



Befriending Networks

Annual Members' Survey 2021

'I appreciated how quickly Befriending Networks rallied round to create useful resources and provide advice. Befriending co-ordinators are often working on their own in organisations and it was so reassuring to know there was support available and that there was a community to contact through the Q&A sessions.'

Annual Members' Survey 2021



Introduction

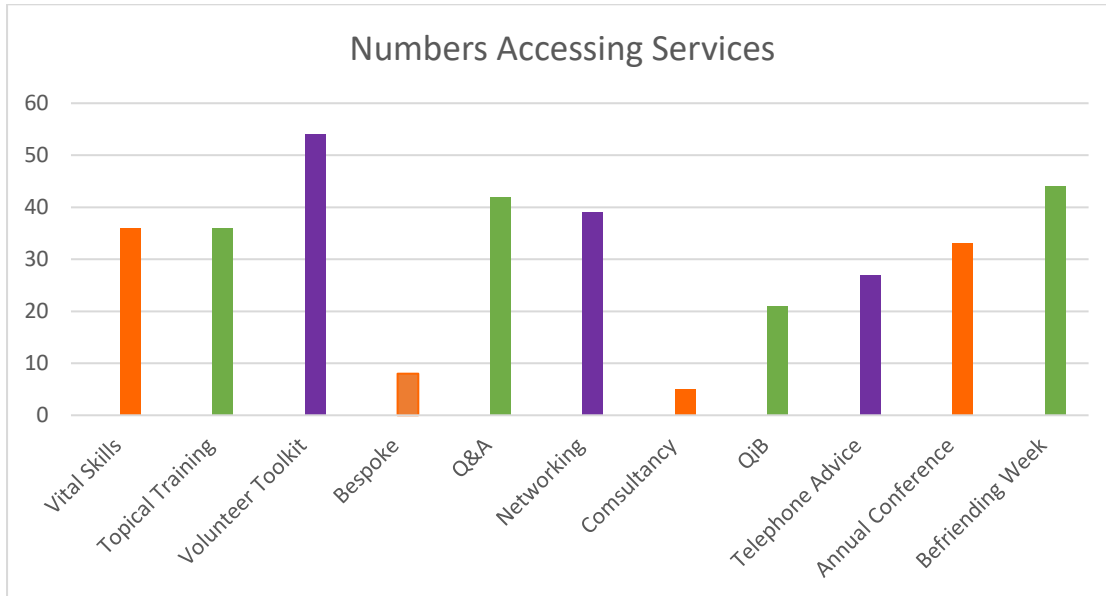
In April 2021 Befriending Networks sent out an annual survey aiming to gather feedback from members on what services members are accessing and using, and what they think about the services they do access/use. As in previous years, the short survey asked members what services they access and how they rate those. In addition, we asked members to rate how successful they thought we were in delivering our strategic aims. In preparation for the review of the Strategic Plan, members were also asked what, if any, additional services or activities they think BNs should be delivering to support them.

Covid19 has continued to have a widespread impact on befriending. All befriending projects adapted their services to ensure these are as Covid secure as possible and responding to changing requirements and priorities. Member organisations continued to cope with increased demand, and, in some cases, managing with fewer than usual staff members.

The response rate for this survey was a little higher than in 2020, 23% as opposed to 20%. However, as membership has increased by over 50% since the start of the pandemic, the number of responses received is considerably higher than in 2020, a total of 80 responses were received.

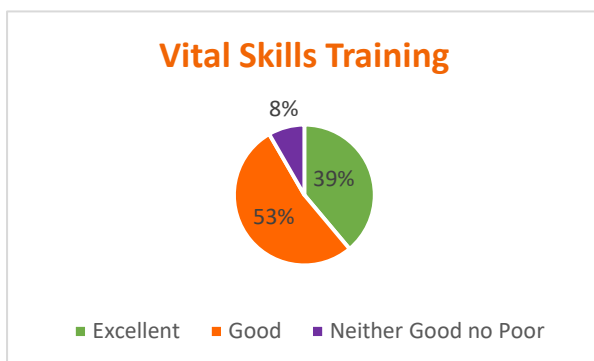
As with the previous survey, questions were asked on services; communications; what other services members would like; strategic plan aims. In addition, members were asked their views on the Covid-19 related support and resources provided by Befriending Networks throughout these challenging times. To allow us to gather feedback on the work in England funded by the Building Connections Big Lottery fund English members were asked related questions. However that feedback is not included in this report but can instead be seen in the final evaluation of that project.

1) Befriending Networks Services



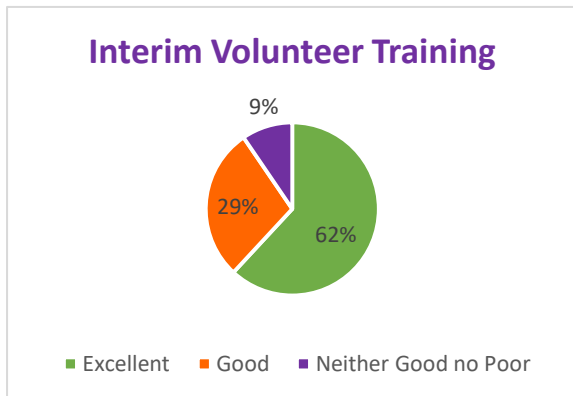
2020-2021 showed a significant increase in members accessing most services, 95% of respondents had accessed 2 or more services. The Interim Volunteer Toolkit was the most accessed. This was developed to support members taking on significant numbers of new volunteers as people stepped forward in response to government appeal for volunteers to help during the pandemic. The Q&A and Networking sessions were also popular as people looked for help, information and advice on adapting their services to ensure safety. All the training, which was also accessed by many, was delivered online.

