

How we can all 'Join Inn' and call 'Last Orders for Loneliness'

By Deborah Kemp, Ambassador for Loneliness Awareness, Pub is the Hub

During Loneliness Awareness week, from 14-18 June, Pub is The Hub is encouraging people to engage with its 'Join Inn – Last Orders for Loneliness' campaign. This was launched in 2019, supported by Heineken, and builds on a trend towards "social prescribing", in which community activities are seen as an alternative to drugs, helping improve health, wellbeing, and in the process alleviating feelings of loneliness.

We all know of amazing publicans who see their role as a 'community connectors', creating opportunities for people to come together, making the pub a hub accessible to everyone and then supporting and enabling people to join in.

This has been particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as publicans across the UK have shown incredible communal ingenuity and social responsibility. Overnight, they diversified to meet the needs of their local community, reaching out the hand of friendship with small acts of kindness to residents feeling isolated and invisible to the world outside. This was despite their own personal financial hardship, business uncertainty and risks to health.

So, as we come into Loneliness Awareness Week here are three simple acts, we can all do that might make a difference to someone's day and life.

1. Start a conversation and listen with your eyes.

People who feel lonely can often feel invisible to others. So, don't just say hello when you pass someone in your community, stop and have a conversation. Give that person your complete attention, watch their face and listen to what they are saying, asking questions with curiosity and interest. This will make them feel valued, establish trust, and over time build a meaningful and sustainable relationship that will help connect them with others. The art of listening and conversation is a skill we all need to re-familiarise ourselves with.

2. Surprise someone with a small act of kindness

When someone feels lonely there is a natural tendency to withdraw, and over time, this vicious cycle of feeling insignificant drives them away from the very relationships they need most. A small act of kindness like inviting someone to a seasonal event, friendship circle or weekly activity is vital to helping them build a social network where the pub can become a social hub for people previously isolated and/or lonely.

3. Reach out to other agencies and charities.

There are so many organisations that work directly with those at risk of loneliness, and the many known health issues associated with it. These agencies open the potential for meaningful collaboration between publicans, community groups and charities, where a pub can become a trusted hub for people to meet and rebuild social connections. Google your local area for potential partners involved in tackling loneliness. Alternatively, we have provided a list on our website of some national organisations and charities who may have local groups you can connect with.

We are supporting the start of Loneliness Awareness Week on 14th June with a second mini-guide – Creating Connections. This will be available to download on our website, along with a poster for publicans to use to help promote events for people to 'Join Inn' at their pub.

Please visit: <https://www.pubisthehub.org.uk/join-inn-last-orders-for-loneliness/> where you will find inspirational case studies, guides and practical tips and material to help tackle loneliness.