"Easing Loneliness in Our Community" Minutes

March 17, 2025, 10:30-11:30am

Present: Susan Olson, Melissa Fournier, Allison Gaffey, Stephanie Gould, John Kiker, Jennifer Muggeo, Holly Rubino, Lori Caine, Mike James, Mike Prill, Ellie Sutton, Missy Garvin, Laura Mooney, Kathy Tisdale, Jeremy Crisp

Call to Order

Laura opened the meeting at 10:35, welcoming guests and explaining that the Lyme Public Library, as a social facility, is in a unique position to help with the issue of loneliness. She encouraged collaboration and discussion with all the groups.

Portraits of Loneliness in Lyme

John Kiker reported that residents (mainly older and single, but some couples) want to talk and have companionship. He felt it was important to "be a force for good in this area." From Gavin Lodge's notes, he read, "Our aim is to raise children who do not fall into pits of isolation" and that art can bridge gaps between people. Jennifer Muggeo said that Lyme has stood in terms of suicidal ideation and self-harm in the 55-64 age group in data collected from emergency room reports. Kathy Tisdale noted that older people don't always go on computers or use cell phones, so getting paper copies about programs, events, etc. out to her list of about 25 "special needs" people is very important. She also recommended that if a neighbor has an overflowing mailbox or a car that hasn't moved in a few days, it's okay to do a well-being check and either call the Town Hall or 9-11.

Psychological/physical Effect of Loneliness

Allison Gaffey spoke about the spectrum of how much social connection is needed by individuals. Social isolation is defined by having few social relationships and little to no social supports. Loneliness is feeling disconnected to others and can occur even if a person has a lot of friends. There are many risk factors, from a history of feeling marginalized, to language barriers, to dealing with divorce, death, or chronic illness, to having a low income, to being part of the LBTQYA+ community. She cited studies that link chronic loneliness to stroke and dementia or cognitive impairment. She felt that many people are unaware of how their loneliness affects their coping, but that it can help to get out that message that loneliness is common in order to destigmatize it. In terms of adolescents and young adults, loneliness can cause early onset and persistent depression.

Roundtable Discussion – here's a list of ideas that came out of the discussion

- How to combat the stigma of loneliness
- Library programs have been great – better for seniors if they take place before it gets dark, as nighttime driving can be difficult for some
- Send out more paper notifications of upcoming programs – receiving mail is a high point for some people
- Recording library programs for the homebound was be a great service
- Provide cell phone and tech skills classes – like "Tech Tuesdays" at the Phoebe Griffin Noyes library
- An online platform (URcommunitycares.org) for seniors who need extra help has been organized by the LOL Senior Center
- Potluck dinners after 5pm services at the Lyme Church once a month are working well.
- Sweet Spot coffee hours at Lyme Library once a month and potluck dinners after movies are well-attended
- Town could do a better job getting information about resources, services, and programs out there
- Need to account for people who are housebound, hearing impaired, disabled, caretakers, etc.

Other Groups to Invite

Lyme Public Hall
Hadlyme Public Hall
Lions Club
Mentor Corps
Lyme Consolidated School
Others???

It was felt that the group would benefit from another meeting. Laura will schedule one in April at the Lyme Public Library.