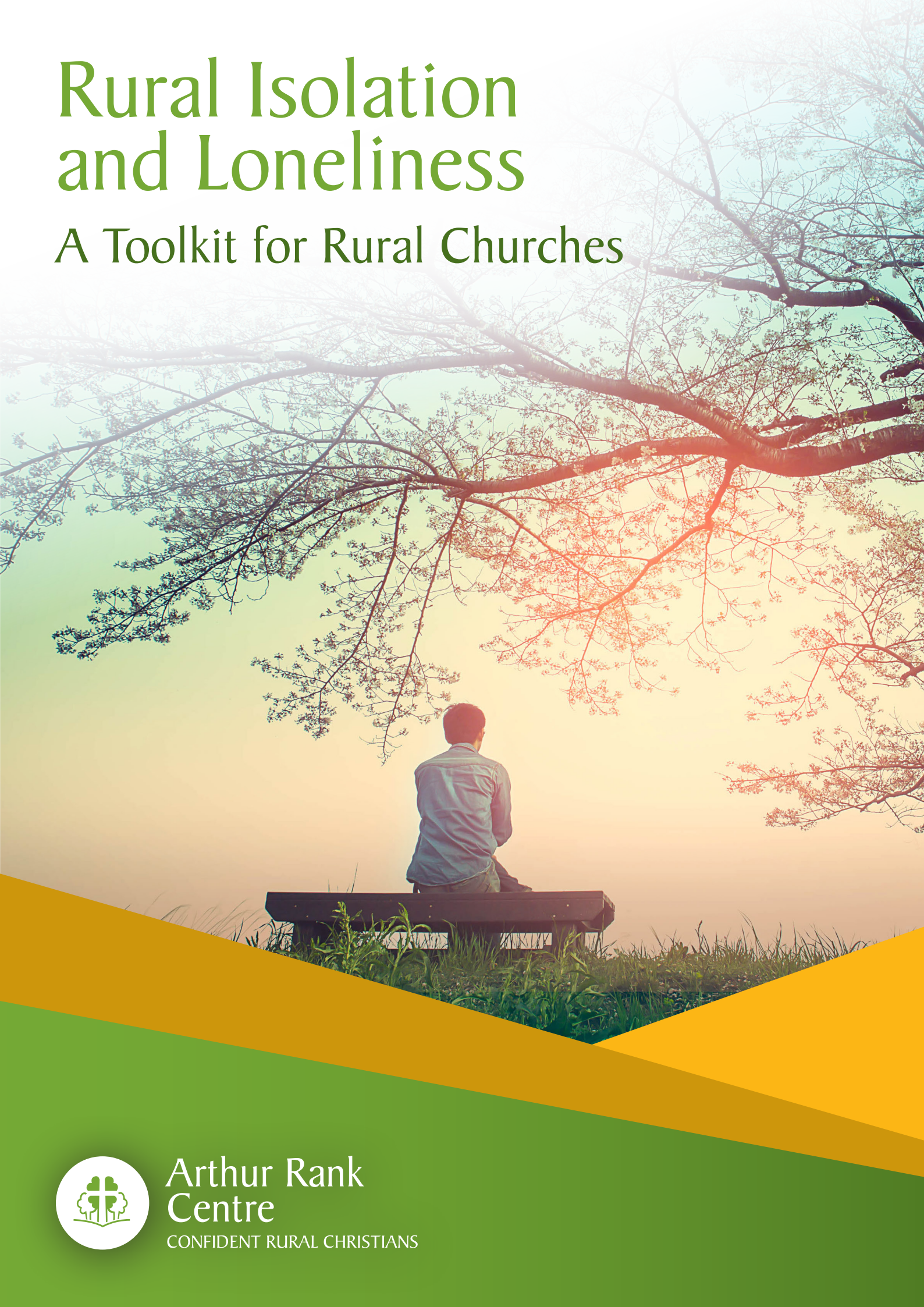


Rural Isolation and Loneliness

A Toolkit for Rural Churches



Arthur Rank
Centre

CONFIDENT RURAL CHRISTIANS



Introduction

We know that isolation and loneliness are on the increase. Loneliness can have a profound effect on our physical as well as mental health, being lonely is as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Rigorous epidemiological studies have linked loneliness and social isolation to heart disease, cancer, depression, diabetes and suicide. This will obviously have an economic impact on health care and in other areas; not to mention the effect on the individuals concerned.

campaigntoendloneliness.org/threat-to-health/

The government appointed a Minister for Loneliness, Age UK have put together a loneliness heat map of the UK to demonstrate where in the country people may be more 'at risk' of becoming lonely.

ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/loneliness-research-and-resources/loneliness-maps/

Defining isolation and loneliness

It is important to understand the difference between isolation and loneliness.

ISOLATION – is defined as the absence of social contact e.g. family, friends, access to services or community involvement. The concept is therefore tangible and measurable and can often lead to loneliness.

Isolation can often be alleviated by practical steps: improved transport links, increased use of the internet and localisation of services and resources.

LONELINESS – is a subjective feeling when there is a disparity between quantity and quality of social relationships that we have and those we want.

“The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved and uncared for.

We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread, but there are many more dying for a little love.”

Mother Theresa

Rural context

It is estimated that there are 15,000 rural churches in the UK. Although some have a small attendance, there remains a unique opportunity for churches to respond to issues of social isolation, as they often provide key community facilities and social interaction in rural communities.

In many rural areas, the only buildings available (if any) which enable local people to meet socially and/or provide community activities are pubs, village halls and church buildings. Often, church members have good links with the wider community and – along with other residents – can be a lifeline to identify and support those with limited mobility.

SECTION ONE

Why address isolation and loneliness?

Rural loneliness is likely to be exacerbated by physical isolation and difficulty accessing services or leisure facilities. This would appear to be an issue that rural churches could help with easily as they often have one of the few public buildings in the community. It could be as simple as opening the doors putting on a kettle and welcoming people in.

In rural communities there may already be people who are working to alleviate loneliness and isolation. Who might they be in your community and how can we use our resources most effectively to join in and support the work of the Kingdom?

Before we rush to action it's always good to think about what we as churches can bring the issue. What is it that inspires us to get involved?

In the following Bible passages, we read about what it is to be human.

- Genesis 1: 24-28
- Genesis 2: 15-24
- Matthew 10: 29-31



What do these passages say about our relationship with God and the nature of our humanity?

Read:

- Matthew 25: 31-46
- 1 John 4: 7-12

How do these passages challenge the way we see people?
What do they say about helping others?

Prayer

Loving God

You have made us social beings who need to be part of a community.

We pray for all those who feel lonely and isolated today.

Help us to build communities where we live, work and spend our leisure time.

Remind us that as we look at each other we are looking into the face of Christ.

Help us to spread your love to those around us.

In Jesus Name Amen

Revd E Clark

Conversation Starters...

“

How easy
is it for you to travel
in your area?

Imagine if you did not have
your own transport how
would it affect you?

”

“

How many
people do you
speak to each day?
where do you find
them?

”

“

We can all have
times when we feel lonely,
maybe we have moved to a
new house, job or school. Until we make
new friends in our new situation it can be easy
to feel lonely. What does loneliness look like in
your own community?

Think for a moment,
have you been lonely?

What did it feel like?

what would have helped you?

If you feel comfortable discuss that with
others in the group only sharing what
you are happy to.

”

SECTION TWO

How do we identify people in need?

Find isolated or lonely people in your community

One of the biggest challenges when addressing social isolation is that, by definition, those who are isolated or lonely are often 'hidden away' from the wider community either because of geographical factors or by physical or psychological restrictions.

People in church may not realise that there are those who may be isolated or lonely in their wider community. Those experiencing the most extreme levels of isolation or loneliness are not likely to be attending community events, church services and activities. Therefore, churches wanting to reach the most isolated and vulnerable will need to be proactive and find a variety of means to make contact, as well as to gain the confidence of lonely and isolated neighbours. We also need to be sensitive as some people are quite content to lead what to us may appear isolated lonely lives. Some people may prefer not to join groups. Are there ways of supporting them e.g. befriending in the home setting. linkinglives.uk

Asking Others

Make use of the local knowledge. Within every church there exists a comprehensive web of networks which together provide a good starting point to look at your local community. Church members living locally will know a considerable amount about their neighbours and the infrastructure in terms of employment, schools, shops, pub and social activities.

