



healthwatch
Somerset

HOW CONNECTED ARE YOU? SURVEY

Introduction

Research shows that there are real and significant negative health outcomes for people who identify with being lonely or isolated. Being connected to friends, family, community, clubs and digitally, via the internet, and social media can have real benefits for people and their mental and physical health.

'The campaign to end loneliness' research shows that lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Holt-Lunstad, 2015). Social networks and friendships not only have an impact on reducing the risk of mortality or developing certain diseases, but they also help individuals to recover when they do fall ill (Marmot, 2010). For more information about how loneliness and isolation affect health outcomes see [Appendix 1](#).

Healthwatch Somerset identified there was a need to find out from local people how connected they feel and why. We also sought to find out how being connected affects feelings of loneliness and isolation.



Methodology

A survey was designed, both online and distributed via paper copies to various groups and services within Somerset. These included: Accessible Transport West Somerset, Active Living, Age UK, Alzheimer's Society, Aspire Support for Employment, Aster Living, Autism Somerset, Bridgwater Senior Citizens Forum, British Lung Foundation, Carers UK, Carer's Voice, CHYPPS, Community Council for Somerset, Compass Carers, Compass Disability, Deaf Plus, Diabetes UK, Diversity Trust, Eddystone Trust, Engage West Somerset, Heads Up Somerset, Headway Somerset, Hft, Knightstone Housing Association, Magna Housing, Marsha Miles Consultancy, Mencap Glastonbury, Watchet Town Council, Mendip CAB, Men's Sheds Frome and Somerset Levels and Moors, Mind TWS, MS Society Mendip, MS Society Taunton & District, Open Storytellers, Parkinsons, Red Cross, Redgate and Somerset Bridge Patient Group, Rethink, Sedgemoor Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter, Somerset Care, Somerset Care and Repair, Somerset Churches Together, Somerset County Council, Somerset Community Care Matters, Somerset Community Council, Somerset Community Foundation, Somerset Lesbian Network, Somerset Mental Health Hub, Somerset Neurological Alliance, Somerset Parent Carer Forum, Somerset Rural Youth Project, Somerset SENDIAS, Somerset Sight, Somerset You Can Do, Somerset Young Carers, South Somerset Disability Forum, South Somerset Mind, SW Forum, SW Seniors Network, Spark, SSAFA Somerset Branch, St Margaret's Hospice, Stroke Association Somerset, Swan Advocacy, Taunton CAB, Taunton Mencap, The Albemarle Centre, The Richmond Group, The Volunteer Network, Turning Point Frome, ViSTA, Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Strategic Forum, Voyage DCA Somerset & Devon, West Somerset Advice Bureau, Yarlington Housing Group Ltd, Yeovil Carers Group, Learning Difficulties Partnership Board, Preston Grove Patient Participation Group, District & Community Hospitals, GP surgeries, Libraries, Carers Groups, Pharmacies.

Summary

An equal amount of those completing the survey identified as not being at all connected with family, friends and their community, as those who identified as being extremely well connected. These results were fairly evenly split between those who live in rural locations, and those who live in urban or sub-urban areas. This suggests that living in an urban or rural location does not obviously relate to how connected people feel.



What is perhaps concerning is that approximately half of respondents identified as having contact with family and friends less frequently than daily and 8.2% were in contact with family and friends less than once a month.



Our research showed that the majority of respondents stayed connected by being involved with Social media and volunteering with approximately one quarter of people identifying support groups, social groups, faith groups and paid employment as a means to staying connected.

When asked, 'What would you like to be involved in?' Most people identified an exercise group or walking group as their preferred choice. Social groups, art groups and support groups were second with approximately one quarter of respondents choosing them.

Physical health, confidence and anxiety, and caring responsibilities were identified as the main barriers to getting more involved. This suggest there is a need for many people to be supported to access groups, both physically and mentally. The results also indicate a need to identify what support carers need to be more involved. Over one quarter of respondents also said they did not know how to find out what was available. This suggests that further research about how people access information would be useful in determining how activities and groups are advertised.

