



City Department of the Aging Joins Campaign to Warn of Health Risks from Living in Isolation

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Eight million older Americans live in isolation, and the holiday season just makes the loneliness even worse. NY1 Health Reporter Erin Billups reports on how a little companionship can change a life.

Childhood polio left Olga Monetti weak physically, so she spends most of her days alone in her Upper East Side apartment.

"You look at TV and you read, but the phone doesn't ring, and you're really alone, so that can get to you after a while. So sometimes, I get very depressed," Monetti said.

Monetti's sister and lifelong roommate Fannie Monetti passed away last holiday season, making this time of year even more difficult.

The 83-year old is among an estimated one in five adults over 50 in America living in isolation.

"Everybody is supposed to be festive and happy, and when you don't have friends to share that or you don't have a social network to connect, it becomes increasingly difficult for older people," said Donna Corrado, commissioner of the city's Department for the Aging.

The city Department for the Aging has joined a national campaign to get the word out about the growing problem of isolation and its health risks.

"We've found that people who are socially isolated and lonely are at greater risk for things such as chronic illnesses, heart disease, Alzheimer's, depression," Corrado said. "And it's very sad that people in this city actually die of loneliness."

Monetti is determined not to let that happen. She got a scooter and accepts help from neighbors to get outdoors. And through the advocacy of Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, she now has weekly sessions with a therapist, daily meals on wheels and art lessons.

She is even getting some companionship through the Friendly Visiting program under Thrive NYC, an overhaul of the city's mental health services.

"To have someone walk in the door? Big, big difference. Because nobody's ever here. So anybody that comes, I'm so happy to see them," Monetti said.

Friendly visitors can be seniors themselves. The Department for the Aging encourages the elderly to volunteer and learn how to use social media at one of 250 senior centers.

But New Yorkers are also urged to reach out to neighbors who may be alone this season.

"It's really important that people stay engaged and connected, but sometimes, people, they need a hand to get to that place," Corrado said.