

THE COMMUNITY CHEST

CONNECTIONS PROJECT

CONNECTORS TRAINING

NOVEMBER 8, 2023

The Community Chest's Mission

Lead initiatives and support nonprofits that make our communities stronger and benefit people in need in eastern Bergen County

Founded in 1933

Serving 15 towns in eastern Bergen County since 2016

The Community Chest's Priorities

- Food Insecurity and Healthy Eating
- Health and Mental Health Services for All Populations
- Home Care (Healthcare Staffing and Services)
- Educational Enhancement/College and Career Prep for Students of all ages
- Racial Justice Education
- Emergency Funding

Why did we choose this project?

For the celebration of our 90th anniversary we chose a project that addresses a community-wide concern that is relevant to our highest priorities and that crosses all populations.

Who is the Surgeon General?

Dr. Vivek Murthy, who has served as the 19 and 21st Surgeon General of the US, is considered the “highest ranking doctor in the United States.”

The Surgeon General’s mission is to help lay the foundation for a healthier country, relying on the best scientific information available to provide clear, consistent and equitable guidance and resources for the public and to reduce the risk of illness and injury.

How did he choose this topic? - Health and Mental Health

As the nation's top doctor, US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy helps to advance the health and well-being of all Americans. He has described the growing youth mental health crisis in America as the “defining public health crisis of our time and warned that social media carries a “profound risk of harm to the mental health of children and adolescents.’

Murthy has also highlighted the employers' role in supporting mental health for their workers and called attention to the health worker burnout. In the recent Surgeon General's Advisory on the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation in America, he highlighted the vital need to heal from the pandemic through community and connection.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness occurs when the social connections we desire do not align with our actual experiences in relationships with others.

Who is affected by loneliness?

According to a Harvard report in 2021, **more than 1 in 3 Americans struggle with loneliness**. However, there are several groups that are especially susceptible to loneliness and isolation:

- Lack of transportation options can contribute to social isolation among **seniors, people with disabilities, or low-income individuals**
- **Mental health conditions** such as anxiety disorders or personality disorders can make it difficult for people to form meaningful connections with others
- **Ethnic and racial minority groups**
- **LGBTQ+ individuals** due to discrimination and stigma they may face from society or even family members
- **Rural residents** due to a lack of community resources and support networks
- **Victims of domestic violence**
- **Individuals who live alone**

The prevalence of loneliness predated the pandemic but was intensified by the pandemic

Technology and Social Isolation

Internet and social media usage

- 96-99% of adults under 65 use the internet
- 75% of adults over 65 use the internet
- Those who use social media more than 2 hours/day were 2X as likely to report feeling lonely

Health Outcomes Impacted by Loneliness

- **Lacking social connections can contribute to premature death :**
 - As bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- **Cardiovascular Health:**
 - 29% increased risk of contracting heart disease; 32% increase in having a stroke)
- **Cognitive Health:** Risk of developing dementia in older adults increased by 50%
- **Diabetes:** Can contribute to type 2 Diabetes
- **Infectious Disease:** Increased susceptibility to diseases and infections
- **Depression and Anxiety:**
 - Isolation can increase risk of developing both conditions;

How are we tackling this huge social problem?

Networking

- Schools
- Libraries
- Nonprofits
- Businesses
- Chamber of Commerce
- Houses of Worship
- Health Department
- Englewood Health
- Hackensack Meridian
- Doctors' Offices

How are we tackling this huge social problem?^{continued}

People to people contacts:

- Connectors
- Clergy
- Nonprofit leaders

Media/Social media

- Facebook
- Press Releases
- Instagram
- Articles for newsletters
- Blogs
- Constant Contact
- Flyers

How do “connectors” fit into this picture?



What is a Connector?

A Connector is an **adult volunteer, over 18 years old**, who is interested in reaching out to people who may be experiencing social isolation. The goal of their contact is to help the person that is lonely to make a connection with other people. A connector is a friend, a support, a confidante, but **NOT a counselor!**

As a connector for this program you are asked to **identify individuals that you know** through your various relationships in your community, such as your family, your religious congregation, your school, through community contacts or through your workplace, that you believe are lonely and work benefit from social contact.

These **contacts are made via telephone**. The contact is intended to be friendly and supportive, **not clinical in any way**. By extending a caring hand and cultivating a genuine relationship, the Connector plays a pivotal role in reducing feelings of isolation and enriching the lives of those they connect with.

The Surgeon General has identified these personal connections as very meaningful to those who are socially isolated. Just a short conversation can be extremely helpful to those who are struggling with loneliness.

Approaches to reaching out

- Begin the conversation with a **friendly greeting**, using your first name and last, if you don't think they will recognize you at first.
- Tell you that you are calling to **check in with them**, to see how they are doing and whether they need any help with anything.
- Let the person speak first; do not rush them. **Assure them that your conversation is confidential.**
- Give the person your **undivided attention**.
- **Validate** the person's emotions.
- **Avoid interrupting** or jumping to conclusions.
- Ask a **nonthreatening question** - e.g. How have things been going this week?
- **Encourage** them to talk about what is going on in their life.
- Only talk about yourself if the person seems unwilling to share.

Approaches to reaching out (continued)

- **Appreciate their courage** - “Thank you for sharing; that took a lot of courage.”
- **Refer the person to supportive solutions.** Brainstorm activities or clubs they might enjoy joining to meet like-minded individuals. Offer to help them locate resources in their area.
- **Encourage them to reach out** to friends or family they trust, and remind them that seeking help is a sign of strength.
- **End on a positive note.** Let them know that they can reach out to you again if they would like to talk. Tell them that you would like to follow up and assist them with identifying activities.

If the person does not want to leave the house suggest that you might be able to drop something off for them to do. (e.g. books, puzzles, etc.)

Some things to remember

1. **Summarize** or paraphrase what you have heard to show that you were paying attention.
2. Always use **appropriate language**.
3. Ask **open-ended** questions.
4. **Share** your own experiences, if appropriate, but don't dominate the conversation.
5. **Avoid** giving unsolicited advice.
6. Be **respectful and non-judgmental**
 - a. **Respect their boundaries** and feelings, even if they seem different from your own.
 - b. **Avoid judgmental language** and be mindful of your tone - treat them like you would a friend.

All calls are confidential, except when the person mentions that they are thinking of hurting others or themselves. In these situations, calmly refer them to speak to Shelly or Vicki.

Follow up

Remember to follow up on your conversations after they end. (The goal is to create a personal relationship that extends beyond one interaction.) Whether it be assisting the person with an activity or sending them resources, it is important to address loneliness through small, supportive actions.

If you feel that they would benefit from additional contact ask them if you can reach out to them again. Send them a note whether they indicate a willingness to have continuing contact or not.

If you are concerned about their response to you - that they seem very depressed or anxious or expressing a desire to hurt themselves or others - tell them that you will be calling a supervisor to discuss next steps and call Shelly (646-300-5997) or Vicki (201-390-8830) on their cell phones.

Connectors are asked to submit information about the people they contact in case of an they have to be contacted in the event of an emergency.

For further information about becoming a connector please contact Shelly Wimpfheimer at 201 568 7474.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

The Community Chest:

Staff Contacts:

Shelly Wimpfheimer: 646-568-7474

Vicki Sidrow: Cell: 201-390-8830

THANK YOU!