The survey asked - a) Please tick which of the following services you or others within your organisation have accessed/used. For all those accessed/used please rate them from 1 – 5, 1 being poor to 5 being excellent.



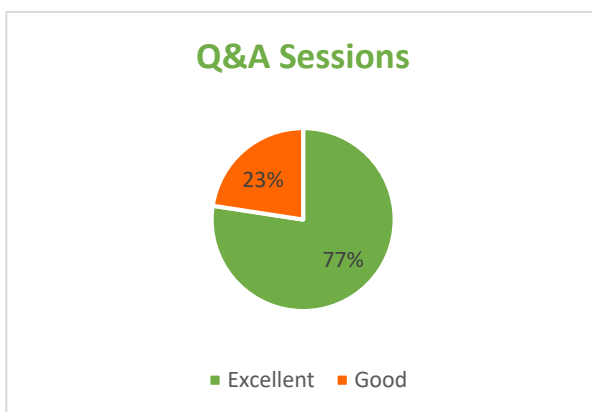
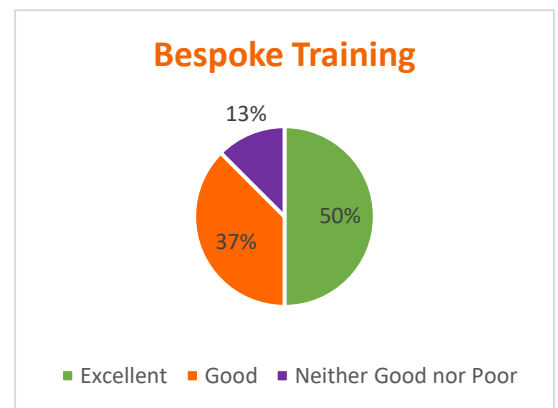
All training for the 20/21 year was conducted online. Over the year 36 respondents, 45% had accessed Vital Skills training modules. Of those the majority rated these positively, 39% (n14) as excellent and 53% (n19) as good. 8% (n3) rated these as neither good nor poor.

The same proportion of respondents, 45% (n36), had accessed Topical Training modules. All rated these positively, 47% rated Excellent and 53% Good.



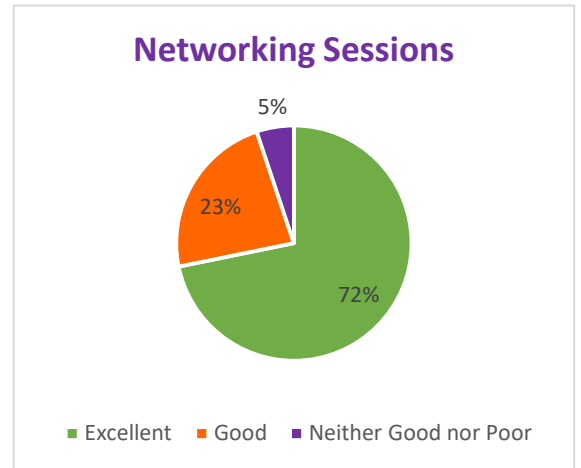
The Interim Volunteer Toolkit, developed in response to a recognised need, was accessed by 68% (n54) of respondents. Most rated the Toolkit positively, 54% rated Excellent, 42% Good and 4% rated it as neither Good nor Poor.

A small proportion of respondents, 10% (n 8), had accessed Bespoke Training. Of those 7 rated this positively, 50% Excellent and 37% Good. 1 respondent rated it as Neither Good nor Poor.



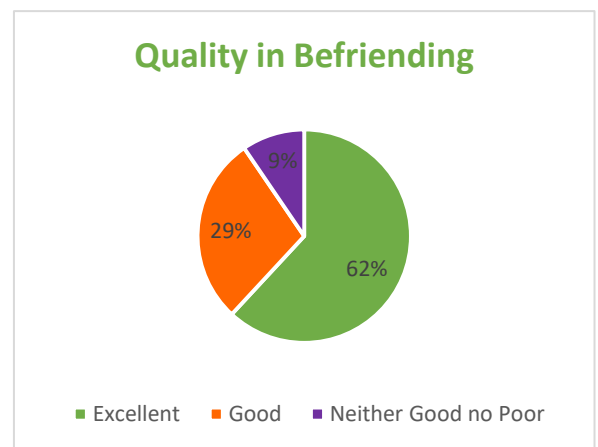
Shortly after the start of the first lockdown Befriending Networks began hosting weekly, online, Question & Answer Sessions open to members and non-members alike to support befriending projects during the pandemic. 53% (n42) of respondents had accessed these. All rated them positively, 60% as Excellent and 40% as Good

Networking Sessions, previously titled Common Ground meetings, were attended by 49% (n39) of respondents. Again the majority rated these positively, 72% as Excellent and 23% as Good. Two respondents felt they were neither Good nor Poor.



