

community champion **TOOLKIT**



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FORWARD

The Pandemic has shone a light on the impact of loneliness and the devastating effects this has on communities' mental health and wellbeing.

But during these testing times we have seen extraordinary examples of community spirit, where people have come together to help each other.

It is important to keep this going and help people to rebuild their confidence to get out there and see what is available.

With loneliness being a major issue and with the number of older, lonely people in the UK set to increase to 2 million by 2025/26, the role of being a "Community Champion" will be so important in helping people to combat loneliness, feel more connected and part of their local community.



LONELINESS CAN
BE AS DAMAGING TO
HEALTH AS SMOKING
15 CIGARETTES A DAY



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LONELINESS HAPPENS WHEN THE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS THAT PEOPLE WANT DON'T MATCH THEIR ACTUAL EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS. IT IS AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE



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INTRODUCTION

This Community Champion toolkit will give you some background to the Neighbours Together project and why the project's "Community Champions" are so important. It includes a range of sections which will give you the tools you need in your role as a Community Champion.

In each section of the guide, we will go through the four main parts of being a Neighbours Together Community Champion: How to CONNECT with your neighbours and local community, PROMOTE activities and inspire others to get involved and try something new, ENABLE people to overcome barriers that may prevent them from being socially active and maybe DEVELOP new ideas to help combat loneliness.

NEIGHBOURS TOGETHER PROJECT OVERVIEW

So what is the Neighbours Together project? It is a local community lead project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. It is a 3-year project to tackle loneliness amongst older people in the Watford and Three Rivers area.

Neighbours Together aims to tackle loneliness and isolation by connecting older people with their local community. The project will enable people to improve their health and wellbeing by building social networks, become better informed and connected to their own community and being more active. We will work with local "Community

Champions" who know (or want to know) their local communities, events, activities and support services available for older people. They will listen and work in partnership with the community to remove any barriers to engagement, help promote activities, enable the introduction of new activities and make exciting things happen. The project will continue to produce the established *What's On* guide to promote the events, activities and support services available for older people living in Watford and Three Rivers.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The project's aims are:

- Combat loneliness by enabling older people to feel more connected and part of their local community in the Watford & Three Rivers area.
- Foster a spirit of neighbourliness in local communities.
- Identify, map and promote a range of social activities, club, support services and events through a guide called the *What's On* guide.

What we would like to achieve:

- Older people feel less isolated and lonely in their own communities.
- Older people are better able to manage their health and wellbeing.
- Older people are better able to access information to meet their needs.
- Local voluntary organisations are better connected and better able to meet the needs of older people.

WHAT ARE NEIGHBOURS TOGETHER “COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS”?

As mentioned, Neighbours Together is a local community lead project and the Neighbours “Community Champions” are essential to its success. A “Community Champion” is anyone who wants to help others in their area get out more and feel less lonely. The commitment to the role is very dependent on personal circumstances and varies from person to person. It is not a formal volunteering role, it does not have set commitments and we are not asking people to find time to do this ‘role’, but to think about incorporating the ethos of the combatting loneliness into their day to day business.

We see Neighbours Together

“Community Champions” being:

- Professionals like Link Workers, Community Navigators, GPs, Dentists, Pharmacists, Social workers, Parish Nurses, Community Health workers etc.
- Business owners like hairdressers, coffee shop owners, etc.
- Libraries, staff & volunteers.
- Local voluntary groups & organisations, staff & volunteers.
- Local & parish council members.
- Community leaders like faith leaders/ groups, community activists, etc.
- Community Centres & Community cafes.
- Good neighbours.
- Any Local residents.

They are mainly people with a friendly & enthusiastic manner, who enjoy interacting with people, a passion to be part of their local community and want to help combat loneliness.

In summary Neighbours Together

“Community Champions” are:

- People who want to help others in their community to feel less lonely and isolated and be part of their community.
- Someone who is looking to connect with their local community by sharing their skills and local knowledge.
- A “Community Champion” will help other local residents to regain their confidence and health by being more part of their community and maybe joining a local activity in their neighbourhood.

