

# Common Ground Notes: June 2017



These notes are compiled from meetings held in different parts of the UK in June 2017.

This latest round of meetings took place in the following locations: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Kirkcaldy and Inverness. We also held a video conference session with participants from Caithness, Orkney and the Isle of Lewis.

As well as giving participants the opportunity to share news and discuss issues and challenges they are facing, during this round of meetings we explored the following key issue with participants:

- **Innovations in befriending: What are members up to that's new and departs from the traditional one-to-one, face-to-face service delivery model? Why was the impetus behind the innovations and how's it going?**

Common Ground meetings are relaxed, informal, friendly, informative, stimulating, challenging discussions and are central to making us a strong, inclusive, dynamic network. The meetings are intended to stimulate discussion and debate. They are an arena where members can air both ideas and frustrations for the consideration of their peers. The notes try to be a true reflection of the views and opinions of the members who attended the meetings and in doing so, hope to give an accurate flavour of these meetings to those who were unable to attend. We attempt to stay true to this even where these views do not replicate those held by BNs.

Befriending Networks provides Common Ground meetings so that staff or trustees of befriending services can meet others involved in befriending in their local area, discuss and explore topical issues around befriending, and contribute to good practice in befriending at a national level. Common Ground meetings around the country feature the same agenda items, but also allow time for specific issues to be raised.

## Part One: Participants' news, views and issues

Below is a sample of the many topics raised and discussed during the last round of meetings. Why not come along next time if you'd like to bring your own topic to the table?

### Volunteer Recruitment

- Discussion around volunteer referrals received through the Job Centre. One of the main for organisations with this is being confident in the motivation of the 'volunteer'. Is someone really volunteering if they've been obliged to come forward on pain of losing their benefits? All present agreed that volunteer referrals from the Job Centre tended to be unsuccessful.
- Discussion also around the shortage of volunteers in general, which was a prevalent theme among attendees. One service had no shortage (they had a waiting list, in fact) and another in an adjacent area had a shortage. Is there scope to collaborate to solve this discrepancy? One service used mainly students, who were reliable although not around for the summer, so the service was put on hold over that period. there was a suggestion that paired befriending (i.e two befrienders for each client) might help to get round this. A good time to recruit students was April so they are ready to start in September, having been vetted and references taken up. One service pointed out that volunteers were lonely themselves, which might also tick funding boxes.
- One participant talked of her success in recruiting befriending volunteers from other community organisations. In her locality there is a very close network of community groups and, using research evidence that people who take on one volunteer role are likely to take on a second role, the coordinator engaged with volunteers from other community groups (by volunteering herself to take part in their activities and with the groups' consent) and successfully recruited quite a number of befrienders that way.
- Many participants agreed that the accessibility both of the application process and of the coordinator as a person are key elements of successful volunteer recruitment.
- Some organisations have had success in creating campaigns based on advertising the support needs of individual (anonymised) befriendees. That seems to appeal to potential volunteers, who respond to the idea of the actual person. The only caveat is to make sure people coming forward know that they might NOT be matched up with that particular befriender – that it is still the coordinator's responsibility to make matching decisions.

### Funding

- Funding sources were discussed at various meetings. Not every service can apply for Lottery funding, due to religious or other constraints in their guiding documents. It

was suggested that councils' Common Good Funds might sometimes be regarded as flexible sources of funding.

- Funding sources for loneliness and isolation might also apply to children and young people, particularly in rural areas. Projects that included other services and activities (in addition to befriending) might also be considered when applying for funding, as partnership working is popular-e.g. one service has received some funds from Paths for All for walking activities.
- At one meeting there was a discussion around how to make the most of opportunities for funding from corporate sources. One member present does have a corporate befriending programme, where the employer gives time from working hours for employees to engage in befriending, or in helping to promote the befriending service. Another member has decided to target possible corporate donors and is thinking about the most effective messages to put out to achieve this. One idea is to try and work out how much it costs to keep an individual match going for a year and to put out an appeal that way. Another selling point might be to list all of the negative issues and problems that could be prevented for befriendees through the support of a befriender. A further suggestion would be to do some arithmetic and work out how much it costs (the country) for befriendees to be isolated and lonely and then compare that to the cost of providing a befriender to show how much of a saving is being made through befriending.