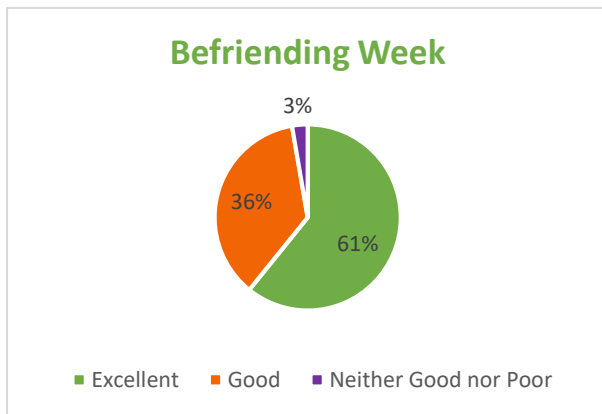
Only 6% (n5) of respondents stated they had accessed Consultancy services during the 20/21 year. All rated these positively, 60% as Excellent and 40% as Good.

26% (n 21) of respondents had accessed QiB. It is likely that some of these had already achieved QiB in previous years as the award lasts for 3 years. The majority rated this positively, 62% as Excellent and 29% as Good. The remaining 9% (n2) felt it was neither Good nor Poor.



Telephone advice was accessed by 34% (n 27) of respondents. All rated this positively, 78% as Excellent and 22% as good.

Due to the pandemic, social distancing and lockdown it was not possible to hold the usual annual conferences in London and in Edinburgh. The 2020 Conference was held online over 3 sessions on consecutive days. It was a member only event and was free for members. The feedback at the time was very positive and the responses in this survey reflect that positive feedback. 41% (n 33) of respondents had attended. All rated it positively, 75% as Excellent and 22% as Good, with the exception of 1 respondent who felt it was neither Good nor Poor.

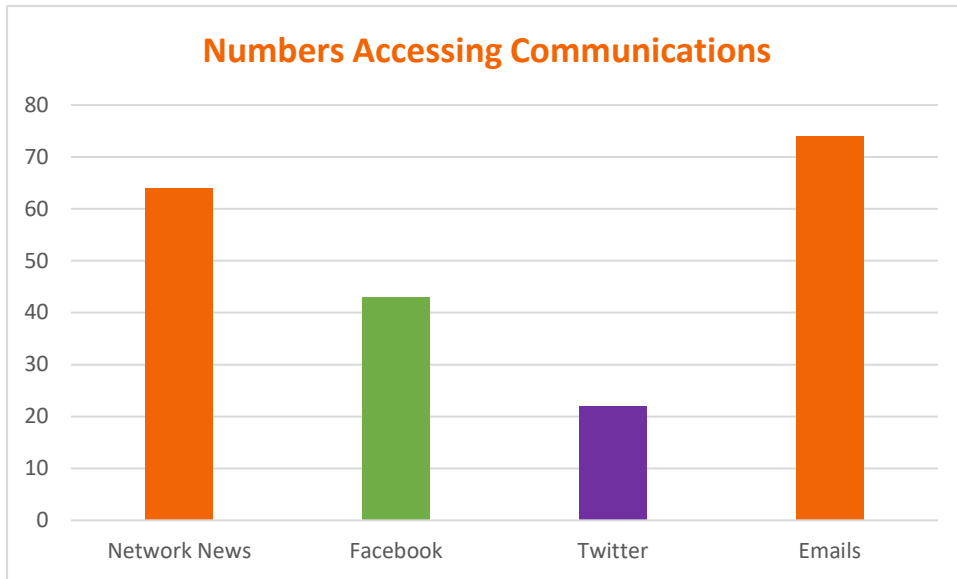


The majority of respondents, 55% (n 44), had accessed resources and/or activities offered during Befriending Week. 55% rated these as Excellent, 43% as Good, one respondent rated them as neither good nor poor.

For each service accessed organisations were asked to make any additional comments if they wished. Examples of these include:

- Befriending Networks information and support has been invaluable, especially during this past difficult year.
- All the above was a wonderful resource to us
- First week in post so am just beginning to use the resources, but so far what I have accessed has been excellent
- Services we have accessed have been excellent and kept current as covid changed our services.
- Always very helpful and supportive, as a new service it has been invaluable.
- Befriending Network support throughout covid has been invaluable to keeping our charity going often passing idea on to colleagues I have heard at meetings.
- So far all the training and resources I have accessed have been fantastic and so beneficial in helping to set up our befriending service.
- Usually use more but this year has been a bit exceptional! Value staff knowledge and quality award too.

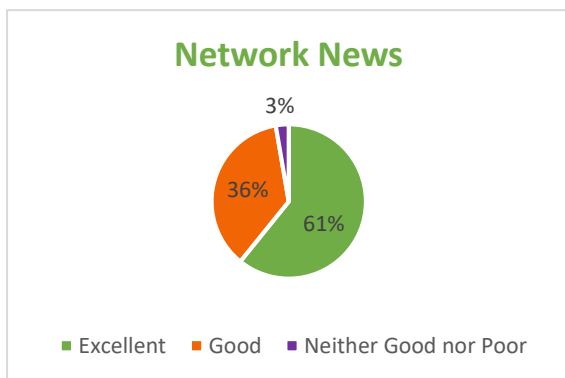
2) Befriending Networks Communications



As in previous years most respondents commented on Network News (64) and Email Communication (74). Subscribers to Network News have increased substantially, 350 additional subscriptions since April 2020 takes the total to 832 as of April 2021. The increased numbers do include a range of people, many non-member organisations have also signed up.

