



Telephone Befriending

Information and resources



Run by Leeds Older People's Forum, Time to Shine aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness of the older population in Leeds.

Our vision is that older people need not experience loneliness as an inevitable consequence of ageing but that our programme will provide opportunities for fulfilment by breaking down barriers and building strong communities. In this current situation in which Coronavirus is enforcing physical isolation between individuals it is especially vital that we reach out in other ways to ensure those who are self-isolating still have ways to connect with others.

Many projects are seeking to develop means to support older people through regular telephone support, this pack gives an overview of tips and issues to consider when providing telephone befriending to ensure the telephone support is a positive experience for both parties.


This information and resource pack includes:

- How telephone support operates and the value of the service to clients
- What makes an effective telephone support volunteer
- To explore the volunteer's own attitudes and needs and the implications within the volunteer/client relationship
- To understand the dynamics of befriending, giving advice and counselling skills
- To become familiar with basic listening skills and the pitfalls to be avoided
- Some information on current (end of March 2020) local support services
- Signposting towards local and national organisations supporting volunteering and befriending


Background information

Many voluntary organisations have provided telephone befriending as a means to stay connected with people who may be restricted to their own homes. Many projects are aimed at older people with mobility problems and other issues which make leaving the home and connecting with others difficult.

Feedback from the older people involved has been extremely positive;



“someone I can talk to – a different level to family”



“feels like a friend even though I have not met her”

By utilising telephone support we aim to address social isolation and loneliness and we enable older people to contribute to, as well as benefit from, befriending. This empowers the volunteer befrienders, also often older people and increases their social and emotional well-being.

Traditionally the service helps those who may be socially isolated for many reasons: long-term illness, recent hospitalisation, anxiety or low self-esteem. They can all benefit from regular telephone contact.

Currently many people are going to be reliant on telephone contact for society, for reassurance and for fun. Many of them might be people who were driving, escorting or running groups last week.

“The telephone’s actual ring- more perhaps than any sound in our daily lives – evokes hope, relief, fear, anxiety, joy, according to our expectations. The telephone is our nerve end to society.”

(taken from Brooks’ history of the telephone).

Traditionally telephone befriending took place maybe once a week or once a fortnight, with a relatively long call. In the current circumstances you may wish to be flexible about how the process works, more frequent but shorter calls may be more appropriate in some circumstances.

Some pros and cons of using the telephone for support



Pros

Anonymity for client and volunteer

This privacy can assist the client to share thoughts and feelings without the confrontation of a face-to-face interview. For the volunteer, it allows them to go unrecognised when about their weekly business, and family commitments.

This may or may not be of relevance at the current time, people may already know each other as acquaintances through mutual attendance at clubs and activities, some clients may wish to talk to someone they do not know. For some organisations it may be a case of current volunteers who know each other well choosing to offer the support they usually supply as a transport escort say, in a different form.

It allows caring at a distance

Clients may be spread through a large catchment area, it is sometimes difficult to link volunteers and clients geographically. Telephone support affords caring at a distance.

This could be crucial even across Leeds as it would enable links across communities of interest that may have been broken very suddenly.

Time out for client

'Take me as you find me' may be said but is it meant? On top of their other worries, many clients still feel they have to tidy up, and put the tea and biscuits, to make the volunteer feel welcome. Telephone support offers the client the chance to sit and enjoy a chat without feeling guilty or embarrassed. It enables them to maintain privacy from an over enthusiastic volunteer.

To chat or not to chat?

If the client hasn't time to talk or doesn't want to, it is easier to tell the volunteer on the phone. It is much harder to say I'm busy/tired/got a visitor when someone is stood on the doorstep smiling.



Cons

Some people would prefer a visitor

The volunteer may frequently be asked, "When are you coming to see me?" it can be difficult and feel uncomfortable for the volunteer to keep outlining their support role to the client. If the volunteer does visit, they have immediately lost their anonymity and their personal privacy is threatened.

This is clearly not an issue during the Coronavirus pandemic, although befrienders may still need to be patient in making it clear that no contact means no contact, referring people on to organisations which provide practical help and supporting people round anxieties about deliveries and appointments etc.

Privacy for the client

"I need to talk but" " If the client is a carer they may wish to disclose sensitive information about themselves or the person for whom they are caring. Sometimes it can be difficult to designate a free time and private space where they can talk without being overheard.