Although only 7.6% of respondents did not have access to the internet only half of respondents had heard of Somerset Choices, and only 17.9% of those that had used Somerset Choices had found it very helpful.

When looking at how respondents felt about the benefits of being involved, the majority identified that meeting new people was important, but the results also suggest that this is key to maintaining mental and physical health.



Conclusions

Our survey suggests that both those who live in rural and urban areas experience loneliness and isolation, and that a significant number of people have little contact with family and friends on a regular basis.

Volunteering is key to helping many people feel connected to their community, and physical activities are identified as being a popular choice.



Our survey results indicate that more needs to be done to improve awareness of Somerset Choices, and making it user friendly, and further research and action should be taken by Somerset County Council to look into this. Further research into how else people find out information would also be key in identifying how to advertise opportunities. Initial research by Healthwatch Somerset suggests that many people find out about activities from community resources such as GPs and libraries, however, this would need to be validated via a larger study, or survey by the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group and Somerset County Council.



Meeting other people is identified as being key to improving and maintaining physical and mental health, but it is clear there is a need for many people to be supported with this due to physical health, anxiety issues, and caring responsibilities.

Recommendations

1. More needs to be done to improve awareness of Somerset Choices.
2. Research on the user friendly experiences of Somerset Choices, and how to improve it based on this should take place.
3. Research needs to take place to discover the best ways of advertising opportunities in local areas in addition to Somerset Choices.
4. For Somerset County Council and Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group to consider the benefits of commissioning support for people who have physical disabilities, and or anxiety issues, to access groups and activities. Support for carers is also key and should feed into the 'Carer's strategy' and new carers support service.
5. After noting the prevalence of the use of social media platforms such as Facebook (46 out of the 108 respondents stated that they use Facebook daily, with 24 others stating that they use it ranging over timescales from two to three times a week, frequently, occasionally or choosing not to say) we recommend that research is taken to maximise the opportunities provided by these platforms to connect people and keep them in touch, particularly people who are housebound and/or geographically isolated.



Full results

The results are listed below, and we have made some conclusions and recommendations based on this, that we will share with commissioners and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

This survey is about 'being connected'. Being connected means that you have contact with other people in your social circle who can support you and that you have access to information to help you make choices. You may be connected to family, friends, your local community or services that are paid to support you.

Q1. Do you consider yourself to be well connected with your support network and local community?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1 (not at all)		8.4%	11
2		6.9%	9
3		9.9%	13
4		9.2%	12
5		11.5%	15
6		10.7%	14
7		9.9%	13
8		16.0%	21
9		9.2%	12
10 (extremely connected)		8.4%	11
		Total Responses	131

Q2. How often do you have face to face contact with friends or relatives?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Daily		44.8%	60
A few days a week		22.4%	30
Weekly		16.4%	22
Fortnightly		3.0%	4
Monthly		5.2%	7
Less often		8.2%	11
		Total Responses	134



Q3. Are you involved in any activities in the community? Tick all that apply

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Exercise class/ Sports activities		24.4%	32
Walking group		11.5%	15
Social media sites like Facebook and twitter		50.4%	66
Social group		26.7%	35
Support group		29.0%	38
Book club		8.4%	11
Art/creative		13.7%	18
Lunch club		9.2%	12
Visit from a befriender		2.3%	3
Volunteering		42.0%	55
Church or faith group		21.4%	28
Paid employment.		22.9%	30
Other, please specify...		16.8%	22
Total Responses			131

Q3.1 Are you involved in any activities in the community? Other, please specify

#	Response
1.	Adult learning
2.	Orchestra, Wildlife group, Parish Magazine
3.	Hospital Governor, National Charity Trustee, PPG, garden club Committee etc
4.	None currently
5.	Helping elderly neighbour
6.	slimming club
7.	School PTFA and Parent Governor
8.	regular meeting with old work colleagues
9.	None
10.	Volunteering to promote my own business. Relax Kids
11.	Friends
12.	Helping at a Mother and Toddler Group, Member of Senior Citizen Forum, Member of the Civic Society
13.	Trades union activity, Civic Society, Pensioner's Forum
14.	Member of Older Person's Forum
15.	Patient Participation Group
16.	Member of Men in Sheds
17.	Scouts
18.	Men's choir, Opera group, National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies
19.	Sailing club
20.	Parish Council and PCC Member
21.	Singing

