



Monday 5th March 2018
The Lion Hotel

Summary

o Introduction

There were 19 members of the Café Society group present at the meeting. Apologies had been received from Ken C. Thank you to Phil K for organising the drinks order. A summary of the meeting's discussions follows. Members agreed that the group is currently at maximum capacity and that no new members should be permitted to join.

Mike S

o Discussion Topics

How should we tackle the loneliness epidemic?

- A group member introduced the topic with some statistics regarding the cutbacks in adult education, bus provision and community services, pointing out that such cutbacks often increase cost demands further down the line (e.g. mental health services)
- Lack of provision for the elderly, particularly with respect to greater life-expectancy was highlighted as major problem of loneliness. It was also noted that the younger generations are not immune from loneliness either, in cases of anxiety, depression and suicide
- Community volunteering was recommended as good, practical way to combat loneliness, a worthwhile reason to get out of the house and a gateway to friendship and involvement
- Bereavement and the missing of a significant relationship was cited as a root cause for loneliness
- The subject of emotional resilience was mentioned as an important coping strategy for those who find themselves in situations of loneliness - the ability to adapt to harder times of stress and life changes
- It was generally agreed that society needs a broader change of attitude in terms of promoting community spirit and more integration between the generations
- A member with connections to the Samaritans organisation reminded the group that the Samaritans are always there just to talk and commonly deal with general loneliness as well as more desperate scenarios
- The question was raised as to whether there really is an epidemic of loneliness or whether society is merely admitting and talking about the issue more openly
- Changes in modern lifestyles were suggested as reasons for increased loneliness - no stay-at-home parent, children not playing outdoors, etc. It was felt that towns and villages used to have communities whereas these days, a culture of commuting has led to isolation
- Members of the group had observed that some people seem to get a sense of community by sitting (alone) in cafés to feel part of daily life
- Helping someone who is desperately lonely can be a difficult task. Encouraging them to attend a group or get out of the house can reinforce their inability to cope and make matters worse. The group felt

that a measure of personal confidence is needed to break free from loneliness and that labelling loneliness tends not to be productive

- Churches, Women's Institutes and public houses were described as the social hubs for previous generations but were now regarded as declining community venues
- There was scepticism amongst the group that the modern era of communication (i.e. telephones, television and the internet) generates more social interaction. Have these electronic methods of dialogue simply resulted in more isolation?
- Retirement villages were quoted as a welcomed return to a community-style way of living but were thought of as being somewhat exclusive, expensive and unavailable to those most in need. Shared or communal living arrangements were also mentioned in a positive light, particularly when the generations are mixed
- Being creative was suggested as a good way to combat loneliness - take up a craft, a hobby, join a painting group, join your local U3A
- It was accepted that the way we live has changed and noted that there are those who are quite happy in their own space

Should we adopt a plastic bottle and metal can recycling scheme along the lines of the scheme in operation in Norway?

- *This topic had been suggested in response to incentives in Scandinavia and Canada to tax the production of plastic bottles and offer a refund upon return for recycling: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-42953038>*
- Members had no objection to the collection machines at supermarkets that suck-up plastic bottles for recycling
- It was reported that in Norway only 3% of plastic bottles are not returned via the recycling process although the production costs of new plastic are still cheaper than the recycling route
- Some members of the group highlighted the problems of single-use or disposable plastic - plastic items designed to be used only once before they are thrown away e.g. drinking straws, plastic bags, coffee stirrers and food packaging
- Other group members questioned why recycling costs were higher than production costs of new plastic items

With the suffragettes in mind - how far can violence be justified in the pursuit of a cause?

- The pursuits of the Women's Social and Political Union (1903-1917), like arson, the cutting of telephone wires and destruction of property, were raised
- It was noted that the government makes a greater reaction to damage to property than damage to society
- Members of the group felt that more acceptable ways to protest were to sign petitions or engage in non-aggressive protests like rallies or publicity stunts that do not harm others like chaining oneself to railings

Should the convictions of women who were imprisoned while fighting for the vote be overturned?

- Overall it was believed that convictions relating to crimes of protest should not be overturned and that historical protests should stand as fact

Should e-cigarettes be made available on prescription?

- There were mixed thoughts on this topic but overall it was agreed that there needs to be a general social responsibility to make all efforts possible to reduce smoking in our society
- Even though schemes to provide electronic cigarettes might be costly, it was generally accepted that the long-term savings for the NHS would be beneficial and that both individuals and society would be better off
- It was explained that nicotine patches and other smoking-quitting aids are currently available via NHS prescriptions. It was therefore suggested that funding of electronic cigarettes could be proposed for suitable set periods

Should charity shops be allowed to sell new goods?

- There were mixed feelings about this topic with most members being positive towards the presence of charity shops but many expressed concern that the advantages they are awarded with can be abused or threaten the prosperity of struggling businesses
- It was explained that charity shops are entitled to allow up to 40% of their items to consist of new goods - a figure which the group in general thought was too high

Why is there an increase in mental health issues?

- The group believed that the continuing rise of mental health issues is due to greater awareness, lack of funding and changes in modern lifestyle and society highlighted by many of the topics previously raised in the session

○ Future Topics

Below is a list of topics that have been forwarded for future discussion. If you have any additional suggestions, especially last-minute topical issues, please email vivienne.barker@gmail.com

- We are in need of suggestions

○ Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on Monday 2nd April 2018 (Easter Monday Bank Holiday) at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room).