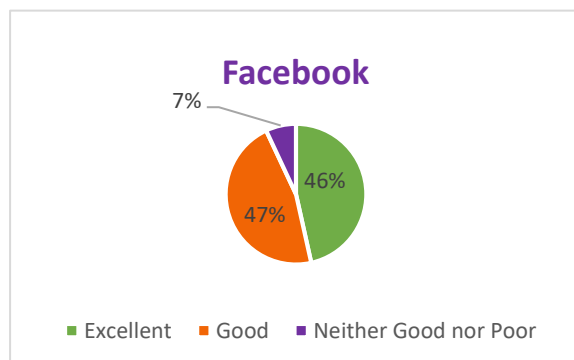
Numbers of respondents commenting on social media have increased since last year. Numbers of followers on Facebook and on Twitter have increased substantially. As in the last survey, more respondents commented on the use of Facebook than Twitter.

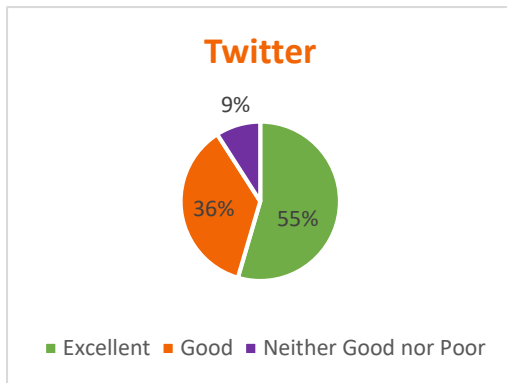
The survey asked respondents to identify which communications they and/or their staff accessed and to rate those accessed.



Of the 64 respondents who accessed Network News 59% rated it as Excellent, 39% as Good and 1 respondent felt it was neither Good nor Poor.

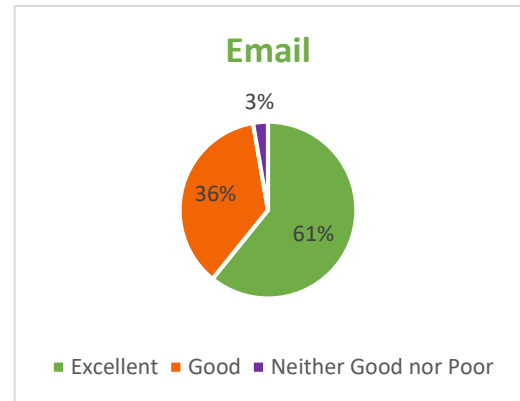
43 respondents accessed facebook. Of those 46% rated it as Excellent, 47% as Good and 3 respondents felt it was neither Good nor Poor





As in previous years fewer respondents, 22, accessed Twitter communications. Of those, most rated these positively, 36% as Good and 55% as Excellent. Two people rated these as neither good nor poor.

Once again the majority of respondents, 74, reported accessing email notifications. Most viewed these positively with 36% rating these as Good and 61% as Excellent. Two respondents felt they were neither Good nor Poor.



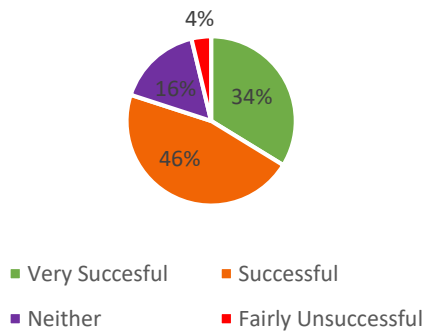
For each communication method respondents were asked for any comments. Respondents added comments as follows:

- I particularly like the Networks News as it is well laid out and clear! Too many of the mailers I get in my inbox are overly busy and it is hard to find the information that I am interested in.
- Kept up to date well
- We have found that sometimes the training that is announced in the newsletters is booked up already and so we have relied on going straight to the website
- Emails are helpful as reminders, i can then access information when required.
- I don't really use facebook as much as twitter to keep informed from BN
- I don't check into Twitter but do make use regularly of the other platforms and find the content to be excellent.

3) Social Media Engagement

Befriending Networks has continued to increase levels of posts and engagement on BNs Facebook and Twitter accounts, particularly during Volunteers' Week, Befriending Week and other campaigns. The survey asked respondents to rate how successful they believe Befriending Networks use of social media has been in raising awareness of befriending and other issues from 1 (not at all successful) to 5 (extremely successful)

Social Media Engagement



As in previous years It does appear that use of social media is not widespread throughout all the membership, however this is definitely increasing. There were 67 respondents to this question. The majority believed that we had been successful in raising awareness, 25% rated this as Very Successful, 58% as Successful and 15% as Neither Successful nor Unsuccessful, one respondent felt we were fairly unsuccessful.