The “Community Champions” will:

- CONNECT with their neighbours and local community
- PROMOTE activities and inspire others to get involved and try something new
- ENABLE people to overcome barriers that may prevent them from being socially active
- DEVELOP new ideas to help combat loneliness

#CONNECT#PROMOTE
#ENABLE#DEVELOP



CONNECT

with your neighbours & local community



WHY CONNECT?

It is proven that engaging with your community helps people to feel connected and part of something which is a great step in feeling less lonely and isolated.

By connecting with your neighbours and people you work with on day to day basis eg: customers / clients / patients, you can encourage them to connect with each other and feel part of their community. This in turn will enable people to feel more confident in participating in group activities and further reducing feelings of loneliness.

WHERE DO YOU START?

Sometimes striking up a conversation with people you don't know can feel a bit daunting, but most people are happy to chat with a friendly smiling face. There are many simple ways you can begin to connect with your people in your local community.

- The best place to start is at home. Reach out to a neighbour and say hello. Maybe take a cake round or invite someone round for a socially distanced cuppa in the garden. You could even ask someone to help you with something such as lending you a gardening tool or ask them if they know a local shop that sells something specific – people like to feel helpful and this could break the ice.
- Organise a street gathering – it doesn't have to be a big event. Maybe just put a note through the doors on your street informing of the date and time and what to bring.
- Go for a walk in the local area and say a friendly hello to others that are walking. Maybe comment on the weather, a pretty garden you have seen, or comment on their lovely dog.
- Chat to local businesses and get to know the staff and owners. Chances are they will know lots of people in the local community and may be aware of local events that are going on.
- Visit the local Community Café. Most wards within the Watford & Three Rivers area have a community café, usually run by volunteers and often run once or twice a week. They are always really friendly, welcoming and they encourage and support people to get to know one another. You could even offer to help out? To find your local Community Café, have a look in the *What's On* Guide or ask the Neighbours Together team.
- Join a local group – if you have an interest or would like to start something new, you could join a local group where you will meet others that live near you. This could be anything from Arts & Crafts, Dance, History, Nature, Photography, Walk, Bowls, Bridge and so much more. You can find a wide range of activities in our *What's On* Guide or feel free to contact the Neighbours Together team to help find something of interest.
- Attend a local Health walk. There are health walks in all areas for all abilities. It's a great way to chat to new people as you are walking round a local park or nature reserve.

- Join local social media groups or pages. There are lots of local groups on social media. For example you will probably find there is a Facebook group or page for the residents of the area where you live. It's a great place to connect with others and find out what's going on in the area and what kind of things you can get involved in. For example, is there a litter pick arranged in the area you could join, or a community fete being organised or maybe you could suggest a meet up in the local coffee shop for like minded people.
- Volunteering – this is a great way to get involved in the community and reach out to local people. For example you could help out at a local foodbank or charity shop.
- If you are a local business owner or a professional trying to help people in the community, the best place to start is by getting to know your local area and the community projects, this is where the *What's On* guide can help. You can then suggest activities to people that they may be interested in or share the *What's On* guide with them.

HOW CAN I CONNECT PEOPLE TO EACH OTHER?

Once you have got to know some of your neighbours and other people in the community and maybe attended a group or community café regularly, where you meet new people, you could recommend they join you. It's then a great opportunity for you to introduce them to people you have met before. You never know – it may be the start of a beautiful friendship!

TIPS FOR STARTING UP A CONVERSATION

Questions are your best friend

If you find it hard to connect with someone, questions are your best friend. Once the conversation reaches a standstill, throw out a question like, "How have things been for you recently?" This will give the other person an opportunity to speak about themselves and guide the conversation. People respond well when other people seem interested in them, and asking questions is a great way to demonstrate that you're invested and genuine. This also gives you an opportunity to look for things you may have in common with someone.

