



BN(S) Annual Conference / AGM 2002

“Why Do They Do It?” Exploring Befrienders’ Motivation

Thursday 3rd October 2002, The Adelphi Centre, Glasgow

The Annual Conference 2002 provided the opportunity for befriending projects to hear about recent research on the motivation of volunteer befrienders, and to compare this with experience from a range of projects. Afternoon workshops provided opportunities to discuss some of the main topics raised in more detail, while the Annual General Meeting offered the chance for members to hear about and comment on work in 2001/02 and plans for the future. 80 delegates representing 56 varied befriending projects from Scotland and England attended the event.

Why Befrienders Befriend

Tara Hollway - Praxis Care Group, Belfast

Tara opened the conference with a presentation of results from her research: *“Providing Support, Reducing Exclusion: The Extent, Nature & Value of Volunteer Befriending in Northern Ireland”*.

The second stage of this research had sought to identify the motivations of befrienders the link between motivation and recruitment and retention. Research was carried out using standardised questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Tara highlighted previous research by Clary and Snyder (1998) which found 6 motivations for volunteering and classified them as the Volunteer Functions Inventory:

- Values – importance of helping others
- Understanding – learning and self development
- Social – conforming to the norms of significant others
- Career – advance in a particular field of work
- Protective – escaping negative feelings about self
- Enhancement – enhancing own self-worth

115 Inventories completed by befrienders using the above classification were analysed and showed that the order of importance to volunteers working at befriending projects was Values, Understanding, Enhancement, Protective, Career, Social.

The impact of this order of importance on recruitment in befriending projects would suggest that projects should try to appeal to humanistic qualities and indicate the social benefits of befriending.

Further comments from befrienders relating to recruitment were that they felt that the public often didn't understand what befriending was, and that as a result projects weren't successful enough in advertising their opportunities.

Sheila Campbell - Argyll & Bute Children's Befriending Scheme

Having managed a befriending project since 1989, Sheila looked back at the involvement of 155 befrienders and their motivations for befriending to give a project's perspective on this topic.

Looking at age ranges, marital status and occupation had begun to reveal some shortfalls for their project e.g. not much recruitment of 50+ volunteers, difficulty in recruiting male single befrienders (possibly relating to their work being with individual children), and very few people involved in health work becoming volunteers.

In terms of motivation, only 20% of volunteers said openly at the start that they were looking to gain something from befriending. The majority had more altruistic reasons for getting involved i.e. looking to help because they wanted to 'give back' based on their own experience.

Sheila also noted how motivations can change over time. For example one volunteer who had originally become involved because of her interest in children and because her own children had grown up, had now moved into a career of working with children, so her initial motivation had become more career-led over time. Such changing motivations were potentially true of many volunteers, and it was highlighted that it was important for projects to be aware of these to ensure that the experience of befriending could continue to satisfy over time.

Amongst many quotes from the project's befrienders Sheila highlighted one that seemed to summarise the feelings of many of their befrienders, *"I got involved because of the scheme's simplicity and the fact that I might be able to help."*

Why Befrienders Stay

Simon Glen - Edinburgh Headway Befriending Project

Simon has taken over the management of an established befriending project in the last 6 months. For the Conference theme he looked at the longer established relationships at the project and concluded that the reasons that volunteers had stayed were because of elements that made these relationships stable:

- **Activities and Interests:** the befriender and befriended having a regular routine and enjoying the sharing of a regular activity of mutual interest
- **Social Support:** both parties enjoying the companionship of the relationship, befrienders feeling able to accept and empathise with the befriended, and both parties experiencing degrees of emotional support
- **Reward:** befrienders gaining a sense of reward from supporting someone who is isolated and seeking social support

Diana Smith & Murdo Morrison - Lewis Befriending Scheme

Diana Smith from Voluntary Action Lewis spoke of the reasons why she believed befrienders stayed once they got involved from her experience of managing Lewis Befriending Scheme. She summarised these as being:

- Mutual respect: building volunteers self confidence and self- esteem
- Support: providing volunteers with regular contact and supervision
- Interesting roles: within boundaries enabling volunteers to participate in varied activities and have a range of contacts
- Having input to the scheme: giving volunteers a sense of belonging and the chance to share skills
- Social contact: providing opportunities for volunteers to be involved in group activities and outings
- Access to training: providing good quality validated training for volunteers
- Sense of belonging: ensuring that volunteers are working as part of a team

Fundamentally for volunteer befrienders to stay, she concluded that their experience has to be enjoyable and involve some fun.

