
 <p style="text-align: center;">Getting Out of the Comfort Zone</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BN(S) Conference & AGM 2005</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Conference Notes</p> 
<p>Have befriending projects got it all wrong – is companionship too cosy?</p> <p>Is protecting the idea of 1:1 befriending a mistake and a route to exclusion?</p> <p>Wouldn't it be better if befrienders introduced a befriender to lots of other people – surely that's inclusion?</p> <p>What is the best way of achieving inclusion & lessening isolation? Is there a "best" way or are there lots of different ways? Does it depend on your client group or whether you are in a rural or urban project? How do you weigh up the risks and advantages of the different ways of working?</p> <p>These were the questions up for debate at the 2005 Annual Conference.</p> <p>The debate was chaired by Steve Coulson of the Edinburgh Development Group who initially asked each panel member to introduce themselves.</p> <p>Robert Weetman (Scottish Human Services) began the debate by presenting a scenario. Imagine a society where blond people were excluded and were starving by the side of the road. There are some benevolent brunettes in this society that saw that the blonds were starving and so they provided them with bread at the side of the road. In time others came along and set up the Bread Centre where blond people came to collect their bread and could take part in other activities and even began to bake their own bread there but all of this activity was focused on this specially set-up centre. This analogy pointed out that we may care for people in our society who are marginalised and we may want to help them out but that doesn't mean that we include them or view them as valued members of society with a contribution to make. Sometimes the ways that we help people can still keep them at a distance and until we are able to go beyond that we aren't including people but holding them on the fringes. Robert said that the irony was that if we are pleasing our funders who are often governmental then we will keep people on the outside as that is really what they want and the challenge for projects is to push beyond those limits.</p> <p>He was followed by Tim McLachlan (Equal Futures Circles Project). Tim's work is in setting up lifelong circles of support for people. He began by defining a circle of support as a group of allies that come together to listen, share ideas, problem solve, plan and co-ordinate efforts in the support of the person at the centre of the circle. Circles start from the dreams of the focus person, looking at what they really want to do or be and at what they are good at. They would also pay due regard to people's nightmares. Circles pool the skills, ideas and connections of the people involved and no two circles are the same. Circles endeavour to establish life long support for people. Tim stated that bringing more people together in support of an individual is more powerful than a 1:1</p>	

relationship.

Next up was **Wendy Bates** (re:discover). Wendy explained the journey that her project had gone through in moving from a 1:1 long term companionship model to a model that she described as social inclusion. In this model clients are matched up with volunteers for the maximum of a year, during this time the befriender and befriended set goals together to give the befriended the opportunity of developing and practicing social skills & getting out & about and engaging in activities and meeting people that leads to them developing their own social networks.

Finally **Alana Trusty** (Sound Sense) talked about her experience of running a befriending project for deaf people. Sound Sense is in its 4th year of operating and has 36 volunteers and 41 clients. Alana's project teaches their benders sign language so that they are better able to communicate with their bendees. Alana said that for many bendees having one stable supportive relationship there just for them was exactly what they needed. She pointed out that the confidence this gave people was enough that they were then able to deal much better with the other relationships in their lives. She also felt that many people didn't want a network of friends but rather sought to have that one true friendship.

The chairperson then put several questions to the panel:

- How could you build support when people may not have any allies?
- How do projects manage to recruit support?
- How might befriending get in the way of inclusion?

The panel arrived at the consensus that for some people who have no-one in their lives then befriending is a good starting point.

Robert felt that because society can see our clients as problems it will expect befriending projects to deal with these people 'over there' and protect the world from them. He went on to suggest that if befriending projects don't seek to integrate their clients into the community that they could be seen to be colluding with the idea of keeping them separate.

Tim said he felt that there was no 'one size fits all' and that we need to respond to clients' needs as regards the number of people that we introduce into their lives. So 1:1 might be right at the beginning but maybe 1:2 or more could equally be the right thing later on for some clients.

The debate was then opened up to questions from the floor.

- "At what point does a befriender become a friend?"
- "How could the projects represented on the panel respond to the needs of older clients that might be house-bound"
- "What is the difference between the approaches?"

Robert was first to respond. His feeling was that "volunteers become friends immediately and as such they don't withdraw from matches. As with friends, everyone would go the visit the person who can't get out and as for the differences Robert felt that when projects were "done well" that he couldn't see that there were any real differences between benders and friends.

Wendy said that it was the role of re:discover's volunteers to be bridge-builders not friends and that in a good match clients would have made social contacts that they would continue to see after the project had withdrawn from the match. She felt that if people needed to get out of the house in order to pursue an interest and the problem was one of mobility that there needed to be services in place that would help people with that but that was not the remit of befriending.

Alana said that she felt that it wasn't always possible for people to get out of the house and that this posed no problem for her project as they were happy to do home visiting. She said that volunteers see clients out of choice because they have become friends and concluded that it might be difficult for anyone outside the world of befriending to see what our differences are.

