and putting on events for young people.



Case Study

Stretton Sugwas Village Hall

Stretton Sugwas Village Hall is a prime example of a hall being the base for external activities and linking the activity to wellbeing. At Stretton Sugwas their coffee mornings follow a walking session, around the village or a local lake. Building up an appetite and giving people the opportunity to chat to others on the walk and afterwards.

“On the walk that I attended we stopped to watch geese and swans on a lake and consider picking sloes for our gin! Sometimes we just stopped to look at the view! Each time a chance to chatter.”

Usually the walks have about 20 people and a few friendly dogs. The dogs are a great way to start a conversation with a stranger. An enthusiastic leader guides the group and others prepare the coffee and cakes.

At the end of the walk, back at the hall there are more people – not everyone has to walk, then for another hour there’s a hubbub of conversation as the cake disappears and the bring and buy table gets emptied. The walking activity has now spawned another activity – that of gentle Thai Chi sessions, initiated casually at one of the coffee mornings and another that has a good link to wellbeing.



Coffee Mornings



Amongst all the activities that are put on in village halls the traditional coffee morning is the one activity everyone understands and is simplest to provide.

Coffee mornings are the vital bloodstream of any community and village hall. They come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, are easy to run and attractive to all sorts of people.

Coffee Morning Essentials:

- Keep the coffee mornings regular – and persevere – these events sometimes take time to get going.
- Advertise and encourage everyone to attend and bring along a neighbour. Don’t limit invitees by age or circumstances. Be child and pet friendly.
- Introduce new activities and themes from time to time. Variations have included, games cafes, discussion groups, book swap clubs, bring and buy tables, cake clubs or combinations of all these activities.
- Listen to what attendees say and keep an eye out for attendees who would like to contribute to the event
- Welcome attendees and spend time with them to make them feel at ease. Introduce yourselves and get to know the names of those attending. In due course, make simple, casual enquiries about their interests and needs.
- Coffee mornings can have lots of features and themes. What you chose to do in your coffee mornings will depend on your local circumstances, volunteer interests and opportunities.
- Always appoint someone to meet and greet and buddy newcomers.



Case Study

Martley Memorial Hall

Martley Memorial Hall hold regular coffee mornings, music and film nights with dementia issues an important element of how they plan and market the events. For instance, at the film nights people are encouraged to bring along their partner with dementia.

The coffee mornings, held once a month, are really popular and vibrant. During the year features of the coffee mornings are tweaked. Perhaps to reflect the seasons or a particular theme, table top sales or games or to mark a particular date.

A feature of all their events is the warmth of the welcome and the focus on what would make people feel comfortable whatever their needs.

Case Study

Whitchurch Memorial Hall

Whitchurch Memorial Hall is an example of the simplest sort of coffee morning growing in its scope and popularity. When the coffee morning was first established it was a place where individuals came for a simple natter. There was always a warm welcome with a minimum of fuss about what people should do.

If you turned up and wanted to read whilst being in a group that was OK. If you wanted any introductions they were done. At least two recently bereaved individuals started coming to the group and barely spoke for the first few sessions... It seemed a natural way to go for them, to be in company but left to their own thoughts for a while. They kept coming until they felt at ease and slowly started engaging with the group more directly.

With only basic marketing, the group grew slowly. But with word of mouth, personal invitations and perseverance, the coffee mornings are now well attended with a couple of dozen attending regularly.

What is more, the group has started organising trips and talks including a theatre outing, a boat trip and presentations from their Police Community Safety Officer.

Now after a social media post from a local new mum who felt isolated, the hall are now exploring starting a baby and toddler group in the autumn.



Other useful organisations

Here are some related organisations combating loneliness:

www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/

www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/loneliness/

www.thesilverline.org.uk/

www.alzheimers.org.uk/

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Become a member of the Village Hall Network and receive tailored news, information, advice and guidance plus discounts for training and events.

Visit www.comfirst.org.uk/village_halls
or call us on 01684 312 730

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