CarnegieUK TRUST

CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

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Social Isolation and Loneliness Consultation
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Dear Sir/Madam

A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections

The Carnegie UK Trust welcomes the publication of the draft strategy A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections, and the opportunity to comment. The Trust supports the vision statement set out in the strategy and the recognition that social isolation and loneliness are very real public policy issues, with implications for the wellbeing of both individuals and communities across Scotland.

We would like to thank the Scottish Government for recognising our work on kindness in the draft strategy, and the opportunity to discuss in more detail with the Minister for Social Security next month.

Our key message is that the answer to rising loneliness and isolation in the general population does not lie in the provision of services but in the actions of individuals and communities. Those with chronic and severe loneliness may require specific interventions, and the Scottish Government should look particularly to the third sector to support those, but the growth in loneliness and social isolation in people who would not otherwise be considered as vulnerable requires other solutions.

Here we would argue that the role of the Scottish Government is far more in shaping culture and 'getting out of the way' of communities, rather than directly planning, managing or delivering community action. In our work we found a number of practical things that individuals and communities can do to encourage kindness, focusing on creating agenda free, welcoming places to gather or simply bump into each other; the importance of informal opportunities for connection; and questioning the intrinsic values underpinning our social relationships.

We also concluded that there might be greater mileage in the Scottish Government tackling the factors that get in the way of informal connections and building a culture of kindness. These focus on our risk aversion and risk management culture; regulation (or

perhaps more accurately the interpretation of regulation); and the often compounding effect of performance management around inputs, processes and targets that can stifle everyday kindness and intuitive human interactions.

In order to encourage greater kindness and stronger social relationships in our communities, we need to better understand and work to overcome the factors that inhibit kindness. There is a clear role for the Scottish Government in exploring the impact of regulation and systems which have evolved – with good reason – to help us avoid failures which have devastated individuals, in limiting our ability to trust and help one another in workplaces and communities, and to ask if we have not perhaps lost something of value in our effort to avoid harm.

In addition to these key themes, we have a number of more detailed comments on the draft strategy:

- The focus on empowering communities is welcome but we believe the connections and relationships between individuals in communities are a fundamental prerequisite for genuine empowerment, rather than empowerment alone necessarily being able to impact loneliness and isolation.
- Loneliness and isolation are not just public health issues which impact individuals' wellbeing. They threaten the solidarity of society and limit the ambitions of empowerment. They are issues which impact on all of us not just those with experience.
- The definitions used are widely accepted. However, there is a danger in pathologising what is a common life experience that we seek service based responses rather than the broad culture change required.
- Indicators for complex social problems are best measured at a population level (through the National Performance Framework) rather than at project, service or programme levels. We are aware that some stakeholders are calling for the development of specific indicators to measure loneliness at a programme level, but we are concerned that this will not support the culture change required and instead lead to loneliness being marginalised as the outcome belonging to a particular service (rather than all public services), gaming behaviour from managers concerned about funding, and other well-known and perverse effects of targets.
- For people experiencing loneliness and isolation, face-to-face connections within their neighbourhood are crucial. There is evidence that those who are connected digitally are also connected face-to-face, but there is no causal link between connecting digitally leading to face-to-face connections.
- We found a big gap between being isolated and / or lonely and taking up opportunities to meet others. For many they just 'don't like anything organised.' In terms of investing resources, whilst it is no doubt helpful to have a range of groups and activities the informal opportunities, such as a chat at the supermarket checkout, are crucial in bridging the gap.
- In addition to fostering an environment and creating conditions for kindness, we believe there is a role for the Scottish Government in exploring and tackling the factors which get in the way of kindness.

We look forward to discussing our response next month and would be happy to support the Scottish Government to explore these issues as work continues on the development of this strategy.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Evans
Chief Executive

Honorary President: William Thomson CBE
Chair: Sir John Elvidge
Chief Executive: Martyn Evans

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Annex 1: Carnegie UK Trust response to three key consultation questions

1) What needs to change in your community to reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections?

The Carnegie UK Trust works across the UK and Ireland, and is not based in any one community. Our response to this question is based on our work on kindness and engagement with seven organisations operating in different communities across Scotland over 2016 and 2017. We found that the nature of the places we have to gather, the opportunities we have to connect, and the values of kindness we hold are important for allowing kindness and social relationships to flourish.

