

Address: APPG on Social Integration, c/o Chuka Umunna MP
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**APPG on Social Integration minutes for intergenerational connection inquiry event on
19th December 2017, 11:00 AM – 12.30 PM, in Committee Room 9, House of Commons**

Present (parliamentarians):

- Chuka Umunna MP, Chair (Lab)
- Holly Lynch MP (Lab)
- Rachel Reeves MP (Lab)
- Wera Hobhouse MP (Lib Dem)

Present (others):

- Richard Bell, The Challenge
- Nick Plumb, The Challenge
- Hannah Millinship-Hayes, The Challenge
- Justin Meadows, Office of Chuka Umunna MP

1. Introduction from the Chair

1.1 Chuka Umunna MP welcomed members of the APPG and the audience. He introduced the inquiry into intergenerational connection, stating that this was the first evidence session as part of this. He referenced the launch of the inquiry at the beginning of December, and the fact that the inquiry began with a focus on differences in political views between generations – as shown by the EU referendum in 2016.

1.2 However, Chuka said it was misleading to restrict our analysis of generational divides to politics – the more embedded differences are cultural. He said there was a link between a lack of meaningful connections between people of different ages and isolation and loneliness, and that this was an important topic of focus in addition to political divides.

2. Presentation by South London Cares

2.1 Rosa and Charlie from South London Cares introduced the organisation, and its links to North London Cares and Manchester Cares, bringing together those in their 20s and 30s with those in their 60s and above. Rosa spoke about the disconnect between older and younger generations, and the loneliness that both currently suffer in different ways – with older people living alone, and younger people moving from place to place in search of cheaper rent and better job opportunities.

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2.2 Charlie then introduced a video showing the impact South London Cares has had on a range of different people, as well as reading some quotes from a number of participants in South London Cares' programmes. These include 25 different social clubs, visits to a range of workplaces, and the one-to-one Love Your Neighbour programme.

2.3 The presentation on South London Cares by Rosa and Charlie helped to frame the issue of intergenerational division and connection, and provide a lens through which the subsequent open discussion could follow.

3. Open discussion

3.1 Chuka thanked Rosa and Charlie for their presentation, and invited all attendees to participate in an open discussion on intergenerational connection.

3.2 Stella Fitzgerald from West Norwood spoke about the decline of strong relations between young and old that has occurred since she was a young girl, with more communally-oriented terraced housing removed in favour of high-rise blocks. She spoke about her experiences in London, in which people are continually looking for privacy and personal space, rather than social interaction.

3.3 Chris, a volunteer from Magic Me, emphasised the need for local initiatives to foster intergenerational connection, as it can be difficult to do this on a national scale. Encouraging greater local action in this way would do a lot to help tackle the problem of loneliness.

3.4 Veronica from Brixton Hill, who works with South London Cares, highlighted housing as key issue. Leases often last for only six months or a year, with younger people not putting down roots in their communities, and taking advantage of the greater choices available to them both within the UK and abroad.

3.5 Chuka responded to Veronica by commenting that some young people might argue they have been forced to move in search of work, as opposed to their decision being a completely free choice.

3.6 Irene from south London said there is too much focus on 'doing' over 'living' in our society, with people having to work very hard to stay above water. This does not leave enough time for interacting with others, even when individuals would ideally like this to be a part of their lives.

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- 3.7 Kate from City Year UK spoke about the charity's programme of getting older people to volunteer in schools, encouraging interaction between people from different backgrounds, and helping to tackle loneliness. City Year UK would like other charities to roll out similar programmes in different sectors.
- 3.8 A representative from Magic Me said people need to take personal responsibility for meeting others in their street, lamenting the fact that we have lost the idea of dropping by to other people's houses, and saying hello. On a separate point, she spoke about the benefits of younger and older people working on common projects together, e.g. arts projects. This reduces ageist attitudes, and helps younger people to recognise the skills and talents of older people.
- 3.9 Holly Lynch MP argued that the Government must engage and work closely with the third sector to address intergenerational segregation. Schools are crucial spaces where the next generation can learn to connect with people from different backgrounds. In finding effective solutions, we need to look locally and then see how initiatives that work can be promoted on a national scale.
- 3.10 John, a volunteer at the Royal Voluntary Service in the Chelsea and Kensington area, spoke about the question of responsibility, and the fact that society must not only be based on rights, but on what everyone owes back to others. Rights and responsibilities should be intertwined.
- 3.11 Wera Hobhouse MP said local government programmes play a key role in enhancing wellbeing, and criticised cuts to funding for such programmes. She went on to highlight the importance of planning Fand infrastructure in creating an environment in which intergenerational connections can be forged.
- 3.12 Alan, a Trustee of Generation Working Together Scotland, and founder of the UK Centre for Intergeneration Practice, said concerns about intergenerational connection had been raised for 30 years, and solutions required long-term thinking and work in communities. He re-iterated the concerns of others that streets were no longer places for interaction, and referenced examples from the Netherlands where cities had been designed for all ages, as opposed to spaces in the UK which have been designed for use by different ages at different times.
- 3.13 Natasha from Lewisham spoke about the concept of "stranger danger" that arose in the 1970s, which told people to be wary of others they don't know, and has led to an erosion of trust. Volunteering more regularly, for example over the summer, would help to re-connect younger people with

