

CASE STUDY 07 Jan 19

MAGIC ME: INTERGENERATIONAL PARTIES TO COMBAT LONELINESS

With loneliness linked to a range of health problems among the elderly, arts charity Magic Me is tackling this issue by running cocktail parties in care homes with the help of volunteers. How can intergenerational connections keep older people happy and healthy in their later years?

Location [United Kingdom](#)

Featured Experts

[Deborah Mason](#)

Deborah Mason is the communications manager at Magic Me. She is also the coordinator of What Next? Southwark.

Author

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Highlights & Data

- Magic Me's themed parties aim to alleviate the boredom felt by care home residents in the evenings
- The concept of intergenerational socialising and care has gained momentum as the negative health effects of loneliness have gained more exposure
- Many older people are addressing isolation on their own terms, taking up activities such as online dating and travel to feel younger
- In a 2017 study, **200,000** elderly people claimed they'd not had a conversation with a friend or relative in more than a month ([Age UK, 2017](#))
- There will be an additional **8.6 million** Britons aged 65 and over in 50 years' time ([ONS, 2018](#))
- **Two-thirds** of retail marketers plan to increase their spending on Gens Z and Y, compared to **38%** that plan to do so for Seniors ([RetailMeNot, 2018](#))

Scope

A study carried out in 2017 found that an estimated 200,000 older people in the UK had not had a conversation with a friend or relative in over a month. [1] With loneliness linked to a range of health problems among the elderly (such as heart disease, stroke and Alzheimer's disease), the

government launched an initiative in October 2018 to address the problem, including providing funding for GPs to refer patients to community activities and voluntary services by 2023. [2] Magic Me is a charity that has been tackling this issue since 2010, running cocktail parties in care homes with the help of volunteers.

The arts charity, which aims to bridge the gap between young and older people through its activities, originally piloted the idea at three care homes to alleviate the boredom experienced by residents in the evenings. “In the evening, [care homes] can be quite eerie and dreary spaces,” says Clea House, a former community manager at Magic Me. “Residents were complaining that nothing happens in the evenings for them.” [3] Most residents, whether due to ill health or diminished energy, are unable to socialise outside of the care home environment and many will not have any visitors for weeks at a time. The monthly cocktail parties aim to “bring a bit of sparkle and glamour” back to their lives and are now run at 16 London-based locations. [4][5]

Magic Me has worked with various intergenerational arts projects both in care homes and schools around Tower Hamlets since 1989. Communications manager Deborah Mason says the feedback from care homes has been very positive and the scheme has also proven a good way to recruit new volunteers who might not have been able to commit previously. “[Beforehand], most of the residents would watch TV or go to their room,” she explains. “Cocktail parties seemed like the perfect solution as young volunteers would be able to fulfil the commitment of socialising with the elderly inhabitants because they would be able to schedule it around their busy working lives. They can book a party when they are free... whatever suits them.” [5]



Half a million people over the age of 60 usually spend every day alone

Magic Me | Facebook (2018) ©

Context

According to research from Age UK, approximately 1.2 million older people nationwide are chronically lonely and half a million over-60s usually spend every day alone. As part of the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission's spotlight on older people, nine organisations from across the age sector

– including the Alzheimer's Society, British Red Cross, Campaign to End Loneliness, and Gransnet – have committed to working together to raise awareness and find solutions to address social isolation. [6] Meanwhile, Royal Mail is partnering with the government on a scheme that will see postal workers check up on elderly residents as part of their delivery rounds. [7]

Isolation doesn't just affect older people – 2.4 million British adults of all ages suffer from chronic loneliness. An analysis of 300,000 people found that the negative health effects are comparable to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day and the problem is fast-becoming the UK's most serious health issue. [8] As part of the government's loneliness strategy, employers will be encouraged to play a bigger part in safeguarding people's wellbeing, with organisations such as Sainsbury's, Transport for London, the British Red Cross, and the Civil Service pledging to take further steps in this regard. [2]

“Residents who were not otherwise engaged have begun to take care of their appearance. They get up and dance

Deborah Mason, communications manager at Magic Me

The concept of intergenerational care – wherein nurseries are opened on care home sites, for example – has been gaining momentum, largely because of the popularity of TV shows like Channel 4's *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*. [9] Findings from the 75-year-old Grant Study, which seeks to identify factors that contribute to a long, happy and healthy life, suggest that while isolation increases the risk of mortality, intergenerational connections can keep older people fit and healthier for longer. [10] Magic Me has also seen the benefits of this through the interaction of its younger volunteers with the residents over a shared drink and perhaps a dance. “Residents who were not otherwise engaged have begun to take care of their appearance. They get up and dance, which is great because music is particularly beneficial for people with dementia. It's a very sociable event and the residents welcome the young people bringing the outside in,” says Mason. [5]

The care homes are also given a makeover and fresh injection of life at a time when the space would otherwise not have been used. Props and decorations are hung to create a theme and the charity [Floral Angels](#) provides flower arrangements that are donated after weddings and corporate events. Previous party themes have included old-school Hollywood glamour, the roaring '20s and a Costa del Cocktail beach party. Mason says that both the staff and residents benefit: “The staff have a chance to relax with the residents rather than just looking after them. And the residents, who have quite an insular life, look forward to the event, particularly because they meet residents who they haven't met before and socialise with the volunteers.” [5]



Many seniors often don't feel as old as they are

Magic Me | Facebook (2017) ©

Insight and opportunities

According to ONS projections, there will be an additional 8.6 million Britons aged 65 and over in 50 years' time, potentially leading to the emergence of new markets, increased involvement in volunteering and community activism, and longer working lives. [11] The changing population make-up also means brands will have to reconsider how they market to older people. Nostalgia may play a part in this strategy. Nestlé, for example, partnered with the Alzheimer's Society to produce packs of cocoa, sweets and sausages wrapped in traditional packaging that can be used to play a board game or snap. [12] As well as helping to prompt happy memories, these Reminiscence Packs integrate a social element that can bring older people together.

Although older people are generally financially better off than their younger counterparts, two-thirds of retail marketers plan to increase their spending on Gens Z and Y, compared to 38% that plan to increase their spending on Seniors. [13] This unequal focus reflects how the elderly are often forgotten or misrepresented by brands, adding to a sense of exclusion from society. However, many of them are making efforts to alleviate isolation on their own terms. With up to seven hours of free time each day, they are bucking stereotypes by taking up activities such as online dating and travel to feel younger. [14]

While Magic Me uses cocktail parties in care homes to tackle older people's loneliness and promote intergenerational connections, there are numerous other initiatives looking to minimise isolation on a day-to-day basis. **Nesterly**, for instance, lets older homeowners in Boston rent out spare rooms to make extra money and build new friendships with younger generations, and the **OWCH co-operative group** sees older women live together to keep each other financially, physically and emotionally fit in later life. As Britain's elderly population booms, such schemes will become all the more important to reduce the burden on public services by improving people's physical and mental wellbeing.

magicme.co.uk

Sources

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