### Befriendee referrals

- There was some discussion about levels of waiting lists and volunteer recruitment. One organisation has been receiving increasing numbers of referrals from Social Work. They feel that, for some of these referrals the individuals are really in need of paid social care services and that, in the absence of service availability, social workers are referring people to befriending services to 'fill the gap'. Other organisations were also experiencing increased levels of referrals. Discussion around giving a clear message about what can be offered by befriending e.g. low level social support and what cannot be provided e.g. personal care. The feeling was that this would help reduce any inappropriate referrals.
- At one meeting, one participant was having a great deal of trouble getting befriendee referrals. One problem, echoed by other participants at the meeting, is that service publicity is not worded in a way which makes it easy for potential service users to identify with. One example of this is an end-of-life befriending service which initially used the term 'palliative care' in their literature. When this was removed, many more people came forward looking for support. The term 'long-term conditions' is similarly problematic. People know the name of their own particular condition, but this generic term doesn't speak to them. 'Loneliness' and 'lonely' are also difficult terms as there is still stigma around admitting to being lonely.
- Suggestions around increasing referrals included engaging with and providing referral information to:

- home helps
- carers
- meals on wheels
- falls management professionals
- day centres
- the fire service (home safety check teams)
- Royal Mail (some befriending services have had referrals from posties)
- pharmacies
- local newsagents
- GPs – through it was agreed that this was probably the option least likely to be successful, as GPs are not only really busy, they are often (still) reluctant to offer non-clinical solutions to patients

### Enhanced volunteer roles

- Discussion at various meetings around the specialist and non-befriending roles for volunteers which befriending services have in place. Some examples follow. Some organisations have experienced volunteers supervising a limited number of matches. Some have 'waiting list volunteers' who keep in touch with people on the waiting list, whilst others leave parts of the volunteer induction training and recruitment in the hands of volunteers. Some have marketing and campaigning volunteers and others have volunteer fundraisers specifically tasked with raising funds locally for the service. One services provides transport to its group befriending activities and has recruited volunteer drivers to do this and others have volunteers who run group befriending activities (some befriending groups are entirely volunteer led).

### Social prescribing

- There was some discussion about the possibilities offered to befriending services by the recent increased interest in social prescribing among GPs. It was agreed that this is an avenue that should certainly be explored, but not only with a view to getting more referrals. GP practices (and the NHS more widely) should really be approached as fully-fledged partners who also collaborate in raising funds for the organisation. It was noted that practice managers are sometimes more willing to engage than GPs themselves. In some areas forming the type of ongoing relationship with GPs which this type of collaboration would require is really tricky as practices are mainly staffed by locums who come and go too frequently for that trust and familiarity to become established.

## **BNs updates**

- We were happy to let members know about the appointment of Muriel Mowat as membership Officer. We're really looking forward to having her as a new team member.
- Liz Watson is leaving at the end of June, to be replaced by our new CEO, Sarah Van Putten.
- Anne Callaghan from the Campaign to End Loneliness will be working closely with us and spending part of her week based in our office. Anne's research project (based on the pilot area in Glasgow) tests the following idea:

*To end loneliness three things must change:*

1. *Loneliness must become everyone's business: in every community, individuals and local businesses must play their part*
2. *Services engaged in tackling loneliness must grow and improve – they must measure the change they achieve and share their learning*
3. *Commissioners and policymakers must collaborate effectively so tackling loneliness extends beyond policy statements, to practical joined up local action by public, private and voluntary sector partners all working together*

- We are lucky to be working with two new interns over the summer months, Nkonde and Rebekkah. Nkonde is producing a report for us based on Google Analytics, helping us to understand which parts of our website work best and which parts are not doing so well. Rebekkah will be compiling a report around resources available to tackle online safety for young people. We will be using Rebekkah's findings to compile an online training for trainers resource for coordinators of CYP befriending services.
- The Leicester Masterclass on Befriending strategy and practice took place in Leicester on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June on the theme of partnerships.