Q4. What would you like to get involved in if possible? Tick all that apply

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Exercise class/ Sports activities		43.5%	40
Walking group		31.5%	29
Social media sites like Facebook and twitter		7.6%	7
Social group		31.5%	29
Support group		25.0%	23
Book club		15.2%	14
Art/creative		27.2%	25
Lunch club		19.6%	18
Visit from a befriender		7.6%	7
Volunteering		20.7%	19
Church or faith group		9.8%	9
Paid employment.		21.7%	20
Other, please specify...		3.3%	3
Total Responses			92

Q4.1 What would you like to get involved in if possible? Other, please specify

#	Response
1.	Quite enough already!
2.	Undertake jobs for my extended family
3.	Swim
4.	Archery and shooting

Q5. What are the things that prevent you from getting involved, or getting more involved than you already are?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Physical health reasons		40.9%	47
Mental health reasons		18.3%	21
Caring responsibilities		29.6%	34
Childcare		10.4%	12
Transport availability		19.1%	22
Transport cost		11.3%	13
Money		24.3%	28
Access to internet		2.6%	3
Language barriers		0.0%	0
Lack of confidence or anxiety		30.4%	35
Safety concerns		2.6%	3
Don't know what is available locally		26.1%	30
Don't know how to find a specific activity (please tell us what it is)		3.5%	4
Other, please specify...		13.0%	15
Total Responses			115

Q5.1 What are the things that prevent you from getting involved, or getting more involved than you already are? Don't know how to find a specific activity please tell us what it is.

#	Response
1.	Not interested

Q5.2 What are the things that prevent you from getting involved, or getting more involved than you already are? Other, please specify.

#	Response
1.	Lack of classes to suit my need
2.	Finding Others to pool budgets with
3.	Time available
4.	Working full time
5.	Running & maintaining home takes up much time so not too much free time available
6.	Still working (and transport is a serious issue for many people)
7.	I'm now disabled caring for aspergers children
8.	finding time to be more involved
9.	Lack of time.
10.	Apathy
11.	Possible Autism.
12.	Not enough time
13.	Making a real connection with people, most feel a bit transient, ie if I didn't go no one would notice
14.	Long working hours and commitments
15.	Unavailability due to work commitments

Q6. Are you aware of the signposting service Somerset Choices?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		50.4%	68
No		49.6%	67
		Total Responses	135

Q7. Are you able to access Somerset Choices?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		81.1%	99
No		18.9%	23
		Total Responses	122

Q8. If you have used Somerset Choices, tick which best describes your experience

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Very helpful		17.9%	7
Somewhat helpful		61.5%	24
Not helpful		20.5%	8
		Total Responses	39

Q9. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Somerset Choices?

The 10 response(s) to this question.

#	Response
1.	Focuses on Older people
2.	difficult to navigate
3.	not sure what it is
4.	Website can be difficult to use when advertising your service
5.	at this point I have not used it
6.	have not needed yet
7.	found it difficult to narrow down the search to my area and needs
8.	Information incomplete and out of date
9.	It is not user friendly
10.	Where are they

Q10. What do you consider are the benefits of getting involved in your community (tick all that apply)

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Increased wellbeing		67.4%	87
Increased confidence		65.1%	84
Increased fitness		44.2%	57
Better health		46.5%	60
Meet new people		77.5%	100
Support other people		62.0%	80
Feel less lonely		53.5%	69
Feel less isolated		56.6%	73
Get some fresh air		41.9%	54
Have a change of scenery		50.4%	65
Structure to the day/week		49.6%	64
Other, please specify...		8.5%	11
Total Responses			129

Q10.1 What do you consider are the benefits of getting involved in your community? Other, please specify.

