

PRESS RELEASE

### **Brightlife festival to launch with bespoke film from Aardman Animations**

Brightlife, the pioneering project led by older people across Cheshire West and Chester, is launching a week-long festival of events for older people by screening a short film produced in association with Oscar-winning studio Aardman Animations.

Combining Aardman Animations' familiar animal characters with the real voices of older people who have experienced and overcome social isolation, the bespoke film aims to reassure people that they are not alone and that there are things they can do to help them be less lonely.

Nationally, over 1 million older people say they are always or often feel lonely, and two-fifths say the television is their main form of company. With the numbers of older people aged 65 or over in the UK predicted to rise by nearly 50% in the next 20 years, loneliness is an urgent problem.

The Brightlife festival will promote the work Brightlife does to reduce loneliness and social isolation, whilst bringing generations together through a range of social activities and celebration events. These include a chance for older people to 'buddy up' with local drivers for a night of entertainment at the circus courtesy of Circus Starr, a drop-in soup lunch supplied by Casserole Club made with vegetables donated from local allotments, and a chance to take part in the famous parade at Chester Pride to show support for the older LGBT community.

Head of Brightlife, Adam Shaw comments: "Social isolation is extremely harmful to our health. Lack of social connections can be as damaging as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, putting people at risk of premature death. With 36% of residents over 65 living alone in the borough, it is vitally important that we develop innovative and engaging support networks that will help create a better life for older people by giving them a sense of purpose and fulfillment."

Brightlife Volunteer Margaret Yorke (76) agrees: "Getting involved in Brightlife has given me something to look forward to ... it helps occupy my days and keeps my mind busy. I'm making new friends all the time and enjoying feeling part of something where my ideas are not just welcomed but really valued."

The Brightlife Festival will launch on National Older People's Day on October 1<sup>st</sup>, with an exclusive premiere of the Aardman Animations film at Chester Town Hall.

Heather Wright, Executive Producer at Aardman said of the film: "Hearing the voices of older people talking about loneliness, helped us to understand just how easy it is for people to become lonely. They gave us real stories that touched our hearts and minds. Our job was simply to bring them to life in a memorable way whilst addressing what is undoubtedly a serious issue for us all."

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**Notes to Editors:**

- Brightlife is a partnership led by Age UK Cheshire (Registered Charity Number 1091608). It has been awarded £5m as part of the Big Lottery's Fulfilling Lives, Ageing Better fund, which has given a total of £82m to 15 areas throughout England in order to improve the lives of up to 200,000 older people.
- The Brightlife partnership includes: Age UK Cheshire, Older People's Network, Cheshire West and Chester Council, West Cheshire CCG, Vale Royal CCG, Cheshire and Warrington Social Enterprise Partnership, Chester Voluntary Action, Deafness Support Network, Rural Community Services, Sanctuary Housing and West Cheshire Inter Faith Forum.
- Over the next five years, Brightlife aims to identify, design and implement a wide range of innovative solutions to address loneliness and isolation in older people across the county. Working closely with older people, it will develop a greater number of sociable services by utilising existing assets including the creation of a social pharmacy. This will be designed to complement any medical care as part of a holistic care package.
- National Older People's Day is on 1<sup>st</sup> October every year to coincide with the UN International Day of Older Persons. The main aim for the day is to be a celebration of the achievements and contributions that older people make to our society and the economy, and to challenge negative attitudes and outdated stereotypes.

**Sources:**

- The number of people aged 65+ is projected to rise by nearly 50% (48.7%) in the next 20 years to over 16 million: *National population projections, 2010-based, Office for National Statistics, 2011*
- Over 1 million older people say they are always or often feel lonely: *TNS survey for Age UK, April 2014*
- Two fifths all older people (about 3.9 million) say the television is their main company: *Age UK, 2014*