

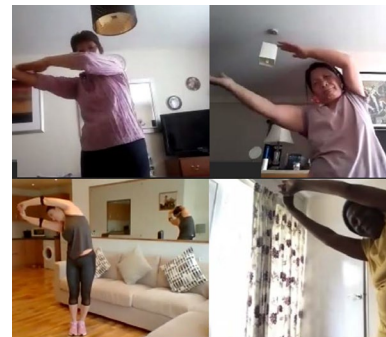


# Isolation and loneliness among over 55s during Covid-19

February 2021



**C&C**  
LONDON HOMES  
SINCE 1926





“I used to go to art galleries but having not been able to, I try not to let my thoughts get away from me. It’s nice to actually speak to someone about this.”

C&C Resident  
(Isolation & Loneliness Survey)

## Foreword

C&C residents are among the most vulnerable people during this pandemic; mostly aged over 55 and living alone, and often with health conditions. From speaking with a large cross-section of residents on the theme of isolation and loneliness, it is apparent that a significant number – higher than other recent adult studies – are feeling the mental health impacts of this crisis.

Others have learned new coping strategies to manage or even avoid feelings of loneliness and isolation and their experiences are invaluable to others.

I am proud of both our residents and my colleagues who have worked incredibly hard to keep themselves and everyone else safe and well during the pandemic. The C&C team has shown creativity and determination to help as many people as possible to stay safe, engaged and connected, regularly checking in on our most vulnerable residents and going above and beyond, for example by supporting weekly shopping and medical supplies.

We have received phenomenal support from our local authority partners, local community groups such as Primrose Hill Community Group, and other charitable organisations such as the Felix Project and AGE UK. These relationships are highly important to us and we want to build and grow our joint work so that we can do more.

It is clear that our residents are good neighbours, and want to get involved and help others, particularly those who are regularly feeling lonely/isolated.

Our aim is for our residents to have a happy and fulfilled life that is connected, stimulated and safe – during this pandemic and beyond. It is vital that we redouble our efforts through development of our partnership working to fulfil our goals and urge anyone who wants to support our efforts to get in touch.

*Julia Ashley*



Julia Ashley  
Chief executive



# Isolation & loneliness among over 55s during Covid-19

## Attitudes and coping strategies of Central & Cecil housing residents

### Executive Summary

Feelings of isolation and/or loneliness can have many causes and symptoms especially over a prolonged period. The NHS reports that being alone and vulnerable can lead to depression and a serious decline in physical health and wellbeing.

With this in mind, we wanted to discover how our residents had been dealing with isolation and loneliness during the past year, and we conducted telephone interviews with many living in our housing schemes. This report illustrates what they told us. We hope it will inspire potential new partners to help; act as a point of reference for those interested in the pandemic's impact on the over-55s; and most of all, help our residents keep connected and manage these feelings.

### Our findings

1. Many of our residents were **copied admirably through the pandemic** by staying connected with friends and family, going out for a walk or taking up a new activity or hobby.
2. However, more than a third had **experienced feelings of being isolated or lonely** at least once a month since the start of the pandemic. **And 12.2% experienced this daily or weekly.**
3. Residents have shared **advice to others to help feel safe, connected and engaged.**
4. **Residents have valued the many ways that C&C continue to offer opportunities to connect including** through wellbeing check-ins, virtual fitness classes, arts activities and volunteering initiatives.

## Contact details

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# Key takeaways

## For residents

While feelings of loneliness and isolation can be challenging at this time, you are not alone. Your fellow residents have given some helpful advice.

<p>Take a walk and/or regular exercise everyday if you are able</p> 	<p>Get online if you can – and join one of C&amp;C's regular online classes</p> 
<p>Read, listen to music and try a new activity or hobby</p> 	<p>Speak with friends and family by telephone or online</p>  

## For funders and partners

We continue to do everything possible to support our residents during this time.

**We are urgently seeking additional support and funding** to further aid our most vulnerable residents to overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation. In particular, we are seeking support to better realise both C&C's and the Government's aim for Digital Inclusion.

