**April 2019**

**Unsung hero honoured for transforming the lives of Winsford residents**

An innovative project run by Jackie Brown which helps lonely people who felt isolated at home has transformed the lives of almost 400 residents in Winsford.

Working as a social prescribing co-ordinator for the National Lottery funded Brightlife programme, Jackie has encouraged many elderly people to join clubs and take up new hobbies and activities.

Elderly residents who rarely saw anyone now meet up with friends at places like Chatterbox Cafe, Monday club or the Salvation Army Day Centre.

Jackie's commitment was recognised when she received a special award from town mayor Cllr Gina Lewis at the annual Oscars ceremony to honour the efforts of unsung heroes.

"It was a real privilege to receive this honour," said Jackie. “I really do appreciate the support all the health professionals and social workers have given the project. They have really bought in to what we're doing."

The project recognises that older people feeling low and depressed often turn to their GP for help but they don't always need pills or potions.

“Some 40 per cent of people go to the doctor for a non medical issue," said Jackie. “Some have never had a chance to get out and meet new people, others have lost confidence. People don't know what is out in the community. We’ve worked so hard to make connections and give people different choices. Doctors have told me I have saved thousands of pounds with just one lady."

Younger patients with complex medical conditions, people with mental health issues or vision impairment, carers and widows and widowers have all found a new lease of life.

"Whatever their circumstances, my role is connecting them with as many services, projects, organisations and activities as I can," added Jackie. "I put them in touch with like-minded people so they have things to look forward to.

"We have demonstrated that there is a need for this project. It was a new concept three years ago and now it is a huge success. There are massive health benefits and it has given people a much better quality of life."

Cllr Lewis said: "We are very grateful to Brightlife for all the work they have done in Winsford. They have brought together so many different organisations to help those who are on their own, those who have limited resources. We're all very thankful for all that they do."

**ENDS**

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**Notes to Editors**

Brightlife is a partnership led by Age UK Cheshire (Registered Charity Number 1091608).  It is a five year project running from April 2015, ending in March 2020.

Brightlife is part of Ageing Better, the six-year (2015-2021), £78 million programme set-up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better partnerships are based in 14 locations across England, from Torbay to Middlesbrough and the Isle of Wight to East Lindsey. Working with local people, charities, businesses, public sector services and voluntary groups, the Ageing Better partnerships are exploring creative ways for people aged over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. Ageing Better is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people’s lives healthier and happier.

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 work closely with older people to identify, design and implement a wide range of innovative solutions to address loneliness and isolation across Cheshire West and Chester.

About Loneliness and Social Isolation:

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.

Research shows that loneliness and social isolation are harmful to our health: lacking social connections is as much of a risk factor for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is worse for us than well-known risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity.

For more information about loneliness and social isolation, visit the [Campaign to End Loneliness](http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/)

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