

Media Release

Subject: Reaching out to Socially Isolated Older People

Date: Thursday, 21 September 2017

Volunteers are being sought for a new community service aimed at assisting socially isolated older people to connect with relevant activities, services and interests.

The pilot program called Hand to Heart is a collaborative project between the Cities of Melville and Belmont, ConnectGroups and Befriend, in response to data indicating an increasing number of older people living alone.

The service is due to launch late October 2017 and will be coordinated by ConnectGroups in Melville who will match suitable volunteers to older residents who may benefit from the service. The volunteers' role will be to provide information, support and encouragement to empower those who have become isolated to 'reconnect' back into the community and rebuild social connections.

City of Melville Mayor Russell Aubrey said the Hand to Heart project supported the City's commitment to an Age-Friendly community by ensuring everyone had access and opportunities to participate.

"With 25 percent of the City's residents over 60, many are living alone and have been impacted by the loss of a spouse, had their lives changed due to injury or ill health or may experience barriers coming from a culturally diverse background. Any one or more of these factors can cause a well-functioning and independent older person to become isolated and reduce their quality of life," said Mayor Aubrey.

"Feedback collected during the creation of the City's Directions from Older People Plan 2017-2021 has indicated older people are vulnerable to living an isolated life, impacting on both their physical and mental wellbeing – Hand to Heart aims to connect those at risk with services and activities that are meaningful to them."

"This is a wonderful opportunity for volunteers to make a real difference to the lives of our older residents and be part of this rewarding program which is one of its first in Western Australia."

The project is funded by a Department of Communities Age-Friendly Communities Innovative Implementation Grant and is guided by a steering group including experts in the fields of older adult mental health, pharmacists, GP's and agencies that work with culturally diverse groups. Local council staff including rangers and community safety officers, as well as external groups such as Meals on Wheels and Neighbourhood Watch will be provided resources to help identify residents who may benefit from a connection into the Hand to Heart program.

To find out more about the project and the volunteer positions available, call ConnectGroups on 9364 6909 or email info@connectgroups.org.au.

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