



# Scottish Forum on Isolation and Loneliness

## 25 February 2026 (Meeting 4)

### Introduction

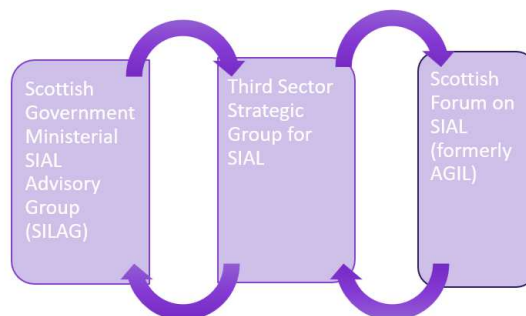
This was the fourth meeting of the Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness (The Forum). The Forum is coordinated by Befriending Networks and co-hosted with Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland.

The Forum is about building a community of organisations and individuals who are interested in the issue of social isolation and loneliness in Scotland. It has an open and fluid membership. It aims to be a supportive space for those who wish to learn more about the issue, a time to connect with peers and support collective action on this issue.

This meeting of the Forum was attended by **58 individuals**, representing **49 organisations** from across the geography of Scotland, predominantly third sector organisations, those working in specific places or with specific communities, as well as others from national third sector groups, local authorities, health boards and funders. A further 8 individuals booked and sent apologies, whilst 19 booked but did not attend or send apologies. List of attending organisations is contained in appendix 2.

In addition to this Forum, we also have a strategic action group on loneliness. This is a smaller grouping with a fixed membership that takes the learning from the Forum to develop and represent strategic ideas and make wider connections. Many from the strategic group are then members of the Scottish Government's Ministerial Group on Social Isolation and Loneliness. This group is convened by the Minister for Equalities, Kaukab Stewart MSP. It will next meet on 12 March 2026.

### The SIAL Forum and its relationship to other groups



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## Update since the September 2025 Forum Meeting

At September's Forum, we focused on place-based strategies for addressing loneliness with example from the London borough of Bromley. We also explored raising public awareness of loneliness through the media, overview of the World Health Organisation's commission on social connection, and an in-depth Forum group discussion on stigma and loneliness.

At the September Forum a draft Manifesto for Social Connection was developed, it was circulated to all Forum members for support. The Manifesto was launched in December 2025, setting out an ambitious 10-year vision for the next Scottish Government to consider.

The Scottish Government's Ministerial Group met on 4 November 2025 and received the report from the Forum. At this meeting, the Scottish Government shared the year 2 findings of the Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund administered by Impact Funding Partners, and a discussion took place on loneliness and public health.

**Read the Manifesto for Social Connection**  
[Manifesto Calls for Urgent Action to Declare Loneliness a Public Health Crisis in Scotland - Befriending Networks](#)

### Presentation 1: Inequalities in Loneliness – Susan Hunter, Befriending Networks

- Scottish Household Survey 2024 data was presented to illustrate inequalities in loneliness by age, deprivation, disability, relationship status, and local authority area.
- [Slides were shared and available for use by all Forum members.](#)
- Scottish Government data source: [Supporting documents - Scottish Household Survey 2024 findings: neighbourhoods and communities report - gov.scot](#)

### Presentation 2: Inequalities in Loneliness – Focus on Disability, with Tressa Burke, CEO of Glasgow Disability Alliance

- GDA is an organisation run by and for disabled people, and they provide direct support, advocacy and policy influence. The group was originally established in response to widespread concerns about social isolation and loneliness.

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- The Scottish Household Survey gives insight into SIAL trends in the country but GDA's own survey provides further insight into how disabled people are affected:
  - 89% of participants reported concerns about SIAL.
  - Disabled people have smaller social circles than non-disabled people, but they rely on these group more for social activities and support.
  - Disability benefits are not enough to cover the costs of social participation. (e.g. the increased cost of transport, food, contingency products and PA support)
  - Increased stigma is also a barrier to participation.
- Accessibility is not the same as availability – even when services exist, they might not be accessible for disabled people
- GDA's approach to the definition of disability is that people can self-identify as disabled, and the organisation focuses on support needs, not diagnosis.
- Even when funding is available to deliver services, the funding budget is usually not enough to cover accessibility adjustments. To make funding fair, there needs to be increased awareness of accessibility needs and costs.