#### **Other news / resources of interest:**

- Scottish Public Health Network scoping report on Loneliness/Social Isolation: <http://www.scotphn.net/projects/loneliness-social-isolation/introduction/>
- IOT UK report on social isolation and loneliness - with an emphasis on use of technology: <https://iotuk.org.uk/social-isolation-and-loneliness-report/>
- £2million fund to support Youth Social Action in tackling loneliness (opes for applications 12/6): <http://www.iwill.org.uk/co-op-foundation-creates-2m-fund-to-help-young-people-take-action-to-tackle-loneliness/>
- The Kings Fund conference on social prescribing <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/events/social->

## Part Two:

### Key topic – Innovations in befriending

#### Background

The way befriending support is delivered is changing in all sorts of creative and interesting ways. From group and telephone befriending, to goal / activity focused, short-term and e-befriending, the traditional one-to-one, face-to-face model is no longer the only one. Organisations are also exploring all kinds of solutions to the pressing issue of providing a service to an increasing number of befriendedees in a climate of ever decreasing funding, so we're seeing an increase in strategies such as charging for befriending, developing enhanced volunteer roles and corporate volunteering.

What are BNs members up to that's new? What do they want to learn about from others?

#### Feedback from participants

##### Meeting 1

Members were very interested in hearing about **alternative models of befriending**, mainly in the context of **capacity building** as at least one service had a hole in their budget for this year and every service considered itself to be stretched. Two services had cut back this year. There was interest in (although not necessarily approval of) **paid services**- someone pointed out that there was a charged-for (non member) service in the area. Others suggested that this was already happening under other guises-e.g. that older people were paying for cleaners, but once the cleaner arrived, the person just wanted to chat rather than have cleaning done. Someone questioned whether PIP (personal independence payment) could be/was used for befriending, but no one had confirmation that this ever happened.

One children's service was introducing **paired befriending**, which would reduce the waiting list (befriending 2 children). The service was considering imaginative potential solutions to generating income, including trying to carry out **training in schools**, which might potentially unlock PEF (Pupil Equity Funding), which is payment to schools per numbers of pupils on free school meals. It was acknowledged that caution must be exerted when trying to be creative-it's too easy to lose the mission by chasing funding, but at the same time funders want evidence of change and development.

## Meeting 2

One organisation spoke about a development in which they are moving towards some **intergenerational work**, working with another organisation that supports young people. The young people and their support will be matched with an older person. One aim would be to encourage young people to move into volunteering in the longer term. Other organisations had also **recruited young people as volunteers**. Some said that for this to work there was a need for some **practical focus** to any interaction between the volunteer and the befriender, that young people can find it more difficult to strike up and sustain chat.

One organisation is developing a new **enhanced volunteering role** where the volunteer will initially shadow the befriending co-ordinator with a view to them ultimately **supervising 3 or 4 matches**. It is expected that this will increase capacity in terms of the number of matches possible but also will provide training and experience for the volunteer which could be a valuable addition to their CV.

Other means of increasing capacity were discussed including extensions of **group befriending and time limited, 'goal orientated' befriending**. Some now include time limited befriending to ensure no sense of dependency developing, they also felt it offered volunteers opportunity for different experiences.

There was some discussion about recruitment issues and **using social media** to support recruitment. There was also some discussion about the use of the **online volunteer training tool**. One person enquired about whether this could be **available in different languages?**

## Meeting 3

**Use of technology:** One organisation uses the Zoom videoconferencing platform to provide support and supervision to volunteers and to keep in touch with referrers and other stakeholders. Another provides mobile phones to all its volunteers very inexpensively so that issues of boundaries and billing (it is a telephone befriending service) are dealt with this way.

**Intergenerational work:** *Little Rotarians* is a partnership with local schools which ties in with the school curriculum and also achieves outcomes of reducing social isolation and loneliness for befriendees.

**Evaluation:** Some participants are trying to link their evaluations into a wider framework – lending greater robustness to their conclusions - using both the outcomes star model (<http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/>) and the place standard tool (<https://placestandard.scot/>)

**Partnership working** and formal collaboration are becoming more important for everybody and **strategic responsibilities** are increasingly a priority. In this area, participation in the regional Health and Wellbeing Forum is proving particularly valuable.