#	Response
1.	Mastering new skills.
2.	Feel valued
3.	Being a rural person this has always been part of life, handed down from one generation to another.
4.	Know help is there if it is needed
5.	Parish council - keeping informed and standing up for your community
6.	Sense of purpose.
7.	catalyst of meeting people
8.	Something to look forward to when you lack confidence
9.	Feel a real person
10.	Sharing skills, gaining from other people's skills/talents
11.	Involvement

Q11. What do you consider are the benefits of having a regular visit from a befriender? Tick all that apply

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Increased wellbeing		62.4%	53
Increased confidence		45.9%	39
Increased fitness		10.6%	9
Better health		28.2%	24
Meet new people		52.9%	45
Support other people		27.1%	23
Feel less lonely		64.7%	55
Feel less isolated		57.6%	49
Get some fresh air		12.9%	11
Have a change of scenery		12.9%	11
Structure to the day/week		27.1%	23
Other, please specify...		10.6%	9
Total Responses			85

Q11.1 What do you consider are the benefits of having a regular visit from a befriender? Other, please specify.

#	Response
1.	Enabled to access community
2.	Not needed at present
3.	I don't see any benefit to this
4.	Not my experience personally, but support and help
5.	do not have visits
6.	I don't want a befriended.
7.	don't know
8.	Village Agent, Laura so helpful I definitely need help with all my problems for support, solicitors, etc.
9.	Someone to talk to

Q12. Do you have access to the internet?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		92.4%	122
No		7.6%	10
Total Responses			132

Q13. Do you use other websites or applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or email? List, and tell us how often you think you use them.

The 108 response(s) to this question.

Facebook daily = 46; Email daily = 28; Twitter daily = 8; Instagram daily = 6

#	Response
1.	Daily
2.	Facebook daily

3.	Email
4.	Facebook daily. Discussion board daily.
5.	Facebook daily, twitter weekly and email daily
6.	Daily
7.	www.mysomersetpeople@gmail.co.uk helped me find others to share activities with but funding stopped 2 years ago.
8.	Facebook, daily, Twitter occasionally, Daily Forum daily, Online jigsaw daily, Online quizzes daily, Email daily
9.	Constant use of websites and email, but choose not to use any social media. Encourage the lonely to phone me
10.	Email
11.	FB, twitter, Instagram, email, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Ello
12.	Email daily.
13.	Email - multiple times per day.
14.	All of them daily
15.	Access to all. Access all several times a day from first thing in the morning throughout until late night
16.	Facebook Daily
17.	I use Facebook most evenings
18.	Facebook daily basecamp most days
19.	Facebook and e-mail every day.
20.	Once every couple of weeks
21.	Email daily
22.	Email - daily
23.	Yes
24.	Facebook about weekly.
25.	Facebook, email
26.	Facebook most days, email most days
27.	Facebook, Twitter, email: use daily
28.	Facebook daily, Twitter weekly, email daily
29.	Email - on average once a week
30.	Facebook. Daily but live away from family and school friends.so use it to keep up to date with things
31.	Facebook - use daily inc Messenger to keep in touch with other parents
32.	Facebook – daily
33.	Facebook daily
34.	Daily
35.	Facebook check daily. twitter irregularly
36.	Facebook, every day
37.	Facebook
38.	Facebook and email daily, Messenger when people send me messages and occasionally to send messages to other people
39.	Daily
40.	Facebook. now & again
41.	Daily
42.	Facebook
43.	Facebook - Two or three times a week.
44.	Facebook, twitter, email
45.	Facebook
46.	Daily

