

BNs Annual Conference Workshop Summaries

Edinburgh

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Workshop 1: The Trustee Tightrope

Workshop 1: The trustee tightrope

How can organisations find the right balance of trustee involvement – between too little and too much?

Main issues covered included:

- Importance of clear understanding of appropriate board member roles by both trustees and staff, especially where there is significant change in board composition.
- Difficulties experienced when trustees get too involved in operational detail, for example, go directly to staff members without involving the chief executive.
- Recruiting trustees who comprehend and are motivated by the governance role. In some cases this has taken considerable effort by the chief executive, for example, where there has been significant board turnover, including the chair standing down. Identifying potential board members may require lots of different approaches, but should include using staff's own networks and contacts
- Providing motivation and encouragement for trustees once they join the board. This is a role for both chair and chief executive. The organisation's constitution can help, for example, being a SCIO provides some reassurance about individual accountability.
- A chair is required who is able to give strong leadership. They need to be alert to board dynamics and individual trustee drivers, skills and approaches to the role (all of which can quite legitimately vary).
- It's a great help to the chair to have the right mix of skills and knowledge among the trustees.
- The chief exec can help educate trustees in basic good governance and also find ways to involve them, for example, in sub-groups on particular issues or new developments. Small group and time-limited approaches, engaging both staff and trustees, can be particularly motivational and a good use of trustee knowledge and experience.
- Such sub-groups can help with problems such as "no-one wants to be Treasurer" by sharing difficult tasks, even involving people from outwith the organisation who can help. Accountability back to the main board is important.

- Both trustees and staff should be involved in strategy and forward thinking, in a suitable format, ideally meeting together at intervals for the purpose. Such discussions need to be informed explicitly by the organisation's values and purpose.
- Boards need to be able to select and "frame" the issues they should be involved in. This will vary depending on the size and complexity of the organisation and the role of the staff team in operational management. For example, the overall approach to charging for services is a matter for the board, but routine calculation of fees, and so forth, and intelligence about what others charge should be managed by staff and just reported to the board.
- Boards need to be responsible for overall risk management, with advice from the chief exec and regular review of risks and mitigating actions. BNs has a good format for a risk register that could be shared.
- A structured risk management approach would help with the issue of whether trustees should be involved in delivering parts of the service or of the organisation's work.
- The chief executive should always attend board meetings, so they can act as a bridge between trustees and other staff. Clear and timely feedback from board meetings to staff is vital.
- Sometimes it's useful for other staff to go to board meetings (or parts of them) too.
- Similarly, it's healthy for trustees to get involved in events and keep in some touch with the direct work of the organisation.
- It can be helpful for the chair to meet the whole management or staff team from time to time, not necessarily on a particular issue or hot topic.
- It's good to appraise trustees' performance regularly.
- There also needs to be a way to appraise the chair, for example, a 360° approach if the chair is open to this, and if it can be clearly driven by the organisation's values.

Workshop 2: Success in recruiting volunteer befrienders

Participants were asked to identify any current recruitment issues they were facing:

- Lack of male befrienders
- Availability of befrienders not matching preferred time slots of befriendees
- Rural population size as pool to draw on
- “Volunteers” being asked to sign up by Job Centres – concerns about commitment, sustainability and the ethics of this type of “volunteering”
- Lack of organisational profile – not reaching people

Members were asked to share any recruitment successes:

- One member shared a positive experience with a local large employer – by contacting the staff member responsible for the employer’s volunteering, or corporate social responsibility, they had gained access to noticeboards, newsletters, intranet to publicise a recruitment stand on site at the employer’s premises – making it an easy option for the large staff pool to find out about their work and what being a befriender involved. A number of recruits had been picked up, but on top of this, the exercise resulted in additional awareness raising for the service.
- It was discussed in the group that these types of engagement can also lead to picking up voluntary contributions beyond those willing to be befrienders – one service had their entire website re-designed by engaging with a local retail outlet and finding an employee who had the right expertise and willingness to take on this bespoke piece for work for them.
- It was also discussed that services should approach the private sector confidently, with something legitimate to offer in return for seeking their support. A good example of this approach can be found at: <http://befriendachild.org.uk/get-involved/corporate/>

3 strands of recruitment were discussed in sub-groups to identify if changes could be made in any of these areas to improve recruitment success:

Changes to the ways in which you try to reach the right people to become befrienders:

- Importance of building on the reputation of your service (requires time, but in the long-run can reap benefits)
- Changing perceptions of your service through branding/image
- Don’t spend £££ on advertising – go for free editorial coverage (local press, local radio)

