

BEFRIENDING NETWORKS LONDON COMMON GROUND MEETING

6th September 2017

Following an initial welcome from Sarah van Putten, CEO of Befriending Networks two short presentations were given by Professor Stefan Priebe from the Unit from Social and Community Psychiatry and Dr. Mariana Pinto da Costa from Queen Mary University of London who explained to the delegates the work of VOLUME (Volunteering in Mental Health) research project.

The morning session of the Common Ground befriending meeting began with a presentation by Caroline Billington, founder of Coffee Companions and Community Christmas. Caroline talked about her innovative idea to tackle loneliness and social isolation with the simple use of 'chat mats' in public places such as café's, hospitals and garden centres. The business or organisation supplies the mats which are reversible depending on whether someone would like a chat or would rather be left alone. She hopes to encourage voluntary befriending organisations to adopt the scheme and incorporate it into their services.

The second presentation was by Lois Muddiman of Withami, a part of Oxford Computer Company. They have designed and launched, in Oxfordshire, a website where organisations are able to post specific befriending opportunities to attract volunteers. Very brief details of the befriender are posted and a potential volunteer who registers an interest will be linked to the organisation who will contact them and register, check, train and match them as with any volunteer. They are hoping the website will be rolled out to other areas in the near future.

The afternoon session was split into four workshops facilitated by Sarah van Putten and Diane Claridge from Befriending Networks. Delegates could choose which groups to attend. The topics were: **Volunteers** – how to recruit, retain, train, support and match. **Clients/Service Users** – referral pathways, boundary issues and monitoring of relationships. **Scheme co-ordinators/Managers' roles** – support from organisation and teams, safe capacity of projects, challenges and achievements. **Project Development, Legacy and Community working** – involvement in project development, evolving to meet changing expectations, measuring impact, pros and cons of partnership and community working. There was lively discussion and sharing of challenges and good practice at all the groups.

The day was attended by 16 delegates including 13 befriending scheme co-ordinators and 8 volunteer befrienders who attended the focus groups.