Respondents were asked for any comments on this, a few made comments about low levels of general social media use amongst members or the fact that they don't generally view social media. Other comments as follows:

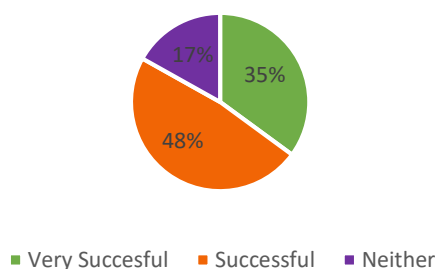
- The social media posts are always relevant and very helpful to share with volunteers and also colleagues and participants.
- Only found the facebook page recently but I like what you post, especially what network members are up to
- We make use of facebook mostly, but have recently implemented Twitter. We regularly check in to your posts, and even more so during events such as Volunteer/Befriending week, and share or make use of links/posts. We appreciate that BN take the time to 'like' or share our social media posts too.

4) Support for members during the pandemic

In response to Covid19 and the, several, lockdowns, Befriending Networks provided, and continues to provide, support to organisations in their work through this difficult time. Examples of such support included development of a range of specific guides and resources, offering online volunteer training, and hosting weekly Question & Answer sessions.

The survey asked respondents to rate how successful they believe Befriending Networks has been in providing support to members during the past year from 1 (not at all successful) to 5 (very successful)

Support during Pandemic



The majority felt that we were Very Successful 55% (n42), or Successful 39% (n 30), 5 respondents felt that we were neither Successful nor Unsuccessful.

Respondents were asked for comments. Many commented on the volunteer training and particularly the Q&A sessions which they felt to be really beneficial. Comments as follows:

- Networking events to share learning really useful for me as lone worker delivering befriending service.
- I appreciated how quickly Befriending Networks rallied round to create useful resources and provide advice. Befriending co-ordinators are often working on their own in organisations and it was so reassuring to know there was support available and that there was a community to contact through the Q&A sessions.
- Know you are there if we need you
- Very quick to respond with useful online interim training.
- Advice guides really helpful, especially launching a guide for telephone befriending so quickly, as this was new to us back when the pandemic hit.
- As a Coordinator I would have been lost with the vital support BN have given especially during the pandemic. Diane is fantastic in getting back and putting us in touch with other members if required. I've also had individual support from Angus and it was great speaking to Peggy recently and contributing to the Good Practice Guide. I always recommend BN support and membership
- The Q&A sessions have been useful in helping people network and learn from each other
- Brilliant couldn't have kept going without you
- I have just been a member for a few months now but even the amount of resources and training that is provided is so helpful
- The fact that you were able to distribute funds through members network speaks volumes of your great relationships.
- I can see from the resources available online/emails and newsletters etc that BN has been a great support to members. Our Project supports children and young people and I didn't always feel there was enough support /content to cover this specific age group however I realise BN has a wide remit in terms of who you support.

5) Strategic Planning

Befriending Networks is currently reviewing its strategic plan. To support this process the survey asked are there any additional services or activities that you think BNs should be delivering to support you? The responses will be considered in the thinking around the development of the new strategic plan.

20% of respondents did not believe there were any additional services or activities that BNs should be delivering. Many simply said No in answer to this, other comments as follows:

- No - services are appropriate
- Not sure at present
- Can't think of anything
- I honestly can't think of anything more to add at present, as you provide so much.
- They are doing a lot already
- We have just joined so at the moment we are pleased with what's on offer

Other respondents identified ideas on a range of issues:

Funding

- More training on funding support.
- Further funding opportunities always good!

Training

- We would most value some training materials that could accurately communicate to prospective volunteers what befriending is and isn't in the context of communities in Scotland, supporting clients with different needs. Namely, a video.
- Volunteer training videos would be great that we could use as part of our own training - such as a mini intro to boundaries that we could pick and play at training sessions
- Mental health support/training as part of general befriending induction.
- Workshops on supporting the main staff/volunteers.
- More around endings - end of support, end of relationships, how to manage these as a coordinator but also as a volunteer. We get a lot of questions around this. Especially when projects are ending due the funding finishing.

Networking/Communication

- More opportunities to hear from those who have been involved in work and research into loneliness/social isolation. Also the opportunity to hear more in depth about other befriending services in order to hear about what others are delivering and new initiatives. Often the Q and A sessions don't allow for this because there are so many participants.
- Perhaps some kind of online forum for information sharing among member projects?
- Perhaps some sort of online members forum where people can share resources, ask questions, get ideas etc?
- Online forum for members to share tips, best practice, raise questions, support each other.
- Guidance when required and ability to link with other organisations providing befriending main strength
- Perhaps quarterly a Q&A or discussion session for groups who work with younger age groups we Run Befriending for 8-18yrs
- Just more sessions, I have not always been able to get on the Q and A sessions. These are excellent as are networking sessions

Miscellaneous

- Signposting to digital tools & resources (for example to Charity Digital for discounted Zoom licenses).
- Use of digital methods of supporting befriendees and volunteers
- I'm not sure how much lobbying/campaigning you do? And, of course, you have a slight Scottish focus. But opportunities to contribute to that sort of things are welcome
- I think you provide an excellent service. We would like more support and guidance around boundaries and endings and how to support clients who have more complex needs. We are also having discussion around whether or not we will use the term 'befriending' going forward and would like to know if other organisations are having similar thoughts
- Now that befriending is in the spotlight more than ever before would a webinar hosted by Befriending Networks add value? We were thinking that the opportunities

for providers to share insights/best practice/research with policy makers, public health officials etc might help our cause in terms of ongoing funding... just a thought!