- Include a weblink in any press coverage to direct people to information on your service and the role of a befriender – if only a phone number is present, this may prove a barrier to some and local press normally post stories online as well as in print.
- Newspapers have fewer print-runs (but many have complementary online pages).
- Exploit opportunities to give promotional talks or have pop-up information stands at public events (sport, festivals, fetes)
- Information stands in supermarkets – though mixed results reported – 2-3 enquiries for a long day
- Witty and clever recruitment messages work, but so does straightforward (so unless you have evidence that the former is needed, is there a need to invest time and resources in coming up with something novel?).
- A powerful slogan is useful – “Befrienders beat loneliness” was thought to be a good example. Services are free to use this or a variation of it, as they see fit.
- Befrienders keeping scrap books of their matches provides a source of material that can be accessed for recruitment messages.
- Testimonials and case studies have worked well (adjust content/detail to suit audience/media).
- Good success can be achieved through social media – using it as a tool for people to find you.
- To effectively use social media, build up a base of followers by posting/tweeting your messages on the sites of others and buy following significant local accounts (to try and get them to follow you) – local authority, health board, councillors, MSP’s, MP’s, local press, radio, other 3rd sector organisations, TSI/CSV, private sector. Then ask them to retweet or share posts to amplify the reach of your recruitment message.
- Get feedback from existing befrienders – what attracted them, what do they think of any recruitment messages you are planning, are any of them interested in helping with recruitment – staffing information stands, giving talks, helping with extending your social media base –either through promoting your message to their followers or working on getting your service more followers?
- Consider taking on a volunteer specifically to do an evaluation of your recruitment strategies to relieve the time constraints on staff doing this.
- Tap into local societies/common interest groups.
- Be aware of what is going on in the wider world – using the Channel 4 clip on loneliness in older people, or the John Lewis Christmas ad (both available online) allows you to tap into the recognition and publicity already achieved and saddle your recruitment drive to it by providing a local solution for anyone wanting to help.
- Promoting your service to referees by taking telephone references for potential befrienders.
- Target specific groups – e.g. health and social care students, ethnic minorities
- Make use of being part of Befriending Networks – we can repost any recruitment messages to our own social media accounts if we are made aware of them. Also, use the Network – do you follow other members Facebook and Twitter accounts?

Recruitment campaigns pop up quite regularly if you are looking for ideas. If you support another service working with a different befriended group in their recruitment efforts by sharing their campaign, they may do the same for you, so your message is amplified.

Changes to the role itself and how it is defined and communicated:

- Consider introducing group befriending – reduces need for one befriender per befriended, reduces level of responsibility taken on by each befriender, reduces impact on befriended of a befriender needing to cancel a meeting.
- Change the hours required for befriending.
- Telephone befriending can be challenging and is not effective for all befriended groups
- Paying benders to support those hardest to match evoked different opinions in the groups.
- Promoting the value of the befriending experience for c.v's, future employment.
- Prepare and send a “What is Befriending” factsheet to prospective benders.
- Upload your befriender role description to your website, but also to your social media accounts – use the Notes app for Facebook and take a screenshot (to make an image file) for Twitter – this allows browsers on any of your online platforms to find out more about what you are looking for in benders - there was some discussion about the risk of people losing interest if the role seems too challenging before staff have had the opportunity to discuss it with them – a suggestion was to post only a “positive points” version on social media and leave the fuller version until after staff have engaged with the person.
- Consider a uploading a video of an existing befriender describing their role and what they get out of it (The video befriender story on our Befriending Week Facebook page has had over 6K views so far).

Changes to structures and processes for recruitment:

- Offer training courses from other organisations to attract people
- Induction interviews and training occur while PVG/DBS checks are being carried out to maintain the prospective befriender's motivation.
- Online self-study training to complement face-to-face group training allows prospective benders to work at their own convenience requiring less commitment to a specific time slot for all.
- Spacing out group training tests the commitment of potential benders.
- Consider taking references over the phone – allows an engagement opportunity (see above), but also by completing the over the phone it can make this step more convenient for the referee, so it may be completed sooner and the results may be more thorough. The completed reference form should be sent to the referee for approval.

- Consider the impact of using a “Register Interest Form” instead of an “Application Form” – if the terms impact on you differently, it should be the same your potential befriender audience.
- Review the content of your application/register interest form – when was it last reviewed? Is it fit for a 21st century audience, or could you be inadvertently putting some groups off by asking for certain types of information – e.g. marital status, gender, education, employment history. Unless you have considered why you specifically need these details for the person to be considered for the role, why are they on the form? (Some details may be collected through anonymised equalities monitoring forms, but these serve a different purpose for the service).
- Offer a “shadowing” opportunity for potential befriendees as part of their recruitment, if you have a willing match (providing the existing befriender ensures the potential befriender is never left alone with a befriendees, risk concerns should be manageable).