Murdo Morrison a long standing volunteer at Voluntary Action Lewis gave a volunteer's perspective as to why he has remained involved with that project over many years. Murdo spoke passionately about his volunteering experience which includes work in supporting people with alcohol problems and befriending adults and children. He noted that in many ways research and statistics about volunteers' motivation were unimportant to him. The important thing was the task itself – taking an interest in a neighbour or a person that was isolated, and getting a sense of reward from that was the essence of why he remained involved. He also highlighted personal benefits that he had gained from the befriending relationships that he had been involved in.

Tara Hollway - Praxis Care Group, Belfast

Following the presentation of projects' experiences, Tara presented research results that showed why befrienders stay, which she summarised by the continuum:

Motivation for Volunteering > Motivation met by Voluntary Action > Greater Satisfaction > Intention to Continue Volunteering

She noted that research has shown befrienders reasons for staying at their projects as being:

- Enjoyment from helping others / seeing benefits
- Being supported
- Feeling part of a team / sharing experiences
- Having fun
- Feeling valued

Co-ordinator's Views on why befrienders stay included:

- Valuing befrienders
- Offering support and encouragement
- Ensuring befrienders involvement
- Good communication
- Social outlets
- Giving befrienders a break

Copies of Tara's study: "*Providing Support, Reducing Exclusion: The Extent, Nature & Value of Volunteer Befriending in Northern Ireland*" are available from Tara Hollway, Research Department, Praxis Care Group, 27-31 Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 7AA.

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Copies will also be available soon on the Praxis Care Group website. See BN(S) website for the link.

An article summarising this research appeared in issue 11 of Net Gain. For copies either contact BN(S) or see the archive in the Members Area of the BN(S) website.

Annual General Meeting (for 2001/02)

Carole Nicol, Chair of the Board of Directors welcomed delegates to the AGM.

Annual Report: 2001/02 was a year of stability prior to development. With reduced staffing and resources, the level of member services had remained the same, there had been a slight increase in membership and an increase in enquiries. The year also involved successful negotiation of funding for the Information Service (Community Fund) and the Training Toolkit (Lloyds TSB), and time was spent developing a Strategic Plan for 2002-05.

Financial Report: this highlighted that income sources for 2001/02 were: 54% grants, 22% events, 16% Fees, 8% publications, while expenditure went to: 65% salaries, 14% office, 11% premises, 7% events, 3% fees). The outlook shows BN(S)' reserve being used, while ongoing funding agreements operate until 2004/05. Income generation plans are therefore underway with assistance from Lloyds TSB consultants.

The accounts were approved (these are available from BN(S) on request).

Election of Directors: following the retirement of Louise Pitcairn, Jennifer Roe and Frances Young, new Directors were appointed: Colette Gallagher (COVEY), Christine Hutchings (Midlothian Befriending Scheme) and Kathleen White (bfriends). Diane Sutherland-Lockhart was re-elected. The Board has its full quota of 10 for 2002/03.

Special Resolution: A special resolution was passed incorporating six alterations to the BN(S) Memorandum and Articles, on the length of Board Member and Office Bearer appointments, and on the Board's powers in expelling members for good and proper reason (details of the resolution were previously sent to all members prior to AGM).

Toolkit Launch: funded by Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland, the Toolkit has been compiled by Training Consultant June Strachan with the support of an Advisory Group of befriending project staff from the BN(S) membership. The Toolkit aims to provide a resource for new and established projects to gain training ideas on the core topics for most

befrienders.

And what About the Staff....?

Sam Whitmore - Epilepsy Connections, Glasgow

Sam led delegates towards lunchtime introducing himself as a 'new kid on the block' having been managing a befriending project just since the start of 2002.

He noted the difficulty of describing to anyone what a Befriending Co-ordinator was to anyone who wasn't familiar with the title, as opposed to other more immediately understandable job titles (from traffic warden to gynaecologist!).

