

An Intergenerational Alternative to Lonely Living

Art and Science of Aging Conference
February 17, 2017

Joan Borst, PhD, LMSW

Sally Pelon, PhD, LMSW

GVSU School of Social Work

BLUE ZONES



Blue Zone Principles

Move Naturally

Belong to a Group

Purpose in Life

Spirituality

Diet

Beuttner, 2008

Research (Steptoe et al., 2012) states:

- Social relationships are central to human well-being.
- Relationships are critically involved in the maintenance of health.
- Social isolation is an objective and quantifiable reflection of a reduced social network.
- At older ages, decreasing economic resources, mobility impairment and the death of contemporaries conspire to limit.
- Socially isolated individuals are at increased risk for the development of cardiovascular disease, infectious illness, cognitive deterioration, and mortality.
- Loneliness itself has been linked with increased risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality, elevated blood pressure and cortisol and heightened inflammatory responses to stress.

“Loneliness often is regarded as the psychological embodiment of social isolation, reflecting the individual’s experienced dissatisfaction with the frequency and closeness of their social contacts or the discrepancy between the relationships they have and the relationships they would like to have”. Steptoe, et al., 2012



Loneliness and Mortality

Social isolation and loneliness associated
with a higher risk of mortality in adults aged
52 and older

Steptoe et al., 2012

Loneliness and Health

Seniors who feel lonely and isolated are more likely to report having poor physical and/or mental health

NSHAP, 2009

Loneliness and Cognitive Decline

Feelings of loneliness are linked to poor cognitive performance and quicker cognitive decline

NSHAP, 2009

Loneliness and Depression

Feeling loneliness is associated with more depressive symptoms in both middle-aged and older adults

Andrews & Sanders, 2010

Loneliness

Living in a facility affords social exposure, yet does not guarantee access to close relationships, so that loneliness may be a result.

Gerontology literature has suggested that loneliness in late life may be a risk factor for serious mental health concerns such as depression.

Resource: Andrews & Sanders, 2010

Loneliness and Health Habits

Socially isolated or lonely more likely to report risky health behaviors such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, and smoking

ELSA, 2011

How can we reduce loneliness
and isolation in seniors?

Success comes from interdependence

Though we idealize independence, the reality is that family, neighborhoods, community, services and networks are the foundation underlying individual success at every age — including healthier, dignified and economical aging.

Here are some examples:

Resource: Next Avenue

Netherlands

Humanitas Retirement Home, Deventer, Netherlands

6 students from two universities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZgGb4p0xo0>



Cleveland, Ohio

Judson Manor, Cleveland, Ohio

Students from Cleveland institute of Music



Grand Rapids, Michigan

Clark Retirement Community

3 WMU students as part of a longitudinal study



New York, New York

‘Home Stay’ program

NYU students live in spare rooms of local senior citizens



Benefits for the Elderly

- ✓ Decreased loneliness and social isolation
- ✓ Health benefits: Fights dementia, regulates blood pressure, improves sleep, fights depression
- ✓ Skill development
- ✓ Opportunity to teach skills: purpose



Cacciopo et al., 2010; Hawkley et al., 2010

Benefits for College Students

- ✓ Less debt
- ✓ Increased knowledge of older adults/aging
- ✓ Decreased social isolation
- ✓ Opportunity to teach and learn skills



QUESTIONS?