To prompt the discussions in these areas, the following questions were asked:

Changes to the ways in which you try to reach the right people to become befrienders

- Do you get current befrienders to give you input on your publicity materials and what media worked best in reaching them?
- Have you had any success with social media as a recruitment tool?
- Have you noticed a change in the media that work best for you over the last few years?
- Do you adapt your message content to suit different media?
- Do you try and get local politician/celebrity endorsement of your recruitment campaigns?
- Have you had any success with listing the opportunity on other websites? (Gumtree, Volunteer Centres, Do-it, local authority news pages /Twitter feeds
- Have you approached major employers in your area to use staff noticeboards/newsletters, etc?
- In terms of the message to attract potential befrienders, do you think simple and straightforward works best, or do you feel, to be noticed, your campaign needs to be witty or clever?

Changes to the role itself and how it is defined and communicated

- Could the role be changed to appeal to a wider audience? Frequency of meetings? Can any distance befriending approaches assist in making the role more appealing to today’s volunteers? Can group befriending roles support your befriendees group in a complementary manner and would this attract a different type of volunteer?
- Would you ever consider seeking funding to pay befrienders?

- Is your befriender role description an easy read? Does it “sell” the role for your service, while remaining accurate? Do you see part of its purpose as a filter for those who may be put off by the commitment required?
- Where can people access your befriender role description? Are there any other ways it could be made more accessible (Facebook, Twitter etc)

Changes to structures and processes for recruitment:

- Relevance of application form – review and ensure all information requested relates to the role e.g. marital status, gender, age? Education, employment history? Are these relevant? Wouldn't they potentially put off some applicants?
- Pre-training interview – how soon is a person contacted after submitting application? How flexible are staff in arranging interview times/locations?
- At which stage are disclosure checks/references begun? During training? (example of service where policy was only to begin after training completion)
- Training dates/times – are these volunteer-friendly? (One service offers a fast track route where volunteers available can attend 2 sessions a week – 1 session for “fast track “only volunteers and then the larger group session).
- Are matching profiles used as “homework” in training to avoid the need for staff time to complete? Or is it felt that sitting down with a befriender is an essential part of getting to know them well enough to match appropriately?
- Would you ever consider passing over some of the pre-training assessment stages to an enhanced volunteer or do you think this would be too risky?
- Do you review your application and assessment procedures with existing befrienders?

Workshop 3: How to Keep your Volunteer Befrienders

Workshop 3: How to keep your volunteer befrienders

This workshop focused on the following main topics:

- The challenges in retaining volunteer befrienders. 25 – 30% of volunteers leave before the organisation would like them to – why is this?
- Strategies aimed at improving volunteer retention
- Good practice guidance in relation to three key elements of successful volunteer retention:
 - understanding and monitoring volunteers' motivations
 - ensuring the organisation's expectations of the befriender's role are appropriate
 - providing the right support to volunteer befrienders

Some of the challenges faced by participants in keeping volunteer befrienders for as long as you want to:

- Volunteers may only be interested in the career enhancement possibilities offered by the training and may leave shortly after completing it.
- PVG checks take a long time to come back. It's hard to keep volunteers engaged – and even to keep in regular contact with them - during this time and they may leave.
- The matching process can be complex and certain volunteers may be disheartened at having to wait to be matched.
- Working with demanding service users puts a strain on volunteers and energy may be quickly depleted.
- Volunteers may perceive the role as restrictive (due to strict boundaries) and may want to do more than is appropriate.
- Illness / bereavement.
- Changing jobs – new employer may not be supportive of volunteering work.
- Inappropriate match.
- Training requirements may be too onerous
- Volunteers may leave due to safeguarding issues – either in relation to themselves or to service users.

What have participants tried out in an attempt to improve volunteer retention?

- Invite volunteers waiting for PVG checks to come through to attend training and meet existing volunteers.
- Hold regular reviews with volunteers to make sure they are happy in their role and with their match.

- Make it clear from the outset that they may have to wait some time to be matched – and explain the importance of creating good matches as opposed to quick matches.
- Make it clear that matches can be undone at any time if volunteers are not happy.
- Create competency-based training, whereby volunteers get recognition for prior learning.
- Make boundaries clear before the volunteer begins, so that they are well aware of ‘restrictions’ before agreeing to start
- Ensure that volunteers understand what is expected of them and that the role is appropriate, not only to the requirements of the organisation, but to the individual needs of the volunteer
- Allow plenty of time for informal conversation between the coordinator and the volunteer
- Get volunteers together as often as possible. Peer support can be very valuable.
- Be well acquainted with the volunteer’s individual motivations and ensure these are being fulfilled
- Recognise the contributions of volunteers, for example by:
 - Organising volunteer meetings to thank them as a group
 - Sending birthday cards to individual volunteers
 - Certificates for length of service
 - Organise an annual party (Christmas? Volunteers’ Week? Befriending Week?) for all volunteers
- One-to-one and online training can be offered so that attendance at face-to-face groups training sessions stops being an obstacle. Skype and webinars can also be used.
- Embed a minimum term of commitment into volunteer agreements or do not give out training certificates until a minimum term of befriending has been delivered. There are obviously no guarantees, but it may make it less likely that volunteers leave straight after training.
- Ensure that up to date safeguarding training is provided.
- Create and share volunteer photo albums and scrapbooks to boost feelings of engagement.