Get creative with your questions

While small talk is important, that doesn't necessarily mean you want to spend all of your conversations chatting about the weather. Get creative with the questions you ask, Instead of asking them what they do, Try to tap into their interests and maybe ask something like, 'What's the most interesting thing you've done lately?'"

Ask open-ended questions

Once again, your goal is the development of a continued relationship. The best way to do that? Use open-ended questions.

Don't forget – W3RT can help with all of these things!

Contact
neighbourstogether@wrt.org
 or tel 01923 606447.

neighbours
together

PROMOTE

activities & inspire others to get involved and try something new

WHAT IS THE WHAT'S ON GUIDE?

The *What's On* Guide is a guide to local social activities, clubs, courses, events and support services in Watford & Three Rivers. The purpose of the guide is to help people stay active and well as well as feeling connected to their community.

WHERE CAN I FIND THE GUIDE?

The guide is currently only available online via our website www.mywellbeing.community/whatsonguide

Here you will find a spreadsheet which lists all of the entries. There are tabs at the bottom to select whether you are looking for a Club Activity, Group or Course, Support Service or an Event. You scroll down to find an activity and then scroll across to find all the information including times, costs and who to contact for more information. If using a PC or Laptop you can also use the 'Control F' function where you can type in a key word to search such as 'knitting' if you are looking for a knitting group.

ACTIVITIES/CLUBS/EVENTS/GROUPS/COURSES/SUPPORT SERVICES

List of clubs, activities, groups and courses

ORGANISATION	NAME	CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Active Watford & Three Rivers	Introduction to Physical Activity	Sport & Fitness	A fitness session to do at home
Ascend	The Zooming Cafe	Coffee Morning	Join us for a cuppa and a chat
Community Learning Partnership	Mixed Media Flowers & Nature	Arts & Crafts	Learn how to draw and paint nature
Herts Inclusive Theatre	Interactive Musical Theatre Singalong	Music	Show stopping singing fun for all of the family
West Watford Community Association	Digital Inclusion for Older People	Personal development	Learn to use your tablet, smart phone or laptop
Watford FC Trust	Golden Memories At Home	Dementia Support	A Watford reminiscence programme

HOW CAN I USE THE GUIDE IN MY ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY?

When you are speaking with local people you might come into contact within your community, whether it be through work, socially, or one of your friends, family or neighbours, you can let them know about the guide and how to find and access information within it.

Perhaps if someone mentions they have a particular interest, hobby or maybe something they need support with, you can use the guide with them to help them find a suitable activity. Perhaps you can attend together to give them some moral support if they are feeling a bit apprehensive about joining on their own?

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT ONLINE OR ABLE TO ACCESS THE INTERNET?

Before the pandemic, we produced a quarterly booklet that we distributed to various places around Watford & Three Rivers such as Libraries, Community Centres and Doctors Surgeries to enable people to pick up their own copy. The booklet was aimed at the over 55s, although many activities in the guide were suitable for all ages.

This booklet had to go in hold in March 2020 but we are hoping to start producing this again around Autumn 2021. We will ensure you receive your own supply of the guide as well as a list of all the stockists to enable you to direct people to obtain their own copy.

Perhaps you could meet a neighbour in one of the many Community Cafes around and take a look through the guide together and find something new for them to try.

There are so many amazing activities happening in Watford & Three Rivers, there's bound to be something for everyone. The more the people in our community get involved in, the more connected they will feel, which is the first step in reducing loneliness and isolation in our area!

Don't forget – W3RT can help with all of these things!

Contact neighbourstogether@wrt.org or tel 01923 606447.



neighbours
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ENABLE

people to overcome barriers that may prevent them from being socially active

WHY ENABLING PEOPLE IS IMPORTANT?

There might be all different barriers that prevent people from being socially active. So enabling them to overcome these barriers is very important in helping people to be more engaged with their community.

By enabling people to overcome any barriers, it allows them to feel more connected and more confident to try out new activities or groups and there therefore reduce the feelings of loneliness.

