**FACTS & FIGURES**

- There are 240 member organisations of Befriending Network Scotland.
- There are 4,000+ befrienders in Scotland.
- 32,000+ hours of befriending take place each month.
- The average length of a befriending relationship is 15-18 months.

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**The Befriender**

*Produced by BN(S) for befriending projects everywhere to distribute to their befrienders*

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**Dosh, lucre, dough, moola, pony, MONKEY, spondoolies, beer tokens, brass, readies, wad, wonga, nicker, SHRAPNEL, quid, lolly, grand, bob... let’s talk about the ‘F’ word in Befriending**

The ‘F’ word...‘Funding’ is surely the number one issue for befriending projects to deal with. Get a group of befriending project staff in a room together and within 5 minutes someone will be talking about funding, or to be precise the lack or uncertainty of it. The current climate is one where organisations are increasingly being encouraged to think of sustainability, but the options to generate income seem limited for projects that simply want to provide a free service of support for people who are isolated.

It’s not that befriending projects want to make out that they are particularly hard done by when it comes to funding struggles...but the nature befriending projects’ work in providing medium to long term relationships, does not fit well with often at best short term funding and all its uncertainties.

Befriending projects are often at pains not to put people who have experience of difficult or broken relationships through the same thing again. Therefore projects tend to go ‘on hold’ in the midst of funding uncertainties rather than make promises of support to vulnerable people when that might be taken away a short time later. Fortunately the experience for many is that as projects go ‘on hold’ they don’t just pause, they go into reverse.

In early 2006 Befriending Network Scotland was contacted by a few projects who facing extreme funding difficulties. One of these was Gala Youth Project in the Scottish Borders.

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A BEFRIENDER’S STORY …

The Simple Things…(names changed)

My befriendee Nan who was in her 80s had often talked of a doll called Elsie that she owned as a child. This toy had been her only friend at times in a difficult childhood when she was often beaten by her father (one attack had left her deaf in one ear) and disliked by her sister. She would hide away and talk to Elsie and tell her that everything would be all right. Things reached extremes as she and her mother ended up running away from home and hiding with a driver in his cab. Elsie was one of the few things Nan took with her. As a seamstress she had also spent many happy times making dresses for the doll. She married late in life and I think it was around this time that perhaps surprisingly she gave the doll away to the Museum of Childhood. One day after hearing about Elsie again I came up with a plan. I made some enquiries quietly behind the scenes and found that the museum could easily trace the doll and bring it out to be seen again. As a rare Christmas trip I suggested to Nan that she and I could go and see Elsie. The look of disbelief on Nan’s face that she could see Elsie again is still with me. It was interesting to see that the thought of leaving the house which so often seemed to present difficulties were firmly put to one side for this momentous trip back in time. We taxi-ed on a damp December day to the museum and announced ourselves. We looked at some of the exhibits as we waited, many of which brought back memories for Nan. Then the staff member I had spoken to arrived and opened a box heavily lined with tissue paper, with the doll nestling inside.

“Can I hold her?….oh ma wee love..there you are again…..and still in that dress I made.”

The staff member and I caught each other’s eye – it was obvious that this was deeply meaningful moment. We almost felt that we were intruding. It was very moving for all of us. They had been through a lot together and some of the stories came out again. Nan sat and held Elsie and nursed her and chatted to her for maybe 10 minutes and then kissed her and handed her back to be returned to her box.

We returned home to Nan’s wee flat for the sandwiches that she had prepared before we left. “That’s the best Christmas present I could have had – I’ll not stop thinking about that”.

Not every contact you have as a befriender means a lot but sometimes you just hit the right spot...

The ‘F’ Word (continued…)

Manager Marion McIlwraith explains, “At the start of 2006 things were extremely bleak. Our 3 year funding from various funders was running out at the end of March and no other funding had been secured. Staff started to look around quite rightly, for other posts. Eventually through approaches to the Education Department and supported by good feedback from schools we had worked in, we were awarded £35,000 to cover work in 3 High Schools. We are not out of the woods yet and need to get some match funding. We have to just keep plugging away with applications – an extremely time-consuming process and one where we are competing with others for the same sources of funding. Our experience has meant that we are looking closely at our vision and developing a proper strategy, identifying where Gala Youth Project fits in to the bigger picture of the strategy for young people for the area. The project was definitely affected by the funding uncertainty. Staff have left and whilst we continued to deliver services we held back from recruiting volunteers and from actively promoting services that we couldn’t guarantee would still be there a short time later.”

This is one of many examples where projects slow up as uncertainty kicks in. Recruitment stops, waiting lists are closed and staff become unsettled. This can lead to volunteers feeling unsettled too and re-evaluating whether they want to stay. There is no quick fix here so funding is set to be a constant challenge for befriending projects. Hang on in there - your projects need you more than ever when they are trying to locate funding sources to keep their work going.
Befriending and Autism

Polly Sheterline befriended Daniel for a year. Daniel was 18 years old and was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome when he was six. His mother was keen for him to meet someone nearer to his own age where he could enjoy social activities and gain more confidence.

"Daniel was very open about his Asperger syndrome and was quick to tell me about situations where he felt nervous. He was particularly nervous on public transport and would not travel alone. So I would get the bus to his home and we would go from there, we would go on the bus to the cinema, or go on a boat trip on the river or go on the train into London and visit the museums."

"Daniel was so keen to conquer his fears and I was also very keen to see him gain confidence. Within no time at all I could see his confidence growing. We spent many an afternoon walking down the riverfront chatting about life etc or talking over a pint in a local pub. I did nothing but be there as a friend, offering assurance and a helping hand. Daniel made so much progress. His determination and confidence grew every day. He has landed himself a great job as a greenkeeper on a golf course, which is the line of career he has always wanted to follow. He gets on buses on his own and comes to meet me in Kingston without any problems. It has been an absolute joy to be a part of this NAS befriending programme and to meet Daniel. I have learned so much and had a huge amount of fun."

Daniel’s mum thought Polly was extremely reliable and a really lovely person. Daniel really enjoyed her company and their outings. She confirms that he has gained lots of confidence since the befriending began and is now able to travel alone and start a full-time job.

Befrienders can help break the wall of isolation for families and individuals whose lives are affected by an autistic spectrum disorder. NAS befrienders spend a few hours each week with the family, or with the person who has autism or Asperger syndrome. Some spend time in the family home, others go out and about. We have a number of schemes around the UK. If you are interested in becoming a befriender please call 0115 911 3369 or email volunteers@nas.org.uk to find out if there is a scheme in your area.

AUTISM—BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1988, Rain Man swept the Academy Awards, winning four Oscars including Best Actor for Dustin Hoffman’s portrayal of a man living with autism. Indeed, the inspiration for the film, 54 year-old Kim Peek, has since become quite a celebrity and travels widely across the US demonstrating his incredible depth and breadth of knowledge. The film was a huge success both critically and commercially, and has become hugely instrumental in informing the public’s understanding of autism. But while it has been effective in raising the profile of the condition, it has also cemented a strong cultural stereotype which is, in fact, both misleading and unhelpful.

The reality is that less than 1%1 of people with autism in the UK actually have autistic savant syndrome, the condition displayed in Kim Peek, whereby a person possesses an unusually high level of specific ability. The vast majority of people with autism do not have such skills, nor is the condition any indication of specific mental or learning ability.

The National Autistic Society defines autism as “a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people around them”. Matthew Day from Number 6 (www.number6.org.uk), a centre for adults with High Functioning Autism (HFA) or Asperger’s Syndrome in the Lothians says;

“The public tend to define autism as either someone with a severe learning disability or as Rain Man. Definitely, the common misconception is that people with autism are all brilliant at something - this can be disheartening for a lot of people who have been told they should be, and don’t deal very well with the fact they’re not.”

When it comes to befriending, many of the issues are the same as in every befriending project. The most important things to be aware of is the massive range of social and relational ability within the autism community. It is extremely hard to make generalisations about forming relationships with people with autism. Simply put, the specific needs of people with autism vary from person to person. In theory, providing befriending opportunities for people with autism seems complex. But in practice, the reality is about taking small steps to make individuals feel comfortable, setting clear, shared expectations and being responsive to the ongoing social and relational needs of the individual. As Matthew Day puts it: “So many people are just your everyday people with a different way of thinking.”
Volunteer befrienders are in a key role to help projects evaluate the impact of their work. Recent contact with befriending projects has shown where they get stuck in evaluation and shows how they can lose sight of the difference that they are trying to make in people's lives.

Befriending projects have no problem in doing some sort of measurement of their work but a critical eye suggests that this tends to focus on 'processes':

- "We matched 10 volunteers with 10 isolated people in 6 months"
- "We received 23 referrals, 10% higher than last year"
- "We recruited 11 volunteers, 4 male and 7 female"
- "14 of the people referred (73%) came through Health Visitors"

These sorts of statements are all very well and give lots of juicy numbers, which we often say that funders want. They also give the impression of a project in full flow….BUT…

What did the project actually set out to achieve….what has it actually achieved?

No befriending project is set up (or receives funding) simply to match volunteers with isolated people or to receive referrals or to recruit volunteers. The statements and statistics above are all very well and give lots of juicy numbers, which we often say that funders want. They also give the impression of a project in full flow…BUT…

Outcomes? What would ‘come out’ of the work of the befriending project…i.e. what would ‘reduced isolation’, ‘improved relationship skills’ or ‘positive community contact’ look like or result in?

It may be people saying they were less isolated, people having more involvement in community activities than they had before, people getting on better with their families or with teachers, people saying that they are more confident or others observing that people have changed in this way.

This is the real stuff of the changes that befriending can make to people…this is typically what we can all tell stories and case studies of…these are the kind of reasons that make you volunteer in the first place.

The challenge is in capturing these achievements simply—can you help your project to do that?

Sally Magnusson will chair a high profile, interactive conference co-hosted by the Scottish Mentoring Network and Befriending Network (Scotland) and funded by the Scottish Executive in partnership with the Laidlaw Youth Project. Mentoring and Befriending for Young People is aimed at all those involved in mentoring and befriending for young people. The event will look at the past, present and future of mentoring and befriending, will feature talks, film and interactive voting. It will take place at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Edinburgh on June 26th 2006.

If you are a befriender at a young person’s project this is for you, the young people and the staff at the project you volunteer for.

To register your interest email: hayley@scottishmentoringnetwork.co.uk