



New Church Initiative Responds to Covid-19 Isolation

A new initiative, called 'Two's Company', is being launched by Clevedon Baptist Church this week in Clevedon as a lifeline to those who find themselves cut off from the outside world during the Covid-19 crisis.

Two's Company, a phone befriending service which has been set up in partnership with national charity, Linking Lives UK, aims to provide companionship to those most susceptible to isolation at this time, due to age, location, health or others factors.

Since mid-March, the number of people who are self-isolating has increased rapidly, with those over 70 or with pre-existing health conditions strongly advised against physical contact with the outside world. For some of these people, it will mean no contact with anyone, leading to profound loneliness and a deterioration in their mental health.

Pat Service, Coordinator of the Clevedon Baptist Church Two's Company programme says "We know there will be many people who now have no contact with the outside world, and may go for days without speaking to anybody at all. Although physical contact is not now possible, a telephone call can be crucial to those who would otherwise experience extreme loneliness.

The project will make use of existing known and vetted volunteers from the church, many of whom are now unable to help in their usual role. Their desire to serve their community is still there, but the ways they can do that are severely limited due to the nature of the Coronavirus. Picking up the phone and chatting to someone in need of company is something that they *can* do, and in some cases this could prove to literally be a lifeline."

The initiative has been set up in conjunction with Linking Lives UK, a national charity that has already established face to face befriending projects in over 30 towns and villages across the country. Jeremy Sharpe, the national director for Linking Lives UK said "We have been ideally placed to help the local church respond to the Covid-19 pandemic through the use of phone befriending. We have been able to adapt our existing framework quickly and easily to be used by local churches for talking on the phone rather than face to face. It is our hope that more and more churches will want to reach out to their communities in this way during this time of need."

Referrals for phone calls are expected to come from the local community itself, from neighbours, friends, the local police and in some cases, GP surgeries. Once a referral has been received, the Coordinator will then match someone needing a phone call with one of the volunteers, and then the befriending process will begin. Pat Service, who will oversee the programme, hopes that each everyone engage with the initiative will receive at least one phone call a week of around 30 minutes, for a period of 4-6 months.

If you would like to make a referral, please contact Pat Service on 08002461898 for an informal discussion.