

The Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland 2018 'State of the Nation' survey, examines social and community issues in today's society, along with establishing a barometer check on how people feel life compares now with previous generations.

Rotary's survey to the nation has importantly uncovered how nearly two-thirds of us (64%) feel lonely.

Loneliness is an issue normally associated with older people but in fact, the highest percentage of people affected were aged between 16 – 29, followed by those aged 30 – 44. This is a significant finding and something that Rotary is seeking to address.

The survey also uncovered, that today's generation feels it doesn't have the same sense of community spirit as the previous generation, with nearly half of respondents (47%) claiming they don't even know their neighbour's name.

According to respondents, the biggest issues in society are believed to be:

- Mental health (56%)
- Poverty (48%)
- Homelessness (48%)
- Crime (45%)
- Care for elderly (41%)
- Unemployment (38%)
- Opportunities for young people (34%)

The situation has deteriorated so much in recent times that Rotary has established 200 extra community-based groups in the past year to help tackle the challenges facing society; with Rotary clubs across the country working to confront some of these big social issues with initiatives including:

- youth employment projects
- creating food banks
- providing mental health support in communities
- helping to tackle crime
- or even just being there for someone to talk to when they're lonely.

Rotary is present within most towns and cities, supporting community cohesion and underpinning the fabric of society. Working alongside other community groups, Rotary is often the facilitator bringing support teams together. But it is our millennial generations that need to be brought into Rotary to ensure the 113-year legacy is maintained and importantly evolves to ensure relevance in the 21st century and beyond.

With data analysis from our State of the Nation report showing how the current generation feel people looked out for each other more years ago, that their current work/life balance is poor, and that the burden to have it all makes them feel under pressure, it is probably unsurprising to find that a staggering 84% of us wish we were living in a simpler time where everyone was less materialistic.

Worryingly, analysis of the survey data exposed that two thirds of people believe their standard of living is worse than that of their parents' generation, and a staggering 92% of us feel bogged down by the stresses and strains of modern day life.

Understanding why people feel as they do is critical to finding meaningful solutions. When asked why work/life balance is harder now than before, the main factors given were:

- managing finances (42%),
- getting on the property ladder (40%)
- maintaining a 'job for life' (40%)

Interestingly, although technology is seen as a positive enhancement to today's world, many people believed their parent's life was better because they didn't have the pressures of social media.

We would always advise a certain air of caution with 'rose tinted spectacles' often being unleashed when we look backwards, but the fact that people revealed their belief that people looked out for each other more, finances were in better shape (more home ownership) and that there was a stronger sense of community spirit does indicate that more needs to be done to address these challenges.

The question we want to raise is around how Rotary affects change within our communities to address the concerns that have been uncovered. Tackling loneliness and enhancing community spirit and cohesion is at the heart of what Rotary stands for. Taking part in something meaningful, getting out of the house and meeting others, particularly in a family friendly environment gives a greater sense of intrinsic satisfaction, easing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

The global Rotary network is a great way to meet new people, make lasting friendships and have fun. This is particularly pertinent given the feedback from the young adults who responded as they will be able to develop skills, share personal and vocational experience and take up leadership roles all whilst making a difference to the local or international community. A true win-win for our millennial generations and the wider society.

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