Here are some of the ways organisations and funders could support us:

- Talk with us about funding a trial of our virtual housing service proposal which could help us to support more people for a reasonable cost
- Donate tablets to help our residents get online
- Help residents to access free digital skills training programmes
- Assist us to develop and grow our existing free online arts, fitness and healthy living classes
- Provide group telephone or online chat support
- Provide voluntary personal contact with residents on an ongoing basis.

We are open to any other practical suggestions to help our most vulnerable residents in managing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

# Background – previous studies

The Government's 'Strategy for Tackling Loneliness' report agrees with the NHS' findings in noting that serious harm and even early deaths could occur to those regularly experiencing loneliness, linking its impact to that of obesity and smoking.

In both April and November 2020, the Mental Health Foundation reported that one in four (24%/25%) adults stated they had feelings of loneliness in the 'previous two weeks'.

The ONS' loneliness survey found an increase in those who reported being 'always or often lonely' from 5% (April 2020) to 8% (November 2020).

AGE UK's 2018 research points to a number of specific factors which can increase the likelihood and frequency of feelings of loneliness and isolation. These include living alone or being in poor health.

There are several current logistical and environmental barriers to supporting people to manage feelings of loneliness and isolation as they age.

## As a result, we conducted this survey to:

1. Give our residents a voice.
2. Enable residents to share their own practical experiences and guidance to others on coping with loneliness and isolation.
3. Share our findings with local councils, charities and other organisations to provide a platform for galvanising support.

## Definitions of isolation and loneliness

**Isolation** (whether enforced or voluntary) is about not seeing or having interaction with others – for example social isolation could be where someone feels as though they may not fit in with others around them.

**Loneliness** is an emotional state, defined as feeling alone, separate from others, or empty.

“Covid-19 has made it so hard to connect to people. I’ve been stuck in for months.”

C&C Resident  
(Isolation and Loneliness Survey)

## Our findings

In December 2020, C&C employees discussed isolation and loneliness with 250 of our residents, mainly aged 55 and over. The majority of these (192) were based in sheltered housing spread across London, with the remainder (58) living in our general needs (street) properties.

250 residents  
took part in our survey

### Feelings of loneliness and isolation

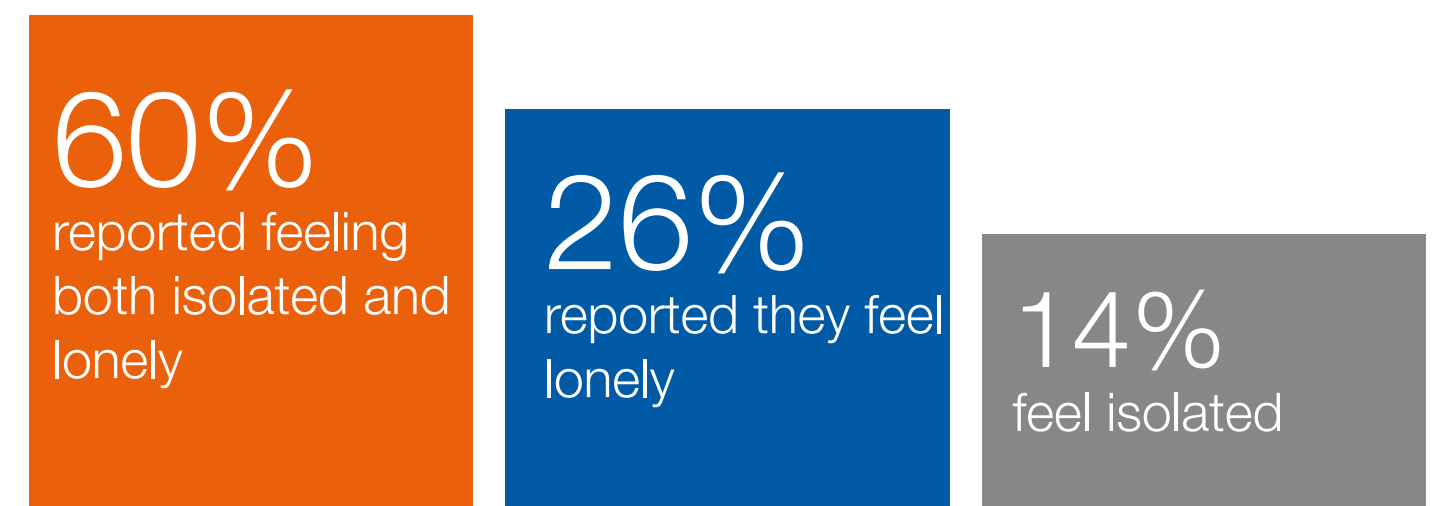
Prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK (March 2020), 29% of residents said they had felt lonely and/or isolated at least once in their lives.