WHAT THE BARRIERS MIGHT BE

There are many reasons why people do not engage with their community and the activities/clubs/events/support services in their area. So to help people overcome these barriers, we need to understand how people think and their reasons for non-engagement.

So let's look at some of the barriers:

External factors

These are barriers out of the control of the individual, such as a lack of time or money or health and wellbeing. These also include:

- The actual physical environment ie the cleanliness or safety of a setting where an activity or event is due to take place, may sway people to either attend or to stay away. The design of buildings also falls under this category; the presence of lifts or escalators.

- The quality of service provision: how well the event or service is organised and run.
- Ease of access to reliable up-to-date information about services.
- The existence of adverts or role models promoting activities or the benefits, play a part in encouraging participation; at the same time, however, adverts and role models can put people off or simply fail to motivate.

Intra-personal factors

These barriers relating to attitudes, beliefs and perceptions held by the individual, such as a lack of commitment and enthusiasm or a perception stemming from the social environment, such as;

- Not having anyone to attend with.
- The attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and skills that individuals gain from their environment, culture, and past experiences. Often these factors determine whether a person will want to experiment with a new activity or event, and whether they are likely to persevere with something they have already tried out.
- Motivation for engaging is often influenced by people's social environment.
- Approval from others can be a motivating force for engagement, when others disapprove or show a lack of interest or familiarity in a type of activity or event, a person is less likely to develop an interest or desire to take it up.

Often the types of barriers are categorised into two areas “Personal difficulties” & “Practical difficulties”

Personal difficulties

The personal difficulties noted, tended to relate to health motivation and energy, and these were identified as having an impact on engagement and are;

- Health / disability, “Health isn’t good enough”.
- Psychological difficulties and fears.
- Activities seen as inappropriate.
- Fear of injury.
- “Too difficult”.
- Inability to identify with.
- “I’m not that type of person”.
- “Never occurred to me”.
- Not interested.
- “I might feel uncomfortable or out of place”.
- “I wouldn’t enjoy it”.

Practical difficulties

A variety of practical difficulties are :

- Accessibility, poor state or accessibility of facilities.
- Digital access to online material, including the costs relating to this.
- High cost, “It costs too much”.
- Lack of time, the personal circumstances, as those with busy working lives and families tended to prioritise these responsibilities over engaging in activities.
- “Too tired / prefer to rest and relax”.

- Language – English not their first language.
- Transport problems, Lack of transport
“I can’t easily get to it”.
- Lack of awareness of activities, events and venues

Overall, a range of general barriers are seen to affect engagement. Particularly, the barriers are issues such as cost, time, language, access both physically & virtually, lack of activities, language and level of awareness and personal issues such as health, motivation and commitment.

HOW TO HELP PEOPLE OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS?

To help people overcome these barriers we need to look at solutions that might help them.

Cost

Most of the activities in the *What’s On* guide are free or low cost and run by voluntary organisations. But if the cost of attending is still an issue, a lot of the organisers of the activities/clubs/events or support services are willing to help in some way. As a champion you could maybe contact the organiser to find if they willing to help, there is always no harm in asking.

Time

Time should not really be an issue, it is known that people tend to prioritise other responsibilities over engaging in activities but as we start to see our own Wellbeing as an important factor in the wellbeing of others, people will start look to allow time for themselves. This could be started by setting up the same time aside each week until it becomes part of a routine and therefore finding time is not an issue.

Language barriers

If language is an issue, the *What's On* guide does look for range of opportunities in a range of community languages, but there are many English language courses (ESOL) available in the area through HFALS (Hertfordshire Family and Adult Learning services) [Adult and family learning \(hertfordshire.gov.uk\)](http://hertfordshire.gov.uk)

Access physically and Health concerns

Let's look at the physical access and health concerns people might have to engage. There are many services out in the community which can help people get to the activities/clubs/events or support services. In the Watford and Three Rivers area there are a range of community car schemes, see [Car Schemes | Community Transport Herts](#) and befriending programmes from a wide range of voluntary organisations, who can help people get out and engage with their local community.

