

**WaveLength**

Fighting loneliness

## **Coronavirus Pandemic**

**Preventing loneliness through technology**



[www.wavelength.org.uk](http://www.wavelength.org.uk)

Registered Charity Number: 207400

# Preventing Loneliness Through Technology

## This report highlights WaveLength's work and why it's been successful during the Covid-19 pandemic

Throughout 2020, WaveLength has seen a large increase in loneliness and isolation, which has highlighted the need for better connectivity. This is due to the Covid-19 pandemic which has forced society to adhere to social distancing rules and lockdown periods for safeguarding public health. This is a trend we expect to see continue during the months and years to come.

WaveLength is the UK's leading national charity in reducing loneliness and isolation through the provision of technology to those most in need.

WaveLength has been providing help and support to people throughout the UK for over 80 years. It receives no government funding and relies solely upon public donations and grants. WaveLength provides everyday technology such as radios, televisions, and tablet computers, to help people maintain and increase the number of meaningful connections they have in their lives. Our beneficiaries report that technology helps them to feel happier, less lonely, and more connected to the outside world.

We are continuing to provide digital technology throughout the pandemic and are aware that the equipment we have already donated is still making a huge impact on our beneficiaries throughout this time. We are passionate about making sure the technology we provide invests in a longer-term solution for individuals and organisations, and is not just a 'quick fix' during the current times. Loneliness and isolation are always present and, as a charity, we want to ensure that the money our supporters donate makes the greatest possible impact. WaveLength is not just providing for today, but planning for tomorrow.

## Reducing Loneliness

WaveLength works to benefit individuals throughout the UK. This is achieved by working with a network of sponsors and small local organisations ranging from local Alzheimer's groups to local outposts and national organisations. We help them to focus on local delivery meeting local needs, and to develop their approach with the benefit of our expertise. WaveLength also chairs the Digital Equality Group whose members include: British Wireless for the Blind Fund, Citizens Online, Independent Age, Research Institute for Disabled Consumers, and Rural Community Council Network. WaveLength covers all age groups in all parts of the UK.

For more detailed information please see: [www.wavelength.org.uk/deg](http://www.wavelength.org.uk/deg)

We work on a national and local basis, targeting hard-to-reach communities in which people are often lonely and isolated. Our network includes groups who are experts in their local areas. They understand where the demand lies and how needs can be met. We support them in developing their projects and discuss different strategies, drawing upon our UK-wide experience and expertise built up over 80 years. We are experts in finding people in need and providing them with appropriate equipment. When we give out equipment we don't simply think about the short-term benefit, but the long-term effects to the individual or the group. Therefore, once our beneficiaries have received their pieces of equipment, we analyse and record the impact over a period of time. This helps us to understand whether their sense of loneliness has reduced and if their health has improved. We are always searching for new funding partners to work with in making bids for project finance. These may include NHS trusts, local authorities, housing associations, academics and corporates etc.

Donate online at [www.wavelength.org.uk/donate](http://www.wavelength.org.uk/donate)

We are aware that there are other bodies which have tried to provide technology. For example, an organisation provided tablets to the care homes in Wales where the success rate for usage was less than 50%. WaveLength critically assesses the organisations it works with and has built up a network of trusted partners. The impact on loneliness is monitored using the UCL Loneliness Scale. WaveLength's emphasis is upon the provision of equipment and the need for connectivity first and foremost, looking to support rather than train.

A key difference that may account for WaveLength's 95-98% success in usage of equipment is the way in which the Charity tailors solutions to individual needs. WaveLength has always seen loneliness as the central core of its work. It understands that many of its beneficiaries find it difficult, if not impossible, to leave their own homes. This means that support needs to be provided by organisations who are able to deliver services within communities and not just provide services remotely within a classroom or a 'rubber-stamp' model.

All hypothesis tests use a p-value to weigh the strength of the evidence. The p-value is a number between 0 and 1. A small p-value (typically  $\leq 0.05$ ) indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis. In our case, the null hypothesis is that technology actually causes loneliness.