Good practice guidance – key elements of volunteer retention

In discussion with participants, facilitators summed up that, echoing many of the points raised by participants, it is widely considered that there are three key elements involved in trying to ensure this positive experience which will lead volunteers to stay:

1. Understand **volunteers’ motivations** (These are unique to each individual and will usually contain a combination of personal motivations –such as meeting new people or acquiring new skills –and wanting to make a contribution to the aims of the

organisation. One of the coordinator's jobs is to monitor how well these motivations are being fulfilled as time goes on and take appropriate steps if they are not being).

2. Ensure the **befriender's role is appropriate** (This includes being clearly defined from the outset and having appropriate boundaries in place as well as allowing for some flexibility to accommodate the preferences and skills of the befriender. Such flexibility could, for example, include a progressive element to the role which would allow befrienders to take on new challenges as time goes on).
3. Provide the **right support to befrienders** (Good communication with the befriender—both in terms of scheduled support sessions and if additional support is required—, making sure they feel appreciated and receive recognition for their input, attention to the individual progress and development of volunteers and ensuring they feel part of a team are all priorities for befriending coordinators and are essential for keeping befrienders).

Workshop 4: Challenges in promoting befriending

This workshop focused on the following main topics:

- The criticisms that are commonly levelled at befriending by those outside the sector
- Strategies aimed at addressing such negative perceptions
- Participants' own practice in relation to four key principles of successful marketing:
 - ensuring people know who you are and what you do
 - knowledge of target audience and how best to reach them
 - evidence of benefits
 - statement of unique position in market

Criticisms commonly levelled at befriending by potential funders and commissioners of services, politicians or the general public

- Not enough robust evaluations of impact
- It doesn't reach enough service users (being mainly one-to-one)
- Practitioners within the statutory sector usually recognise its value, but commissioners, who don't see it close up, often do not hold it in very high regard
- It doesn't seem to consist of very much substance to those who are not familiar with it
- Research does not show it to be the most effective intervention for achieving (constantly shifting) wider and national outcomes
- Because it is person-centred and based on building an informal relationship, some commissioners etc see it as unprofessional – something which could be done by any neighbour or well-meaning acquaintance
- Befriending is a very general form of support and you can't necessarily guarantee an impact on very specific outcomes (one example cited of a social worker looking for a befriender to cure a child's balloon phobia) (This is an excellent example of unrealistic expectations)
- Befriending takes too long to become effective (trusting relationships are not built from one day to the next)
- It's a nice add on but not a hard-hitting core service
- They've heard of it but don't really know what it's about
- People don't want a befriender. Stigma around loneliness will make referrals a problem.

Strategies aimed at addressing negative perceptions (already tried out by participants)

- Define outcomes clearly, evaluate robustly and share results of evaluations as widely as possible

- Try to work with other organisations and the network to create a common outcomes and evaluation framework for the whole befriending sector so that impact can be more readily understood
- Liaise closely with statutory partners, both in making it clear what befriending is and in trying to ensure that referrers' expectations are realistic
- Produce stats which attempt to show how much money is saved to statutory services by providing befriending support
- Local campaigns to address stigma around loneliness ("Everyone can feel lonely at times ..." etc)
- Make it clear why befriending is unique – and different from other forms of informal one-to-one support, such as mentoring or advocacy)
- Encourage the promotional / advocacy role of befriending Networks on behalf of the whole sector
- Do the Quality in Befriending award
- Don't be tempted to stop using the term 'befriending'
- Make more of the 'collateral' benefits of befriending, for example, benefits to volunteers and to carers (There were divided feelings around the idea of promoting befriending as a way of providing respite, as this doesn't take into account the primacy of the befriended's wish to have a befriending over their carer's wish for them to have a befriender)
- Directly lobby parliament to have the value of befriending recognised and embedded in policy
- Engage in depth with funders in an attempt to make them understand why befriending is as it is and why it needs to be that way to work properly
- Don't only supply the quantitative evidence asked for by funders – give them the qualitative evidence that really shows the difference befriending makes to real lives too (whether they ask for it or not)
- Make the 'added value' very explicit in every report

Conclusions – reflections on practice

Participants were encouraged to continue to reflect on possible changes to their own practice with regard to four widely-accepted pillars of successful marketing:

1. How do you ensure people know who you are and what you do?
2. How do you improve and update your knowledge of your target audience and the best to reach them?
3. How do you continue to provide better and clearer evidence of the benefits of what you do?
4. How do you convince people that befriending is unique and that nothing else can work quite as effectively with target groups?