- During the Advanced Masterclass I was interested in hearing about projects that are evolving a strand of "peer support " to enhance their service with long term volunteers supporting new volunteers. In the future I would be interested in support around setting this up as I am currently adapting our service delivery which will allow minimum input from Coordinator hours but with maximum reach to clients and volunteers, and this down the line would prove a great addition. We are also interested in how digital video call befriending could work for our client group.

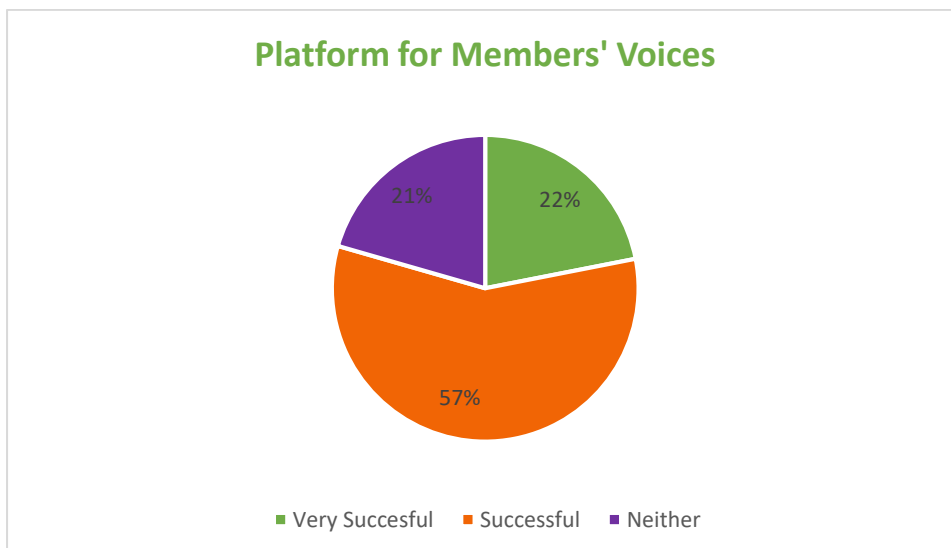
Two respondents commented on pandemic specific issues:

- During this pandemic time, it would be good to know more of the strategic delivery under restrictions.
- Opening up after lockdown befriending in a post-pandemic world evaluating unintended consequences of befriending services at a distance (not face to face)

6) Progress against Strategic Aims

Members were asked, in addition to their views of support, services and communications, their views on how successful, or otherwise, Befriending Networks has been in relation to our Strategic Plan aims. They were asked to rate our performance from Very Successful through to Very Unsuccessful. They were also asked for any comments on these aims.

We aim to be a platform for member voices; raising awareness, representing them and influencing national and local policy.



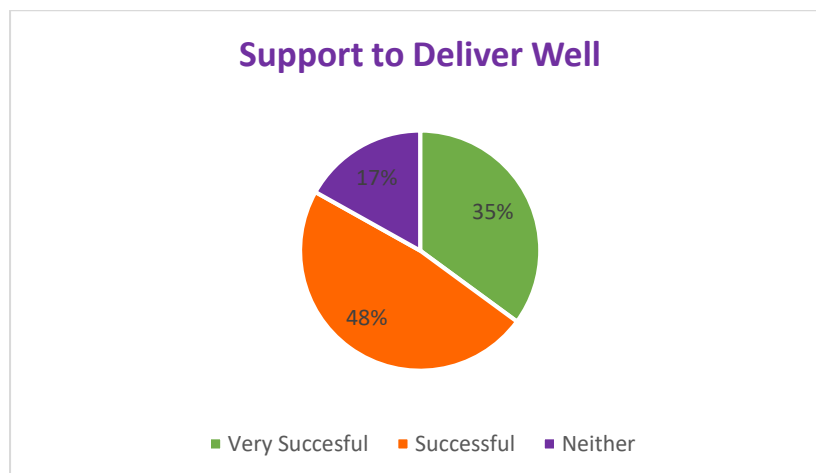
79% of respondents, down from 83% in 2020, felt we were Very Successful, 22% (n 16) , or Successful, 57% (n 42). The remaining 21% (n 15) felt we were neither Successful nor Unsuccessful.

Some respondents felt they were unaware of levels of success for this strategy, others commented positively as follows:

- Unsure as new to post but appear to be very successful
- We are particularly grateful for Befriending Networks for following up with the Scottish Government the possibility of vaccinations of befriending volunteers, and for enquiring about their status as unpaid carers.
- Very proactive on behalf of the membership
- Don't know much but feel isolation and loneliness has been very prominent and befriending networks been good at showing how this can reduce when appropriate services in place.
- Social isolation increase and the impact to mental and physical health was brought to the forefront by BN prior to the pandemic which was paramount to raising awareness nationally and was a catalyst of how council support and communities reached out to isolated people in the crisis
- At every meeting i have attended I have taken back information to pass on to colleagues as well as helped in my role.

The majority of respondents feeling that Befriending Networks was neither successful nor unsuccessful in this aim were English members, 13 from England, 2 from Scotland. One comment, from an English member was - *I don't know what influencing you have been doing so don't feel I can comment.* This may be reflective of a comment from the 2020 survey which was - *I do think sometimes that the policy work is more focused on Scotland.*

We aim to support frontline organisations to deliver well through providing information and support, encouraging organisational development and capacity building, promoting good practice within the Befriending sector.