Reliance on a volunteer

"I really look forward to your calls... .. it would be lovely to ring you sometime."

Does the volunteer give their home number or not? One or two calls now and then would be okay wouldn't it? A volunteer's case load may cater for 15 clients, 1 or 2 calls might then be 20-30!

It also encourages the client to seek you out as a first port of call for help rather than the organisation or formal sources of help.

During a call the volunteer may be the first port of call for help or signposting, particularly during the Coronavirus pandemic. Volunteers shouldn't take on the burden of counselling, but it may be appropriate to ensure volunteers have access to appropriate telephone numbers/contact details for frequently used services to reduce the load on organisations and the anxiety levels of clients.

Essential skills and qualities the telephone befriender might need:

A Calm Mature Manner

Self Awareness

Confidentiality

Respect

Trust

Acceptance

Being attentive
'active listening'

Being genuine

Good communication skills

Empathic

Understanding



Which Skills do you Have?

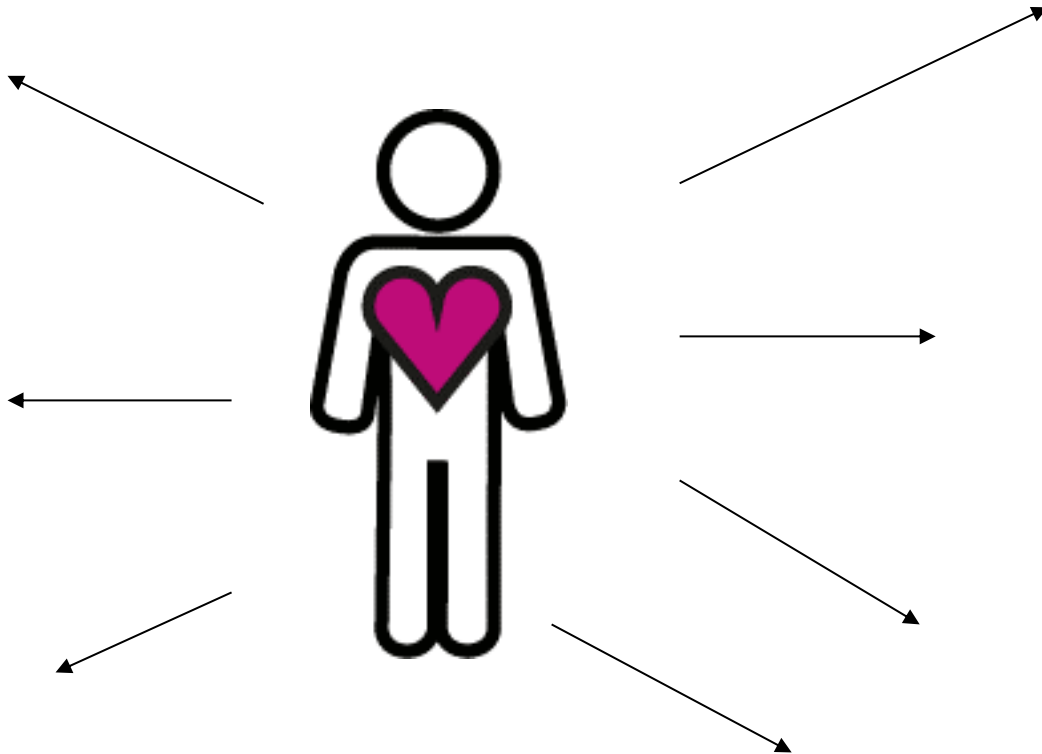
Which Skills would you like to develop?

So...is giving support being a friend, a counsellor, or an advisor?

Firstly, think about your own support system.

Who do you turn to when you need help?

What sort of help do you seek from them



How do you feel when seeking support from these people?

Personal information and boundaries

When you have a conversation with someone if you are really to get to know them you will inevitably share something of yourself. Think a little beforehand about what you do and so not want to share

I am happy to share:

Inappropriate information:

Guidelines for good listening techniques

- ✓ Empty your head of your problems before starting;
- ✓ Listen with undivided attention;
- ✓ Remember what has been said, including the details, the more you listen and the less you say, the more you will remember;
- ✓ Listen to the 'bass line' what is not openly said, but possibly being said;
- ✓ Listen to yourself, how might you feel in a described situation, as a way of further understanding empathy;
- ✓ Try to tolerate pauses and silences that are a little longer than usual in conversations (and avoid asking questions to break silences);
- ✓ Help yourself and the client to feel comfortable and relaxed, keep calm even if you don't feel it;

Reflective listening

Reflective listening is when the listener reflects the feelings and thoughts of the client back to the client. This clarifies the emotional content of what has been communicated. The speaker will then be reassured that you have the right message and it underlines that you have been listening. He/she is more likely to open up to you and tell you of their deeper feelings. If you show a genuine interest in the other person it will show in your reactions.