Workshop 5: Enhanced Volunteering in Befriending

Workshop 5: Enhanced volunteering in befriending

Befriending services are increasingly finding creative ways to develop capacity in their service, and keep volunteer befrienders engaged. The ‘enhanced’ or ‘expert’ volunteer befriender is one such model, where the befriender takes on some of the responsibilities of the coordinator-e.g. supporting other befrienders, delivering training, running groups, maintaining waiting lists by phoning befriendees who have not yet been allocated a befriender, etc.

This workshop explored the pros and cons of such models-for example:

Points in favour of enhanced volunteer roles within befriending services:

- Creating different types of volunteer roles would enable the incorporation of different kind of activity (e.g. group befriending) and different types of volunteers (e.g. those who might not want to / be suitable to work one-to-one remotely from direct supervision). This variety of roles available might also be helpful when befrienders are waiting to be matched – they could be kept engaged in another capacity.
- A volunteer befriender willing to take on a role within a management committee could provide valuable insight at that level (but there are potential problems associated with this too – see below).
- It can be very valuable to have an experienced volunteer act as a mentor to new recruits, as someone with a key role in the recruitment process itself or indeed as an ambassador in promoting befriending more widely.
- In many ways, enhanced volunteers could allow organisations to increase capacity i.e. to provide more services to more people with the same amount of paid staff time. Some examples of this could be:
 - Befriending groups led by volunteers
 - Experienced volunteers supporting a limited number of one-to-one matches
 - Volunteers could keep in touch with people on the waiting list
 - Volunteers could carry out initial assessments of new clients or regular reviews
 - Experienced volunteers could deliver part of the induction training programme, providing a valuable peer perspective and allowing the coordinator to spend less time engaged in this.
- Enhanced volunteers could provide valuable day-to-day support to (often overstretched) paid staff.

- One possible enhanced role could be as a 'stand in' befriender to cover if the regular befriender is not available. This would ensure a continuity of service which might otherwise be disrupted.
- Using enhanced volunteers to increase capacity could be looked on favourably by funders, who want to see organisations doing as much as possible with the money.
- Developing existing volunteer roles can be refreshing for individual volunteers and might lead them to stay rather than move on to a different organisation.
- Offering more responsibilities to experienced volunteers can be felt as a reward and can offer them the possibility of engaging in new training and in acquiring new skills, which is great for their own personal development (in addition to the many possible benefits for the organisation)

Possible concerns in relation to enhanced volunteering within befriending

- Enhanced volunteer roles might come to be seen by the organisation (or by funders) as a way of replacing paid roles, possibly even leading to redundancies.
- Volunteers are not bound by the same type of contractual responsibilities as a paid member of staff so problems could arise in relation to confidentiality, time availability, longevity of service etc.
- Volunteers as trustees raises concerns about management. Coordinators are responsible for volunteers, but trustees are responsible for staff. Boundaries here become problematic. It was suggested that Befriending Networks might provide some guidance on this and other issues around working with trustees.

Workshop 6: Working with volunteers with extra support needs

This workshop focused on the following main topics:

- Why do we / should we involve volunteers with extra support needs?
- What are some of the challenges involved in doing this?
- What can we do as managers / coordinators to work effectively with volunteers with extra support needs?
- What can we support the volunteers themselves to do?

Why do we / should we involve volunteers with extra support needs?

Potential benefits to the volunteers themselves:

- Everybody deserves an opportunity to contribute as a volunteer regardless of their own needs
- It offers them the chance to gain valuable experience
- Some volunteers may develop extra support needs whilst part of the service and you have a responsibility towards them as such
- For someone with extra support needs, being considered capable of carrying out the responsibilities of a volunteer is a very positive and appropriate approach, unlike the condescending attitude which often prevails.
- It could be the starting point on an individual journey of recovery

Potential benefits to the organisation:

- The more volunteers there are (whatever their support needs may be), the more work can be done with clients.
- They may be people with similar experiences to befriendees and this may add a valuable peer support element.
- It is an example of inclusive non-discriminatory practice.
- It is simply good practice
- Such volunteers may be a huge resource for the organisations with, possibly, a different skills set to volunteers without extra support needs.
- It is of benefit to have a wide range of unique individuals as part of the volunteer team.
- Managing volunteers with extra support needs can increase the volunteer manager's skills.

What are some of the challenges involved in doing this?

