

Vignette 1: Patricia

- Patricia, a 72-year-old woman living in a regional town in South Eastern NSW.
- She lives independently and doesn't have any in person support.
- Her adult daughter and grandchildren used to visit her; however, they have recently moved away and COVID travel restrictions have meant she has had a couple of years with very little human contact.
- She had lost contact with friends too, many not wanting to catch up for fears of catching COVID.
- She does not know how to use her phone, so finds it difficult to communicate with her family or friends.
- Without her family around, Patricia has been less active as she doesn't feel confident getting out of the house as she is not steady on her feet, particularly as she has arthritis.



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Vignette 1: Patricia

- She is lonely and isolated and has gone to her GP, her only social contact, for something to help her sleep and to manage the pain of her arthritis.
- The GP did not want to give any medication that could increase her falls risk.
- Patricia understood but just didn't see how she was going to cope as felt so tired and uncomfortable.
- Patricia really used to enjoy reading but has stopped doing this. Her daughter used to bring her books that she had finished reading.
- When she was younger she loved to swim in the local rockpool and walk along the beach with friends.



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Vignette 2: Fred & Barbara

Fred and Barbara are retired teachers in their early 80s.

Barbara:

- Recently diagnosed with dementia
- Movements limited due to osteoporosis, and scared to move about after fracture
- Moving around less, losing muscular strength, at high risk of falls
- Withdrawn from social activities, feeling lonely.

Fred:

- Eyesight is deteriorating
- Not sure how to support Barbara
- Overwhelmed with responsibility, afraid of losing his wife
- Scared to visit health services due to COVID.

- Fred and Barbara go to the GP seeking medication to help with anxiety and sleeplessness.
- GP knows medication is not the answer to their stresses but doesn't know how to help, so refers them directly to a social prescribing program to assist with practical and social supports
- The Link Worker quickly connects with them.



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Vignette 3: Sylvia

- Sylvia is desperately lonely. She lives in a rural community.
- Now aged 70, she has watched by as her social circle has slowly diminished.
- She missed the regular cafe catch ups with her old friends.
- Living in a rural community can be isolating, especially so given Sylvia's mental health concerns.
- With seemingly all her friends either moving away or passing away, Sylvia felt that her life was at a crossroads.



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Vignette 3: Sylvia

- Despite Sylvia's depression feeling almost all encompassing, she knew that she had to meet others and get out of her comfort zone to make a positive change in her life.
- She did not know what to do or what was even out there in the community for her to do.
- She was alone and felt helpless.
 - When the Link Worker met Sylvia, she found that she was very wary of support being offered and very uncertain about whether she could benefit from the service.



Vignette 4: Angela

- Angela is a 50-year-old woman living in Northern Sydney.
- Angela had a work place bullying injury, she was psychologically scared and did not trust anyone.
- Angela was told not to contact anyone from work and lost a lot of work friends.
- She was shocked that people she had worked with for 15 years no longer wanted to talk to her.
- She loved her job, working with children and had a wonderful career, until a new manager came on board and that was when things went downhill.



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Vignette 4: Angela

- Angela was born deaf and had developed great skills to get me through life – even so she was finding it difficult to hear as well as she used to.
- She said, “my husband passed away and I lost control of my world.”
- Her husband managed all the finances and she found she was unable to manage this without him.
- She also experienced loss of her daughter in-law in tragic circumstance which left her and her son, and grandchildren in shock and turmoil.
- Due to having too much time off work, her working relationships started to crumble.



Vignette 5: Brad

- Brad is a 32-year-old man living in Western Sydney.
- Brad developed stress, anxiety and depression after experiencing bullying in the workplace.
- His mood and emotional wellbeing were impacted, resulting in a distorted view of his self-worth, which led Brad to breaking point.
- He left his workplace of 12 years, lost contact with most of his work friends, then began nervously navigating the job market eight months later.
 - He found it difficult to enjoy outings with his friends and his partner; he always felt worried or guilty that he should be working more on pursuing a legal case against his employer.



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Vignette 5: Brad

- His partner was patient, but their relationship was becoming stressed.
- Brad was drinking more to unwind.
- It had been over 12 years since Brad had applied and interviewed for a new job.
- With his self-confidence at its lowest, the prospect of promoting himself to new employers was very daunting.



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Vignette 6: Nick

- Nick is a 59-year-old man from a large town in South Western Sydney.
- First generation immigrant and unfamiliar with supports in the community.
- Nick's worked in a sales showroom for over 16 years in a role that required regular heavy lifting.
- He was well-liked and respected within his team and proud of his long-term contributions to the workplace. The camaraderie of his work mates made him feel a part of something meaningful.
 - He hurt his back at work and had spinal surgery 6 months ago. He still has radiating pains and cannot sleep.



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Vignette 6: Nick

- He has also experienced incontinence and has been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.
- The stress and boredom of being mostly stuck at home led to weight gain and increased smoking.
- Nick walks with great difficulty using a walking stick - he is embarrassed to use, so rarely leaves home.
- Nick's employer terminated his employment prior to his back surgery without first consulting him.
- Nick said "The loss of my job, the financial stability, and the meaning that work provided led me to feel like there's no hope. I'd lost my dignity, and that had always been an integral part of who I am."



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Vignette 6: Nick

- This was a massive blow to Nick, not only financially but also to his confidence. He felt his commitment to the company had been overlooked and he lost important friendships.
- This heavily impacted Nick's family too. His wife feels burnt out from the financial and day-to-day pressures that the family now faces. Nick said: "My injury impacted my family, my daughter's depression increased, the financial stress and pressure has led to my wife being the main earner for the family and the pressure on her is leading to her burning out."
 - Nick is increasingly stressed, embarrassed and frustrated and cannot see a way out of his situation.
 - Nick is socially isolating himself leading to increased stress and boredom.



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Discussion Prompts

1. What factors might lead to a person experiencing social isolation and loneliness as described in the vignette?
2. How common are these factors? Are they often ignored and/or dismissed by health professionals? In your role what could you do to reduce the risk of mental health issues as a result of the social isolation and loneliness being experienced?
3. What types of activities, supports or services (formal and informal) could enable the client featured in this vignette to feel less isolated and more connected? What sort of collaboration/communication should occur between these service providers and between the service providers and the client?
4. How accessible/available are these sorts of activities, supports or services in your region? What can you do to improve access and availability? What can you do to mitigate the service/provider gaps?