Below are two such services W3RT provide:

- Community Cars, if getting to the activities/clubs/ events or support service is a barrier, then it is worth talking to Community Cars. Tel 01923 216964 or emailing wellbeing@w3rt.org.
- Befriending service. If you need emotional support from someone else to get the activities/clubs/events or support services, then it is worth talking to My Wellbeing befriending programme. This service can be access through the following link [Home | Community Helps](#)

When someone's confidence is low and they need help attending an event/club for the first time maybe as a Community Champion you could offer to help them feel more confident by

- Meeting the individual at the activity/club/ event or support service to help them.
- Meeting the individual on the way and walking together to the activity/club/event or support service.
- Take the bus together to the activity/ club/event or support service.

This is to help them to take the first step but we don't want the individual to become reliant on you or for there to be an expectation that you go every time (unless you want to).

Virtual access and IT concerns

Having access to some of the online activities and the materials involved can be a barrier for some.

- Libraries: Libraries across Hertfordshire provide support with IT. You can access computers in the libraries and time on these PCs can be pre-booked (hertfordshire.gov.uk). The libraries also run a range of services and courses to help people with their digital skills. [IT taster and Make it Click sessions | Hertfordshire County Council](#)
- Digital inclusion programme through W3RT and the Hertfordshire wide. This a new programme which can be accessed through Herts Help or by the following link [Home | Community Helps](#). They will provide volunteers to help people get online and, in some cases, can help provide equipment.



Level of awareness

This is where the *What's On* guide is so important in helping to highlight what is available in the local community. As a Community Champion, by knowing the area you can highlight things.

Motivation and commitment

It has been proven that when others show support – for example by accompanying a friend or family member to an event, joining them in an activity, or verbally encouraging them, a person is more likely to begin engaging and remain engaged. Therefore perhaps as a Community Champion, you could suggest they call a friend / relative or even ask their neighbour if they would like to go with them.

Lack of activities

If the lack of activities is an issue, this is where we would like the Community Champions to highlight them and we might be able to help in setting up a new activities or introduce you to someone who can. (DEVELOP)

Don't forget – W3RT can help with all of these things!

Contact neighbourstogether@wrt.org or tel 01923 606447.

neighbours
together

DEVELOP

new ideas to help combat loneliness



UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNITY

Getting to know your community is a best place to start because it will give you the local support and knowledge that you will need

- Find out what people want and talk to people in your area to hear what they would like.
- Find out what's already happening and talk to people who are doing something similar

Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) can help you with contacts if you need help.

WHO CAN HELP YOU HELP OTHERS?

Sometimes, knowing where to start can feel a bit daunting and you may need a bit of support to get going in your neighbourhood or community.

So come and talk to us at W3RT about starting up something in your community. W3RT CVS team can help you with information, news, legal advice, access to resources, publicity, volunteer recruitment and training. W3RT Neighbours Together team supports local community champions and leaders to help reduce social isolation and loneliness.

Also, both councils Watford Borough Council (WBC) and Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) provide a range of support services.

STARTING UP YOUR OWN GROUP/ACTIVITY/EVENT

Finding people to help me; even a superhero couldn't run things on their own! Hopefully you will know one or two people who can help you, but the chances are you will probably need to recruit more volunteers. Think about the skills you already have and what extra ones you might need. You will also need to think about:

- Drafting and agreeing a constitution
- Setting up a bank account
- Insurance
- Policies and guidelines
- Food safety

You will need to make sure that you are following the law and not doing anything unsafe but don't panic, this is actually very easy and straightforward and W3RT CVS & Neighbours Together teams can support you.

JOIN AN EXISTING GROUP

Look for groups doing something similar to your idea on W3RT CVS Voluntary Sector Directory or talk to the Neighbours Together team.

CHOOSE A VENUE

When looking at a venue there are a few things you will need to consider.

