

## Combating loneliness: it's all about people and time



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The recent appointment of the Loneliness Minister, Tracey Crouch, has once again heightened awareness of the impact of loneliness and isolation on a society of increasing elderly, and those more vulnerable members of our communities.

The adult social care sector is addressing this society-wide challenge head-on, with many tried and tested initiatives underway. We turn the spotlight on Princess Marina House; run by the RAF Benevolent Fund on the South Coast; and what they're doing to combat loneliness and social isolation for serving and former RAF personnel.

### **A spotlight on Princess Marina House**

*Shirley Steeples is the registered manager at Princess Marina House and a [registered manager member of Skills for Care](#). She talks about their response to the growing problem of loneliness and shares simple ideas that can be used across the sector.*

The biggest single element to combating social isolation and loneliness in a care environment is people and time. At Princess Marina House we have an excellent team of dedicated and compassionate staff, from housekeeping and catering to care entertainments and admin. Time is always built into the day to enable them to spend time talking to, and interacting with, our guests and clients.

In 2015 the RAF Benevolent Fund undertook research to discover the needs of our beneficiaries and social isolation emerged as a concern to our older veterans. We know that the causes of this are varied and can include poor mobility, lack of and cost of transport,

loss of confidence, diminished financial status, as well as difficulties in keeping in touch with friends and family.

We hear frequently from our guests about how lonely they are when they are at home and how much they benefit from their stays at Princess Marina House. We offer a range of support, including respite and care breaks for serving and former RAF personnel and welfare breaks for their families and veterans, specialised advice on benefits and care services and support.

In response, we've introduced a number of initiatives to deal directly with this. Through a partnership with the charity, Community Network, we've introduced a weekly telephone friendship group, staffed by trained volunteer facilitators. I identified those who might benefit and promoted the service to our guests. Participants chat for an hour each week, with the facilitator on hand to assist in the conversation and to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to speak.

The feedback has been extremely positive with almost all participants reporting positive improvements to mental wellbeing. Participants have formed friendships, with some keeping in touch outside of the group. It's been so successful that we've expanded this service further.

We've also introduced a lunch club. Many of the veterans who stay with us live locally and enjoy their visits so much that they're really sad when it's time to go home. Historically, we ran a Tuesday lunch club for members of the RAF family; however, we were unable to meet the demand and had many veterans on our waiting list. We were sponsored by the Aged Veterans Fund to expand this service to a daily service for two years. Veterans can bring friends and family and can join in an afternoon activity.

Although we've been fortunate at Princess Marina House to have benefited from the Aged Veterans' Fund and the RAF Benevolent Fund, it's still possible to organise adaptations of these initiatives within other services. The lunch club could be replicated; most of the cost could be recovered in the cost of the meal. People from the community mixing with residents in the home give positive benefit to residents and guests. It also raises the profile of the home in the local area.

Shirley is a registered manager membership of Skills for Care where she has the chance to share best practice and initiatives around loneliness and other challenges. Registered managers can find out more about membership benefits [here](#) and join for only £35 for 12 months. They will join a growing community of registered managers dedicated to improving the quality of adult social care.

[www.rafbf.org](http://www.rafbf.org)

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