For him the post title "Befriending Co-ordinator" covers a multitude of possible descriptions: mind reader, trainer, listening ear, administrator, agony aunt, good cop/bad cop, crisis management specialist....and many more.

To try to sum it up in a phrase Sam chose the answer to the question "What do I do?" to be "I Manage Uncertainty with Confidence"....perhaps the new motto for all befriending project staff!

Afternoon Workshops

Workshop A: Recruiting Befrienders by Understanding Motivation

Led by Louise Pitcairn & Colette Gallagher - COVEY, Blantyre

This workshop was attended by fourteen participants, representing a wide range of befriending projects. The purpose of the workshop was to:

- explore recruitment messages currently used by befriending projects
- compare these with the reasons why people befriend shown by research
- develop new recruitment messages to match all befrienders motivations

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss these issues within a small group setting, to share ideas and experiences.

The workshop concluded that projects currently use recruitment messages which appeal to people's value base i.e. the importance of helping others, giving something back to the community. Participants also said that the social and career benefits of befriending were powerful messages in terms of recruitment. Within this, some particular trends were highlighted. For example it was noted that younger people and students would be most likely to pursue a befriending role in order to gain experience and enhance their career prospects.

Linking this to the research presented by Tara Hollway, participants highlighted that there

are many reasons why people befriend, therefore recruitment messages need to reflect this. Moreover, projects need to work hard to ensure that they are meeting the needs and expectations of befrienders. Again, the social needs and the value base of volunteers were thought to be paramount.

In terms of what projects need to do to develop new recruitment messages, the workshop found that "who" communicates is as important as "what" is communicated. Many participants therefore said that existing befrienders are often the best advert. Generally, it was felt that it is important that projects raise the profile of befriending within their local community to reach as many people as possible. Whilst it is impossible to promote messages that have a generic appeal, participants agreed that the communication of positive messages about befriending and the client groups with whom we work, are invaluable.

For further detail about this workshop, please contact Louise Pitcairn or Colette Gallagher on 01698 527258.

Workshop B: Role of Supervision in Retaining Befrienders Led by Tony Stevenson - Buddy Service, Waverley Care, Edinburgh

As an introduction, participants noted that many do not use supervision as the main means of support, that only a small percentage felt they had had adequate Supervision training while many had had none or were only trained after they started supervising.

People's experience of receiving supervision was also mixed with many having had 'less than good' experiences.

Most of the group agreed that they did not feel clear and confident how to use Supervision to support volunteers. There was agreement that supervising off-site volunteers presented problems that needed creative solutions as to how, when and where supervision is offered, and what it is called e.g. a 'meeting', a 'chat'.

It was noted that supervisory models had been developed in other professions e.g. psychotherapy and nursing over considerable time. Befriending projects are still learning and adapting to develop a suitable model. It was noted that like befriending effective and helpful supervision should be all about the *relationship* e.g. honest, open, safe.

In two groups participants then produced arguments 'for' and 'against' supervision – both managed big lists! Conclusions from the session included:

- Befriending relationships are community based and contact with befriendees is unseen
- Befrienders have one 'client' rather than a 'caseload'
- Befriending relationship boundaries are less clearly defined than those of staff
- Befriending is *potentially* an extremely isolating and lonely role to undertake
- Befrienders are not generally regarded as being part of, or included in, the professional support structures that may be around for a befriendee. This has many positive aspects, one being that the befriendee feels that the befriender is there for them alone and is not shared with others. The negative side is that befrienders can not access the ongoing contact with others in similar roles
- Befrienders are not 'professionals', although they need to be highly 'professional'.

- Most befrienders will come with little or no previous experience of supervision.
- There is an expectation on the befriender to build a trusting and useful relationship with befriendees where others have either failed, or never tried...

Common Ground Meetings in November and December will feature Support and Supervision as one of their topics following requests from this workshop for further opportunities for discussion.

Look out for further development of this topic by Tony Stevenson in the next issue of Net Gain.

Workshop C: Paid Befriending - A Conflict of Interests? Led by Joe Pearson - The Lighthouse Project, Elgin

This workshop featured presentations from Owen Smale of Concern for Mental Health (CMH) , and Liz Notarangelo and Frances Young of Home Link (HL).

- Concern for Mental Health in Huddersfield currently employs 5 paid befrienders, working with 10 clients a week during office hours. The paid befrienders tend to work with clients with more severe, long-term mental health problems. They are paid £6.27 an hour.
- Home Link in Edinburgh provides support for families with a child under 5. They received a small grant to take on two paid befrienders from their pool of volunteers. They are paid £6.80 an hour.

In discussion the main concerns that were raised were over the potential for blurring staff and volunteer roles although CMH noted their experience was that this wasn't a problem, and in fact befrienders were interested in applying for forthcoming paid roles as a career progression.

The use of paid befrienders by HL also had a development element as each befriender does an hour a week on building up personal portfolio.

Other issues raised:

- Should paid befrienders be sessional or salaried? It was noted that sessional workers do not have access to sick pay, holidays etc.
- What happens if a paid sessional befriender goes to visit and the befriendeed is not there? HL responded that travel time would be paid

Other observations:

- Projects using paid befrienders had experienced referrers being more prescriptive if it was a paid service e.g. being specific about the length of relationship, type of activity etc.
- HL volunteers had expressed concerns that they might get 'lightweight' referrals if a paid service was in operation, reducing the level of responsibility and experience that volunteers might gain
- CMH asks befriendees to choose whether they want a volunteer or paid

befriender. She is able to offer paid befrienders more quickly and people often opt for this which seems to indicate that having more immediate access is more important to befriender than whether the befriender is paid or not.

- Befriending projects are good at supervising, supporting volunteers – do these skills transfer to managing a large paid workforce where there are different areas of knowledge / expertise required?

Other areas covered:

Use of transitional housing benefit / money for flexible home support

As might be expected for such a contentious subject, within the workshop there were those who remained unconvinced that paid befriending with the same remit as volunteer befriending was a good idea. However all agreed that it had been an interesting debate and one participant concluded that she felt she could see a role for paid workers that is more akin to befriending, but that it would be helpful if it had a different title, remit and maybe more of a goal, e.g. shorter term.

For further information on the two projects highlighted and their approach to paid befriending, please contact:

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Paid Befriending was featured as an article in issue 11 of Net Gain. For copies contact the BN(S) office or check out the archive section of the members' area on the BN(S) website.

Workshop D: Training Toolkit
Led by Mike Nicholson - Befriending Network (Scotland)
Kirsty McNally - Barnardos Space Project

In 90 minutes participants had the chance to try activities from 5 sections of the new Training Toolkit. The Toolkit activities can often be adapted and many of this session's activities had been simplified to fit the time restrictions.

Ice Breaker: participants organised themselves into a circle based on alphabetical names and then in order of their birthday dates in the year. (page 32 Toolkit)

Assessment: participants took time to do part of the roles/leadership & training styles assessment from the Toolkit to gain some understanding of how they work as a trainer/group leader (page 11 Toolkit)

Befriending: participants individually marked as 'Essential' or 'Desirable' and a list of qualities associated with being a befriender. They then discussed their answers and the relative importance of the qualities. (page 49 Toolkit)

Relationship Building: taking a list of types of relationship e.g. friend, employer/employee, participants discussed what made these work and what expectations people had of these relationships. This was then compared to befriending relationships. (page 58 Toolkit)

Confidentiality: participants listed the information that a befriending project might know about a befriender. They then ticked in adjacent columns what as a volunteer they might *like to know*, *need to know*, and *what they could share with a friend/relative*. (page 91 Toolkit)

Evaluation: participants drew or wrote an advert to describe the workshop they had just attended. (page 136 Toolkit)

See flier enclosed in Autumn Mailing for details of purchasing a Training Toolkit.

Workshop E: Library Roadshow Led by Rebecca Dodd - Befriending Network (Scotland)

Conference delegates were invited to browse through the BN(S) documentation library and request copies of materials.

To see an inventory of library contents, check out the library section of the members' area on the BN(S) website.

***The 2002/03 Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday
October 2nd 2003 ! We hope to see you there !***