Reflective listening is sometimes called 'mirroring' because you mirror what the other person has said. You need to concentrate to do this and as you become more skilled you may even be able to paraphrase the content of conversation and reflect its emotional content back to the client.

Guidelines for Responding

- Be as accurate as possible in describing feelings/ideas that you perceive;
- Use empathic understanding tentatively;
- Keep questions to a minimum unless you need
 - Precise information
 - You want to open an area (open questions)
 - Or you want to prompt (rhetorical questions)
- Use minimal prompts - hmm, or the last few words, "difficulties"?
- Paraphrase or reflect accurately to indicate that you have been listening, and a way of making sure you understood correctly;
- Avoid loaded remarks or judgements;
- Where possible link reported experiences, events, reactions or ideas;
- Avoid changing the subject unnecessarily;
- Avoid speaking too soon and for too long;
- When you have responded return to listening mode.

Be Aware of the Pitfalls and Blocks to Active Listening

Here are some dangers to watch out for:

Comparing - Could I do it that well? When my mother died I coped better.

Mind Reading - Trying to figure out what the other person is thinking.

Rehearsing - Giving attention to preparation and delivery of the next comment.

Filtering - Listening to some things and not others.

Judging – Making a judgement on what is said.

Dreaming – Half-listening because your own memories or associations have been triggered.

Identifying - Referring everything the person says to your own experience.

Advising - Being a great problem solver, ever ready with helpful suggestions.

Sparring - Angling/debating, taking strong stands and beliefs.

Being right - Going to any lengths to avoid being wrong. Will not listen to criticism, or acknowledge mistakes.

Derailing - Changing the subject suddenly, indicates boredom, or feeling uncomfortable.

Placate - Being nice. Saying 'right, absolutely, of course, really?' indicates a low level of interest or involvement.

Open and Closed questions



Closed questions invite a yes/no answer and can block the development of communication. They offer little opportunity for the client to expand, explore or elaborate.

Open questions encourage the client to say things that are important to them in a situation, they allow responses which are open ended.

Open questions are much more likely to lead to a dialogue between equal partners rather than one involving a powerful side (the Helper) and a powerless side (the client).



Examples

Closed Questions

Are you feeling well?

Have you stuck to your diet this week?

Did you feel angry?

Open Questions

How are you feeling?

How did you get on with your diet this week?

How are you feeling about things?

Warning! Don't take open questions too far! For example it's much better to ask 'What time is it?' than say 'How do you feel about the time of day?'

How to Acquire a Good Telephone Voice Personality

Breath Control

The "power" behind your voice is breath. Good posture, erect but not too rigid, helps you breathe properly. '

Irregular breathing interrupts the smooth flow of words and sometimes gives the impression of boredom or fatigue.

Audibility

A normal conversation tone of voice carries best - not too loud nor too soft. The transmitter should be one-half to one-inch away from your lips.

Enunciation

Distinct speech is essential since the listener cannot read your lips or see your expressions.

Rate of Speech

A moderate rate is more easily understood. Slow down when giving detailed information.

Pitch

A low-pitched voice carries better and kinder to the listener's ear. High-pitched voices tend to become shrill and irritating.

Inflection

Inflection - "the rise and fall of your voice" - not only helps to express your thoughts but also adds personality to your voice. A monotone may be interpreted as lack of interest.

Naturalness

A natural voice keeps politeness from becoming forced, artificial or overly apologetic. Use tone of voice and vocabulary, which truly expresses your own best self.

Good Telephone Manners

Three equally important parts make up good telephone manners.

1. Your voice.
2. The way you listen.
3. Your attitude to the person you are talking to.

1. The voice

The chances are the people you are speaking to on the telephone you will not have met - in fact you may never meet them. They will be building a 'mental picture' of you just as you will of them!

