

World's longest railway bench gets chatty in fight to end loneliness

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TransPennine Express (TPE) has launched a brand-new initiative, 'chatty benches', in a push to end loneliness and increase conversations amongst customers, following more than a year of reduced interactions amongst the public due to the pandemic.

With more than 9M people in the UK experiencing loneliness, TPE understands it may be the person sitting next to you who is quietly struggling. Consequently, the train company has launched the 'chatty benches', which will now be signposted at all of TPE's managed stations** throughout the North.

To mark the launch, colleagues, customers and representatives from the Campaign to End Loneliness took a seat at the world's longest railway bench, at Scarborough train station, TPE's very first 'chatty bench'.

In a recent study conducted by the Campaign to End Loneliness, 71% of adults in the North of England thought that loneliness would be a serious issue beyond Covid-19. Now, TPE has committed to raising awareness of loneliness and helping customers in the North and Scotland who currently suffer, or who have suffered from loneliness during and following the pandemic.

Half the battle when it comes to loneliness is having the courage to speak to someone. TPE hopes this reminder on selected benches will give people a gentle nudge to encourage conversation or even a hello to someone and break down these initial barriers to stimulate conversations between people. These small moments of connection could help alleviate feelings of loneliness for someone.

Partnership Marketing Manager for TransPennine Express, Lisa Hewitt said: “We’re very excited to be launching the ‘chatty benches’ initiative at stations throughout the North. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic rise in cases of loneliness and so we know, now more than ever, getting together has never felt better. We want to raise awareness of the issue and encourage moments of interaction to support those who have experienced loneliness, helping them make new connections whilst also enabling them to reconnect with family and friends.

“Loneliness affects so many people in the UK and we share the vision of the Campaign to End Loneliness that everyone can live a life free from chronic loneliness. We want to encourage people to get out and about and make those human connections that we all need, and as a provider of travel, we know we can help make a difference.”

The benches, that will be clearly signposted in TPE’s managed stations, will be cleaned throughout the day to ensure they are safe for customers to use. This is in addition to the thorough cleaning programme in place where key touch points in stations and on board the 100 plus carriages are sanitised to ensure the safety of passengers when visiting the station and travelling on the trains.

Robin Hewings, Programme Director of the Campaign to End Loneliness, said: “Tackling loneliness by helping people to build social connections is really important. Loneliness can be felt by people of all ages and backgrounds and can seriously impact people’s quality of life and even their health.

“We are delighted that TransPennine Express has launched the ‘chatty benches’ initiative. We hope that passengers take advantage of the scheme as you never know who you may be talking to and what a huge difference it could make to that person’s wellbeing.”

TPE will also be taking on the Campaign to End Loneliness employer’s pledge, setting up pathways and signage for colleagues to access support and training resources will be made available so colleagues can recognise if someone may be experiencing loneliness.

The train company will be conducting an employee survey to measure loneliness amongst colleagues as it recognises that some of the workforce may have experienced loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, customers can save over 50% on travel when booking in advance, giving great value for money when people will be using the train to reconnect with family, friends and loved ones again.

The ‘chatty benches’ will be signposted and visible at TPE managed stations across the North. To find out more about TPE and the Campaign to End Loneliness

visit: <https://www.tpexpress.co.uk/loneliness> and <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/>

Photo credit: TransPennine Express