

# Friendly chat and banter masked social isolation



Brewers Heineken host a Xmas lunch with a local charity at The Riccarton Inn at Currie

Excited chatter flowed from the atmospheric, cosy dining room at the Riccarton Inn, a local pub in a leafy, commuter area on the outskirts of Edinburgh.

Yet, many of the people in the room exchanging friendly chat and ultimately jokes from Christmas crackers were there because they are lonely and suffer from social isolation.

The guests were invited to the pre-Christmas lunch in Currie by brewing giant Heineken as part of their community policy and #BrewingGood Cheer campaign.

There are similar lunches, three more in the Lothians and in England (York, London, Hereford and Manchester, where Heineken have offices) in the next few days in a partnership with local charities.

The brewers campaign aims to underline the pivotal role pubs play in nurturing community spirit and bringing people together and staff at the Riccarton, which was given a pleasing facelift several years ago, regularly do that.

Hopefully, new friendships were made at the lunch and organisers hope the event – in its first year – provides a catalyst for the participants.

Social isolation is most common in the elderly. However, it is also noted in younger adults who may be housebound or disabled or possibly a single mother with young children.

Reduced social contact, being alone and feelings of loneliness are associated with a reduced quality of life and the situation could be caused by a bereavement or simply by good neighbours moving away for whatever reason.

Edinburgh is not immune from the problem and has a waiting list of people who need help, according to Graham Smith from

the Royal Voluntary Service who run a Good Neighbours Service. Promoting social activities plays a big part in their work with lunch clubs and social groups, supported by volunteers, bringing people together in many ways.

Dedicated volunteers, who range from 18 upwards, also visit people at home to provide companionship and support and the service is keen to encourage more people to help.

Mr Smith said: "We provide training for home visitors but we would encourage people to be good neighbours.

"Knock on the door and ask if everything is OK or if they need any shopping or a plate of soup – that's all it takes."

Sadly, at the moment, the Good Neighbours Service has so many people who want to receive help, that's is why they need more volunteers.

He mentioned the RVS' Books of Wheels service – basically home library services – for older people who enjoy reading or listening to a recording but can't get out of the house.

The service, incidentally, delivers 110,000 books every year. So, if you want to volunteer or find out more about the scheme, or get a book or tape, then call 0131 220 2194 or go to the Royal Voluntary Service's office at 115 George Street (first floor).

Other lunches in this area, by the way, are on Monday 19 December at The Cross Tavern, East Main Street, Whitburn, with Answer Project & The Mood Project and Wednesday 21 December at Tanners Lounge Bar, Lanark Road, Juniper Green, with the Pilton Equalities Project.