In addition to all the qualities stated above **'BE NATURAL'**

Remember - Always put a 'SMILE' into your voice - it really does work.

2. Listening

We have looked at your voice and how you speak. Now how important is what you hear?

To put things into perspective - virtually all parts of our body communicate and even when we are not speaking - we are communicating!

The frown, the smile, the nodding head all says something. Take that away as with a telephone call and you have a mountain with no echo, a speaker with no audience, a customer with no interest. Never leave your client in the dark. Replace the missing "body-language" with a "Tele-Language" by using an occasional 'Yes', 'I see', 'really!' 'Uh-huh'.

That's real "Active Listening".

Telephone Technique

Two way communication

Impatience is audible

Shut out distractions

Two ears - one mouth

Examine ideas

Makes minimal notes to help remember details

Good Relationships - Setting the Ground Rules

A conflict of expectations and the factors that cause them can lead to wasteful and difficult relationships between client and volunteer. By mutually agreeing some basic ground rules at the beginning, the responsibility for what happens and the power within the relationship is shared.

For effective telephone support basic ground rules are:

- Agree a suitable time to call and be reliable - a client may have been looking forward to your call all week.
- Be clear in letting the client know that your role is on the phone only - not as a personal visitor.
- Clarify that you are a volunteer and cannot deal with their problems directly, but you can refer them to your co-ordinator.
- If necessary, ensure that you have all the information you need to answer basic questions and signpost to practical or emotional support services.

Relationships



Relationships are like good stories; they have a *beginning, a middle and an end.*

Sometimes like good stories, we don't want the end to come, but would prefer to continue reading on enjoying the company of the characters portrayed and the exploits and experiences we share with them through the story line. Just like the best 'reads' some relationships are difficult to forget, they stay with us for a long time and we relive the memories they created for us in our minds, sometimes to the detriment of the new ones.

With befriending there is also a *beginning, middle and end.* We can compare what happens within those processes.

The start of a relationship:

- Create a non-threatening 'light' atmosphere.
- Friendly introductions.
- Ask how the client is feeling.
- Show you care by listening to their answers.

How many times have you encountered?

"Hello, how are you feeling?" and answered, "Fine thanks", and then walked on thinking,



If you had said how you felt would the enquirer have stopped and listened anyway?

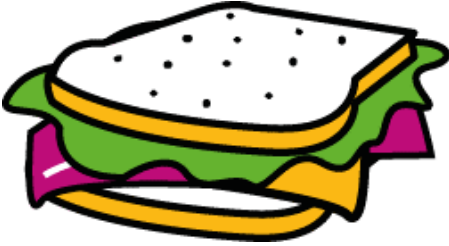
-Probably not!

- Communicate commitment to the client.
- Inspire confidence.
- Negotiate expectations.

This is the time to lay down ground rules, yet at the same time you are showing commitment and enjoyment of their company on the phone by arranging to phone them again.

In the middle:

The 'middle' of the relationship is where the main body of your work occurs, and largely determines how successful it is, and how the relationship will end.



The 'middle' should offer the following:

- Feel comfortable
- Chance to talk in depth
- Sharing equally
- Trust built up
- Give real practical support over the phone

This is where the client gains the most, and feels really valued by their volunteer.

It can also be the most rewarding for the volunteer.

Improvements are noticeable if the client indicates how valuable your call is to them.

It is important that the contact is person-centred and the volunteer uses their listening skills to focus the conversation on what the client needs to get out of it. We are aware at times conversation may be difficult, some ideas for topics to discuss could be things such as agreeing to both watch a certain TV programme and reflect on what you've seen. The opportunities for creativity are endless.

Endings:

Endings happen for a variety of reasons and may be expected *and / or* sudden.

In a way the expected endings are easier to deal with as preparation for the event can take place between the client and the volunteer. They have chance to review their relationship and relive both the good moments they have shared, and also the times where they have journeyed through a difficult situation together.

The ending may occur through a house move to nursing home accommodation, move from the area, or sadly through illness and expected death.

For abrupt endings, the transition may be more difficult and the sense of loss felt more acutely. A sudden death bringing home the things left unsaid, the plans unfulfilled, and the volunteer denied the chance to say goodbye. This may also happen with an emergency hospital admission and subsequent move.

Sometimes it may be the volunteer who has to move on, for personal reasons or work commitments, or simply that their particular role has been fulfilled.

