

I am typing this in a frenetic realisation that we are merely days away from breaking up for Christmas and I have still got so much to do. It is really easy as we rush around competing task lists while ticking off gifts and in an overall haze of festivities to forget that not everyone will be celebrating Christmas with their loved ones.

There are many public servants from the emergency services or armed forces who will be on duty at home or abroad, away from their families and friends. But there will be many others who have no close relatives or friends to share their day, or any other day and suffer in isolation from the fun happening as close as next door.

The statistics on loneliness are quite stark. Over 9 million adults report of being always or often lonely, half of all disabled people will be lonely on any given day and more than 1 in 3 people aged 75 and over say that their feelings of loneliness are out of their control. The health impact of chronic isolation is equal to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, while the economic cost is billions.

Loneliness is happening all year round and there are many people, organisations and charities who are offering services to reduce loneliness. And yet Christmas time can be one of the hardest periods for those who are most affected by loneliness. This is where we can all help. If you know someone who is alone this Christmas, a friend or neighbour, could you spare a few minutes to knock on their door or give them a ring? It won't solve the long term problem – that's for Government to take a lead on – but it might just brighten someone's Christmas day and that could make a huge difference on many levels.