Lindsay Leg Clubs: People and communities at winter time: A Leg Club philosophy

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As the autumn welcomes another turn of the season, we often find a brief time to reflect on the year to date and the months ahead. The winter period can be a challenging time for people at any age across the country as the days grow shorter and the evenings darker. It can be particularly challenging as we face a cost-of-living crisis that leaves many concerned about food and energy prices as the weather gets colder. Winter time is especially difficult for older people who live alone, with social isolation and loneliness affecting one in six people worldwide (World Health Organization, 2025).

Surprisingly, the latest data suggest that loneliness is most common among adolescents and younger people; although loneliness can affect anyone, evidence indicates that older people are at particular risk of social isolation and loneliness which can have a detrimental effect on physical and mental health, quality of life and life expectancy (World Health Organization, 2025).

Age UK (2024) found that 52% of older people (8.5 million) in the UK were concerned about winter including home heating and food to eat. There are also the unique challenges of living with one or more long term conditions directly related to older personhood: frailty and the physical changes age can bring, including loss of muscle mass and other age-related physiological changes. This can mean older people are less able to regulate temperature and that many older people are inclined to be less active during the winter months.

Age UK recognise that winter can present mental health challenges; the good news is there are things we can do to support patients, families and colleagues through the winter months.

Staying connected to people and the community is a key part of supporting everyone. Interpersonal connection is a basic human requirement. The need for social connection is deeply rooted within humans biology; we are social creatures with an instinctive dependence on connection, communication and community (Braren, 2025).

The Lindsay Leg Club model has pioneered the philosophy of social connection since its establishment in 1995 with the first Leg Club founded in Suffolk in a community cottage, welcoming informal "drop-ins"; their members quickly growing to 1,200 per annum. Prior to Covid there were 48 Leg Clubs in the UK and to date there are 18 Leg Clubs, alongside international clubs in Europe and Australia with many more in the early stages of development. Ellie Lindsay OBE, founder of the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation and lifetime president eloquently shared her reflections of the year in her recent Leg Club update (Lindsay, 2026) stating;

'I would encourage everyone to take a moment to read this important newsletter from Ellie and other useful information on the Leg Club website (www.legclub.org) to share with patients, family members and neighbours. There is information for everyone that captures the essence of the Leg Club ethos and to fulfil our mission "Healthy Legs for Life".

> **…the Leg Club model exists for one simple reason: to change people's lives for the better. … Conversations replace isolation, confidence is rebuilt and healing happens not just physically, but emotionally and socially."**

In some ways, basic human connection can at times be lost in the busyness of day-to-day life. And yet, the relationship between one person and another is the cornerstone of establishing person-centred care. As a person-centred model, we care about the worries, needs and wellbeing of our members, volunteers and the wider community. The Leg Club paradigm for lower limb care is rooted in caring for the individual in a person-centred manner; encompassing the wellness and maintenance of health, placing emphasis on equality and focussing on the prevention of isolation and depression of our community members with attention to how our members think and feel rather than a task-orientated agenda (Galazka and Lindsay, 2023).

Health and wellbeing, in particular the

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psychosocial welfare of our members and the wider community, are always central to our ethos as a social model. In a world where often social networks of family and friends can be limited, and in some cases non-existent, who can the public look to in the community to provide this pivotal role of connection while addressing the physical health need of lower limb care? We are so very fortunate to have Leg Clubs across the UK which are established and run by local communities whose members themselves are often living with a lower limb condition, returning to the Leg Club as volunteers.

Winter time can be a positive time for connection, growth and celebration. As clinicians and members of the public, we welcome in the new season with positivity and look forward to the year ahead. To support mental health as we pass through the season, let us be mindful of positive engagements that support a healthy mindset, physical activity and fresh air that have been proven to help both mental and physical wellbeing.

Let's look to our local communities for connection and if you do not already have a Leg Club in your area… consider setting one up! Partner with the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation: contact the Foundation for guidance on best-practice guidelines, documentation templates, staff training and visits to working clubs. ●

References

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