Issues to be aware of are:

- Acknowledgement of the sadness of the ending
- Offer a clear idea of any future commitment
- Offer of other, perhaps different, help
- Offer help through referral to another volunteer/agency

This shows the client you also feel loss and sadness at the ending, but offers them an open doorway to future actions.

And Finally...

Telephone support is a rewarding and worthwhile service to offer. For a couple of hours of your free time per week, you can bring a ray of sunlight to those who are lonely, isolated or sad, for whatever reason.

All that you need is - a quiet setting, suitable chair and desk, pen and paper!

Remember, we are all born with two ears and one mouth, so listen twice as much as you speak and you will make people feel cared for, valued and safe within your company.

An Example of a Volunteer Self-Assessment Sheet

In this role I am	Yes	No	Don't know
<i>Afraid to appear inept</i>			
<i>Afraid to appear overbearing</i>			
<i>Afraid that I will upset people</i>			
<i>Anxious to find opportunities to use my skill / knowledge / experience</i>			
<i>Anxious to move people in the direction I feel they should go</i>			
<i>Not sure where to draw the boundary between friendship and work</i>			
<i>Afraid that I will not be able to reconcile the interests of the client with those of my organisation</i>			

Think about where your answers lie within the helping relationship.

The '*don't knows*' indicate that you need to spend some time exploring what your own needs are, and how they relate to supporting others.

Rating Scales

When I talk to this client I feel:

TENSE	1	2	3	4	5	RELAXED
NOT CONFIDENT	1	2	3	4	5	CONFIDENT
BORED	1	2	3	4	5	INTERESTED
TONGUE-TIED	1	2	3	4	5	FLUENT

Mark on the scale how you feel

Useful and Accurate Record Keeping

What use are notes or records if they are never used, illegible or too complex to understand quickly? In this section we look at how to use different types of notes for different purposes.

Because of the lack of visual contact, the telephone support volunteer has little to remember the client by other than the conversations themselves. As we are all aware there are only so many details that we can remember before the information is displaced by later incoming information.

Written Notes

- Keep clear concise notes, depicting the major concerns for the client during the call, and how they were feeling. In this way the volunteer can easily pick up the threads of what was happening in a particular client's life.
- It is important to write notes straight after the call, as delay will affect how the information is remembered, and how much. Don't write much during the call; it will affect your listening.
- Incidents needing help from the volunteer's supervisor can be recorded and acted upon.
- Records or notes should be stored out of view, complying with the rules of confidentiality held by organisation.

Pictorial Notes

Sometimes clients give so much information about family members; it is difficult to keep track of them all. Who lives with whom; who has had a new baby; where our Frank went on holiday; all very important to the client, and therefore are expected to be remembered by the listener.

One way to overcome this is to make a map of the client's life and keep it on the front page of the file for quick reference. This way, large amounts of names/places/events become easier to understand and include in conversations.

- Firstly, put your client at the centre of the page, with arrows coming off at different angles.
- Label the arrows Family, Friends, History, Hobbies.
- Divide the Family arrow into branches for each branch of the family.
- Fill in the names, sons, daughters, grandchildren, where they live/work. Include other items such as expected new arrivals, or relatives who are ill.
- Do the same for hobbies and interests.
- Include significant events the client has shared with you on the history branch. Items such as what they did during the war/working life/favourite place to visit with partner.
- Also include information about childhood, where they were brought up etc.
- Keep a space for significant dates with emotional attachment such as birthdays and anniversaries, which may affect how the client is feeling

Telephone Call Procedure

If the client hasn't understood who you are:

- Repeat your name - speak more slowly perhaps changing the pitch of your voice.
- Hopefully, this time they will understand who you are and why you are telephoning.
- Be patient as they may have hearing difficulties.

Your conversation:

- Use the information on the file to refer to and do not forget to use it when building up a rapport with the client each time you call.
- Speak clearly and talk at a comfortable pace.
- Do not shout in conversation.
- LISTEN carefully to what the person has to say.
- Give them the opportunity to reply.
- Try to sound helpful and interested.
- Try to be reassuring and to empathise with client's current emotions.
- Remember to be tactful and discreet.
- Make brief notes on a notepad and then transfer to client's sheet in your file.
- REMEMBER: The client may not have been in contact with other people recently and that their conversation may be limited.
- Construct sentences that do not require a yes or no, which encourage the client to play a full part in the conversation.
- You may need to check what the client has said. If so do this in a manner to make the client feel comfortable.
- Try to keep the conversation between approximately 20 to 30 minutes long.
- During the Coronavirus pandemic it may be appropriate to have a number of short calls each week to check in on your befriender. You can agree this with them at the start of the process although you may wish to make alterations as you go along.
- If the client asks for or needs help refer them on and advise them that you're doing this.
- End by reminding the client when you or another volunteer will be ringing again.