- WaveLength's provision of technology reduces loneliness at the high level of statistical meaningfulness of  $P < 0.001$  which indicates an extremely high correlation between the reduction of loneliness, WaveLength's methods of working and the provision of technology.
- WaveLength's provision of technology not only reduces loneliness but increases people's health outcomes. This has been found to be at the level of  $P < 0.001$ , indicating the provision of technology promotes good health.
- WaveLength's provision of technology has also indicated that different sorts of technology reduce different sorts of loneliness and isolation. For example, tablets have been found to reduce individual loneliness and televisions reduce social loneliness. It was also found that, throughout the WaveLength beneficiary group, the level of loneliness was not determined by age, sex or region.

For more detailed information please see: [www.wavelength.org.uk/reports](http://www.wavelength.org.uk/reports)

What follows are case studies of the impact of WaveLength's work and how everyday technology can change lives.

# Digital Equipment For Care Homes

## Friend in Deed

Friend in Deed has been a registered charity since November 2018. We share the same vision, to reduce loneliness. They also promote intergenerational friendships, through building connections between younger and older people. Since March 2020, WaveLength has given the centre 10 tablets, 10 radios and 10 CD players.

“The use of equipment from WaveLength in the last 9 months has made such a difference in terms of the well-being of the residents. When seeing friends and loved one’s face-to-face was no longer possible, seeing them via video call was the next best thing. The tablets have been valuable in not only maintaining social connections, but in helping those who are visually impaired. Our aims are to reduce loneliness and promote kindness and collaborating with WaveLength helped us achieve this.” Kelly Lindsay, Friend in Deed.



“ A resident has been using the tablet to write messages to the care staff and then holding it up for them to read. ”

## Essex Dementia Care

Essex Dementia Care provides support for people with dementia as well as providing needed respite and emotional support for their main care-givers. Sometimes carers leave their loved ones at the centres for a few hours while they run errands, but many stay to join in with activities.

WaveLength donated 8 tablets to Essex Dementia Care. The tablets were used to play stimulating brain games and gave the users an opportunity to work together using the tablets.

“ The tablets are a familiar item, it’s like using a fork. Once you’ve learnt the skill of using it, then it becomes second nature - so the tablets are very helpful. ”



# Forging friendships over football targeting loneliness and isolation in men over 55

Witton Lodge Community Association run an over-55s men's project. A significant number of older men within the community are isolated.

Bringing people together locally in a sympathetic environment, channeling a shared interest, would be a way of using digital technology to enhance the wellbeing of this group.

During the first lockdown, WaveLength gave Witton Lodge a Smart TV and tablets to help bring them together.



A range of men who took part in the project found the experience rewarding and fun. The men have a range of physical disabilities, learning disabilities, or wellbeing and mental health issues. They come together for a shared experience using digital technology. This has made them feel less isolated and more motivated in the activities provided. The number of males accessing Craft Club has increased.

## Working with BAME groups

### Autism Pin



Autism Pin is a self-funded charity, supporting African families that have children with autism and other disabilities. At the start of lockdown, WaveLength awarded 5 radios and 2 tablets for young families to use.

“One parent said it really helped to improve their child's mental health as he is now fighting less with his siblings and there have been changes in his behaviour since he got the tablet. Things have improved not just for the son, but for the whole family.”

Ola, founder Autism Pin

# March 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown

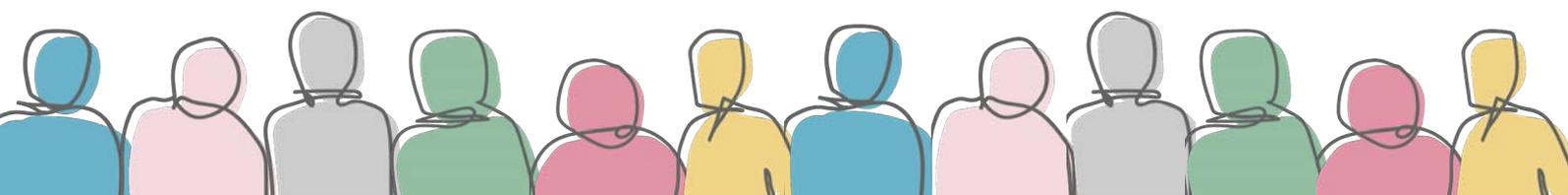
## Over 70s Radio Scheme



The Coronavirus pandemic has had an unprecedented impact across the world. In the UK, the past 12 months have been transformational and many people did not fully anticipate the range of impacts that this virus could cause. WaveLength's services have never been more in demand, helping the lonely and isolated. In March 2020, WaveLength launched a radio distribution scheme for the over-70s who were vulnerable and self-isolating. The purpose of the scheme was to relieve loneliness and isolation during the first lockdown and to help the over-70s feel more connected to the outside world.

It is a common misconception that every home has a radio. However, within the first few hours of the launch of our scheme, it became evident that this is not the case. The day after the launch, we had over 90,000 people visit the WaveLength website and, by day two, we had received over 9,000 applications. This was an overwhelming response which highlighted the need for support. Our staff worked tirelessly to support those most in need, prioritising those who did not have a radio or broadband access, and those who were living alone. Over-70s who were caring for others were also placed in the high-need category.

The scheme, which ended in April 2020, showed an outpouring of concern and thoughtfulness from people who were nominating their grandparents, friends and neighbours to receive a vital radio set. WaveLength was able to help over 5,000 people through the Radio Scheme. We would have liked to have reached more people but, unfortunately, donations that were promised didn't materialise. We know from our work that a radio set brings comfort and is a helpful tool in relieving loneliness.



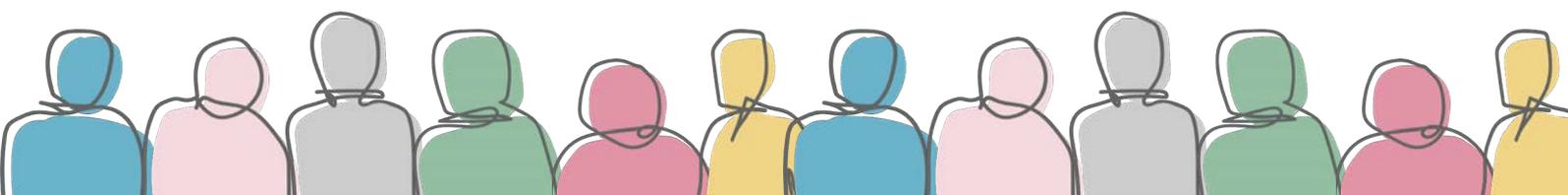
“ I just wanted to say how pleased my mum is with her new radio. My mum is 86 in May and suffers with dementia, diabetes and numerous other issues. She has no internet so the radio is an awesome way for her to be reminded of what’s going on and hearing people chatting about things and stops her feeling alone.”



“ The radio has helped with my mental health. It has helped through distraction and refocusing, as I am often at crisis point. The radio has been really positive for me, it really has saved me.”