## Meeting 4

- **Incorporating diverse delivery models.** Many formerly face-to-face, one-to-one befriending services are introducing telephone and group befriending to run alongside this as a way of catering for a greater range of service users, volunteer preferences and referrer requests. One member suggested that perhaps in the near future all befriending services will comprise a suite of different delivery models (suitable to their service users and outcomes) including those mentioned above, and possibly also short-term, goal- and activity-focused models too, as well as specifically intergenerational approaches. There was a short discussion on the key role for Befriending Networks in drawing together learning on all these models so far and providing guidance on best practice for all types of approaches to delivery.
- **New sources of funding.** Some members are exploring both corporate and individual sources of funding. Services are beginning to talk to local businesses about how they can play a role in supporting the befriending work going on. Sometimes this has taken the form of the company acting as a recruitment agent for volunteers, supplying meeting space, paying for resources (such as printing of training materials), allowing employees to carry out telephone befriending in work time and at the expense of the company. The possibilities are wide and varied and it was agreed that there is currently an appetite among private enterprise to collaborate with community organisations (and get their name out there as a sponsor / benefactor), so it would be wise for befriending services to explore this possibility. In terms of attempting to appeal to private individuals to support befriending services, members were discussing the idea of an Oxfam-style approach where services work out the cost of various elements of running a befriending service (e.g. training a volunteer befriender, supporting a match for X weeks/ months, paying for a weekly trip out of the house for a befriender for x number of weeks etc ) and launching appeals locally based on this (befriending services could even make Christmas / greetings cards based on this idea and people buy them at the cost specified, all of which goes to the organisation)
- New outcomes, such as **facilitated friendships**, where the befriender's role is either to enable the befriender to meet up with existing friends (whom they are not able to see on their own for whatever reason), or to bring more than one service user together, thereby enabling new friendships to form. **Peer support befriending** where service users can go on to become volunteers is also increasingly popular and successful in some services – mainly suitable for those working with adults in transition from a bad place – e.g. homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse – to a better one. It was noted that in some circumstances the potential pitfalls of befriending being provided by people with a similar set of experiences – such as whether the befriender has any setbacks in their own journey, or really being 'ready' to take on the supportive role – could outweigh the possible advantages and that this needs to be carefully assessed by the befriending organisation.

- **Social media** as part of **internal communications** within the befriending service. For example, some organisations have had success with the use of closed Facebook groups as a way of keeping in touch with volunteers, or of volunteers exchanging ideas with one another. Some services have also attempted to setup closed forums for service users to communicate with one another (and the coordinator) but there are fewer examples of this and fewer cases where it might be appropriate.
- **Enhanced and diverse volunteer roles.** Organisations are exploring the benefits of including non-befriending roles within their services. Some of these could be 'expert' roles such as volunteer trainers, or coordinators (of limited numbers of matches), but could also be marketing, fundraising, campaigning and admin roles.

## Meeting 5

In this meeting, largely made up of services in remote, rural areas, many different types of innovations were already a standard feature of service delivery. There was a short discussion around whether such services, due to their own remoteness, have had to be more innovative just as a matter of survival! Some of the already well-used 'innovations' include:

- Intergenerational work
- General and themed group befriending, e.g. casserole clubs and walking groups
- Activity-focused befriending, such as 'gym buddies'
- Partnerships with 'Men in Sheds'
- Collaboration with volunteer-led street associations (providing good practice guidance)
- Facilitated friendship initiatives such as 'coffee companions', whereby local coffee shops agree to be hubs for people getting to know one another. At certain times during the week, they advertise this and collaborating befriending services provide 2 – 3 befrienders in the coffee shop to do introductions and facilitate conversation.
- Working with local businesses e.g. in employer-supported volunteering initiatives and in holding events on premises of local businesses (free of charge), or cafes such as in the example above.
- Formal and informal partnerships with other community organisations in the coordination of mutually-beneficial service delivery, such as Dial-a-Bus, or in practical measures such as sharing office space with other organisations.
- Collaborating with local churches e.g. the development of a summer lunch group for older isolated parishioners. The befriending services has provided the initial expertise to get this off the ground, but after the summer the church itself will take over the running of the group. It was noted that, aside from those befriending organisations run by churches, there is often little collaboration between befriending services and local churches and that this should be explored much more enthusiastically by befriending services in the future.