- How much is the rent, does it include public liability insurance, and will it be higher during winter to cover heating bills?
- Is there easy access for wheelchairs/people using mobility aids? Is there a disabled toilet?
- Facilities: Will you have use of the kitchen? How many tables and chairs are there?
- Location: Is the venue easy to get to by public transport? Is there enough parking?

WR3T venues can help you if you need a venue in the centre of Watford or Holywell area.

CHOOSE THE DAY AND THE TIME.

Consider what else is happening in the local area. Many people are disappointed because two social clubs fall on the same day and they are forced to choose between them. To allow for people's parenting or caring responsibilities, start after 10:30am and it is best to finish no later than 4pm as it will be dark by this time in the winter.

FUNDING

Some funders offer small grants for new projects and you will need to explain why your project is worth backing. Before applying, think about:

- who will benefit from your project; what will change because of your project;
- why your organisation is best placed to deliver the project;
- what you will need to run the project and how you will measure the success of the project.

MAKE PEOPLE FEEL WELCOME.

The most important thing you can do is to make people feel welcome! Think about the details – they will make a big difference.

Don't forget – W3RT can help with all of these things!

**Contact neighbourstogether@wrt.org
or tel 01923 606447.**

FEEDBACK & SUMMARY

FEEDBACK

As mentioned, the Neighbours Together project is funded by the National Lottery and we need to measure the impact of the project. This is being measured by finding out the following information:

- Number of older people who are reporting that they
 - are engaging with people or have met new people.
 - are participating in new activities or pastimes.
 - are feeling less lonely or social isolated, or more socially engaged.
 - have more resilience or better coping strategies.
 - have improved wellbeing and mood.
- Number of conversations people are having about the *What's On* guide and the Neighbours Together project.
- Number of older people engaging with "Community Champions".
- Number of older people reporting they have found the *What's On* Guide useful or informative.
- Number of new community projects.

So, we would like you to help us as a "Community Champion" by providing us with regular feedback on the above.

The funding for the project and the *What's On* guide is reliant on us getting this information. It will also enable us to effectively support you and your community in developing new activities in your area.

SUMMARY

In summary a "Community Champion" will

- CONNECT with their neighbours and local community
- PROMOTE activities and inspire others to get involved and try something new
- ENABLE people to overcome barriers that may prevent them from being socially active
- DEVELOP new ideas to help combat loneliness

#CONNECT#PROMOTE#ENABLE#DEVELOP

If you need any further help or guidance please do not hesitate to contact the Neighbours Together team via email neighbourstogether@wrt.org or tel 01923 606447.

FURTHER READING

Neighbours Together “What’s” On guide
[What’s On Guide | W3RT \(mywellbeing.community\)](#)

Local formal volunteering opportunities
[Volunteers | W3RT \(mywellbeing.community\)](#)

National database of volunteering opportunities
[Do IT | Connecting people to do good things](#)

Campaign to End Loneliness has loads of resources around
how to identify loneliness and research around the affects
[Home | Campaign to End Loneliness](#)

Loneliness: Conceptual review
<https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/loneliness-conceptual-review/>

A brief guide to measuring loneliness
<https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/brief-guide-to-measuring-loneliness/>

How social prescribing can best treat loneliness
<https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/health-and-social-care/fulfilling-the-promise-social-prescribing-and-loneliness.pdf>

Network of organisations which want to enable
people to live longer better
[LIVE LONGER BETTER – Home](#)

The Centre for Ageing Better vision is a society where
everyone enjoys later life.
[Centre for Ageing Better | Action today for all
our tomorrows \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](#)

Mental health support.
www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/
www.time-to-change.org.uk/mental-health-and-stigma/help-and-support

Questions to build closeness and establish reciprocal
relationships in a structured way.
[36 Questions for Increasing Closeness |
Practice | Greater Good in Action \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

Befriending Networks
[Befriending Networks — Befriending Networks](#)

ONS, measuring loneliness during the pandemic
[Mapping loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic
– Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

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www.facebook.com/MyWellbeing.W3RT

www.twitter.com/Watford3RT



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