

# Projects that tackle isolation showcased

ISOLATION issues will be top of the agenda at the Cheese and Grain on Monday, May 12, as two innovative Frome projects showcase the work they are doing to support local people who live alone and feel out of touch with the community around them.

From 10am to noon, volunteers and members of Active and In Touch Frome, part of Somerset You Can Do, will be hosting The Talking Café to chat about the one-to-one befriending service they provide to isolated, vulnerable and elderly people in Frome and the surrounding villages.

This will be followed at 1.30pm by a two-hour open

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meeting to discuss setting-up a community Men's Shed in Frome to address the needs of local men, some of whom find themselves lonely or socially isolated for a variety of reasons such as retirement, redundancy or bereavement.

According to figures published by the Office for National Statistics the number of hours we spend socially interacting in person has fallen dramatically in the last 25 years.

The proportion of adults living alone has also doubled

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between 1973 and 2011 from nine per cent to 16 per cent.

In a survey of various loneliness research reports, the Campaign to End Loneliness found an estimated one million people over 65 are always lonely; half of all older people, about five million, say the television is their main company; 17 per cent of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week and 11 per cent are in contact less than once a month; 36 per cent of people aged 65 and over in the UK feel out of touch with the pace of modern life and nine per cent say they feel cut off from society.

Lucia Chadwick, project coordinator for Active and In Touch Frome, said: "Loneliness and isolation issues are becoming increasingly prevalent in our communities. Both Active and In Touch and the Men's Shed Association are working to tackle these challenges.

"The people Active and In Touch support have become isolated and lonely through the circumstances that life has thrown at them, but with the help of our volunteer befrienders we can make a real difference.

"Our volunteers meet people and spend time with



Volunteers who will be on hand at the Talking Café to chat about the services they offer to local, isolated, vulnerable and elderly people

them, find out their needs and interests, and help them to find their own place in the community.

"At the Talking Café we are inviting people to come and meet our volunteers and some of our members to find out firsthand what we do and how we can best support people who are struggling with isolation issues.

"Also, if you are interested in becoming a volunteer then we can chat to you about how

you might like to get involved with the charity, so we can reach out to more people in the local area."

The Frome Shed plans to offer a workspace where older people can work on practical projects with others.

Patrick Abrahams who is managing the project said: "Isolation can lead to health problems, physical or mental, and yet it is proven that the practical focus and camaraderie available from with-

in a shed, can address these issues most positively.

"People are welcome from anywhere in Frome and the surrounding area. The space will be equipped with tools and materials donated by the public or local businesses.

"The club will be run by the members who decide when they come and what they do. We plan to undertake projects, acceptable to the group, which are of benefit to individuals, other groups and the broader

community in Frome.

"We will learn from each other and contribute voluntarily to the club's future.

"What activities the group will do in the shed will be discussed at the general meeting on Monday, May 12. This public meeting will also include the current status on the group's progress, updates from similar sheds in Somerset, as well as a 3D printing demonstration."

The idea draws on the successful Men's Shed movement in Australia where more than 1,000 Sheds have formed in just over a decade.

It is now part of a growing movement in the UK, which now has 60 Sheds open – up from five three years ago. The UK Men's Sheds Association aims to promote and support Men's Sheds in the UK. For further details see [www.ukmsa.org.uk](http://www.ukmsa.org.uk)

Active and In Touch Frome is funded from a grant from Somerset You Can Do and is managed by Volunteer Sector Training Alliance, or ViSTA. The charity has won the backing of the *Frome Standard*, and the project is supported by businesses such as hairdressers, opticians and medical staff, who can help pass information on to those who need it, and feeds into the wealth of activities that Frome has to offer such as the Mendip Health Walks, lunch clubs, and special interest groups.