Charities and MPs call on next government to tackle the UK's urgent crisis of social disconnection

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One of the UK's leading social connection charities, The Cares Family, has today called on the two main political parties to make strengthening social connection in the UK a key priority by adopting policy recommendations set out in a new report.

The report, Building Connection: A Manifesto, sets out five key policy recommendations to help strengthen social connection in communities across the UK. It argues that **the UK is currently experiencing a crisis of social disconnection** which is having a profound impact on public health, personal wellbeing, democracy and the economy.

The report is backed by a growing body of evidence that points to the detrimental effects that the crisis of social disconnection and loneliness is having in the UK. In 2022, 49.63% of adults (25.99 million people) in the UK reported feeling lonely. Numerous medical studies have highlighted **how improved social connection can decrease the risk of developing and worsening heart disease, anxiety, dementia and diabetes**. Only 45% of younger people feel as though they belong within their neighbourhood. And the cost of loneliness to UK employers has been estimated to be £2.5 billion every year.

The recommendations in the report are all designed to help policymakers from across the political spectrum tackle the urgent crisis and ensure that local people responding to it have the resources and power they need to build more socially connected communities. The five policy recommendations for the next government are:

1. **Bring forward a refreshed loneliness and social connection strategy**, and invest £90m over three years in community organisations working to reconnect those experiencing loneliness and disconnection.
2. **Appoint a dedicated Minister for Loneliness and Social Connection** whose sole responsibility lies within creating a more connected country where people feel less lonely. This would sit within the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
3. **Create a new Centre for Social Connection** to fuel the development of connecting institutions. These are community initiatives which work in purposeful ways to shape encounters between people from different social and cultural backgrounds and generations
4. I**nstitute a 0.5% 'loneliness levy' on the profits of social media companies**, generating funding for these policy measures. This would include companies like Meta, Twitter, Tik Tok and more.
5. **Introduce a Community Power Act** to drive power downwards and outwards to local people and strengthen social connection. This would include a 'Community Right to Buy' and a range of other measures encouraging the development of local, relational, and preventative services and policy approaches.

It is hoped that both the Conservatives and Labour adopt the recommendations in their party manifestos ahead of the next general election.

The recommendations have cross-party support and are being backed by Kim Leadbeater MP (Batley and Spen, Labour) and Tracey Crouch MP (Chatham and Aylesford, Conservative). Both MPs have a long history of campaigning to reduce loneliness in the UK. Kim Leadbeater is currently Co-Chair of the APPG on Tackling Loneliness and Connected Communities. Tracey Crouch was the world's first Minister for Loneliness and is currently Chair of the aforementioned APPG.

Kim Leadbeater, Labour MP for Batley and Spen, said:

"We need urgent action to bring people together in our communities. As part of a cross-departmental approach to health and wellbeing, tackling social disconnection is a personal, public health, and political necessity.

"The Cares Family's manifesto provides a bold vision with imaginative ideas for achieving a more united country, including giving communities real power to decide on the priorities they need to make best use of the resources available in terms of local spaces, services and spending.

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“With levels of loneliness continuing to rise and with communities in need of urgent support to help keep them strong and united, we cannot afford not to act.”

Tracey Crouch, Conservative MP for Chatham and Aylesford, said:

“I’m proud to have launched the first loneliness strategy in 2018 as Minister for Loneliness, and taken bold action to strengthen social connections across the country.

“It’s vital this work is taken forward and that we ensure the right funding and support is in place for local organisations and groups in every community to tackle loneliness.

“The Cares Family do amazing work to bring together younger and older people, and their new manifesto should make us all stop and think about how we can create a truly united country.”

Robin Hewings, Director of the Campaign to End Loneliness, said:

“Tackling loneliness has never been more important: new evidence shows that half a million more people are always or often lonely now, compared with before the pandemic.

“While great steps forward have been made since the publication of the first loneliness strategy in 2018, it’s vital the next government builds on this and makes tackling loneliness a key priority.

“The Cares Family play an important role in building connections across generations, and it's great to see them setting out ideas for how governments can support this work. We know that Parliamentarians across the political spectrum are committed to this agenda and we welcome this contribution to the ongoing debate.”

Sam Dalton, Head of Campaigns and Policy at The Cares Family, said

“*Our crisis of social disconnection is* impacting our society in a number of detrimental ways. It is at once a personal, public health and political crisis. We need to act, and we need to act now.

Our manifesto lays five out big and bold ideas to build social connection that we believe the next Government can make a reality. Taken together, the policy recommendations will help put social connection where it needs to be on the legislative agenda.

They will also help support the UK’s rich tapestry of community-based organisations that are working to build connection and bring people together in a variety of innovative ways.”

Company Contact:

The Cares Family

T. 07908772498
E. press@thecaresfamily.org.uk
W. https://www.thecaresfamily.org.uk

Additional Contact(s):
David.utley-williams@thecaresfamily.org.uk

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Building Connection: A Manifesto

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