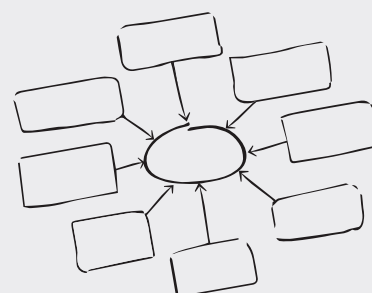
- Consult members; have they noticed anyone who appears to be lonely or isolated? Who do you see in church, but never during the week? Do you know why?
- Talk to the people who run the shop or pub, or who organise the community events. Who do they know who might be isolated?
- Are there parents of young children or carers for older people at home who may not see another adult during the day?
- Set up some community events; coffee mornings, afternoon teas, barbeques or other informal events which bring people together.
- Is there a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in the community? This provides a network of people on lookout who also meet on a regular basis. Who do they know who might be lonely or isolated?

Asking Other Agencies

Even in small communities there are likely to be some people who represent statutory agencies and authorities; whilst they will be bound by issues of confidentiality you may be able to set up a referral system whereby they can inform clients of activities you are hosting.

So, who might be worth talking to in order to let them know of your plans?

- **Local Councillors** may be able to provide useful links to the Adult Social Care team.
- **Police Community Support Officers** may well know those who are vulnerable and might also be happy to attend events to pass on crime prevention messages.
- **GP surgeries** may be willing to help gauge the level of need in the locality and can help to advertise events and resources on offer.
- **Voluntary organisations**, may already be involved in your community and how can you work together to enhance what can be offered?



SECTION THREE

How to make a start

Understanding your local area

There are various ways to address isolation or loneliness in your local area, but it is important to understand the specific issues, needs and resources before making concrete plans.

Carrying out some straight forward research will enable you to gain a fuller understanding of local circumstances. It is important not to duplicate what is already available or provide something that is not relevant or helpful.

The resource Equipping for Rural Mission has ideas on surveying your community and is available free from arthurrankcentre.org.uk.

Understanding the needs

A useful way of understanding your local area is through the Church Urban Fund website which provides a breakdown of key data relating to poverty in local areas. cuf.org.uk The Office for National Statistics can help you discover detailed information to ward level, through the results of the last census.

Consultation

Inviting people from the community to come to a public open meeting to discuss ideas and agree what could be done together, can help people to own and support the outcome. It is also a good way of encouraging more people to get involved.



Publicity

For many people unable to venture out of the house, radio and television become their main form of company. So, using local media is a good way of communicating events or start up projects aimed at isolated or lonely people.

- Write a press release explaining your event or project and send it to local newspapers, radio stations and parish magazine. Make sure that full contact details are provided and don't assume that everyone has access to email or internet.
- Approach your local radio station asking for a short interview to talk about what you are doing.
- Leaflets can be produced and either dropped door to door and/or distributed to key locations e.g. shops, pub and doctors etc. to publicise the initiative.
- By personal invitation, an offer to come along with someone to an event? Offer a lift?



Pilot project

Remember small is beautiful. What are you already doing? How can you make sure you are reaching those who need it most? Before launching a new initiative, pilot the idea to assess the way it works, the demand and any unintended outcomes.

Review Progress

Once a project has been set up to address isolation and loneliness, carry out regular reviews to assess areas for improvement and to ensure that it is still needed.

Send us your stories to inspire others.
arthurrankcentre.org.uk



SECTION FOUR

Project ideas

There are many different groups that can be isolated and lonely and here are some ideas to get you thinking about ways to reach people. For advice and support on safeguarding contact your denomination.



Children

- Messy Church and Godly Play, parents/carers and children can have fun and support as well have an introduction to faith.
- Toddler groups can be a very effective way of engaging with parents/carers with young children and providing means of social support.
- Family Fun Days or holiday clubs are a great way of supporting families.

Young People

Nationally, young people are feeling lonelier and in rural areas being isolated can be a real and significant problem.

Streetspace is an organisation which supports churches in reaching young people on the margins. streetspace.org.uk

Whilst some congregations might find the idea of working with young people a bit daunting, simple ideas and an open offer with appropriate safeguarding can often work better.