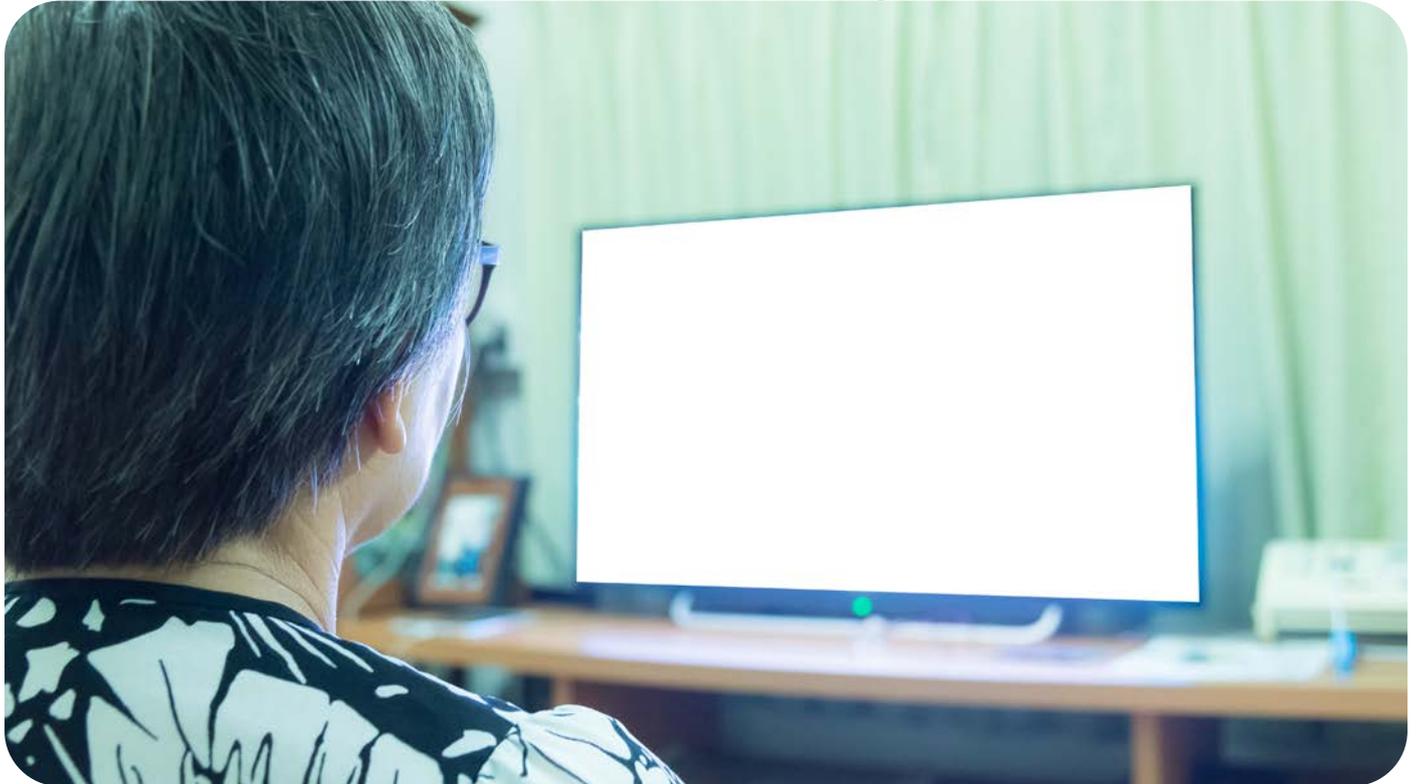
“ My mum received the radio this morning and was so happy. She loves music and is going to carry it round the house with her so she always has something on in the background. It will really make such a massive difference and I wanted to pass on how grateful we are for such a brilliant initiative.”

“ My nana received the radio this morning and is absolutely delighted with it! My Grandad has recently gone into a care home and so she has been unable to visit for the last month. She’s been married to my Grandad for 53 years and has gone from seeing him and family daily to not seeing him at all.”



# Television Licences: key changes to support survivors

## Simplifying the rules for domestic abuse refuges



In 2017, after years of campaigning, WaveLength was proud to announce that, together with the BBC, we successfully clarified the policy around TV licences in domestic abuse refuges. Before, the rules around licences in refuges were unclear and impractical, disadvantaging vulnerable survivors of domestic abuse. Now just one TV licence will cover everyone within a single refuge. This clarifies the licensing rules and allows the temporary inhabitants to benefit from a television while they rebuild their lives.

For a man, woman or child fleeing domestic abuse, a television can be a powerful tool. If an abuser has controlled one's every action and decision, owning a television and choosing what to watch can feel like freedom. A television can distract an abuse survivor from the unfamiliarity of their new surroundings and help to build a community with others in the refuge.

We are told of the huge difference that a television can make to a person fleeing abuse. However, until now, many abuse survivors did not own a television because they could not afford the TV licence fee. While, for many years, hospitals and businesses had the benefit of blanket provision in the licensing rules, this was the first time that domestic abuse refuges had been recognised in this way.

“ Wow, thank you, I am so very grateful! ”

“ This is just wonderful news; I have informed everyone and they are very grateful. ”

“ Wow! Wow, this is so amazing! ”

# Supporting survivors of domestic abuse

The Clothworker's Fund awarded us a grant to support survivors of domestic abuse. This allowed us to give tablet computers to domestic abuse refuges to help survivors and their children move as quickly as possible from their abusive relationship into the temporary shelter of a refuge, and through into independent living. Within abusive relationships, withholding technology can be used as a means of exerting control over the victim. For someone trying to escape an abusive relationship, access to a tablet computer in a refuge enables them to lay the foundations of a new life without fearing the reprisals experienced at home.

Once a victim has escaped their abusive relationship, they are likely be housed in a refuge far from home in order to protect them from their abuser. This means that they have to leave their old life, career, family and friends behind, and can quickly feel isolated. A tablet computer enables survivors to contact friends and family to let them know they are safe, and it can help to create a sense of normality amid unfamiliar surroundings.