- Volunteers may have as many support needs as the clients. It may also be that they only contacted the service as a potential volunteer as a way of benefitting from the support you offer)
- If they become unwell whilst volunteering, you may need to spend a lot of time supporting them (and perhaps have to learn how to do so)
- If they become unwell, they may not be reliable as a befriender and coordinators may need to undo matches, or accompany them on visits etc
- There is a risk that the befriender may end up feeling like they are supporting the volunteer
- If disabilities are physical, it may be hard to gauge what they are capable of and to tailor the role accordingly
- It may be very hard to explain to enthusiastic people why you don't think they are ready / able to volunteer
- Capabilities and readiness may need closer monitoring during training
- Support and supervision may require more coordinator time
- Finding the right match / volunteering opportunity may require a willingness to be creative in defining roles
- Being aware of your own support needs (as a coordinator) when working with volunteers with extra support needs
- Overcoming potential opposition from colleagues – or working to change their opinions and attitudes
- Overcoming potential opposition from service users / family members – or working to change their opinions and attitudes
- Support needs of volunteers may be undisclosed or may be greater than those which have been disclosed
- Coordinator may lack the skills / knowledge to give effective support
- There may be financial implications – for example specialist equipment / training

What can we do as managers / coordinators to work effectively with volunteers with extra support needs?

- Fully utilise training and selection procedures to get to know whether people are reliable and responsible before making a decision about their suitability as a volunteer befriender
- Use scenarios during training to gauge reactions and their ability to cope in different situations
- Train 'key volunteers' to support other volunteers. Target the recruitment of these key volunteers at people with existing skills – for example workers from health and social care services (or retired from them)

- Be realistic in your expectations and define the role clearly from the outset
- Spend time getting matches right – even if it means that people have to wait
- Ask the right questions on reference request forms
- Establish close communication and build up trust with the volunteer so that they will let you know if they aren't feeling well enough / able to go on / begin volunteering
- Spend time accompanying them when they first start to meet a client if necessary. This could be done on an individual basis, or, to avoid any stigma, you could routinely build in one or two accompanied meetings after the initial match meeting for all volunteers
- Create supervised befriending opportunities – for example, meeting clients on the organisation's premises, or taking part in group befriending activities, where a staff member can be at hand if required
- Signpost / suggest other volunteering opportunities if not suitable for befriending
- Work towards befriending through other less onerous volunteering roles
- Make sure you find out all you need to know at interview
- Ensure that information about the role is easily available, is clear and is written in plain language
- Request appropriate support and training for yourself
- Learn from other organisations who have experience in supporting volunteers with extra support needs
- Arrange buddying / mentoring relationships with more experienced volunteers

What can we support the volunteers themselves to do?

- Be honest and disclose their support needs
- Realise they are perhaps not ready
- Be realistic about what they can hope to achieve
- Wellness exercises
- Develop coping strategies for bad days
- Keep befriender diaries which include reference to how they feel / are coping with the challenges of the role
- Understand the importance of the support and supervision framework and actively buy into it rather than resisting it

Workshop 7: Evaluating outcomes for befrienders

This workshop focused on the following key areas of discussion:

- The range of benefits of befriending to befrienders
- creating an evaluation framework for befriender outcomes
- some of the challenges involved in getting funders and commissioners of services to appreciate the importance of befriender outcomes

Some examples of positive outcomes of befriending for befrienders

- Increased confidence
- The acquisition of new skills (including life skills and transferrable experience)
- The opportunity to increase social connectivity (i.e. make new friends)
- Improved employability prospects
- Greater involvement with the community
- Enhanced feelings of self-worth
- Happiness / joy / fulfilment
- Being active / effective in ways you care about
- Improved quality of life
- Reduction in loneliness
- Strengthened empathy
- Greater understanding of client group

Creating an evaluation framework for befriender outcomes

It is advisable not to choose too many befriender outcomes and to focus on one of two which you consider to demonstrate the benefits of your service most clearly and strikingly. In order to report on any particular outcome, it must be broken down into **indicators**. Indicators are those changes in behaviour, attitude or circumstance which will tell you that the difference you want to see (the outcome) has been achieved.

So if we consider the following example (discussed during the workshop), the outcome would be:

As a result of becoming befrienders, our volunteers have increased confidence

In order to demonstrate that you have achieved this outcome, you need to decide what exactly you're looking to see which would tell you that. No more than three indicators are required per outcome. Indicator of the above outcome could include:

- Volunteers report feeling more confident
- Volunteers demonstrate more willingness to engage in new tasks / group activities
- Volunteers move into employment

Evidence for these three indicators could be gathered in numerous ways, including face-to-face interviewing; questionnaire completion; self-reporting; third party observation; organisational records (e.g. exit interviews)

Challenges in creating interest in befriender outcomes

Many organisations are funded to make a difference to the client group they support and it is often the case that funders are not particularly interested in any impact on the befrienders themselves.

How can we generate this interest?

