

**Befriending Networks Report
August 2021 – March 2022
£170k grant to deliver a
Befriending Fund.**

June 2022



Befriending
Networks

Befriending Networks Report August 2021 – March 2022

£170k grant to deliver a Befriending Fund.

Befriending Services have been a crucial part of the third sector response to Covid-19 but funding and limited resources remained key challenges in meeting the needs of the many referrals they have received and some of the people they support. This fund built upon our knowledge and experience gained from management of the Befriending element of the Winter Support Fund and continued to support our ability to get funds to trusted and experienced befriending projects and gather direct feedback of the impact of befriending for the following specific client groups

- Young people 16 – 24 yrs.
- Women
- Carers
- People living with dementia

A total of 19 applications were received with 16 awards being granted. Total funds distributed were £162,800 with awards from £5,000 to £15,000 (the remainder of the grant was used to cover our costs of administering the fund and gathering evaluation data for this report on behalf the Scottish Government). The average award was £10,175. Applications were received from 8 NHS Board areas covering 13 local authorities, no applications were received from Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Orkney, Scottish Borders, Shetland or Western Isles. All identified client groups were covered by the 16 projects; 2 supporting Young people (16 – 24 yrs.), 7 supporting women, 3 carers projects and 6 supporting people living with dementia.

Shortly after the initial distribution of the funds the number of Covid cases rose and many restrictions were reintroduced aiming to halt the spread. As a result, some of the planned activities, including recruitment and training of additional volunteers, were delayed. However, as in the earlier stages of the pandemic, the befriending projects rose to this challenge and adapted plans to deal with the change. Most projects planned to use these funds to help reduce waiting lists which had continued to lengthen due to increased numbers of referrals. Some projects had become aware of gaps in their provision and have used the fund to help expand their services and their access criteria. Several have worked in partnership with other organisations to offer befriending along with the services provided by those partners.

Seven of the projects worked with women.

Three of these projects have focussed on women in specific circumstances. One of these, Aberlour, has been able to expand their provision of befriending to young mothers experiencing perinatal mental health problems. A second project, Airdrie CAB, has been working with their local Women's Aid project developing peer befriending for women who have experienced domestic abuse. A third project, ECAS, has worked with women with physical disabilities.

Feedback from the matches has been truly positive from both befriendees and befrienders. The two years of pandemic and lockdown had resulted in levels of isolation for many, befrienders as well as befriendees. Both reported real increases in confidence and improved mental health as a result of the matches. The organisation working in partnership with their local Women's Aid project recruited some peer befrienders who had previously been supported by Women's Aid. One peer befriender has now begun work in the care sector.

'J (befriender) who had now got a job and had moved, said, in response to a review of her match with her befriender, 'The job is going well and I couldn't have

done it without M (befriender) and the Befriending Support Service which helped in building my strength and confidence.'

The impact of perinatal befriending relationships not only improves life for the mothers but extends to improve things for the children and family as we heard from one woman supported by Aberlour Perinatal Befriending:

'S was matched with her befriender over a period of time when, due to Covid 19 restrictions, support was offered remotely or through socially distanced outdoor contact. She was keen for her children to be able to access the outdoors – one of her own goals for Befriending support was to increase her confidence in going out and to take her children regularly to a local park, something she felt unable to do on her own. Each week S and her befriender went out for walks and S reflected how much the befriending relationship, spanning 8 months meant to her

"I was supported by Aberlour with my older child and then when I had my youngest son I remembered how well supported I was. They have been fantastic with me and my children and its really helped having my befriender on days that have been stressful so I can talk to her about how I was feeling and about what was stressing me out, all whilst going for a walk or when having a coffee together'

Three projects worked with carers.

CARDS work with individuals with Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD), they had previously identified a need for support for their family and carers. One need identified was to help the families and carers to develop an understanding of ARBD and its potential impacts on individuals. This support has taken the form of training, on a one to one basis, to help friends and family. They have also developed some inter-agency working with Edinburgh Young Carers who support children and young people who may care for parents with problematic alcohol use. In addition, they have been invited, following discussion with VOCAL, to an exhibition later in the year along with the option of attending information sessions on the day and are encouraging referral to the CARDS service to help carer respite/wellbeing for the long term.

The project working with young carers, Volunteering Matters, were enabled to continue to provide *'a much-needed service of support to young carers in North Lanarkshire, providing a role model to each young person and safe space for them to be themselves, contributing positively to their emotional wellbeing and mental health and enabling each of the young people to have someone who is there to support and listen to them.'*

Befrienders Highland used the Befriending Fund in the development of a service for individuals living with dementia and have expanded this work to provide befriending, where wanted, to family carers.

Six projects worked with people living with dementia.

All reported on the difficulties particularly encountered for this client group. For many, the enforced isolation with no access to their usual daily activities and support had a major impact on their condition often increasing levels of memory loss and confusion.