29%  
of residents reported being  
lonely or isolated prior to  
Covid-19

### Covid-19 sees increase

The impact of Covid-19 affected a further 9% of residents, who have experienced loneliness and/or isolation for the first time during the pandemic. 38% now feel lonely and/or isolated at least once a month (43% from our general needs properties and 36% from sheltered schemes).

### Breakdown of loneliness and isolation\*



\* of those residents reporting these feelings

The restrictions associated with the pandemic have also meant that 72% of these residents stated that these feelings had worsened since March 2020.

# Above national averages

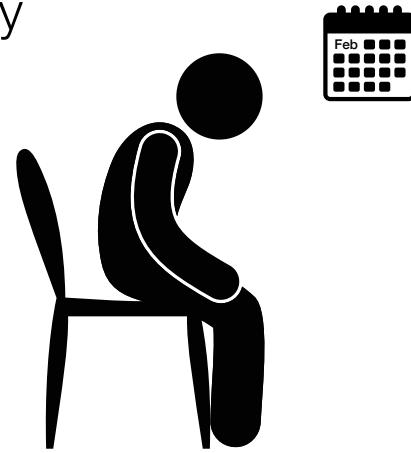
68% of those affected said their feelings of loneliness or isolation occurred one or more times a month. For 24%, these feelings occurred one or more times a week and 8% said that these feelings occurred on a daily basis.

Based on these numbers, this means around 12% or 1 in 8 of all residents feel lonely and/or isolated all the time or regularly.

The Mental Health Foundation's 2020 study cited 25% of adults feeling lonely at least once 'in the past two weeks'. The ONS' most recent (November 2020) study of adults always/regularly feeling lonely (8%). Our findings are significantly higher.

This is cause for us to seek to do even more to help residents – and for residents to help each other.

1 in 8 residents regularly feel lonely



## Profile of sheltered/supported housing residents

91% of residents surveyed live alone. All live in affordable accommodation – often studio flats – with the vast majority receiving little or no income outside of pension(s) and/or state benefits. In addition, 57% of those surveyed have a long-term health condition.

Our residents are already far more likely to experience loneliness and/or isolation and as our research has shown, Covid-19 has compounded this.

According to AGE UK (All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life, 2018), there are several factors which are far more likely to exacerbate feelings of loneliness. For example, people aged 50 or over are:

91% of residents live alone

- 5.2 times more likely to be often lonely if they are widowed
- 3.7 times more likely to be often lonely if they are in poor health
- 1.6 times more likely to be often lonely if they live alone