Communicating using video

In many situations, it may be appropriate to contact people using video rather than telephones. Platforms such as Skype, Zoom and FaceTime are readily available and for those who use digital technology, having the chance to see your face as you chat can be an advantage.

This introduces a new area of consideration to your communication –

Non-Verbal Communication

Eye Contact

Our eyes reflect our sincerity, integrity and comfort when communicating with another person. Good eye contact demonstrates interest in what the other person is saying, however, staring constantly can be unsettling too! Try to use your natural level of eye contact when talking to clients.

Avoid Distractions

Having other things popping up on screen alongside your video connection can distract you. Try to shut down other programmes such as emails and social media so that you can concentrate on your conversation. Imagine how it feels when you are chatting to a friend and they keep checking for text messages!

Facial Expression

In addition to eye contact our facial expressions say a lot about how we are feeling and what we might be thinking. So much information can be conveyed with a smile or a frown. Your facial expression can often say more than the actual words you say so think about what you are communicating beyond the spoken word.

Body Language

The way you are sitting as you chat can affect the message you are communicating:

- Sitting slightly forward can help you to appear interested in what the other person is saying.
- Slouching might make you seem bored or disinterested.
- Crossed arms often make you look defensive.
- Nodding your head gives a message that you agree and are listening.
- If you naturally use hand gestures as you speak, then use them in a video chat too - just be yourself!

As well as considering what your own non-verbal communication is saying, be aware of what the person you are talking to is saying with their own body language too!

Signposting to Other Agencies

During the Coronavirus pandemic there will be many factual queries the befriender might have and you can help to reassure them by checking trusted channels and answering without reference to others. However, there may be things you need to share, or refer back to your volunteer manager or a staff member.

We have not listed specific answers here as they are likely to change regularly in the coming weeks but if you or they have access to the internet, here are some trusted places you might either be able to find helpful information or would be able to pass others on to.

You are not expected to become an expert overnight but remember that you might be someone's window on the outside world so share what you can with them.

For example they may ask again what people have to do if they are concerned about family or other friends, so you can read them the government guidance, or they may worry about regular things changing like bin collections and so on.

They might just want to know more about how people are coping and what they are doing, but not want to watch the news themselves which can make people feel panicky or depressed.

Services for people in Leeds

Leeds City Council www.leeds.gov.uk they have a banner across flagging Covid-19 and specific services or changes and they are updating it daily at present. There is information about the council and volunteer services. 0113 378 1877 Contact Centre for those unable to leave their home and needs help.

Leeds Directory www.leedsdirectory.org is a website listing lots of organisations and services that offer support, they might be charities or small businesses like plumbers.

Caring for other people www.carersleeds.org.uk

Mental and Physical health

Mindwell www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk

Hospitals www.leedsth.nhs.uk all they need to know about the hospitals currently

Careview leeds.care.vu/ click on the menu bars in the top right and then go to the Isolation tool.

Use it to help find a range of services. Works really well on a phone as it doesn't need much data.

Bereavement

Leeds Bereavement Forum www.lbforum.org.uk/ 0113 225 3975

Cruse www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief

Volunteering

If someone wants to know what they can do to help everything is being co-ordinated through Voluntary Action Leeds at present. They might also wish to undertake volunteering from home.

Community Care Volunteering www.doinggoodleeds.org.uk/covid-19-care-volunteering.html

Debt and money worries

BLC www.betterleeds.org.uk/

FAN Leeds Food Aid Network mary@leedsfoodaidnetwork.co.uk or call 07903 123283

Leeds City Council website also has a lot of information and signposting for anyone with money worries, Age UK can also help. Age UK Leeds www.ageuk.org.uk/leeds/ 0113 3893000

Older People

Age UK Leeds <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/leeds/> 0113 3893000

Time to Shine <https://timetoshineleeds.org/>

Notes: