

'CONTACT' BLAMES SOCIAL SERVICES FOR IGNORING LONELINESS

by Trevor Lyttleton
(Chairman of "Contact")

LONELINESS is bad enough at the best of times. For those who are also old and disabled it is particularly distressing. All too many pensioners live alone and three-quarters of a million are completely housebound (1971 Census figures).

But how do we find the really needy cases? This is the biggest problem confronting the voluntary and welfare services at the present time.

With only one full-time paid employee and almost 1,400 volunteers throughout the country, *Contact* has to rely on Local Authority Social Services Departments and certain voluntary agencies to refer lonely old people for our young volunteers to take out on monthly Sunday car outings.

Unfortunately the old people referred to us are all too often already benefiting from other services such as "Day Centre" facilities, "Meals-on-Wheels" and Home-help visits.

When this happens, volunteers are justified in feeling discouraged if they discover that they are not really being asked to help those who are in the greatest need, ie old people who are neglected, housebound and unvisited by friends or family.

In our experience — with certain impressive exceptions — Local Authority Social Services Departments are not doing enough to remedy the situation. All too often their officials are content to play "the numbers game", reporting proudly to their respective Councils each year on the number of outings, the number who went to Christmas parties, the number of "Meals-on-Wheels" served and the number of attendances at the local Day Centre. This not only tells half the story; it misses the point entirely. This is because very often it is the same people who enjoy these facilities!

No referrals

Meanwhile, the Social Services do precious little digging below the "shouting line" in their respective areas. More spade work is required to seek out those whose needs cry out for attention whilst their voices are never heard.

For example, *Contact* asked a London Borough for a list of 12 lonely old people with a view to setting up our first *Contact* group in that area. Notwithstanding that over 6,000 old

people live alone in the Borough, it took *three months* for us to receive the first list of 12 names. Furthermore, it took another six months for the second list to arrive and, when it did, it included half the names already on the first list.

Although we receive excellent co-operation from several Social Services Departments, there are some who simply do not reply to our requests to help set up *Contact* groups in their Town or Borough. One such department even went so far as to offer a *grant* without being prepared to help by making referrals of old people. The machinery simply did not exist, with the result that we had to go ahead by taking out old people from the neighbouring Borough with the grant received from the first!

The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act has caused many Councils to initiate a survey into the needs of all the disabled and old people living in their area. The Act should have made it mandatory that every Council should publish, by a specified date, the results of their findings and — what is more important — indicate what action they had taken and what further resources were required to remedy the defects revealed by the survey.

It is simply not enough for local Social Services Departments to say: "We do not need *Contact* here because we have several organisations helping the old and lonely already" without first answering the question: "How many old people are you helping in relation to the total number in need in your area?"

I do not believe that anyone has a complete answer to the enormous problem of getting at the lonely, old people who are in greatest need. The best we can do is to create "a caring society" in which all of us — children and parents alike — are educated to become curious about the possible plight of "poor old Mrs Jones living in the attic at the top of the stairs", to be interested enough to make sure that she has enough to eat, to call in for a chat and, if possible, to take her out from time to time.

This is the spirit that *Contact* hopes

to infuse into the many volunteers and hostesses who are joining our team throughout Britain and Australia.

We hope to achieve this by (1) creating awareness, (2) enabling our helpers to see the immediate results of their efforts and (3) showing them how much a small contribution of their time can mean to an old person with only the *Contact* outing to look forward to, marked by an isolated cross on an empty calendar.

All too often those doing social or voluntary work seem to believe that an encroachment from without reflects criticism of what is being done within. A more constructive, outward-looking approach is needed from local authorities and voluntary organisations alike.

Expansion

Not only is there room for all of us and many more, but more creative and imaginative thinking is required combined with the will to expand further by doubling and quadrupling all our efforts.

For example, although since 1965 *Contact* has grown from 12 volunteers to nearly 1,400, we know that we could expand at the same rate for the next 20 years without fulfilling the needs of Central London alone!

Let us all — Social Services Departments, voluntary bodies, charities and individuals — remember that we are all merely scratching the surface of an enormous problem. Let us be positive and work together everywhere to destroy the outmoded concepts and negative attitudes that have done so much to bury the real problems beneath the carpet. If we harness our enormous voluntary resources (which, by the way, are as precious to this country as our reserves of North Sea Oil!); if we draw on the reserves of energy and goodwill of all those who have contributed and can contribute so much more to the voluntary movement in this country; if we face the facts squarely, intelligently and constructively without pretending that what is being done is anything like enough — we can make a giant leap forward in the right direction.

Contact is based at 15 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8QH: 01-240 0630.



contact



ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS

1973

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING : 6th DECEMBER, 1973

Remember the forgotten people

Behind the fun lies a serious purpose: *to remember the forgotten people.* **CONTACT**, with the co-operation of local authorities and professional welfare workers, establishes a link with old people living alone, who have neither friends nor relations to visit them.

It is our job to see that they are remembered and that these personal links, once established, are maintained.

CONTACT is divided into independent groups, each consisting of 12 old people (who all come from the same area) and 12 volunteers (6 drivers with their own cars and 6 passenger helpers). We need one volunteer for each old person, to help with getting in and out of cars etc. and to create a personal link between each volunteer and old person.

On one Sunday afternoon every month the 12 volunteers collect the same old people and drive out to tea to the home of a host or hostess. To avoid tiring the old people, the outing seldom lasts longer than 3 or 4 hours, including the journey there and back. The volunteers take out the same old people each month, so that contact is continually renewed and personal friendships are established – not only between old and young but also between the lonely old people from the same area.

We have only one rule in **CONTACT** -

We never let down our old people

Help contact make contact

New **CONTACT** groups are being formed every month – but we are still only scratching the surface of a vast problem (one London Borough alone has over 6,000 lonely, old people). If you would like to be a volunteer driver or passenger helper, *but only if you are prepared to give continuing help*, please come along to our next Recruitment Evening. Although it is not essential for potential hosts or hostesses to attend, any who wish to do so are, of course, most welcome.

contact needs

Volunteers

Drivers (with their own cars) and passenger helpers to take out our old people on one Sunday afternoon a month

Organisers

to set up **CONTACT** groups in other towns and cities

Hosts/Hostesses

within 1½ hours drive of our old people to entertain **CONTACT** groups to tea on a Sunday afternoon once or twice a year

Finance

to support our expansion

If you can help in any of these ways please contact our Answering Service: (01) 486 4808 (24 hours) or write to:

The Secretary
CONTACT
8 Curzon Lodge
Curzon Place
London W1

CONTACT



Have fun helping old people