This presentation was followed up by a question and answer session, Tressa was able to share experiences and suggestions to colleagues in the Forum. Presentation, if it become available for sharing, will [be available here](#).

### **Presentation 3: Practice Presentation: The Joyous Choir, with Rose Filippi, Development Manager of Maryhill Integration Network (MIN)**

- MIN is a [Glasgow-based community organisation](#) that provides advocacy, direct support and learning opportunities.
- People in the asylum process face several barriers that make SIAL worse:
  - Accommodation is often provided outside cities with poor public transport links.
  - The asylum support allowance is extremely low and usually can't cover the cost of transport and social activities.
  - Increased hostility towards asylum seekers increases safety concerns and worsens loneliness.
  - Language barriers are present.
- The Joyous Choir was created for women in the asylum process and aims to provide a community for participants. They work across multiple languages. The choir aims to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness and the harm caused as a result.

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- A film of the choir project was shared: [Joyous Choir - Maryhill Integration Network](#)

#### **Presentation 4: Scottish Government Strategic Update – Karen Mechan, Team Leader, Social Isolation and Loneliness.**

- Government recognises SIAL (Social Isolation and Loneliness) as a public health problem.
- Minister has reviewed the Forum’s manifesto, which will be on the agenda for the next advisory group meeting taking place in March 2026.
- Due to the upcoming election, updates on future plans are limited.

#### **Presentation 5: Global Intergenerational Week and Congress, with Corinna Bruce, Generations Working Together**

- Corinna shared details of the upcoming Intergenerational Week taking place in April and Global Intergenerational Congress in September, and encouraged forum members to sign up and send in sessions proposals. See [Corinna’s slides for full details](#) of all opportunities.
- Glasgow Intergenerational Learning Roadshow – 23 April – includes local projects, discussions, and networking.
- Global Intergenerational Congress – 30 September to 1 October, will include global leading practice, networking and collaboration, three-days of events and programmes including Excellence Awards and a civic reception.

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## Forum Discussion: How are inequalities in loneliness being addressed, and do organisations have the data they need they need?

Forum members, in four discussion groups, had the opportunity to share the work they are currently doing to address inequalities in loneliness, and to consider if the data they had available to them was what they needed to make impact on reducing inequalities.

The experiences were diverse, and views are not always in consensus.

### Supports and Interventions

- The importance of volunteering as a way of tackling social isolation and loneliness – can create a double benefit, one for the volunteer and also for the cause they are supporting.
- We addressed the importance of us as educators for people in other sectors around social isolation and loneliness and the policy asks related to this. Need to advocate beyond our own organisations.
- The importance of peer support when it comes to addressing social isolation and loneliness – Care 4 Carers gave the example of a pilot project they are doing which supports carers who can't leave the cared for person and focuses on peer support.
- Befriending service – trusting relationships, regularity of contact, safety is considered throughout. Examples shared from Good Morning Service, Lead Scotland and others.
- Peer support groups are provided but transport is a barrier, with no funding or availability for transport, so new members cannot join the group.
- Social prescribing, focusing on a new framework for social prescribing with improved reach, data flow and measurement.
- Young Carers: unpaid carers and their families, opportunities for carers to engage and reduce isolation. Barriers can be transport, cost, mental health, fear of accessing services. Focus on 'what is it that you need?' Focus on the individuals. For Young Carers, they regularly report feeling very isolated due to a range of reasons, but where confidence is often at the centre. Levels of anxiety can be very high with young carers.
- Barriers are that people will opt-out and not put themselves forward for supports, stigma and shame. Careful and sensitive marketing and promotion of opportunities to ensure reaching those they are intended for and to close inequalities gap.

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## Data

- The importance of understanding the nuances behind social isolation and loneliness (they are not the same). This should be reflected in any data/outcomes etc – there can be distinct differences about why someone feels the way they do across different communities (the examples given were disabled people and the LGBTQI+ communities)
- In relation to data, it can be difficult as many people won't always identify themselves as struggling e.g. carers who don't always see themselves as a carer.
- Rural communities appear to struggle more with isolation than with loneliness. Experiences are that communities can be quite close knit with people more willing to support each other informally and engage in volunteering.
- More work is needed to unpick the variance by local authority – is it a reflection of areas where there is thriving community sector, assets of interventions from third sector? Or it is related to other variables such as demographics or poverty?
- Importance in data to distinction between social contact, social connection, loneliness, social isolation. Quality of relationships not just quantity. Make sure we are measuring all of these factors, and be clear they don't mean the same thing.
- Concern about having to measure against economic value / “unit price” of providing wellbeing outcomes in alleviating loneliness.
- Services are engaging with their community but believe people may hold back on what information they disclose as they are time-limited relationships (6 months) which means that there may not have built the trust to give accurate feedback/data.
- Service user voice and lived experience was a strong and evident in all discussion groups. Service rich data of who is being supported and what is local need.