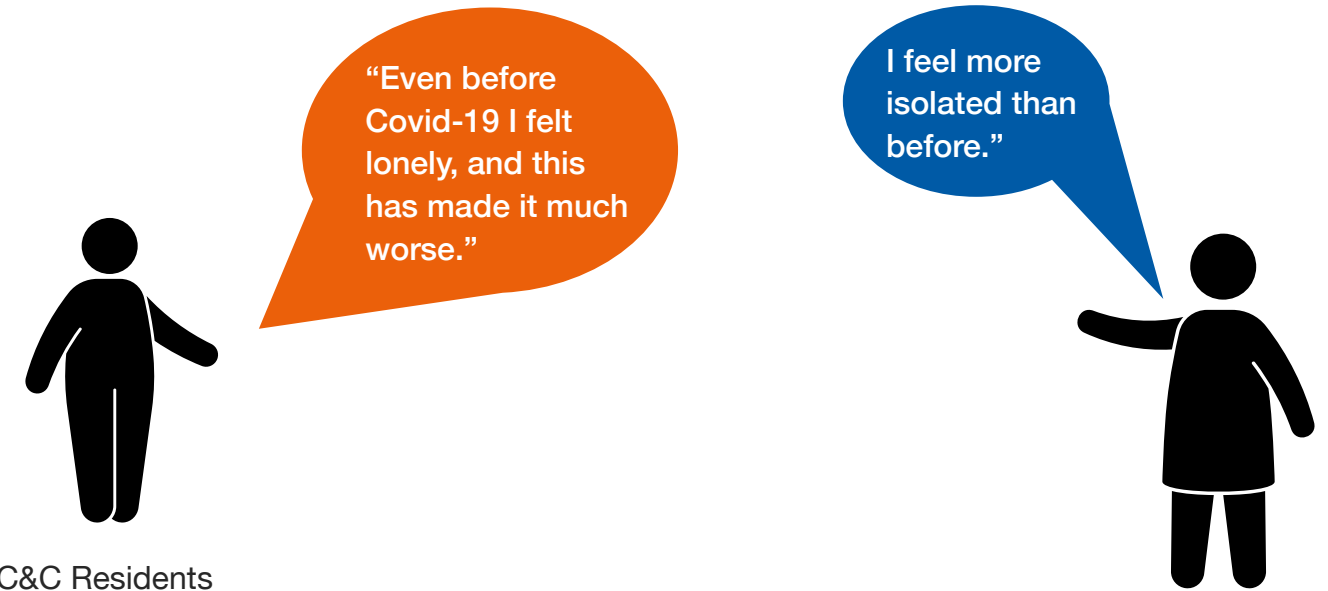


# What our residents told us

"I experienced loneliness at the very beginning of lockdown, because I am by nature very sociable, and not being with people is very tough. But then I found something to do, and that saved me from loneliness."

Myriam,  
Edna House resident

To watch Myriam's full interview visit: [ccht.org.uk/winter-watch](https://ccht.org.uk/winter-watch)



C&C Residents  
(Isolation and Loneliness Survey)



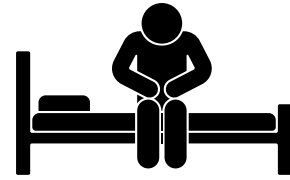


# Emotional impact

For those residents reporting feelings of loneliness and isolation since the pandemic, the biggest impacts have been emotional.

Some residents reported growing feelings of boredom from restrictions on going out and not being able to host friends at their homes. For others, these feelings were around difficulties in concentrating and motivating themselves.

For a smaller number, the impact has grown deeper, with, for example, residents reporting increased anxiety, depression and/or difficulties sleeping.



“I find I don’t sleep well at night as I do worry.”

“I am getting used to it, that is a sad thing to say but you do get used to it. There isn’t much I can do about it.”



“I feel lonelier and I’m prone to crying more often.”

## Help from other residents

62% of surveyed residents reported no feelings of loneliness or isolation – and many are happy to help others where they can.

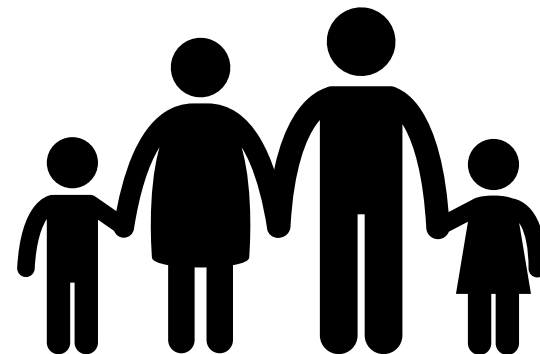
Health and shielding permitting, many residents were able to get about for shopping or exercise as required.

## Coping strategies

Unsurprisingly, when asked how they best manage feelings of isolation and loneliness, 58% of residents thought about their nearest and dearest. Speaking to family and friends was the most popular way that residents dealt with negative feelings.

The second most popular coping strategy (50%) was turn to nature and regularly go out and about for a local walk, connecting more closely with the world around them.

