

Summary of discussions from the first two Q & A Sessions around COVID-19 and how organisations are coping and adapting.

The following questions were discussed:

1. Have you accessed our COVID-19 support page on the website? Have our resources been of any use?

The majority of organisations have accessed Befriending Networks new resources and found them extremely helpful, especially when transitioning to telephone or distance support.
<https://www.befriending.co.uk/resources/covid-19-support/>

2. How are you keeping up staff morale? Are we managing to maintain a team collaboration during social distancing?

All organisations reported daily or weekly team support via Zoom, Skype, Google Hangout, WhatsApp etc. Discussions around being tempted to work over and above normal hours and trouble switching off when working from home. Self-care was discussed with some good tips including sharing good news or funny video with teams, taking breaks and switching off phones and laptops when not working.

3. How are organisations coping with the transition to distance befriending?

- **Letter Writing** – working for some organisations, recommended adding *Please wash your hands after reading this letter to avoid contaminations*, GDPR considerations around swapping addresses if organisation offices are closed.
- **Cards** – One service is sending Moonpig cards with birthday or get well messages
- **2nd Matches** - a lot of services are asking volunteers to take on a 2nd match as demand increases. Needs to be clearly communicated that this is a temporary arrangement to both parties.
- **Cost of Phonecalls** - Most services are finding that their volunteers are using their current landline or mobile packages of free calls. One organisation has adapted their Volunteer Expense form to offer 15p per minute for phonecalls, asking volunteers, even if they are not claiming to record number of minutes so they can capture the impact of C19 has on their service. Several organisations already buy all their volunteers inexpensive mobile phones with low contract packages (£7-£10 per month). Volunteers could be asked to produce itemised phone bills to claim costs
- **Shopping** - If handling money, this is a Regulated Activity. Some services are offering or considering support with shopping and asked how organisations are dealing with the cash handling. Suggestions were crowdfunding to buy staple items which can be delivered, asking the public for donations of basic items, giving the volunteers a float (maybe by bank transfer) which can be collected from the befriender at a later date via cheque or transfer. Many local communities are setting up informal shopping services with volunteers so tapping into these may be an option.
- **Video Calls** No organisations present were using video calls although two CYP (Children and Young People) services were considering this although we unsure of the suitability with their client groups and permission.
- **Supporting your volunteers** – Can be a struggle, not being able to meet and finding time to phone for support and supervision. Ideas included befriender Hang Out groups, WhatsApp Groups for volunteers, peer support – buddying up volunteers to support each other, group supervision online with Zoom, Skype etc but offering 1:1 to anyone who is struggling.

**Q & A Sessions Hosted by Befriending Networks
held on 24th March and 26th March 2020**

- **New Volunteers** – All organisations (including Befriending Networks) reported an increase in enquiries about volunteering (*40 in one week in one case*). Whilst this is great news, the challenges of capacity, training and matching all take time. This is why BN is developing an online '**Interim Volunteer**' **training package** which will be available to access via the website as well as a set of **Sample Forms and Templates** for Interim Volunteers which can be downloaded.
- **Supporting harder to reach service users - Discussion** around service users who are hard of hearing or who have memory issues as these are harder to reach by phone or online. Two organisations said they were sending out **Activity Packs** which included quizzes, crosswords, a notebook to record memories and feelings, paper, envelopes and stamps to write letters, knitting patterns, simple craft activities and maybe a small bar of chocolate. All agreed this was an excellent idea if these resources were readily available.
- **DBS and PVG** - Befriending Networks has written confirmation from the DBS that checks are not permitted for pure telephone befriending in England and Wales as it does not come under any of the Regulated Activities. See the documents on our website. For PVG advice see <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-organisations/disclosure-services/pvg-and-coronavirus-covid-19/>

Please note that these Q & A sessions will now be held weekly

for more information see our website:

<https://www.befriending.co.uk/training-events/covid-19-support/>