One woman who, shortly before the March 2020 lockdown, in the early stages of dementia, had moved to a different part of the country to live with her daughter. She had been a very sociable person with many friends and an active social life, this stopped with the lockdown and she had no opportunity to meet people and make any local friends. The project reported *'She has been very lonely and down and her daughter has been very stressed about the impact on her Mum and has expressed how guilty she herself feels about taking her Mum away from her home and friends.'*

The befriending visits have made a big difference from the very first visit. The volunteer visits every week for an hour or more and said "we don't stop for breath, we talk whole time!" The (befriended) said she looks forward to the visits every week and told her daughter after meeting the volunteer for the first time "I really like her, she's lovely!"

The daughter said "there is no doubt the difference the Volunteer has made to my Mam. She is brighter and chatty and has more to chat about even to me now. And she really looks forward to the visits, along with Daycare they are the highlight of her week"

Two projects worked with young people.

Volunteering Matters, mentioned earlier, works with young carers. The fund allowed them to recruit and train additional volunteers to offer one to one support meeting on a weekly or fortnightly basis in a safe environment, providing them with new opportunities to become more physically active through activities and experiences within their local communities.

BeFriends works with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, mostly through group work, activities and outings to help support building confidence.

Along with one-to-one befriending matches projects reported on a range of group events and activities. BeFriends organised several outdoor activities including a trip to an alpaca farm and a trip to an outdoor Christmas market as well as, when Covid levels permitted, several indoor activities detailed as follows:

'Upon request of our young people, we then ran a craft workshop with a local organisation called 'How it Felt' where they learned all about comics and movies. The young people each got to create their own while learning, using their own interests. As the fund was aimed at our older young people, we asked for their ideas and help to run activities where possible.

We held a Halloween Party at our office and invited all young people and befrienders, another great success.

Next, we organised a trip to the Escape Room in Dundee which was a different experience for most of our young people, and befrienders. We split up in to four rooms and had a race to finish first, it was so much fun. A group went to a local café afterwards for some desserts, a lovely end and social interaction between members.

Over the festive period, a group of our older boys, designed and decorated the windows at the front of our building with a festive theme. It was so great to get creative, work together and while doing it, members of the community were stopping to have a chat with the boys, which was great for their confidence and community inclusion. We also purchased small Christmas gifts and treats for our young people, which were available for befrienders to pick up. A group took a trip to the festive market in the city centre, which was a new experience for them all. One of our eldest boys, overcame his fear of heights by going on the big wheel, a surprising choice, but a super achievement!!'

Group activities organised by other projects, which ran shortly before Covid levels increased, included pre-Christmas events one of which was an afternoon tea in the Orient Express Rooms in Edinburgh. Photographs of some of these events can be seen at the end of this report Appendix 2.

All participating projects reported some difficulties in the earlier months of the grant period first adapting to the easing of Covid restrictions and working with staff, volunteers, and befriendeds to establish the levels of face to face contact people were comfortable with. As

the festive season approached and levels of infection rose, they then had to revert to some distance befriending or, in some cases, to delay planned activities as well as recruitment and training of new befrienders. However, in most cases, in the new year, they were able to start again with the recruitment and training exercises as well as re-planning outings and activities previously stopped.

Key outcomes of the fund

Returns from successful projects show:

- Total new matches created - 178
- Total existing matches sustained – 268
- Total attendees at group events - 70
- Total number of befriending hours delivered – 12,468

The key outcomes reported by the projects included the following:

- Increased enjoyment and quality of life for people living with dementia
- Reconnected people living with dementia and their carers with family and friends
- Reduced levels of social isolation and loneliness
- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Increased levels of community connections
- Increased confidence
- Increased understanding of Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD) among carers, reducing stigma and allowing more trusting relationships to be built with befriending clients
- Improved wellbeing for family carers, other family members and children

One example of such outcomes reported by projects include –

‘One mother told us “this means everything to me, being able to get my kids winter clothes and stuff, my befriender is so lovely too – I think this is what having a family would feel like “

We have been struck by the social interactions between babies on screen – infants have been pointing, smiling and babbling to one another and the effect on both baby and mother has been visibly positive, as have the most recent face to face opportunities as described by a mother who has attended regularly with her baby.’

Some of the projects have also reported the impact of the befriending role on their volunteers. They, like many others throughout this period, had experienced degrees of anxiety, isolation and loneliness. Projects, which have supported peer befriending have observed improved levels of self-confidence and self-belief.