47.	Facebook daily
48.	Facebook, email
49.	Facebook Daily
50.	Facebook Daily
51.	Facebook almost daily, email twice a week
52.	sailing forum daily it is my principle social activity
53.	Email, Facebook
54.	Facebook, Twitter – daily
55.	Facebook
56.	Email – daily
57.	Facebook
58.	Email, Facebook and Instagram daily
59.	Yes daily
60.	Instagram and Twitter daily
61.	Facebook daily
62.	Email daily, Facebook and WhatsApp weekly
63.	Email and Facebook daily
64.	Facebook daily, email when needed
65.	Facebook daily
66.	Facebook daily, email weekly
67.	Email occasionally
68.	Facebook, Twitter and email daily
69.	Facebook, email, YouTube
70.	Email daily, YouTube occasionally, internet browsing frequently
71.	Facebook regularly
72.	Facebook daily
73.	Facebook daily
74.	Facebook and email daily
75.	Email daily
76.	Snapchat and Instagram daily
77.	Facebook daily
78.	Email
79.	Facebook and email daily
80.	Facebook daily
81.	Facebook and email daily
82.	Email daily
83.	Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, Hangouts, IMO, KIK most of the time
84.	Twitter and email daily
85.	Facebook daily, email weekly, Instagram and Twitter very occasionally
86.	Email and Facebook
87.	Email daily
88.	I don't put my phone down!
89.	Don't put my phone down.
90.	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, email most of the time
91.	Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube
92.	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, email
93.	Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat daily
94.	Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter daily
95.	Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter

96.	Facebook
97.	Email weekly
98.	Facebook and email daily, Twitter weekly
99.	Facebook and email daily
100.	Facebook very occasionally and email weekly
101.	Facebook and Twitter for work, and Tumblr daily
102.	Email weekly
103.	Facebook and Twitter very occasionally and email and BBC website daily
104.	Facebook very occasionally and email weekly
105.	Email and various websites daily
106.	Facebook and Twitter very occasionally and email daily, websites for daily news and music
107.	Facebook, email, Yahoo, online shopping, NHS daily
108.	Facebook very occasionally

Q14. The following questions help us to make sure we are treating everyone equally, and that we are communicating in ways that work for everyone - please complete these questions as it helps us do better!

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Mendip		18.5%	25
Sedgemoor		28.1%	38
Taunton Dean		11.9%	16
South Somerset		28.1%	38
West Somerset		13.3%	18
Total Responses			135

Q15. How would you describe where you live?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Rural		44.7%	59
Suburban		34.8%	46
Urban		20.5%	27
Total Responses			132

Q16. How old are you?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Under 18		6.7%	9
18 - 25		1.5%	2
26 - 35		5.2%	7
36 - 45		14.2%	19
46 - 55		13.4%	18
55 - 65		23.9%	32
66 - 75		17.9%	24
76 - 85		13.4%	18
86+		3.7%	5
Total Responses			134

Q17. How would you describe your ethnicity?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
White British		93.2%	123
White Irish		0.0%	0
White European		0.8%	1
White other		3.8%	5
Black British		0.8%	1
Black African		0.0%	0
Black Carribean		0.0%	0
Black other		0.0%	0
Asian British		0.0%	0
Asian Indian		0.0%	0
Asian Pakistani		0.0%	0
Asian Chinese		0.0%	0
Asian other		0.0%	0
Mixed heritage		1.5%	2
Other		0.0%	0
Prefer not to say		0.0%	0
Total Responses			132

Q18. How would you describe your sexuality?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Bisexual		4.7%	6
Gay		1.6%	2
Heterosexual		84.5%	109
Lesbian		0.8%	1
Other		0.8%	1
Prefer not to say		7.8%	10
Total Responses			129

Q19. If you consider yourself to have a disability, then please tell us what this is (this could be a learning disability, sensory impairment or a physical disability, for example)

The 53 response(s) to this question.

#	Response
1.	Parkinsons
2.	Learning disabilities
3.	Arthritis, temporary I hope.
4.	Have hearing aids and increasing problem with arthritis.
5.	Multiple Sclerosis
6.	Lack of mobility. Osteoporosis etc
7.	Physical disability and mental health condition
8.	Osteo-arthritis, bad sight, depression and anxiety.
9.	Limiting physical disability
10.	Back
11.	Dyslexia, Lost of leg, Back problems

