



# Looking after your well-being

By signing up to become a befriender, you are joining a national mission to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst our communities. Regular social interaction can help to build confidence, self-esteem and structure for someone, amongst many other positive outcomes. Befriending projects could not function without people like you. The work that you will do in this role can really make a difference and this document is designed to support you to achieve the most out of your role.

Whether you have joined a grassroots project, a small community or a national campaign: thank you for taking the time to support others and to make a difference.

Befriending is not dissimilar to volunteering in general. You are providing a service that helps and supports others. What is important, is that you protect, help and support your own well-being too.

There are several ways you can do this:

## **1. Know your limitations**

It is natural to want to help. This is called being empathetic. Empathy is a key skill for both befrienders and volunteers. It is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another with sensitivity. This said, you need to know your limitations.

It is important to be able to admit when you are in too deep. If you are struggling with your match, admit it as it does no positive service to the befriender, yourself or the organisation. If at any point you have concerns over the well-being or safety of your match, you must communicate this with your volunteer coordinator / line manager.

There is no shame in stating that you do not know what to do or how to handle a situation. Your training and guidance as a befriender should inform you of this and



there should be a clear procedure outline given to you, either as an explanation or in your volunteer handbook. Although all organisations will vary on specifics: If you are struggling, speak to a member of staff from the organisation as soon as possible.

### **2. Supporting others**

As a befriender, you will have direct access to the service user and your primary role will be to support them. This support may be delivered by taking the time to talk to them, assisting them with outings in the community or it could be assisting them to carry out hobbies. Monitor and evaluate the well-being of your match(es) and ensure to alert your coordinator if you notice a deterioration or factors of concern. Rather than spend time being worried or stressed about what you can do or trying to help in ways not related to your role, it is best for you to discuss this with your point of contact in the organisation and allow them to take any necessary steps.

### **3. Signposting**

The term signposting means to direct someone to another service or organisation. For example, you may not be a legal expert but your match needs advice. In this situation, you could help them access legal aid by giving them the phone number or accompanying them into town.

Signposting can be the best step in many situations from well-being, mental health, housing, human rights or specialist care to name a few. There are many organisations in the UK which people can access by phone, in person or online. Rather than try to study and learn about a topic and potentially get it wrong, signpost your match to an expert on the topic to ensure they get the best care and support possible.

### **4. Boundaries**

One of the best ways to protect your well-being is to respect the boundaries. Your organisation should have boundary policies and procedures, such as physical contact and exchanging of money.

Boundaries are in place to protect the welfare of the organisation, the volunteer and that of the service user. It is important to respect and to follow them to ensure everyone stays safe and clear as to what is expected of them.



## **5. Expectations vs. Reality**

It is crucial that you understand the reality of being a volunteer befriender from the beginning so that your expectations are accurate so that you can avoid being overwhelmed or disappointed.

As we advocate that all service users should be given a clear outline of what the service is and what it is not, *Befriending Networks* also advocate that volunteer benders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

If you are unsure of what your role entails, ask your volunteer coordinator for help. Just as a job comes with a job description, volunteering should come with a clear outline of the role. Factors such as time commitment, tasks, responsibilities, dress code etc. should be outlined to you. If you have not received this, please request it from the organisation to read so that your expectations match with reality.

## **6. Protecting your mental well-being**

According to HSE, the biggest cause for staff turnover is stress. Stress can affect people's mood, appetite and sleep pattern which in affect can be highly negative on your mental well-being. You need to be honest with both yourself and your coordinator. If you are struggling, please do say so.

While befriending, there can be many things which may alter your mental well-being. For example, you may be finding the commitment too much, be grieving or struggling with specific factors of the match that cause you to need some time off.

It is important to recognise your emotions and well-being. If you feel your mental well-being is in jeopardy or at risk of being so, either:

- a) speak to your coordinator immediately
- b) use your next support and supervision to talk it through

## **7. Safeguarding and risk management**

If you are working 1:1 with your befriender, you should be aware of your lone working the right to **confidentiality** is not absolute. Sharing relevant information with the right people at the right time is vital to good **safeguarding** practice. This policy is in place for maintaining your safety. For some organisations it may mean checking in with your



coordinator via text at the start and end of your befriending meeting, for other organisations it will entail only meeting at agreed locations within office hours.

Risk assessments will be carried out within the organisation to evaluate any potential dangers and to action the precautions and steps that can be put into place to ensure your safety.

Safeguarding is also your duty as a volunteer. As a befriender, you have a duty of care to inform your coordinator if you are made aware of anything of concern. Your confidentiality agreement should state this: that everything you are told by your match is to remain confidential – though sharing relevant information with the right people at the right time is vital to good safeguarding practice. *E.g. if you are informed by the befriender that they are subject to abuse, you should inform your coordinator who will contact the relevant services.*

### **In Conclusion**

It is important to monitor and evaluate your well-being and be honest with both yourself and your coordinator about your feelings. Your role as a befriender should be a pleasant and enjoyable one. The service user may already have feelings of social isolation or loneliness. Having a befriender should provide social interaction and help to eliminate some of the barriers they are facing. If you are befriending with your mind elsewhere and distracted, it will not support their progress but hinder it.

Use your support and supervisions to discuss your roles and responsibilities as a volunteer and if you need urgent support, make sure to phone or visit the organisation.

If you have any questions about this document, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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