- Film night for young people -using a popular suitable film which can be shown in the church or village hall.
- Detached youth worker – the church could support this post to run a regular session in the community and engage with the young people where they are e.g. on the street or in a bus shelter.
- Occasional trips - providing transport to events in e.g. nearby towns.



EXAMPLE

'A young family began to attend Messy Church. Sadly the father died in the autumn. The mum came with her children to the Christmas Messy Church, because she said, "this is my safe space I needed to be here".



EXAMPLE

'The Granny Wagon supplied hot chocolate and biscuits every Friday night to a group of young people that used to congregate in the play area of a market town'.



Adults

Older people in care homes research has suggested are twice as likely to feel lonely as older people living in the community. **carehomefriends.org.uk** helps local churches adopt residential care homes to befriend elderly people, particularly those who experience loneliness.

Hospitality can be key if it is easily accessible.

- Coffee morning or afternoon tea – good quality refreshments and homemade cakes. This provides an opportunity for conversation in a safe environment. Consider that some people with limited mobility might require lifts.
- Community Groups – create your own community group around an activity- or run a variety of events! From Board games, singing, arts and crafts, reading books – whatever your hobby or interest, it's a great way to meet other people and make and create friendships.
- Walking thought the local area – what do you notice about your local environment? You can always create a walking route for people to enjoy. Look at your surroundings. What do you see? What do you notice? What surprised you?

Multigenerational events

- Afternoon teas timed so that parents picking up children from school can come for a chat together with older people.
- Reading together – everyone loves being read to! Get the latest children's book and read to each other.
- Cooking and baking – children love being in the kitchen, so get together and make some biscuits. Share with them your secret ingredient in making the biscuits extra special!

EXAMPLE

'A parent started coming to a Community Café as they wanted to meet more parents. They started coming to the café but very few parents came. They met other people there who were supportive and helped them to develop a sense of self again. Their child had had some difficulties at school, so they were feeling reserved and isolated at home. But when they started coming to the café, they got hints and tips, help, support and encouragement. It was great and has made a huge difference to them and their child. And now – more parents and their school children come to the café!'



Linking with others

The church can facilitate activities and be a catalyst for local people to run events such as:

- Local walking group
- Pub lunches
- Hobby clubs
- Lunch clubs
- Befriending projects in which isolated people receive regular home visits

EXAMPLE

'A younger woman with disabilities was moved into a rural community and began to attend the church craft group. After a few months she arrived with her birthday cake and said, "this group has saved my life".'



Useful information and resources

Germinate Arthur Rank Centre

- Case studies including Pilling and Over Wyrsedale
- Country Way Issue 77 Rural Isolation and Loneliness
- arthurrankcentre.org.uk/mission/equipping-for-rural-mission/
- Rural Pastoral Support Network Project Report

Other organisations addressing isolation and loneliness

Age UK – vision to make the UK a great place to grow older. They do this by inspiring, supporting and enabling in a number of ways. ageuk.org.uk

Campaign to End Loneliness – National body supporting organisations to address loneliness and isolation and campaigning about the issues. campaigntoendloneliness.org

Linking Lives UK - (previously operating through Link Visiting Scheme) help local churches to run a unique befriending service, primarily for isolated older people. linkinglives.uk

Marmalade Trust – a charity devoted to recognising loneliness across society and assisting people to make new friendships. marmaladetrust.org

Other sources of information, ideas and support

The Farming Community Network (FCN) - is a voluntary organisation and charity that supports farmers and families within the farming community through difficult times. fcn.org.uk

Over the Hill Campaign - Offers innovative solutions to the problems faced by people who are growing older in the English countryside ruralmedia.co.uk/charity/projects/over-hill

Parish Nursing - Christian charity helping churches to appoint nurses, who in turn support people and communities towards whole person healthcare. parishnursing.org.uk

Rural Coffee Caravan Information Project - Befriends people and offers them access to the information they need to empower them. ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk

Streetspace – Provide ideas, support and networking opportunities for churches engaging with young people on the margins of society streetspace.org.uk

The Plunkett Foundation - Helps rural communities through co-operatives and community-ownership to take control of issues affecting them. plunkett.co.uk

Young Farmers -Recognised that there was a need to ensure that young farmers do not become isolated and as a result may be more vulnerable to suffer from mental health issues. The campaign is called Rural +. nfyfc.org.uk/Ruralplus



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