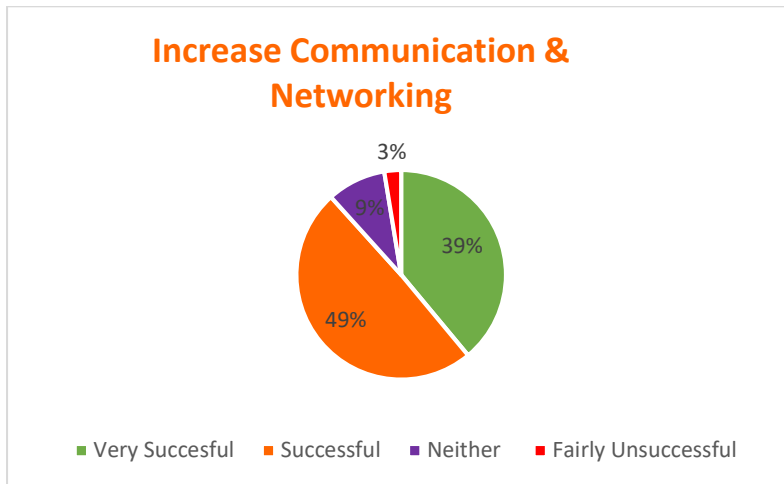
92% of respondents believe that BNs were Very Successful, 47% (N 36), or Successful, 45% (n 34), in supporting organisations to deliver well. This was an increase over 88% in 2020. Six respondents, 8%, felt we were neither Successful nor Unsuccessful.

Comments as follows:

- BNs delivery of QiB is also excellent to reinforce members' good practice
- Your training, Q+A and toolkit have all been extremely helpful, as has the support I have received via the phone

- Very supportive helped with guidance and resources
- I as a coordinator and the organisation value the support in from BN service development and capacity building of which the service has adapted in the pandemic and will be adapting and adopting learnings going forward.

We aim to increase Communication and Networking: provide a network for communication and sharing; develop an evidence base for befriending.

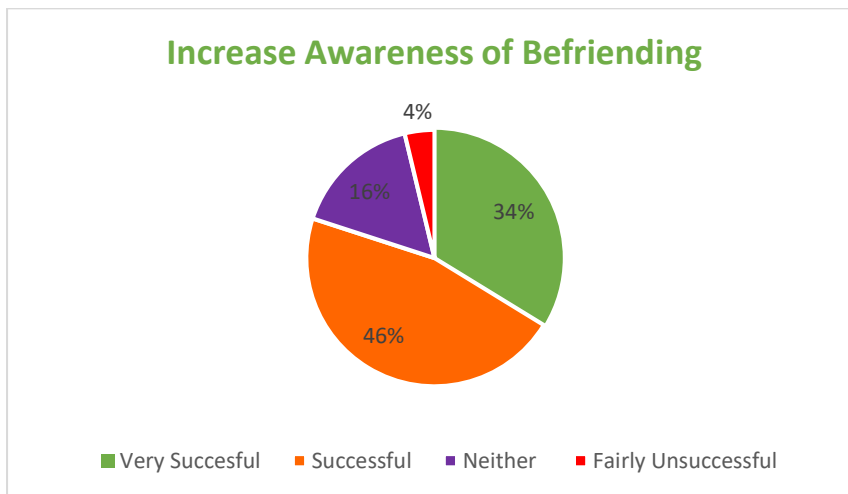


88% of respondents felt we were Successful 49% (n38) or Very Successful 39% (n30) in increasing communication and networking. 9% (n7) felt we were neither Successful nor Unsuccessful, two respondents felt we were fairly unsuccessful. These are very similar proportions to those of 2020.

Comments, which were mixed, as follows:

- I do not feel comfortable to comment, as we have not engaged very much in networking and knowledge sharing over the last year.
- Unfortunately not been able to access Wednesday sessions due to temporary role change on a couple of my working days each week.
- I prefer in person events but this is out of your control! Online is so difficult to form relationships or even have those one-to-one chats which can be so useful
- Its been great meeting colleagues from other organisations at the online events
- networking with others via zoom has been very helpful to me, as a new service.
- Just more networking events please
- The regular Q&A sessions has been excellent for this.
- Networking opportunities between projects and services

We aim to increase awareness and understanding of befriending across the UK and more widely.



80% of respondents felt we were Successful 43% (n37) or Very Successful 31% (n27) in increasing awareness of befriending. This was down from 88% in 2020. 16% (n13) felt we were neither Successful nor Unsuccessful and 3 respondents felt we were fairly unsuccessful.

There were very few comments, most were related to the Neither successful nor unsuccessful ratings as follows:

- I can't judge this as you are talking to the converted in my case
- I am not aware of where this has happened and so am not able to comment
- Not aware
- I don't feel qualified to comment on this

One positive comment was - *Befriending week and volunteer week are very good.*

7) Conclusions

BNs Services

2020-2021 showed a significant increase in members accessing most services, 95% of respondents had accessed 2 or more services. The Interim Volunteer Toolkit was the most accessed. This was developed to support members taking on significant numbers of new volunteers as people stepped forward in response to government appeal for volunteers to help during the pandemic. The Q&A and Networking sessions were also popular as people looked for help, information, and advice on adapting their services to ensure safety. All the training, which was also accessed by many, was delivered online.