**58%**  
of residents said they cope with their isolation and loneliness by speaking to friends or family





## Advice to others



“There are great opportunities right now to see all this amazing stuff you’ve never seen before. Instead of fast walking, slow it down and take the time to really look at things. It’s exploring. It’s all about exploring.”

**Robin,**  
Edna House resident

To watch Robin’s full interview visit: [ccht.org.uk/winter-watch](https://ccht.org.uk/winter-watch)

When residents were asked to share advice to **other people** on managing isolation and loneliness, speaking to family and friends and getting out for a walk were again popular results.

But a high number of residents (55%) suggested taking up hobbies, joining activities or something similar, having or developing a personal passion to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation.

It’s interesting to note that this advice was shared most often by those residents who were not experiencing significant feelings of loneliness and isolation.

From puzzles, jazz piano and online yoga to knitting, using helplines such as the Samaritans and talking to God, there were many varied ways that residents believed others could benefit when feeling lonely and/or isolated.

“When you have a friend you communicate, are on the same wavelength and that will count a lot when it comes to combatting loneliness.”

58%

of all residents said they recommend speaking to a friend or family member to manage isolation and loneliness



55%

Join a local activity, starting a new hobby, or similar



43%

Go out and about (walking)



27%

Connect with people who may feel similar



12%

Volunteer



## Staying social

C&C strives to play its own part in supporting residents. Prior to the pandemic, C&C enjoyed a number of long-standing partnerships with arts, culture and age-specific organisations, but sadly many of these partnerships are on hold. Since March 2020, we’ve been fortunate to work in partnership with: Age UK, the Royal Albert Hall, InCommon, The Old Vic, The British Museum, The Barbican and Good Gym on a limited number of smaller projects. We’ve also had support from Flourishing Lives, Penfold Community Hub, Camden People’s Theatre and Golden Years.

While the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on C&C’s ability to run its own programme of face-to-face activities, we have set up and maintained an online programme of fitness, arts

and music. This has been alongside a limited number of outdoor activities as and when the restrictions and the weather has allowed.

76% of survey respondents agreed that C&C offered them opportunities to socialise with each other before Covid-19. The majority of these activities were offered to sheltered scheme residents, and this was reflected in the results.

22% said that they did not feel comfortable in attending social activities even before Covid-19.

Of these, 24% cited a health condition as the major reason for not socialising.

## A new hobby

“Since the Covid-19 pandemic started, I have learnt to cook. I could only cook eggs previously and I think I have now become quite a good chef!

“Before the lockdown we used to have an exercise class run by a gentleman called Chuk, who now runs it on Zoom with us every week. This helps because I can maintain my body through exercise, and it also helps my mind. I think that has helped me a lot, to be honest with you.”

**Salim,**  
Ada Court resident

To watch Salim’s full interview visit: [ccht.org.uk/winter-watch](https://ccht.org.uk/winter-watch)





# Striving for digital inclusion

According to the Local Government Association, digital exclusion is a key driver of social isolation. It was therefore encouraging to find 60% of residents using the internet regularly.

C&C ran 79 online classes between April 2020 and December 2020, along with 75 'safe' outdoor fitness classes (when restrictions permitted) – attracting over 700 attendees in total. We also started virtual resident assemblies and launched a regular activity e-newsletter, which has seen readership more than double to almost 450 subscribers.

C&C also donated over 130 tablets during the pandemic to our most vulnerable residents to help them stay connected online. We are also following up directly with those residents who reported not being able to join in activities due to health reasons.

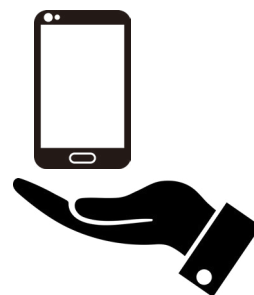
New technology solutions have helped bring residents increased safety and wellbeing.

We would like to do a lot more with technology, as set out in our 'Digital C&C Strategy'. We have a vision to develop 'virtual sheltered housing services' so that we can help more people in our communities.

Extra financial support would allow us to achieve our ambition, for example, of providing greater connectivity and giving vulnerable residents more freedom and confidence.