‘K was part of our Thursday group, which is for young people aged 17-25. During the time of this funding, K has gone from strength to strength within the group, showing leadership skills with younger people, giving ideas, supporting staff and volunteers. Eventually he came to the decision that he could make the transition from young person to volunteer. We supported this idea straight away and felt he was up to the challenge. With some training and support, K now supports with

our Tuesday group, which is for boys aged 10-12. The group has been running since early December and K has been part of its growth and development. Doing activities in BeFriends as a young person, has been life changing for this young man and has given him the courage, confidence and skills to give some peer support to other young people in need.'

All funded projects were requested to submit case studies to represent the work that fund enabled them to carry out and demonstrate the impact in a person-centred way. Examples of these can be found in appendix 1.

Report end.

Written 27th May 2022

Appendix 1

Case Study 1

A woman in her mid-90's living on her own with dementia. She is very quiet and timid and has little conversation. One of her sons lived near-by with his wife and they visited most days. This lady lived abroad in many countries during her life, Egypt being one of them and could still re-count tales and facts about her time spent in Egypt. Her son and his wife struggled to engage with her and at times it was uncomfortable to watch as they would quiz her on things such as her current age, we felt this led to the lady retreating into herself as well. The plan was to provide befriending, but also to work with this family to help them gain a better understanding of dementia and how to engage in meaningful conversation with their Mum.

Initially we met a few times with the lady and her son and his wife, and we led the conversation involving the lady and being steered by what she wanted to talk about. We also asked for photo albums and were able to have a lovely afternoon with the lady hearing about some of her adventures in Egypt. The son and his wife became engaged as well and I think it showed them an example of how to connect with their Mum. We had to tread carefully though as we didn't want to upset them by introducing too much at once or by them thinking there was any form of criticism. So, we started the new Befriending match and wanted to build that relationship with the family as well as the lady herself. We had resources on communication and planned to also introduce the family to courses run by Alzheimer Scotland moving forward.

The lady and her volunteer connected really well from the start. The Volunteer had visited Egypt and that delighted the lady and they had lovely chats about Egypt. They both also connected about crocheting and cross-stitch as the lady was once keen on both. The Volunteer searched for old cross-stitching patterns and was able to show the lady these on her phone, and enjoyed hearing about a large intricate cross-stitch the lady completed herself.

Case Study 2

Alan lives at home with his Mum and younger brother. His young brother has down syndrome, various health co-morbidities and is currently awaiting assessment for autism spectrum disorder. Alan's mum lives with fibromyalgia and bipolar disorder and as a result Alan has caring responsibilities for both his younger brother and his Mum. Throughout the first and subsequent lockdowns, Alan's caring role increased due to everyone being at home, however over the last year his caring responsibilities reduced again back to more 'normal' levels for Alan. He continues to support his Mum with household tasks e.g., tidying up, fetching snacks, making his younger brother a bite to eat, as well as supporting mum's emotional wellbeing. Alan assists with his brother's personal care and keeping an eye on him to ensure his safety. He can also demand Alan's attention which can leave him with little time to himself. Things were worse when Alan was younger as Alan's dad used to hit him and there were many occasions where Alan was exposed to drugs in the home (his fathers). Alan's parents are now separated and Alan has a strained relationship with his father. Mum feels that Alan deals with a lot for his young age; she is supportive of Alan and they have an incredibly open, honest, and trusting relationship. Alan says that he can experience levels of stress and anxiety about his caring role but overall, he enjoys being there to help.

Alan was referred to us by Action for Children (AFC) for befriending as they felt it would be of great benefit to him to gain some time-out with a positive role model (preferably male), away from the day-to-day stresses of his life. We were able to match Alan with a young male befriender for 6 months during which time Alan spent time away for 3-4 hours a fortnight and they took part in fun activities within his local community.

Alan has a love of film so they would often go to the local cinema. Some of the films they enjoyed were Eternals, Free Guy (Alan said this was amazing) and Spiderman. They also enjoyed going to the local golf range where they spent the afternoon playing on the range and had a few mini rounds of golf. After their activities they would have a bite to eat at MacDonald's and a chat. This offered Alan a safe space to talk and he often did, specifically about his younger brother who is in and out of hospital a fair bit, but also about school, home life and general interests he has.

