

# SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER

**Age Concern New Zealand**  
Serving the needs of older people  
[www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)



*Loneliness – a sign to take action,  
make a move, do something,  
and ask for help!*



*Join up,  
link in.*



*Makes me feel  
wanted as a  
person.*

*You are not  
alone, we all  
get lonely.*



*Connect,  
Share, Learn.*



*She always lifts  
me if I'm feeling  
down and the  
positiveness  
lasts the rest  
of the week.*



*You are  
part of the  
solution.*

*My visitor has been just great.  
Helping me through my lowest  
time of my life by being herself.*

**Age  
Concern**  
He Manaakitanga Kaumātua  
Aotearoa



**Serving the needs of older people**

# NATIONAL OFFICE ROLE













- Age Concern New Zealand provides local Age Concerns with experienced and expert advice, promotional resources, and training programmes. We provide an overview of what's being done to promote social connection both within Age Concerns and outside our organisation, and we carry out and support evaluation of Age Concern initiatives so we can identify and share what works.
- We are a key contributor to the National Science Challenge on ageing well and social connection studies.

Health Promotion (HP)



## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

### HOW CAN WE HELP PEOPLE GET CONNECTED?

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <br>Befriending services (AVS) | <br>Reducing stigma and shame     | <br>Group activities                        |
| <br>1 to 1                     | <br>Sharing meals                 | <br>Counselling                             |
| <br>Public education           | <br>Promoting respect and dignity | <br>Research                                |
| <br>Changing thinking          | <br>Community Navigation          | <br>Support with transport and IT education |



Sign up as an Age Concern Dignity Champion Pledge combating ageism

### WHY IS SOCIAL CONNECTION IMPORTANT?

As humans, we've evolved to be social as a way to survive, so being lonely and isolated causes stress. Over a long period this can have harmful physiological effects. It can also make it less likely that we will be able to regulate unhealthy behaviours. It distorts our social perceptions so that we feel unrealistically negative about our social interactions. This discourages us from making new efforts to connect socially, and can also affect the way we behave when we are in social situations, so that we end up pushing people away, instead of attracting them. This can lead to a downward spiral of loneliness and reduced well-being.



*"My visit means she can talk to me, as she might not have anyone to talk with over the week. She is deaf, and finds she is able to hear me."*

*"Last week my client said that if I hadn't been coming as usual she would have stayed in bed for the rest of the day. She has been depressed, so have phoned her every second day, and she has perked up."*

*"I hear that I am the only person outside family that she sees, and that it is easier to talk to me than to family about things worrying her."*



## ACCREDITED VISITING SERVICES

### WHAT DOES OUR ACCREDITED VISITING SERVICE BRING TO THE TABLE?

The Age Concern Accredited Visiting Service (AVS) is a befriending service that matches older people who are lonely or socially isolated with volunteers who are keen to spend time getting to know them. The volunteers are police-checked and trained, and spend about an hour each week sharing conversation and activities with their older friend. Some visits take place in the client's home, and some involve going out together. Matches are made carefully, on the basis of personality, shared interests, cultural needs, and location, and are regularly reviewed. AVS clients are often older, with issues like reduced mobility, sensory losses, bereavement, depression, or lack of social confidence. We offer a safe way for them to reconnect.

*"I know I am alive and kicking still in the world."*



*"I am disabled and have difficulty in getting to the shops and bank. My visitor takes me out to do errands sometimes, which is a great help to me."*

## THE POSITIVE DIFFERENCES IDENTIFIED BY CLIENTS INCLUDE



Reduced loneliness



Someone to talk to / discuss things with / confide in



Company / filling in empty time



Keeping in touch with outside news / information



Practical support / reassurance



Improvements in mood / energy / confidence.



Getting out of the house / transport

### AVS MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

- **1375** new referrals
- **72,994** visits
- **19,105** phone calls
- **44** Staff - **5** regional peer support groups
- **2,441** Volunteers - **544** new visitors trained
- **78%** of people visited once per week and **60%** of visits last between 1-2 hours
- **632** volunteer training manuals / resources
- **6600** brochures
- **3769** people helped

### HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?

- **90.7%** can rely on their visitor to come regularly
- **97.3%** think of their visitor as a friend
- **83.6%** have things in common with their visitor
- **93.6%** feel that their visitor and Age Concern are respectful of their culture
- **96.4%** feel satisfied with the service overall
- For each **\$1** we receive in funding we provide **\$3.50** of value connecting older people and visitor volunteers

### WAS ANYONE BETTER OFF?

- **89.8%** feel less lonely due to having a visitor.
- **92.7%** feel happier due to having a visitor.
- **91.6%** feel that having a visitor makes a positive difference in their lives.
- **100%** of volunteer visitors enjoy and get a benefit from being a AVS volunteer
- **97.1%** would recommend others to volunteer for Age Concern





## SUPPORT SERVICES

Older people experience loneliness and social isolation for a range of reasons, so we need to offer different options for rebuilding their social connections. Age Concern provide a range of social connection activities and services. These vary in each area, and are developed in response to local needs. Age Concerns also link closely with other agencies, and can provide information or referrals for older people who need other types of support. This is important, as it enables Age Concerns to find individualised solutions that work for people.



## SOCIAL CONNECTION PILOTS

We are now inspiring new projects to increase opportunities for people to connect in high need and rural areas. Age Concern New Zealand provides the seed funding and expert guidance. The projects need to become self-sustaining. These projects bring people and community resources together. They are based on the needs of each community and fill gaps in supporting older people to connect, join in and belong. The community decide the best way to solve the issues.

Age Concern New Zealand get to learn from each unique community project which helps build our knowledge. We contribute that knowledge and what works to promote social connection for older people in other parts of New Zealand.



[ageconcern.org.nz](http://ageconcern.org.nz)

[facebook.com/AgeConcernNewZealand](https://facebook.com/AgeConcernNewZealand)

[twitter.com/AgeConcernNZ](https://twitter.com/AgeConcernNZ)

## WHERE ARE THE PILOTS HAPPENING

### PHASE 1

5 groups are now running sustainably.

- Age Concern Taupo Senior Social Connection Group
- Age Concern Rotorua Ngongotaha Social Connection group
- Age Concern Rotorua Mamaku Social Connection Group
- Age Concern Taranaki Singing Group
- Age Concern Waitaki Coffee and Games Group

### PHASE 2

7 new social connection activities are emerging in Te Puke, Turangi, Wairoa, Napier, Nelson Tasman, Christchurch, and rural Southland.

### WHAT WE LEARNT

- Transport is key
- Food brings people together
- Volunteers are vital
- Communities are keen to come together
- Older people want to contribute to their own solutions
- People need to be needed and valued
- Deaf people enjoy singing
- Residents of retirement villages and rest homes need off campus activities to really feel connected
- Joining one activity can lead to other new connections.

*"I've never been as lonely as I am in the retirement village. People drive into their garages and shut their doors. This is where I come for good conversation."*

*"It took me five times to get here, and when I finally did I wondered why it took me so long. It's like a family."*

*"I was depressed and suicidal, and my doctor suggested I come to this group, and it changed my life. Now I go and pick other people up to bring along."*

