

FEATURE ARTICLE:

Maslow Hieracrchy of Needs

BEFRIENDING THEORY: MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Befriending is often faced with the conundrum of wanting to offer a service to those who need it the most but not being able to. This is because those who would appear to most need support, are those with very chaotic backgrounds who find it hardest to engage.

Experience in a recent evaluation of a befriending project undertaken by Befriending Network Scotland revealed that 50% of the pilot project's referrals had come from the category they originally identified as the priority group - young adults who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The project had worked hard to try to 'up' the percentage but found it a difficult group to gain referrals of.

Feedback from referral agencies in the area suggested that one of the main reasons for this was that getting involved in befriending is not a priority for young adults if there are other more serious issues at play, such as homelessness. The evaluation concluded that, "Befriending is not normally a crisis service, and these young adults can often be at a point of crisis. An ability or desire to focus on supportive relationships appears more likely when people have reached a level of stability in their lives. This suggests that a client group of young adults is a challenge in itself to engage with, let alone those young adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness."

According to Neil Thain-Gray, project co-ordinator of the Glasgow-based NCH Young Refugee Befriending Project, "Circumstances change for a lot of our clients and this can have a major knock-on effect on their ability to engage in a relationship. It is difficult for them to commit to befriending when they are isolated and their priority needs are accommodation, education and immigration – realistically, we are offering a secondary role in terms of social support."

So where does this leave befriending? Is it an intervention that is only applicable when people have reached a certain point of stability and can consider relationships? What does that mean for those projects wanting to provide supportive relationships for people who are living in chaotic circumstances or have multiple needs to address?

One theoretical framework that considers people's ability and interest in forming relationships is Maslow's Hierarchy

of Needs. This theory depicts needs as a pyramid consisting of five levels.

- The base of the pyramid is formed by the physiological needs, including the biological requirements for food, water, air, and sleep.
- Once the physiological needs are met, an individual can concentrate on the second level, the need for safety and security. Included here are the needs for structure, order, security, and predictability.
- The third level is the need for love and belonging. Included here are the needs for friends and companions, a supportive family, identification with a group, and an intimate relationship.
- The fourth level is the esteem needs. This group of needs requires both recognition from other people that results in feelings of prestige, acceptance, and status, and self-esteem that results in feelings of adequacy, competence, and confidence. Lack of satisfaction of the esteem needs results in discouragement and feelings of inferiority. Finally, [self-actualization](#) sits at the apex of the original pyramid.

The basic idea behind his model is that once an individual moves up a level, needs in the lower level are no longer prioritised. However, if a lower set of needs is no longer being met, the individual will temporarily re-prioritise those needs, dropping down to that level until the lower needs are reasonably satisfied again.

Therefore relationships are seen on the third level and are considered only after physiological needs and safety have been addressed and are not the priority. This would suggest that relationships might be more difficult to form for people who have other concerns that are more pressing.

In Edinburgh, Bethany Christian Trust have developed a programme of support for people who are homeless which in some ways recognises similar needs and stages where someone might go from living on the streets and being supported or cared for with food and shelter, through to people who have addressed their housing issues and possibly addiction or health problems and are able to look at learning opportunities.

Level 1: Street work (care vans (food), night shelters, drop ins)

Level 2: Emergency accommodation

Level 3: Specialist units (supported communities for men and women)

Level 4: Supported housing

Level 5: Specialist support services (such as addiction support)

Level 6: Homemaking and furniture help & charity shops

Level 7: Community education and life-long learning

Bethany are now developing a localised befriending service to support people at the point that they are re-housed in order to provide supportive relationships at a point where people are moving into a new community. Befriending in this case is therefore being applied at a point of transition but also of relative stability in people's lives, rather than at the more transient, potentially chaotic stage of sleeping rough where needs are more likely to be physiological or safety-related.

So how can we best work with people whose lives are very chaotic? Does some really have to 'sorted' is some way before befriending can kick in and have a positive, sustainable and lasting effect? If so, how 'sorted' do they have to be?

The reality of working with vulnerable, chaotic client groups is that situations change and deteriorate, sometimes overnight. A further challenge to the practicalities of maintaining relationships in these circumstances is keeping volunteers motivated when the clients aren't getting involved.

One main criticism concerning Maslow's hierarchy is although he predicts that human beings will move up the hierarchy, satisfying one need before moving on, there are many examples in which this is not the case. Many artists and scientists, (Van Gogh and Galileo, for instance), suffered from mental illness, and yet were able to produce works that changed the world around them permanently, and intellectual giants such as Trachtenburg and Frankl, who developed new ways of doing arithmetic and psychology therapy respectively, perfected their achievements while suffering in concentration camps. Maslow addressed some of these criticisms in his paper, *Theory of Human Motivation*. He explained

that some people will put a need above others, such as self-actualization above physiological needs, when the lower need has been so neglected for a length of time that it becomes undervalued in the eyes of the person,

The experience of many support projects is also that relationships when people are facing great difficulty are what can move them on to a safer, healthier level in life, and not that they will only happen when these other needs are addressed. Take this case study from the Streetwork website.

Frankie, 40, had been sleeping rough for many years. He had chronic alcohol and health problems and had been physically assaulted on the streets on a number of occasions. But he refused to go into a hostel, saying he did not like living with other people. As a result Frankie became very isolated and lonely. However Streetworkers started to build up a relationship with Frankie and the breakthrough came when he agreed to see a doctor about his health problems. Now, after 6 years of sleeping rough, he has recently moved into a temporary furnished flat with the support of workers from Streetwork.

<http://www.streetwork.org.uk/project.php?cat=10>

Perhaps then, it is about projects recognising that people's need of support does not come in isolation. It could be that an older man would benefit from a weekly visit and trusting relationship of a befriender but is also struggling to eat well because his cooker has broken, or someone who is being re-housed in an unfamiliar area not only needs company and support but help with decoration and cleaning.

The question for befriending projects is then how far does their involvement go? In some cases such as Fresh Start in Edinburgh, befriending for new tenants goes hand in hand with a Hit Squad providing a decorating service and Starter Packs of cleaning and household goods.

Other projects may offer befriending as a more dedicated, stand alone service. They may rely on signposting people to other services, or on the original referral agency doing work again to assist the service user.

Either way befriending projects perhaps need to consider just how able they are to fully support people who might fit their criteria, but might have many needs in addition to that of a supportive relationship.