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## Signposting to Resources and Developments in SIAL

The following resources were highlighted for Forum attendees and links shared for further reading, dissemination or application.

### All Previous Forum Reports and Slide Decks

[Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness - Resources - Befriending Networks](#)

**World Health Organisation Commission on Social Connection**  
[Report of the WHO Commission on Social Connection](#)

**Manifesto for Social Connection in Scotland**

[Manifesto Calls for Urgent Action to Declare Loneliness a Public Health Crisis in Scotland - Befriending Networks](#)

**Marmalade Trust: Loneliness Awareness Week 15-21 June 2026**

[Home | Loneliness Awareness Week](#)

**Global Intergenerational Week 24-30 April 2026**

[Resources GIW26](#)

**British Deaf Association** – Scotland encouraged Forum member to subscribe to their Facebook community for updates.

### Contact

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**Date of Future Forums: June 2026 and September 2026**

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## Appendix 1: Forum Agenda

Wednesday 25 February 2026, 14:30-16:30 on Zoom

14:30 Introductions, updates and networking

Welcome from Susan Hunter, CEO of Befriending Networks and co-chair of the Scottish Forum on Isolation and Loneliness and [Manifesto on Social Connection](#) – reminder of key asks

**Breakout room:** Say hello to someone new, and share how your work is helping those experiencing chronic loneliness or social isolation?

**Scottish Government Strategic** Update from Karen Mechan, Team Leader

**Overview of inequalities in loneliness** – Scottish Household Survey 2024

15:00 Keynote Presentation and Q&A: Inequalities in Loneliness – Focus on Disability, with Tressa Burke, CEO of Glasgow Disability Alliance

15:25 Comfort Break

15:30 Practice Presentation: The Joyous Choir, with Rose Filippi, Development Manager of Maryhill Integration Network

The choir welcomes participants from diverse backgrounds including women who are seeking asylum and refuge in Glasgow, as well as those born and raised in the city. The group shares songs from different cultures, and often sing about themes such as friendship, protest, sisterhood, dreams, freedom and hope.

15:40 Forum Discussion Group:

- How is your work contributing to addressing inequalities in loneliness?
- Do you have the SIAL data that you need to design, deliver and measure impact of your services (with a focus on inequalities)?

16:00 Facilitated Feedback from Breakout Rooms

16:10 Presentation – Global Intergenerational Week and Congress, with Corinna Bruce, Generations Working Together

- [Intergenerational Week](#)
- [Global Intergenerational Congress](#)

16:20 Close and thank you

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## Appendix 2: Organisational Attendance – 25 February 2026

A Listening Ear	Maryhill Integration Project
Adandra	Meeting Centres Scotland
Befriend a Child	Midlothian Community Action
Befrienders Highland	Mikeysline
Befriending Caithness	Monifeith Befrienders
Befriending Networks	NHS Orkney / VAO
BHA BeFriend	NLDF
British Deaf Association - Scotland	Playlist for Life
CACE	Public Health Scotland
Caraidean Uibhist SCIO	Samaritans Scotland
Care and Share Companionship	Scottish Civic Trust
Care for Carers	Scottish Community Link Worker Network
Ceartas Advocacy	Scottish Government
Central Carers	The Eden Project
Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland	The Jo Cox Foundation
Crossroads Fife	The Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice Befriending Service
Generations Working Together	The Salvation Army
Glasgow Disability Alliance	The Welcoming Association
Glasgow Life	University of Stirling
Good Morning Service	Vintage Vibes
Impact Funding Partners	Visiting Friends SCIO
Larkhall and District Volunteer Group	Voluntary Health Scotland
Lead Scotland	Volunteer Glasgow
LifeCare	Wavelength
Marmalade Trust	

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