Many government services are only accessible easily online, and children now need to use the internet to do their homework. By gifting the refuges with tablet computers, we can give the survivors of abuse access to housing support, employment potential, financial support, education, entertainment and helpful online support groups.



“ The mums have commented on how the tablet eases pressure for kids by being able to complete homework.”

Survivors  
reached:  
2,000+

Tablets  
gifted:  
464

Refuges  
helped:  
42

## West Cornwall Women's Aid



Wavelength has donated tablets, televisions and radios to West Cornwall Women's Aid since 2016. "The women at refuge have experienced high-risk domestic abuse. Most of the women have never lived alone and are experiencing high levels of anxiety. We have found that the most likely time that a woman will call or message her abuser (while at refuge) is in the evening when staff are absent.

Having TVs in their bedrooms not only occupies them but also reduces their sense of isolation. Many women leave the TV on even if they are not watching it, as the sounds gives them comfort and makes them feel they have company and are not alone. We can't stress the sense of company and normality that a television can give to our women."

## Strategic work with NHS: stress and trauma

WaveLength works strategically on small projects with some NHS trusts. WaveLength feels that statutory organisations should be able to fund their own services. This includes putting their services online and providing the equipment for their communities.

WaveLength has a long tradition of working in the St Pancras area and has therefore provided support to patients with cancer and mental illness. During the coronavirus pandemic we have also supported the provision of digital access within hospitals in this area.

The Traumatic Stress Clinic, St Pancras Hospital, offers services to adults experiencing PTSD following traumatic experiences. WaveLength gave their clinic TVs, radios, and tablets for adults to use.

“The TVs have been great in connecting patients with the outside world. Patients reported constantly that it helped them feel less lonely. The tablets in particular have been helpful, as patients were able to connect to social media and their families as well through Skype or Viber etc.”

“ CD players have been helpful for patients. CDs we provide promote relaxation and self-soothing which has a major impact on psychological and emotional wellbeing which helps to make them more able to be around people. ”



# Refugees: Providing valuable companionship

WaveLength has worked with charities and local government organisations throughout the UK in welcoming Syrian families forced to flee from their homeland.

Staff from the refugee support team have encouraged families to watch the news and other TV programmes. The children's programmes especially, have allowed the families to work on their English alphabet and simple phrases. This has enabled them to begin their ESOL classes with a good basic knowledge. The equipment has made families feel less lonely and isolated as they enjoy going to the communal room to have a cup of tea and socialise with others. The women also get together to watch DVDs and fitness work-outs and feel secure in the understanding that they can do this without any judgement.

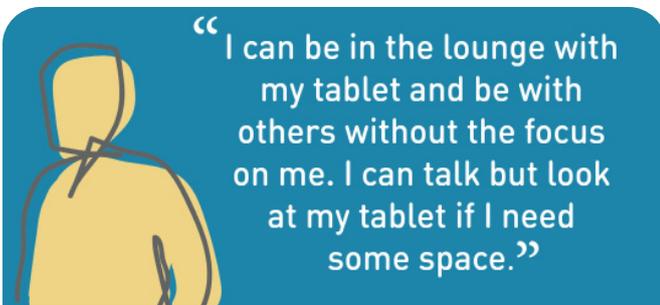


“ All the families can't thank you enough as they would have been totally isolated. Now the children can get together and watch a film and they are learning to play together again.”

# Creating communities for young people at risk

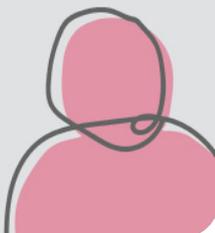
Llamua supports young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. WaveLength gave radios, televisions, and tablets for young people to use in a shared lounge.

Without the TV, the lounge would have been an awkward environment. Young people may have felt under pressure to be together, in a quiet room, with people they don't really know, having just moved in. The chances are that they would have retreated to their own rooms and continued to be very isolated and lonely.



“ I can be in the lounge with my tablet and be with others without the focus on me. I can talk but look at my tablet if I need some space.”

“ We have movie nights now together and not just staying in our rooms. I enjoy watching documentaries and learning I can connect with family and friends.”



# In Conclusion

The provision of technology must be a key part of the solution in the fight against loneliness. Whilst training plays an important role in teaching people digital skills, individuals need to have access to equipment and connectivity in the first place. Though owning and using technology is something that many of us take for granted, not everyone can afford a radio, television, or tablet. Funding should be allocated to help purchase technology for individuals in need.