Some ideas:

- Tell them anyway, whether they ask or not. Eventually the significance will be recognised
- Make every effort to tie these outcomes into the outcomes they ARE interested in e.g. volunteers who have more confidence will be able to provide a better service to clients
- Approach funders directly to argue the case for looking at volunteer outcomes

Workshop 8: Supporting and supervising volunteer befrienders

In this workshop, the following questions were discussed:

1. Explore why it's important to provide appropriate support and supervision to volunteer befrienders

Morning Session

- Value your volunteers
- Making befrienders part of the organisation
- Identify ongoing training needs
- Gives volunteers emotional support
- Finding additional potential in volunteers
- Can be hard to find balance in amount of support versus supervision

Afternoon Session

- Opportunity to meet regularly
- Tailored to suit befriender
- Some volunteers are capable, come from different backgrounds, previous volunteering experiences
- Open sessions – most orgs present experience limited uptake – some moved now to quarterly sessions
- Raise issues on uptake for support & supervision
- Hold more informal support sessions – e.g. social aspect, e.g. TV/Film night & food!
- Identify on-going training session ... throughout volunteering

2. Discuss the ideal frequency and format for support and supervision within their service

Morning Session

- Dependent on relationship with staff member and how match is going
- Mandatory dates supplemented with “as needed” supervision
- After first visit then 4 weekly/monthly
- Opportunity to reinforce boundaries – might need to be more frequent if issues
- Re-emphasis on need for confidentiality as a main focus of S&S
- Full time volunteers (a children's befriending service using Gap Year students) meet at the beginning of each week. This was thought to be too excessive for other groups due to the nature of the job – many staff part-time, working alone, etc.

Afternoon Session

- Once per month seemed to be the norm and then more frequently if org also offered outings/special sessions/social activities

- Some groups now offer befriender/befriendees social gatherings/lunches so that impact on both can be evidenced and informal support takes place, especially if volunteers regularly miss sessions due to other commitments etc.
- Some say support/supervision sessions decrease over time but can be more frequent at the beginning of a match

3. Consider the topics to be included in a support and supervision agenda

Morning Session

- Confidentiality (revisited)
- Diary activities
- Expenses
- Training Needs
- Outcomes for volunteer
- Reflection
- Problem solving
- Risk assessments

Afternoon Session

- Are you happy with your match – what are their general feelings about their befriending?
- Differences they feel they are making to the befriender?
- Boundaries to cover and go over
- Any problems?
- Training needs
- Changes in the programme – changes in the project or frequency of meetings etc
- Whether the befriender might offer to volunteer to attend training for Q&A session with new volunteers?
- Empowering volunteers to help with other roles within org, e.g. help with funding applications (good example of one group asking volunteers to assist with case studies for funding applications – helps them to feel part of the org and to be part of the ongoing work if application is successful)

4. Think about the personal skills required by the coordinator in delivering appropriate support and supervision

Morning Session

- Small charities can struggle to provide support / time necessary to do this effectively
- Developing suitable skills – many relying on previous knowledge / training as little time to upskill. Opportunity to share with other co-ordinators at common ground mentioned
- Support from internal or external colleagues within same org or elsewhere – needs time for this to be effective

Afternoon Session

- Good to find time to build a rapport with colleagues for support
- Good to reply to requests for help straight away

- Good to network with others
- Good co-ordinators have ability to notice difficulties before they arise and offer support or signpost to other help if needed
- Using/relying on “gut instinct” in many situations

5. Reflect on the boundaries of the support you are able to offer volunteer befrienders

Morning Session

- If a relationship breaks down then evaluate if it's salvageable and 'let go' if a volunteer is struggling
- Some services comfortable with denying progress to a volunteer if not suitable. Agreement in group that selection, pre-selection processes are very important and can be lengthened if there is any doubt about commitment or suitability. Danger of prolonging too much but opportunity arises then for some vols being able to de-select if they want and being signposted to other volunteering more suited to them
- Using training sessions as a screening tool
- Finding lesser roles for volunteers who aren't 100% suitable. Some groups have offered admin type roles (a birthday project where the volunteer sends a card to befrienders/befriendees; admin roles)
- A couple of groups had difficulties with keeping in touch with volunteers – who seemed to disappear. There was discussion of ways to keep communications going especially with more distant volunteers but agreement that there was not one way that would suit all.