Tim said that he felt older people had a lot to give society and that was sometimes forgotten. He felt that instead of always asking what can we do for them we should also be looking at what they have to share and finding ways of making it possible for them to do this.

The question was then asked "what would projects do when befrienders and befriendees became friends?" "if every match is kept running how can you make time to support new matches" and "how do you decide when matches are ready to end"

Alana answered that they prepare volunteers for endings as part of their induction training and that each volunteer knows how long they are able to commit for, or knows when they are coming to the end of their time and so can prepare befriendees for this happening.

Wendy said that right from the beginning of re:discover's matches they are talking about endings and what might happen after. It is by doing this that they plan and set tasks and goals that will enable their befriendees to have things in place when the match does come to a close.

Tim said that it was down to circles members to maintain, strengthen and create new relationships within the circle.

In summary **Robert** said "befriending should learn from other approaches and we need to be open to learning. He challenged that society doesn't expect our clients to become part of the world and as a consequence it's most comfortable for us when we meet that expectation – if that is happening then we need to worry.

Alana said 1:1 was needed as it provided many clients with the support and friendship that they require. She added that this may lead to the widening of social circles as clients' confidence is raised. She acknowledged that different projects are funded differently, have different client groups and different remits and will therefore work in different ways. She went on to talk about the fact that many people who volunteer to befriend are themselves excluded and that the befriending relationship is equally important to be useful for them and valued by them.

Tim said that what he wanted for his clients was to get as many people involved as possible in their circles and to be able to build a vision of the future with and for his

clients. He used the analogy of a wheel with the focus person at the hub, the circles members around the outside and the spokes that hold the wheel together being the strength of the relationships that develop.

Wendy said that she felt it was important for us to be able to have time to reflect on what we do and how we do it. That it was important for us to have time to look at the dreams and aspirations that we have for our clients, our volunteers and our organisations.

The Workshops

WORKSHOP 1: Anything Could Happen (Robert Weetman)

Robert started the workshop by asking the participants to say what they wanted to look at in the workshop.

- Why are we afraid to take risks?
- How do we allow relationships to develop if we are too concerned about risk?
- How can we prevent risk?
- How do we balance what might be a risk to the befriender, the befriended and to society?
- What do we consider to be risky?
- Do we have to research the risks so thoroughly that we are stopped from doing anything because of the time that this takes
- Don't we just naturally eliminate risk from the things that we do with befrienders?
- Risks versus rights
- What's enough for us to assure safety and how do we know when we've done it?
- What information do we gather for risk assessments and how do we stop that from feeling really invasive for the befriended?
- How do you balance protecting someone and allowing them to grow through successfully dealing with risk?
- How can creative relationships develop without risk?

The group then went on to discuss 'what is risk really about?' and at whether it is more about protecting our projects than it is about protecting our clients. It was noted that we all take calculated risks all of the time, but no matter how much we consider things something unexpected can always happen. The question of whether we are living in a frightened society was raised.

It was concluded that we should look at the impact of the risk versus the likelihood of it happening and that we should look at two areas of risk assessment- risk to the client and risk to the volunteer.

The Children Scotland act asks us to take "all reasonable steps" to eliminate risk but who decides what constitutes reasonable steps?

Really there are 3 main areas of risk.

- That there is risk inherent in the environment we are in or
- The befriended does something or
- The befriender does something

We talked about what protects us from risk in our everyday lives

- Being forewarned
- Having other people around
- Knowing or being able to access people in authority
- Other people knowing where we are and when we are expected to return
- Having contact phone numbers with us
- Having access to emergency services
- Trusting no-one
- We need to build layers of protection against risk

We should look at risks so that:-

we are enabling people to do things knowing that we have made it as safe as possible rather than:-

looking at risk as something which prevents us from doing things.

And lastly the workshop looked at the way forward for befriending as regards risk.

- Negotiating
- Having policies in place
- Recognising that risk is unavoidable
- Making “reasonable” attempts to gather and consider information about any situation
- Putting safeguards in place
- Sharing responsibility
- Having open-minds and a can-do attitude
- Supervision and reviews
- Policies documented properly
- Never taking our eye off the ball
- Starting from befrienders’ and befriendees’ perception of risk
- Allowing calculated risks to be taken
- Not getting too hung up on what others do.
- Knowing our befriendees
- Sharing best practice

WORKSHOP 2: 3's company (Wendy Bates)

This workshop looked at

- Why we involve others?
- When could/should we involve others?
- What are the rewards and risk associated with involving others?
- What are the barriers to others getting involved?

Why involve others in befriending?

Why involve others in befriending			
project	befriendee	Befriender	wider community
Partnership working	Broader involvement	Less pressure	Greater participation
Develop further good practice	Less dependant	Peer support	education
Other ideas	Decision of service user	More comfortable in groups	Reduced stigma
Better links	Meet other needs that 1 voln couldn't	Less responsibility	Participation in groups
Get out of comfort zone	Additional friendships		Raising awareness
Help meet projects aims	Promote independence		funding
	Moving on		Challenge stereotypes

The key benefits are to the befriendee

When do/can we involve others?

