



ISPA
Intersectional Stigma
of Place-based Ageing



Connecting through badges, sticks, and ticks.

Loneliness Awareness Week

2026

In Partnership with



Blog: Connecting through badges, sticks, and ticks.

LIZ RICHARDSON



Figure 1 Liz Richardson, ISPA CPR

The 15th of June saw the start of [Loneliness Awareness Week](#). Anyone can be affected by loneliness at any time in their life, but the stigma which surrounds it makes it difficult for people to talk about openly. Between 2014-2023 the WHO estimated that 16% of the population were affected by loneliness (WHO, 2025). Research shows that everyday encounters with neighbours, acquaintances and strangers can lead to improved wellbeing and support connection (Sandstrom and Dunn, 2014; Schroeder et al. 2021).

This year we heard from Liz Richardson, ISPA Community Peer Researcher, and one of the founders of the Highland Inclusive Living Group. Liz talks about how she connects with the world around her through badges, sticks, and ticks amongst other things.

Connecting through Sticks & Ticks

When I first moved here, I would say hello to everybody, and I wouldn't get a response. They'd look down at the ground and keep going. Then I got my Urban Poling walking sticks, they're so great, they're my connection to the world. Without my sticks, I can't go anywhere – they keep me vertical. I tend to walk fast, because when I walk too slow, I lose my balance. Since getting my sticks, what was peculiar was, I started getting stopped by people on the street. I would pass the usual people and get a comment like, "wow, you know, you're really going like the clappers with those sticks" - and that was the introduction.



Figure 2 Urban Poling Walking Sticks with Side Grip

People assumed I had arthritis and I'd say, "no, it's Lyme disease". And all of a sudden... I'd have stood for an hour talking with someone about ticks. I'd get backpackers passing me saying, "I like your poles". And I'd say, "oh, well, I'm not a hill walker anymore. I use these because I've got Lyme disease. By the way, are you hill walking, and do you have a tick remover?" and the conversation continues.

Be Bold – Bag a Badge



I also have a rucksack that has a 'housing is a human right' badge on the front of it. One time, all of a sudden, I heard, "well, that's not true". She was looking right at me challenging me - The United Nations codifies this principle in Article 25 of the 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), - so housing IS a human right. Well, we had to agree to disagree on that one. I think people just need an excuse to talk and if a prompt on my bag gets them saying something, all the better.

How's your holiday going so far?

My accent is another way to connect. If go to a hotel here and they don't know me, they assume I'm a tourist, and in the supermarkets, I get asked how's your holiday going so far? If someone hears me talking, and it'd be a complete stranger, they'll say, "are you from Canada or America?" And when you say you're from America, ah, I've been to California, or I've got a niece that's in New York, and it just starts...

Taking a Seat

The bus is interesting too because I see the person sitting on their own looking out the window and I purposely sit next to them. Then they look up and I'll start talking. Look at the view, it's a disruptor, and they have to deal with me. The bus station benches are a great opportunity for chat. All these interactions open up a whole, totally different conversation from the last, but it's always a connection, a way of bonding that's made me feel more connected to my community.

Some Final Thoughts

Be disruptive. Make the first move. Compliment something that someone has...something they're wearing, their bit of tech, their dog. I think a lot of people are dying to talk to somebody, but they're so shy of being either rejected or...they just, don't know how people will react. If that sounds too scary, put something on - a badge, a pair of sticks – something that gives people an excuse to strike up a conversation.

About the Group

The Highland Inclusive Living Group launched in September 2026 and is a collective of older people, disabled people, and carers across the Highlands of Scotland. Emerging from the Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) project, it exists to ensure that people with direct experience of ageing and disability shape the housing, care, and community policies that affect their lives, in line with the social model of disability.

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Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project

The ISPA project is an ambitious 5-year participatory mixed method study that will explore and understand how the stigma attached to where people live can intersect with experiences of disability and ageing. This will provide nuanced insights into the structures and systems that drive exclusion and allow us to tackle the inequalities experienced by older disabled adults. Do visit <https://www.youtube.com/@ispaproject> for an audio and visual overview.

We aim to develop interventions related to home and environmental modifications that encourage interventions for inclusive approaches within housing, health and social care delivery. This in turn supports people to age well within homes and communities across England, Scotland, and Wales. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Ref: ES/W012677/1) and runs from September 2022 to September 2027.

The Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project is a collaboration between the University of Stirling and the University of St Andrews, Newcastle University and University of Bristol. We are also partnered with the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA).



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