

## SIAA Response

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### **A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections**

April 2018

SIAA is a membership organisation that has the overall aim of ensuring that Independent Advocacy is available to any vulnerable person in Scotland. Independent Advocacy safeguards people who are vulnerable and discriminated against or whom services find difficult to serve, empowering people who need a stronger voice by enabling them to express their own needs and make their own decisions.

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to tackle social isolation and loneliness and build stronger connections.

We believe that in order for these issues to be successfully tackled, the Scottish Government needs to apply a human rights and equalities lens, ensuring that it tackles social isolation and loneliness as the cross-sector, cross-generational issue that it is. It is important to recognise that the causes of social isolation and loneliness may differ between equality groups.

It is essential that the Scottish Government focuses on challenging stigmas, tackling multiple inequalities and fully engaging with those with lived experience. Social isolation and loneliness are heavily linked with poverty, ill health and protected characteristics. It is vital that we challenge and tackle the root causes as opposed to treating the symptoms.

It is important to note that a range of public policy areas have a part to play in ensuring that where we live and work is more connected and less isolated. These include housing, health, transport, education, planning and economic development. It is essential that the Scottish Government aims to tackle social isolation and loneliness by feeding into and connecting strategies such as child poverty, alcohol, suicide prevention and mental health. In addition, it is vital that when making strategic decisions, there should be a duty by all involved to aim to tackle these issues.

It is essential that the Scottish Government approaches this strategy through a human rights and equalities lens, working in collaboration with third sector organisations and people themselves in order to grasp the full picture and ensure people's voices are heard. A human rights-based approach should underpin this strategy. It is essential that the Scottish Government fully encourages and undertakes public participation, consulting with communities about strategies prior to implementation. Co-production is a vital tool which should be utilised in this strategy.

It is important to identify and reach out to communities, groups and organisations that have not already been approached while maintaining strong relationships with those that have been contacted.

We welcome the broad scope of organisations that have been consulted. However we would stress the importance of ensuring equality groups are adequately and effectively consulted.

Across Scotland, there are many pockets of good practice. Some examples include;

- **Ceartas Creative Writing Group:**  
Creative writing is an empowering and liberating tool which can have a profound impact on health and well-being. Creative writing can help people feel better about themselves; feel less isolated and more connected with others; improve confidence and self-esteem; reduce stress levels and relieve anxiety; and, very importantly, give people a voice to say what they want to say in a safe and creative way. Ceartas is all about ensuring people have a voice and that those voices are heard.
- **The Food Train Project:** a grocery shopping, befriending and household support service for older people assisting and enabling them to live at home independently for as long as they are able. Due to funding, this service has now been cut, highlighting the need for a sustainable funding strategy.
- **Collective Advocacy** has a strong role in tackling stigma and bringing people together for a common cause. One of our members, **Ceartas** have done lots of work on engaging with hard to reach groups, such as their 'Get On Side' project which combined information about Self-Directed Support, decision making and advocacy with football. This project is now delivered through local football clubs around Scotland, helping people to 'live a good life'.
- **Local libraries** have a central focus on connecting communities, especially when integrated into other services. For example, those placed within local councils tend to be successful due to the fact that people can access a range of services all in one place.

We believe that the third sector and social enterprise already play a huge role in tackling social isolation and loneliness amongst other issues. We believe that long-term, adequate and sustainable funding would support the third sector and social enterprise to deliver projects to fully tackle these issues, plan for the future and better retain staff and volunteers.

In addition, it is essential that the Scottish Government consults with third sector organisations, social enterprise and members of the public in order to better understand the needs of individuals and communities.

There is much evidence to show that the DWP limits the amount of volunteering that benefit claimants can undertake. The [advocacy map](#) that SIAA produced in 2016 shows that volunteer numbers have reduced. As a result, we believe that the placing of limits and sanctions on claimant volunteers should be removed.

Volunteering has a multitude of benefits to individuals, the organisations and communities they support and wider society – reducing social isolation and loneliness is one of a number of advantages. We should be focusing on celebrating volunteers.

We believe that the emphasis for children and young people should be on overall wellbeing – teaching skills that help children live healthy lives both physically and mentally. There should also be a focus on resilience in the early years, helping them develop skills that equip them to tackle challenges. We believe that the curriculum needs to be developed and adapted to measure happiness and wellbeing levels as opposed to only academic attainment.

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The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) is Scotland's national membership body for advocacy organisations.

The SIAA promotes, supports and defends independent advocacy in Scotland. It aims to ensure that independent advocacy is available to any person who needs it in Scotland.

SIAA is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation Charity number SC033576

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