- When volunteers identify the need or want for this through support and supervision
- Doing things like going to a film group rather than just going to the pictures, or joining a photography club rather than going out and taking photos together
- If the client wants to join a group or club but wants their volunteer to chum them along as they don't feel confident about going along
- If the client's confidence has been raised by befriending it's good to then do activities which might help the client to meet other people
- if it's identified as a need
- group activities as part of befriending project
- crisis interventions (e.g. child protection issues)
- life changes - different supports
- as part of a planned ending
- to increase independence and lessen dependence

The workshop then went on to list the risks and rewards

REWARDS	RISKS
A support network	Confidentiality issues
Self-esteem confidence	Potential for exploitation of client
More people to share interests with	Jealousy
Lack of dependency	Stepping on other projects toes
The project can work with more people	Accountability
Inclusive	
New experiences	
New things to talk about	

The group then looked at ways of overcoming or minimising the risks

Confidentiality:

Be open with the service user about what you are doing together, talk it over, find out what the service user wants to say to others about themselves, communicate appropriate info with permission, Give volunteer good training and good support.

Potential for exploitation

Work with the service user to increase their social skills, work to educate the wider community about the groups we work with, To reduce stigma and prejudice,

Jealousy

Reassure, make sure that there is 1:1 time

Accountability

Clear boundaries, timely introductions, small steps, planning ahead

WORKSHOP 3: Person Centred Planning (Steve Coulson)

Steve explained that Person Centred Planning had originally been developed as a method of working with people with learning disabilities but was now widely used in other sectors e.g. with young people, older people and for people with mental health problems. He described it as 'infinitely adaptable' and that it could be adapted as long as it made sense to people.

Person Centred Planning can be thought of as a way of helping people who want to make some changes in their life. It is an empowering approach to helping people plan their future and organise the supports they need. Person Centred Planning puts the 'person' at the centre of a planning process and shifts power to them. It provides an effective way to listen and respond to people. The approach encourages us to take direction from people by identifying their gifts, interests and desires. This makes it different from traditional approaches to assessment and individual planning.

As an example Steve introduced himself and told us a few things about himself – short sighted, has a dodgy knee, talks a lot and can ramble on...he noted that describing

these 'deficits' is how we can often approach descriptions of the people we work with.

Steve then noted other things about himself and drew a 'Who Am I?' poster:- e.g. his identity (family member, where he was born), his interests (Indian meals, having friends round), his gifts/qualities, skills and resources, hobbies/passions/interests (cricket/pop trivia), his abilities. He drew simple images to represent each item.

Steve suggested that if we aspire to people being more connected then we should start by considering people's strengths and things to be positive about. To practice this approach the group split into threes. One person to talk about themselves, one to act as recorder (writing/drawing the images) and the other person to be the prompter. Steve noted that an important skill in recording is not so much drawing as listening. He suggested that the recorder should have fun with it and noted that words can be used alongside pictures.

Steve's experience was that people's allies should be at a meeting that looks at Person Centred Planning. Allies are people who know and care about the person (e.g. a reaction might be "I'd like my mum and my wee brother but not my big brother" or "I want Mary from the night staff"). The person at the centre should be in control of who comes.

Steve noted that Person Centre Planning had other tools e.g. Path, a useful tool to assist people in direction towards an end point e.g. "I want a job"

Another area was exploring around people's Dreams (what life would look, who would be in it' and Nightmares 'if everything goes wrong' (if these are not talked about they are still there' (alternative language that could be used here was 'wish' and 'worry').

WORKSHOP 4: Permanent Reduction in Isolation (Alana Trusty)

The workshop began by looking at causes of isolation for befriendedees. Projects concluded that isolation occurs because of a lack of social skills, discrimination, social circumstances (e.g. family), emotional isolation, physical isolation, geographical isolation or health problems.

Staff concluded that isolation for their befriendedees meant people being unable to access everyday activities/experiences, people not being visited, people having a low level of contact or interaction or people having practical or financial constraints in accessing social activities.

The results of isolation could often be an increase in loneliness, fear, a lack of confidence, a loss of individuality (being seen as a problem not a person), a lack of value/worth, people being intellectually isolated.

Projects noted that in the main they used existing procedures and records relating to these as sources of information for evaluating whether isolation had been reduced namely; supervision records, reviews, feedback from referring agencies.

Alana presented the approach taken at Sound Sense where befriendedees complete a self-assessment (or work with the project to complete this) before they are matched up. This rates their confidence, the level to which they go out in the community and other measures which link to isolation. This assessment is subsequently completed every 6 months so that change can be shown and quantified. Because the scale used is 1-10 it is also easy to plot percentage changes over time.

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