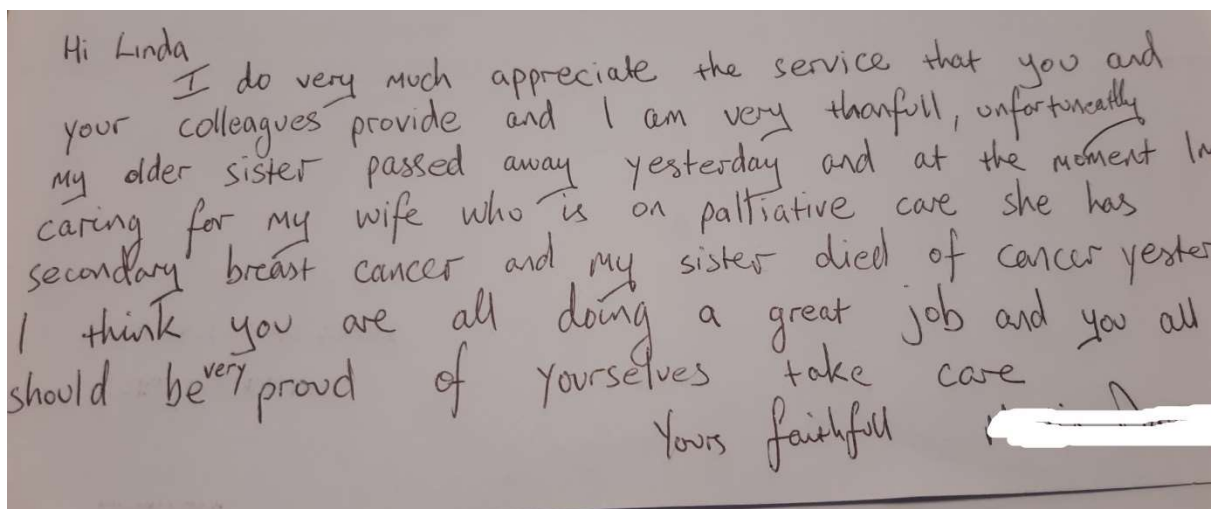
Alan was excited to come along to the residential trip we had for 5 days in the October holidays last year. Alan's befriender came along on the first day to help and to ease Alan's nerves about not knowing anyone but as soon as he got there he made a friend in another young carer who he remains friends with. Alan took part in every activity on our trip including raft building, kayaking, climbing, orienteering, night-time hide and seek, archery (his favourite), axe throwing, go karting, tree climbing, abseiling, fire building, blindfold forest walk, laser tag, quiz night and much more. This was a fantastic opportunity for Alan to have an extended break away from home and meet friends with similar home lives to himself. Alan said he thoroughly enjoyed the residential trip. This residential trip coincided with a period where Alan's younger brother was in hospital and Mum advised that this eased pressure on the family also, as she did not have to worry about Alan and knew he was having a great time. It also eased the anxiety Alan suffers from when his younger brother is in hospital as he was so busy and spending time with friends. Mum gave the same feedback surrounding Alan's befriending which he always looked forward to as it gave him a break from home and time just for him.

Alan's befriending has now ended, but it has left Alan with increased confidence to get out of the house more and into his local community. Being listened to and having had a friend to talk to has allowed Alan to be able to express himself better with other people around him and improve his resilience in demanding situations he faces.

Case Study 3

Martin was an elderly carer who received befriending calls from CACE; he is a gentleman who until recently was caring for his wife and sister, both ladies have recently passed from cancer, CACE coordinator Linda or worker Maria now periodical call to check in on him.

Below is a photo of a thank you note that he sent Linda and the CACE befriending team to thank them for their support.



Hi Linda
I do very much appreciate the service that you and your colleagues provide and I am very thanfull, unfortunately my older sister passed away yesterday and at the moment I'm caring for my wife who is on palliative care she has secondary breast cancer and my sister died of cancer yesterday I think you are all doing a great job and you all should be very proud of yourselves take care
Yours faithful Martin

Case Study 4

Edna, who is 99 years old, suffers from mild dementia and has difficulty remembering current events. She is reliant on her husband, David for day-to-day care and taking her out to shops and holidays. She also has some carer support. The only company Edna has had is David and is therefore not connected with other people in the community. She also lacks physical stimulation and is sometime reluctant to get out of bed.

Initial contact was made with David who explained his concerns for Edna. While she had difficulty relating to the present day, she is very sharp and able to relate stories and events that happened many years ago, particularly her job as health visitor in London.

Edna's dementia did give us some concerns, however, having spoken to her and completed the assessment, it was felt that she would benefit from the company of a befriending volunteer.

A match was found with a very experienced volunteer. Introductions were made and both client and volunteer were immediately engaged.

Follow up calls with both client and volunteer were made to ensure that match was successful.

Feedback from Husband, David, is that 'Edna is a different woman after visits and the visits are making such a difference'.

Edna has told the volunteer said she really appreciates her visits and feels less lonely and isolated. She has been singing to the volunteer a song that her husband didn't know. David heard this, came through from next room & said he'd never heard her sing that and was so pleased.

They were also talking about exercise and the volunteer asked her if she knew any chair exercises. She joined in doing some ankle circling, which was great as she isn't able to walk much.

As an aside, her husband, David who is the primary carer, also benefits indirectly from the service as it would allow him to spend some time at the golf club with his friends.

Appendix 2: Photographs of some of the funded group events

BeFriends Activities



Pre-Christmas Afternoon Tea at the Orient Express Rooms



Elder Voice – Blairgowrie