As in previous years the training modules, Vital Skills and Topical training, were rated highly. The Topical training, much of which has been newly developed in response to identified need, was the more highly rated than Vital Skills.

Shortly after the start of the first lockdown, Befriending Networks began hosting weekly, online, Question & Answer Sessions open to members and non-members alike to support befriending projects during the pandemic. These were highly rated and have proved extremely popular. The maximum number of spaces has had to be increased substantially to meet the regular demand, most sessions are fully booked each week. It appears that members find these particularly helpful in the current situation offering opportunities to consult with Befriending Networks staff and with fellow members.

The high take up of training and of Q&A and Networking sessions may also be, in part, as a result of the switch to all sessions being delivered online, making access to all easier for members.

Levels of satisfaction in services accessed were consistently high and very similar to the 2020 survey ratings. Overall there was a small increase in levels of satisfaction for most services with 100% satisfaction for 4 of the services accessed. These were Topical Training, Q&A Sessions, Consultancy, and Telephone Advice/Information.

The most popular services, accessed by the greatest number of respondents, were Q&A Sessions, Volunteer Training Toolkit, and Befriending Week. One respondent commented - *'Befriending Networks information and support has been invaluable, especially during this past difficult year'*

As the pandemic has been with us for over a year we sought members' views on the support offered by Befriending Networks during this time. Responses were overwhelmingly positive about the resources and support offered to all befriending organisations and projects, members and non-members. Comments in response to this included:

- The Q&A sessions have been useful in helping people network and learn from each other
- Brilliant couldn't have kept going without you
- I have just been a member for a few months now but even the amount of resources and training that is provided is so helpful

In response to the question about suggestions for consideration in the review of the Strategic Plan there were very few offered. 20% of respondents did not have any suggestions, others spoke of issues around funding, training and communication. Several of the suggestions were for things already offered by Befriending Networks.

BNs Communications

Members were asked once again about their views on BNs' communications. As in previous surveys Network News was well received as were Facebook posts, Twitter and Email Notifications.

Subscribers to Network News have increased substantially, 350 additional subscriptions since April 2020 takes the total to 832 as of April 2021.

Numbers of respondents commenting on social media have increased since last year. Numbers of followers on Facebook and on Twitter have increased substantially. As in the last survey, more respondents commented on the use of Facebook than Twitter.

The majority of respondents accessed email notifications, all rated these highly.

Views on Aims of Strategic Plan

79% of respondents felt that BNs was successful in providing a platform for members' voices, down from 83% in 2020. 21% felt we were neither successful nor unsuccessful.

The majority of respondents feeling that Befriending Networks was neither successful nor unsuccessful in this aim were English members, 13 from England, 2 from Scotland. One comment, from an English member was - *I don't know what influencing you have been doing so don't feel I can comment.* This may be reflective of a comment from the 2020 survey which was - *I do think sometimes that the policy work is more focused on Scotland.*

It would be interesting to identify, if possible, whether, if this is an accurate reflection, this has to do with the accessibility of the Scottish Government as opposed to the Westminster Government and the ability Befriending Networks has had to develop relationships in these separate areas. Another possibility is that there may be a reporting bias within Befriending Networks and the membership towards Scottish policy work and resulting outcomes.

The 2021 survey showed a small increase in the proportion of respondents that felt that BNs was successful in providing support for frontline organisations in their work, 92% in 2021 as opposed to 88% in 2020. *'BNs delivery of QiB is also excellent to reinforce members' good practice' 'Your training, Q+A and toolkit have all been extremely helpful, as has the support I have received via the phone.'* *'I as a coordinator and the organisation value the support in from BN service development and capacity building of which the service has adapted in the pandemic and will be adapting and adopting learnings going forward.'*

Once again the majority of respondents felt that BNs was successful or very successful in increasing communication and networking for members, 88% in 2021 as against 87% in 2020. *'Its been great meeting colleagues from other organisations at the online events' 'The regular Q&A sessions has been excellent for this.'* However not everyone has found the shift to online has suited them. *'I prefer in person events but this is out of your control! Online is so difficult to form relationships or even have those one-to-one chats which can be so useful.'*

The percentage of respondents that felt BNs were successful or very successful in increasing understanding and awareness of befriending was 80%, down from 88% in 2020. 16% felt BNs was neither successful nor unsuccessful and the remaining 3 respondents felt we were fairly unsuccessful. The very few comments related to those who had rated as neither successful nor unsuccessful and put their rating down to a general lack of awareness of this. One respondent told us that *'Befriending week and Volunteer week are very good.'*

The results for the 2021 survey do not show a significant difference to results from the 2020 survey. It is apparent from much of the response that, as would be expected, the past year managing throughout the pandemic, changing levels of virus spread, moving into, out of, and then back into lockdown, is at the forefront of members' minds.

Overall the message coming from survey respondents is one of general satisfaction with Befriending Networks, our work, and the support and services offered to members. This is encouraging but also presents challenges in moving forward to ensure that we continue to strive to develop, to reach out more widely, and to meet the differing needs of members.

Muriel Mowat

14th May 2021