Afternoon Session

- Boundaries to be in place from beginning
- Limits to staff availability – i.e. cover out of hours, over Christmas – having a strategy in place for this and an understanding that co-ordinators have lives
- One group does offer an on call 24/7 service
- Discussion around the need for text on arrival and departure – befrienders who forget – what about trust element to the role? Co-ordinators finding this troublesome and time-consuming. Others like it – and because it was part of training their vols keep to the deal
- Making sure there are other support numbers available for out of hours – e.g. next of kin for befriendees, social work out of hours numbers etc. One group insists the befrienders don't visit during longer holidays as no support. They issue a list of numbers, e.g. Silverline, Samaritans etc. They usually inform befrienders of arrangements with their Christmas Cards
- Keeping things real – seeing updates on a monthly expenses form (having a part of the form for details of activities means befriendees only complete one form).
- Problem of keeping in touch with distant befrienders – finding out their preferred communication to ensure commitment to respond to co-ordinator when needed
- Some groups ask befrienders to record every visit – some feel this is quite a commitment but others would like to try and introduce this as a way of getting more evidence re activities

- Difficulties some co-ordinators have getting volunteers to complete paperwork – how many times do you phone/leave message etc? One group asked for support with a problem with a volunteer who completely disappeared with no word of why they stopped visiting their befriender and no way of finding out what happened due to phone disconnected and moved house etc.

Workshop 9:
Training
Volunteer
Befrienders

Workshop 9: Training volunteer befrienders

This workshop focused on three main topics:

- Ensuring that the content and format of your volunteer training programme are appropriate to the needs of the organisation and the volunteers participating.
- Ensuring that your approach to delivering your training programme is appropriate to the learning needs of your participants
- The challenges involved in training volunteer befrienders and some possible solutions to these.

Introduction

Participants began by discussing what they considered to be the elements of a really good training session. Some of the suggestions are listed below.

A really good training session should:

- Allow plenty of time for discussion
- Be correctly pitched for participants
- Be clearly structured and flow well
- Not run over time
- Include strong graphical content
- Be fun
- Engage the participants
- Include refreshments
- Get the key messages across clearly
- Be delivered in an upbeat and enthusiastic way
- Contain relevant and interesting content
- Take place in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere
- Involve lots of participant interaction
- Include clear well-written handouts and other materials
- Allow participants time to get to know one another as well as the topic
- Be preceded by a clear outline
- Allow participants to be active in their learning.

This initial discussion was summarised by pointing out that these elements cover **content** (the actual subject matter of the training), **format** (how long the training lasts, how many sessions, what time of the day, where it is held, whether it is carried out one-to-one, in groups, face-to-face, in a distance format etc.) and **delivery** (what the trainer says and does on the day and what they ask participants to do).

It was pointed out that different coordinators have different amounts of input into the first two of these areas. Some may design their own content, others may not. Some coordinators may be able to decide when and where their training takes place, whilst others may have to

follow a programme decided by the organisations. However, all trainers have control over the delivery of their training and can really have a positive influence of the success of their sessions by ensuring that they are well delivered.

Content of a training programme for volunteer befrienders

It was agreed that this should contain everything a volunteer needs to know to carry out their role competently and confidently. Most of the content can be delivered by the service coordinator, and occasionally, certain aspects – particularly those relating to the background and needs of specific client groups, such as mental health awareness, first aid or assisting with mobility - could be delivered by external organisations. It was also agreed that volunteer training should not contain unnecessary or repetitive information.

No two volunteer training programmes are exactly the same, as they need to be tailored to the needs of very different services, however, the core topics of befriender training typically include:

- An introduction to the organisation
- What befriending is and what it's not
- Boundaries and confidentiality
- Values and attitudes of a befriender
- Communication skills
- Background information about the client group
- Matching and person-centredness
- Managing Endings
- Communication with the organisation
- Practicalities of the role – expenses and paperwork
- Safeguarding
- Support and supervision arrangements

Format of training programme

It is not appropriate for the network to be prescriptive as regards the duration and format of a training programme for volunteer befrienders, nor is it possible to provide good practice guidance across the board. Whether a training programme lasts 3 hours or 30 hours depends on the requirements of the organisation and its volunteers. The most important guidance we can offer is to view the training programme – including its format – as constantly evolving and be ready to make changes where appropriate. Almost all participants attending BNs Training for Trainers events have changed their volunteer training programme at some point, or perhaps many times and changes to format are part of this. Some recent trends relating to the format of volunteer training include the following:

- Changing the time of day and length of individual sessions to accommodate changing availability of volunteers
- Changes to the length of the overall training programme to accommodate new learning requirements
- Incorporating more self-study and less face-to-face time
- Developing home learning resources
- Designing training materials which can be used for one-to-one training if necessary

Delivery of training programme

Discussion focused on several key areas of training delivery, including:

- Ensuring that individual learning styles of participants are catered for
- Creating learning experiences which are active and participatory
- Structuring learning content in 10 – 15 minute blocks, ensuring a variety of activities and groupings are included in any one session
- The importance of effective examples and illustrations of key learning points
- Ways to make the session fun and engaging
- Ensuring the preparations have been appropriate before the session begins
- Achieving the right balance between presentation and facilitation within any session.