



With plans to extend the project nationwide, Lyndsey Young said:

***“The Friendly Bench™ plays a vital role in tackling loneliness amongst older people and those with restricted mobility in our communities.***

***By creating an inclusive, accessible and well-located place to meet and join in with regularly organised activities, The Friendly Bench™ is a hub for people to connect. This not only helps improve our older people's physical and mental wellbeing, it also helps develop and strengthen community connections and build relationships between residents and their wider community.”***

With the full backing of Sir Alan Duncan MP and Rachel Reeves MP, co-chair of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, who recently mentioned The Friendly Bench™ in her Westminster Hall debate on loneliness, The Friendly Bench™ also has the full support of its local Housing Association, Nottingham Community Housing Association.

NCHA Scheme Manager Jim Anstey comments: “Some of our residents have been put off going to the shops due to the distance. The bench gives them the confidence to venture out, using it as a pit stop along the way! I think The Friendly Bench™ is a great idea. It encourages people to socialise with their neighbours and passersby and become part of the local community.”

After successfully developing and launching the first The Friendly Bench™ model, Lyndsey plans to partner with other organisations and communities to grow The Friendly Bench™ network nationwide. Offering a full design, build, installation, training to support set up and operation package, as well as funding solutions and advice, Lyndsey and her team would work closely with each community to develop a The Friendly Bench™ to cater for their bespoke needs.

To find out more about The Friendly Bench™ and to find out how you can join The Friendly Bench™ network, please visit their Facebook page [Facebook.com/TheFriendlyBench](https://www.facebook.com/TheFriendlyBench) or follow on Twitter [@Friendly\\_Bench](https://twitter.com/Friendly_Bench) and Instagram: [@TheFriendlyBench](https://www.instagram.com/TheFriendlyBench)

Finally, to connect and showcase individuals, community groups, charities and organisations who are positively working to end loneliness in their own communities. Lyndsey Young has also created and runs #EndLonelinessHour – taking place on Twitter every Monday evening, 8pm-9pm (BST) #EndLonelinessHour is free to participate in and brings together people from across the UK and world who want to link up, collaborate and support each other in tackling this hidden epidemic.

To get involved simply log onto Twitter on Monday at 8pm and include the hashtag #EndLonelinessHour in a tweet.

**+Lyndsey Young**

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# Nature and wellbeing

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Moving into a care home can sometimes mean we lose our connection with parts of life that shape our identity. For many people this can be a connection with animals and nature more widely. I've been told that, on average, a care home resident in the UK spends just four minutes per month outside – that's less than people in prison.

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A growing number of studies show that time in nature is beneficial for health and happiness; it's more than just something 'nice to have', it's vital for our wellbeing. Dr Miles Richardson, who runs the Nature Connectedness Research Group at Derby University, says "...feeling a part of nature has been shown to significantly correlate with life satisfaction, vitality, meaningfulness, happiness, mindfulness, and lower cognitive anxiety". It's no wonder, then, that through our co-production work with older people we're hearing they want to take part in nature-based activities and spend more time outside. Alive are now able to make these wishes a reality.

Last year we were approached by award-winning, social and therapeutic gardening organisation, Growing Support, with a view to a merger. We jumped at the chance and Alive are now running outdoor, nature-based activities for older people in care settings.

Meanwhile, one of Alive's community engagement projects, 'Communities of Interest', is working with care home residents to learn about the activities they enjoy, and how they would like to engage with their local communities. By setting up steering groups made up of residents and care staff, the project helps care homes to plan activities collaboratively. Building lasting relationships with local community groups enables older people in care to feel more connected to, and better able to contribute to community life.

During steering groups at three care homes involved in the project, a trip to Windmill Hill City Farm was a top choice for a group activity. Running since 1976, the farm holds many happy memories for residents, who were all keen to go back and see how it had changed over the years. So, with the help of some brilliant care staff, we took three groups of older people out into the sunshine for a day at Windmill Hill.



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***On arrival at the farm the effect of being out in nature on was immediately clear: the residents' relaxed shoulders and twinkling eyes demonstrated the importance of spending time outdoors.***

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Early on during the visit, a family of pigs were met with shrieks of laughter after covering everyone in mud. Giggling like school-children and wiping mud from their noses, this was sure to be a new memory created for the group.