

A plan to fight “loneliness”

The Scottish Government has launched one of the first attempts by any government in the world to tackle loneliness and social isolation. The plan will bring together health, housing and social care organisations to identify and help the one-in-ten people who report feeling lonely or isolated. There will also be a campaign to promote “befriending” and a programme to encourage older people to engage with digital technology.



Christina McKelvie MSP (centre) with volunteers at Bridgend Farmhouse launching the government’s new strategy to tackle loneliness.

Launching the strategy, Christina McKelvie, Minister for older people and equalities, said: “ It’s known that social isolation and loneliness can have a significant impact on a person’s physical and mental wellbeing. This is why we are

tackling this issue with a preventive approach and treating it as a public health issue.

“We need to reach out with kindness and build a country where all of us feel welcome within our communities and valued as an important part of society.”

The Minister was speaking at Bridgend Farmhouse, one of several projects highlighted in the strategy for drawing people out of loneliness and helping them to contribute to their local community. She toured the farmhouse’s kitchen and café, its workshops and garden and met the volunteers working there. Bridgend Farmhouse is one of the first “asset transfer” projects in urban Scotland and is now owned and run by the local community.

The loneliness strategy has been 18 months in preparation. Ms McKelvie said it was “world-leading” and is now being followed in England and Wales. NHS Health Scotland compiled statistics which show that:

One in ten people “often feel lonely”.

A third of Scots live alone.

6 per cent of adults have contact with friends, family or neighbours less than once or twice a week.

21 per cent feel they don’t have a strong sense of belonging to their local community.

The research also found that social isolation and loneliness permeates all ages, stages and groups in society – children, students, new parents, pensioners, ethnic minorities – and is often caused by life changing events like the loss of employment or the death of family or friends.

Ms McKelvie said £1m was being put behind the strategy over the next two years and she will chair a special committee of stakeholders to monitor progress.