We recognise that there is negativity around the relationship between technology and loneliness, but this research shows that technology was not of itself the cause loneliness. In fact, its provision led to improved mental well-being, quality of life, and satisfaction. These real outcomes should counter the negative discussions concerning technology that appear in the media. For people who have nothing, technology provides a valuable lifeline.

- Connection & re-connection to society
- Topics of conversation
- Comfort & companionship
- Accessing online social content
- Facilitating hobbies or interests
- Diversion & engagement
- Accessing information & media content
- Improved language, social skills, & cultural integration
- Empathy & identification

## Key recommendations

- You don't need innovative or costly technology to reduce people's loneliness. Radios, televisions, and tablets influence people's lives for the better. We shouldn't shy away from an everyday solution, which offers real benefits to people who are lonely. This technology can save the health and social care sector significant amounts of money.
- Every home should be connected. To expand the provision of technology, there should be means-tested access to a basic standard of broadband. Access to a basic viable standard of broadband would enable a growing number of people to use tablets and smart TVs to connect them to the world. It is often not possible for people to leave the house to go online in community spaces. Low-cost access to broadband at home is vital, if not a right!
- Digital Equality is not just about providing access to equipment and data at an affordable level but the maintenance of non-digital alternatives to provide holistic access. It is practically unrealistic to think that everybody will be able to use the internet and technology. By default, this is causing loneliness and isolation, particularly amongst disabled people and low-income households. World Wide Web accessibility standards and the concept of inclusive design are somewhat misnomers. The UN charter for disabled people recognises this.



In combatting loneliness through technology, there is the need to concentrate on everyday solutions that are proven to be effective and delivered in a way that has measurable impact. Concentrating upon the hunting of new solutions to old problems means that money is being spent on: training, development, assessment, scaling and delivery. Arguably, it would be far more effective and efficient to spend money on 'off-the-shelf' solutions, which are already proven to work, delivered by bodies that have experience. This would be just a question of scaling up.

WaveLength has found that there is more need across the UK than it can meet with its own resources but is keen to help many more people as funds allow. Government funding and The National Lottery scheme has been available only to large national organisations or small local organisations. Between these categories are those smaller charities with a national reach which have been neglected. There are undoubtedly going to be further challenges ahead.

As a charity we rely on donations from supporters, companies, and groups to continue our vital work. By donating you are helping to provide individuals and organisations with media technology which is crucial in their fight against loneliness. We couldn't achieve this without generous supporters. There are many ways to donate and fundraise for WaveLength.

#### **Regular Gift**

If you would like to make a regular donation please call the number below.

#### **Post**

Post a cheque to our head office in Hornchurch, Essex.

#### **Fundraise for us**

Fundraise at work, at your local club or among friends and family for WaveLength.

#### **Charity of the year**

Choose WaveLength as your company's charity of the year.

#### **Contact us**

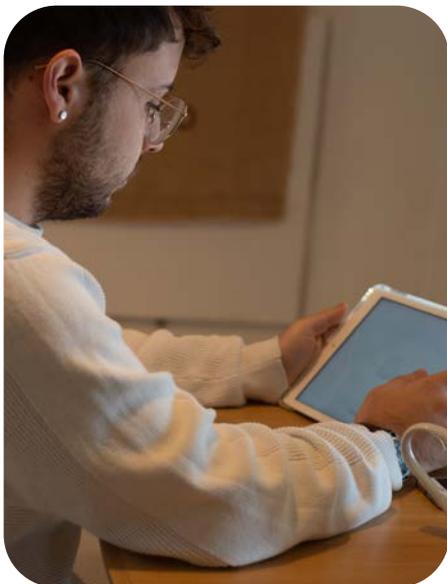
WaveLength, 159a High, Street Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 3YB  
01708 621101

## Find out more

WaveLength is the UK's oldest loneliness and technology charity. We give radios, televisions and tablet computers to people in need. We support those who are lonely and isolated due to old age, illness, poverty, or by circumstances which make it difficult for them to leave the house or meet new people.

For over 80 years, we have worked with domestic abuse refuges, young people living in care, homeless hostels, hospital wards, care homes and many more.

We thank our supporters for their continuous and generous support.



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