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- 3.14 Sarah from Magic Me said there should be an active system in place through which people can come to assist and help those in need, for example disabled people. Everybody in society should be able to make a phone call to support those most in danger of social isolation and loneliness, to understand their needs better and see how they and others might be able to help. On a separate note, Sarah lamented the lack of conversation and interaction that occurs on public transport within London, compared to her experiences in the north of the country where she used to live.
- 3.15 Elin, a volunteer with South London Cares, spoke about the mutual benefit gained from volunteering, the commonality that can be found between different generations, and how this contrasts with the false social connections provided by the digital world. The wide range of activities put on by South London Cares makes it easy for people of different ages to find the time to interact with one another in their local area.
- 3.16 Another volunteer from South London Cares said there had been more need for unity in the past. She said the internet only results in people building limited, self-serving webs of interaction, so doesn't achieve its ultimate aim of enhancing connection, and actually harms it.
- 3.17 Bethan, a teacher from Stepney Green who has been involved in Magic Me project, said it was important for young people in schools to be linked with older generations, for example by going into local care homes. She agreed that children should be encouraged to interact with a variety of different people, and find a balance between an awareness of "stranger danger" and speaking to others. Small actions like smiling and saying hello to someone catch on, and can then provide the basis for larger action.
- 3.18 One lady in the discussion spoke about the role employers have in fostering intergenerational connection, referring to the 2015 Conservative Party manifesto commitment to introduce a statutory entitlement to paid volunteering leave. She argued that this policy would bring benefits for both employees and employers, whose workforce would become more open-minded, well-connected, and enjoy higher self-esteem.
- 3.19 Jamiesha from the British Academy focused on the issue of local government finance, highlighting the work done by Rushmore Borough Council to forge intergenerational connection. Having experienced a large influx of people from Nepal, which created some early tensions in the local community, the Council helped to bridge intergenerational divides on this issue, receiving special funding from the Department

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for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It is important for local government to be properly funded to deal with integration issues like this.

3.20 A participant in the discussion called Aron highlighted the fact that most people live very busy lives, and therefore find it hard to interact with others in their community. While a lot of people would love to have contact with other generations, there is often not the time – Aron spoke about his own experiences juggling his role as a youth councillor with studying for his A-levels. Intergenerational activities need to be weaved into education, or paid volunteering leave, so that people have time to engage in them.

3.21 Susan from Magic Me highlighted the problem of ageism in society, with younger people harbouring fears of growing old. A number of societal pressures influence these fears – for example, the beauty and hair dye industry sends messages which make people afraid of being old. She raised the question of whether something needs to be done in the area of advertising in order to reduce ageist attitudes.

3.22 Agreeing with Susan's point on the problem of ageism in society, Chuka raised the question as to how we can achieve practical action of this sort without a silly row erupting over something like anti-wrinkle cream. Following this, Chuka then raised the issue of social media platforms such as Instagram in shaping pro-youth biases, describing how filters are geared towards making people look younger in photos.

3.23 Susan from Magic Me then followed-up on Chuka's point by stressing that the problem is anti-ageing attitudes rather than the focus on anti-wrinkle. She said that challenging ageism is equally as important as challenging all the other isms, such as racism and sexism.

3.24 Holly Lynch MP described the fact that older people have been younger, and younger people will be older, so they will all face the same challenges at some stage in the lives. We must all ask the question - what environment do we want to see when we reach an older age? Everyone can reflect on that question and identify with it.

4. Presentation by Rachel Reeves MP, Co-chair of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

4.1 Rachel described how Jo had drawn on her own experiences of loneliness at university when striving to tackle loneliness as an MP. Having moved from a close-knit family in a small town in west Yorkshire to university in the south, she did not always feel at home and often felt lonely. She then also realised as an MP that many members of her

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constituency experienced loneliness, and didn't have anyone to confide in. "Young or old – loneliness doesn't discriminate" said Jo, who emphasised that it can affect anyone at different stages in their lives.

4.2 Rachel then spoke about the Commission's work with 13 different groups to better understand loneliness across different age groups, including Carers UK, and the Co-op /Red Cross research partnership. The Commission's research has shown that 9 million people in the UK are 'always or often lonely'.

4.3 As well as worrying about loneliness from a moral perspective, Rachel highlighted that loneliness is also a public health issue, given it is as detrimental as smoking 15 cigarettes per day, and that five or 10 patients per day who visit a GP are there primarily because they are lonely. Loneliness is now a "social epidemic" and not just a matter of personal misfortune.

4.4 Rachel spoke about the Commission's manifesto for government, which was published a week before this meeting, and how she was hopeful that the Government would respond early in the new year. In terms of what the Government could do to reduce loneliness, Rachel described how cuts over last few years have exacerbated problems, with there now being fewer social spaces where different people can come together and spend time with one another, such as public libraries, community centres and children's centres. Cuts to benefits have also made it harder for people to engage in society. The Government might take steps to explicitly tackle the problem of loneliness, for example by appointing a Minister for Loneliness, and better measuring loneliness. Rachel spoke about the fact that, so far, the Commission has had to do the hard research and grafting on the issue of loneliness because the Government have not been doing it. Going forward, the Government needs to fund fantastic initiatives in communities to reduce loneliness, measure what works, and then put more resources into those projects which are successful.

4.5 Though there is an important role for government in tackling loneliness, Rachel said that Jo knew the solution to loneliness lay also in every street and with every family: we all have a responsibility to make time for others. For example, the 'Great Get Together' and 'Great Christmas Get Together' initiatives are about knocking on doors, and speaking on the phone to people we know are alone – living our lives more like Jo Cox lived hers.

5. Final remarks from the Chair

5.1 Chuka thanked everyone for joining the discussion, and said everyone had raised different yet important points, and that these would feed in to the interim and final

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reports of the inquiry into intergenerational connection. Hannah from The Challenge then led a Christmas decoration-making session to bring participants in the discussion together and foster conversation and mixing.