We would like to hear from organisations who may be able to assist with offering free IT training to support our residents to get online.

**130+ tablets**  
given to residents for free to help them stay connected online at the start of the pandemic



"I think having meetings and groups online are good. It's hard at the moment being stuck in with the cold and social distancing."

"The activity newsletter helps me to stay connected."

**79** virtual activities hosted over Zoom



# Recommendations and next steps

## Support from local partners

We are passionate about our residents having a good and healthy life. Social isolation and loneliness are real barriers to achieving this and impact greatly.

Please get in touch with us to discuss ways to get involved with our mission to beat social isolation and loneliness and help us to provide additional and new services:

[getinvolved@ccht.org.uk](mailto:getinvolved@ccht.org.uk)

## A second survey

We will be looking to conduct a follow up survey in the medium-term future to better understand long-term trends.

## About C&C

C&C is a housing association that provides safe and affordable homes for people aged 55 and over in London. We use our own funds and income that has been fundraised to provide a diverse and active arts and events programme for the benefit of all our residents.



## Who to contact for more information or partner/support?

If you would like advice, guidance, or recommendations of where to find more information for dealing with loneliness and isolation, go to:

[ccht.org.uk/winter-watch](http://ccht.org.uk/winter-watch)

[getinvolved@ccht.org.uk](mailto:getinvolved@ccht.org.uk)

For more details on our current activities, visit

[ccht.org.uk/for-residents/activity-and-events-calendar/](http://ccht.org.uk/for-residents/activity-and-events-calendar/)

## Social media links

[facebook.com/Central.Cecil](https://facebook.com/Central.Cecil)

[twitter.com/Central\\_Cecil](https://twitter.com/Central_Cecil)

[linkedin.com/company/central-&-cecil/](https://linkedin.com/company/central-&-cecil/)





# Acknowledgements

This report was made possible thanks to the support and advice given by many individuals and organisations.

Firstly, we are grateful to our wonderful residents, some 250 of whom gave up their time to share their experiences of isolation and loneliness (representing approximately 1 in 6 of all C&C residents). In particular, we wish to thank Myriam Martinez, Salim Thobani and Robin Duff for talking to camera about how they manage these feelings – you can view their contributions on the [C&C Youtube channel](#).

We would also like to acknowledge our Service Scrutiny Panel, and in particular our resident panel members, for their work in highlighting the importance of better understanding these important issues.

We wish to thank those partners that have worked with us and supported us during the pandemic to date, to help our residents in a variety of ways. These are: Age UK, The Barbican, The British Museum, Camden People's Theatre, Flourishing Lives, Golden Years, GoodGym, InCommon, Neighbourhood Tales, The Old Vic, Penfold Community Hub, and the Royal Albert Hall. We have also worked closely with councils across the 17 local authorities that C&C currently operates in.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of C&C staff. Nearly 30 employees helped bring this report together, largely through conducting calls to residents about their experiences of isolation and loneliness. Andy Duke and Alexander Asrate-Denyer, two of our housing service officers, also took part in our filming. Most importantly, staff have been on hand to help residents in a variety of ways – be this to help with their shopping, running activities, or just being someone to talk to.

# References:

Age UK: All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life (September 2018) [loneliness-report.pdf \(ageuk.org.uk\)](#)

BBC: Lockdown loneliness reaches new levels (18 November 2020) [Lockdown loneliness reaches record levels - BBC News](#)

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: [A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness \(October 2018\)](#)

IFF: [Landlords are learning lessons from the Covid-19 lockdowns | IFF Research](#)

Local Government Association: Loneliness, social isolation and COVID-19 Practical advice (May 2020) [The Local Government Association \(LGA\) and Association of Directors of Public Health \(ADPH\) have jointly produced this practical advice for Directors of Public Health and others leading the response to the loneliness and social isolation issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Mental Health Foundation (2020) [Coronavirus: Mental Health in the Pandemic | Mental Health Foundation](#)

NHS: [Loneliness in Older People \(September 2018\)](#)

ONS Coronavirus and loneliness, Great Britain: 3 April to 3 May 2020 [Coronavirus and loneliness, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)



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