- | |
|---|
| 12. Knee & back problems - difficulty in dressing and unable to walk at times. |
| 13. Colostomy, osteoarthritis, diabetes, scoliosis, solitary rectal ulcer syndrome, depression, borderline personality disorder |
| 14. various broken limbs from a road traffic accident a number of years ago and an 'acquired brain injury' from same accident |
| 15. N/A |
| 16. Physical disability |
| 17. Physical disability |
| 18. Anxiety |
| 19. Cauda equina syndrome. Spinal injury. Rare condition |
| 20. Physical |
| 21. Mobility is limited |
| 22. Hearing |
| 23. Physical |
| 24. Anxiety, depression, Autism |
| 25. heart impairment |
| 26. physical impairment - spinal cord injury |
| 27. Loss of left leg; hear problems; diabetes |
| 28. Dyslexia |
| 29. COPD; vertebrae crushed |
| 30. Bronchitis and Arthritis |
| 31. Physical |
| 32. Heart failure |
| 33. Lower back disability, Arthritis in joints, Asthma, Diabetes |
| 34. Poor healing |
| 35. Physical |
| 36. Physical |
| 37. Hearing impaired |
| 38. Long standing respiratory condition |
| 39. Extremely poor memory, physical disability, broken neck-spine, and skeletal condition |
| 40. Early onset Vascular Dementia |
| 41. Pancreatitis, difficulty walking |
| 42. Learning and hearing disability |
| 43. Yes |
| 44. Learning disability |
| 45. MS |
| 46. Deafness |
| 47. Mental health |
| 48. Physical disability |
| 49. Physical and mental health |
| 50. Slight Arthritis in knee |
| 51. Mental health |
| 52. Mental health |
| 53. Mental health |

Q20. Do you have a caring responsibility? If so, select the option that best fits

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
I care for one or more parents		14.3%	11
I care for my partner		31.2%	24
I care for an adult child		5.2%	4
I care for another relative or friend		6.5%	5
I have childcare responsibilities		3.9%	3
I care for a child with disabilities		22.1%	17
I am a single parent		1.3%	1
If the options above don't really work for you, then please explain more here		15.6%	12
Total Responses			77

Q20.1 Do you have a caring responsibility? If the options above don't really work for you, then explain more here

#	Response
1.	I'm 30 there isn't a 26 -35 option
2.	There are several people for whom I am a support, whether through being there on the phone, visits, driving etc.
3.	I have no responsibilities and am well looked after by family
4.	I provide care for a non-related neighbor
5.	Private paid Carer
6.	At times my husband is ill and needs care from me but not all the time
7.	Single parent with a child with disabilities
8.	I help someone manage money, shop and sometimes act as taxi, but I am not a carer in the ormolu sense of the word
9.	I'm fine and very busy but thank you for asking and caring. It is appreciated.
10.	I am a single parent to a child who has Autism
11.	I care for a parent and a child and I'm a single parent
12.	Regularly visit a friend to assist with gardening, maintenance, general upkeep and dog walking.



Appendix 1



Taken from Campaign to end loneliness

<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/threat-to-health/>

Loneliness and physical health

Loneliness increases the likelihood of mortality by 26% (Holt-Lunstad, 2015). The effect of loneliness and isolation on mortality is comparable to the impact of well-known risk factors such as obesity, and has a similar influence as cigarette smoking (Holt-Lunstad, 2010).

Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of developing coronary heart disease and stroke (Valtorta et al, 2016).

Loneliness increases the risk of high blood pressure (Hawkey et al, 2010).

Lonely individuals are also at higher risk of the onset of disability (Lund et al, 2010).

Loneliness and mental health

Loneliness puts individuals at greater risk of cognitive decline (James et al, 2011).

One study concludes lonely people have a 64% increased chance of developing clinical dementia (Holwerda et al, 2012).

Lonely individuals are more prone to depression (Cacioppo et al, 2006) (Green et al, 1992).

Loneliness and low social interaction are predictive of suicide in older age (O'Connell et al, 2004).

Maintaining independence

Academic research is clear that preventing and alleviating loneliness is vital to enabling older people to remain as independent as possible. Lonely individuals are more likely to:

Visit their GP, have higher use of medication, higher incidence of falls and increased risk factors for long term care (Cohen, 2006).

Undergo early entry into residential or nursing care (Russell et al, 1997).

Use accident and emergency services independent of chronic illness. (Geller, Janson, McGovern and Valdini, 1999).