Welcoming Places

The physical spaces and places we have to gather, or simply bump into one another, are important for our ability to connect and form social relationships. Here, local government has an important role to play as stewards of many of our civic spaces, investing significant resources into their ongoing maintenance. The physical design of spaces is important. Poorly designed physical space has a strong negative impact on the ability to make connections and ease of managing relationships within the community. We need to consider how physical design might help to foster kindness and connections.

How places are used, run and managed is also important. We visited a number of civic spaces during our work, largely community centres. We found that the atmosphere of places is largely created by the people who use, and particularly those who manage, spaces. Open, neutral, agenda-free places are important for creating opportunities for social connections. We need to ensure those who run our civic spaces do not own or control what goes on there.

Informal Opportunities

The informal opportunities we have for social interaction are important for relationships. There is evidence that low level interactions – for example, a chat with a known member of staff at the checkout, or a greeting from a neighbour in the street – can make a difference to the quality of daily life for people who might otherwise be isolated or lonely. These low level interactions can be important in their own right insofar as they contribute to 'background emotions' associated with familiarity, comfort and trust, particularly for people who do not wish to engage in formal, organised group activities. They can also be building blocks for more substantial and significant interactions. We need to consider how we can encourage informal, non-random connections between people in communities, and support people to overcome the sense of risk they feel when engaging informally.

Values of Kindness

The values that underpin our connections and relctionships are important, and just noticing and asking ourselves what kind of society or community we want to live in makes a difference. While we found that people understand the societal and economic shifts that have led to a change in our values, they nonetheless miss a sense of community spirit. We found that during our time working on kindness, and engaging with others, the very act of thinking and talking about kindness encourages us to act in kindness.

2) Who is key at local level in driving this change, and what do you want to see them doing more (or less) of?

Local people and communities are best placed to shape the places, opportunities and values of kindness, to enable the development of social connections and relationships that are grounded in Scotland's diverse communities. The ongoing community empowerment agenda will help to strengthen the voices and capacity of communities across Scotland. However, we need to be wary of particular voices in confined local areas presuming to speak for all local residents.

The scale of the challenge posed by social isolation and loneliness is such that it cannot be tackled by one actor alone. There are limits to the extent to what a community can do on its own, as there are limits to what a service provider can offer, or a government can legislate for. A partnership approach is required, bringing together individuals, community groups, third sector organisations, local businesses, local authorities and community planning partnerships to shape a holistic approach to tackle isolation and loneliness in local areas, through supporting the culture change required to build strong social relationships and connections in communities.

3) What does Government need to do nationally to better empower communities and create the conditions to allow social connections to flourish?

The recently released draft National Performance Framework identifies kindness as one of Scotland's values. Through our qualitative work and new survey findings to be released in the summer, we know that people are generally kind and generally see kindness in their community and from public services.

But we also know what gets in the way of engaging in and encouraging kindness both in individuals and organisations, and developing the conditions that allow connections and social relationships to flourish, including:

- Personal risk: Concerns about opening ourselves up to risk when we interact with each other appear to dominate our thinking when engaging with those outside our direct family and friendship groups.
- Regulation: Organisations have become adept at managing risks of human interaction through regulation and policies. While essential and important these unintended consequences impact on our ability to act in kindness.
- Professionalism: The dominant model of dispassionate professionals may impact on the ability of those in positions of authority to act in kindness.
- Performance management: In measuring what we can, we often fall short of measuring what matters. Narrow performance indicators can crowd out flexibility, in turn reducing the ability to act in kindness.

The Scottish Government has an important leadership role to play in exploring the unintended consequences of features inherent in our institutions and systems on society's

ability to act in kindness, and to consider what steps it can take to reverse these impacts as part of a wider Scottish Government agenda.

In particular, the Scottish Government should:

- Review existing legislation and regulations, and consider how these are preventing people from coming together and connecting in communities. The Scottish Government could also consider how the interpretation of the framework is damaging people's confidence to act in kindness.
- Review existing performance management and recruitment criteria and consider whether these might drive and reward professional behaviours that are in tension with kindness, and consider how these could be revised to better align with the values of kindness and humanity.

Respondent Information Form

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Please Note this form **must** be completed and returned with your response.

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

☐ Individual

☑ Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

☑ Publish response with name

☐ Publish response only (without name)

☐ Do not publish response

Information for organisations:

The option 'Publish response only (without name)' is available for individual respondents only. If this option is selected, the organisation name will still be published.

If you choose the option 'Do not publish response', your organisation name may still be listed as having responded to the consultation in, for example, the analysis report.

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

☑ Yes

☐ No