

# Befriending Networks Strategic Plan 2024-2029





We are the network for befriending organisations. Established as a charity in 1994 we have thirty years of experience supporting and connecting befriending services.

**Our members form the largest network of befriending services in the world.**

We provide access to sector-specific training, events, resources, and awards which support quality in befriending. Each year we coordinate Befriending Week from the 1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> November.

# Contents

Introduction	04
About Befriending Networks	05
What is befriending?	06
Plan summary	08
Our member informed plan	09
Our strategic objectives 2024-2029	10
Our befriending policy priorities	18
Our stakeholders and partners	18
Our resources	19
Monitoring our plan	19
Strategic Plan 2024-29 Logic Model	20
Performance Indicators	22

# Introduction

## Welcome everyone,

As the largest network of befriending organisations in the world, we aim to develop our service based on the interests and needs of our members. Our strategic plan has taken into consideration their collective voice. It is our pleasure to introduce the Befriending Networks Strategic Plan 2024-29.

At Befriending Networks, we envisage a society where quality befriending support is available to everyone who needs it and where meaningful connection is recognised as important. We know that befriending changes lives and strengthens communities because every day we hear life-changing stories of human connection, made possible by dedicated volunteers, compassionate coordinators, and resilient befriending services. Befriending benefits the health and wellbeing of individuals, increases social connections, and adds value to people's lives, so it is a privilege to support organisations to deliver services making such a significant difference.

We understand that our members are operating during challenging times, with increased operational costs, competition for funding, declining trends in volunteering, and a greater level of need in our communities. So, our network has never been more vital, ensuring that all members have access to the support they need for good practice, to manage challenges, and to find connection with each other.

With a proven track record of delivering services for our members over the past thirty years, going forward, we want to consolidate our core activities and seek investment for new work. With a renewed mission and clear values, this strategic plan sets our direction for the next five years, which gives priority to delivery with and for our members. We remain accountable to them and are committed to providing opportunities for member engagement to inform and shape our services.

**We look forward to working with you!**



**Susan Hunter**  
Chief Executive Officer

**Emily Kenward**  
Chairperson

# About Befriending Networks

Our vision is of a society where quality befriending support is available to everyone who needs it and the importance of meaningful connection is recognised.

## Our Mission

We are the network for befriending organisations. We are the intermediary between our members, supporters, and stakeholders, working collaboratively and inclusively to connect and strengthen the befriending sector.

Our mission is to support organisations to deliver quality befriending services that promote wellbeing and meaningful connections, ensuring that everyone feels valued.

We further our mission by:

- Maintaining and expanding an effective and connected network of members
- Providing information, resources, training, awards, and consultancy for all aspects of befriending
- Raising the profile and an understanding of befriending and its impact
- Coordinating Befriending Week, our annual campaign taking place 1st to 7th November.

## Our Values

Befriending Networks has three values. These values guide our behaviour, our service design, our planning, and our evaluation.

### Support

**We are supportive.**

We are well informed and share our expertise, knowledge and insight. We value learning and consider different perspectives, reflecting our members' experiences and needs. We listen and understand.

### Collaborate

**We are collaborative.**

We connect with people. We care and are approachable. We are respectful to each other, our members and other organisations. We are effective and efficient.

### Lead

**We are sector-leading.**

We are resourceful, adaptable and innovative. We lead a valuable network which gathers, amplifies and represents the voice of befriending at all levels.

# What is befriending?

**Befriending is a relationship supported by an organisation to enable meaningful connections.**

The befriending relationship has boundaries. It begins with an organisation matching individuals together and then providing ongoing support to both befriender and service user. The befriending relationship is monitored by the organisation and is supported at all stages, including managing the ending.

Befriending can be diverse in its delivery but shares a common goal of enabling meaningful connections. This connection can be between people with shared or different life experiences. Befriending is a planned social interaction, taking place in 1:1 and small group settings, and can be delivered in person or at a distance.

Befriending will achieve positive outcomes and prevent negative outcomes for individuals and communities. Befriending reduces loneliness and social isolation by increasing meaningful connections. The befriending relationship is nurturing, enriching, and trusting.

Befriending can take numerous forms. In our network of more than 370 befriending services, there are delivery models which include face-to-face befriending taking place in the home or community and distance befriending which includes telephone and video calls, letter writing and gaming. Befriending organisations provide one or more of these delivery models. Befriending is predominantly provided by trained and supported volunteer bidders. In some projects, befriending may be delivered by a paid employee.



**In our network, we estimate that there are at least 55,000 people supported by nearly 20,000 bidders. Bidders contributed more than 1 million hours of time to the befriending sector in 2023.**

Source: Befriending Networks (2023), Befriending Statistics Report, Befriending Networks: Edinburgh

# Plan summary

**Our vision is of a society where quality befriending support is available to everyone who needs it, and the importance of meaningful connection is recognised.**

## Our Values

### Support We are supportive.

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## Strategic Objectives 2024-2029



1. Supporting a network of quality befriending services
2. Sustaining a valuable network
3. Facilitating an empowered network
4. Developing a digitally connected network
5. Recognising an impactful sector
6. Championing the befriending sector
7. Succeeding as an organisation

# Our member informed plan

Over the past three years, our members have consistently told us that Befriending Networks has been successful in advancing our aims. Our plan provides us with an opportunity to utilise our ambition and purpose to respond to the emerging and changing needs of our members for the next five years. The external environment is challenging, but we are determined to support the befriending sector to be resilient.

This plan has been informed by our members. We have created opportunities for members to tell us what they need from Befriending Networks. This includes networking discussion events, focus groups, 1:1 meetings, evaluation surveys, and the leadership provided by our Member Trustees. Ideas contributed by our members include:



“The direction the Befriending Networks is going in is extremely positive and it is a great time to be involved”

“We look forward to further collaboration and growth within this supportive network”

### Training and Support

- Continue to be responsive and open.
- Improve access to the Quality in Befriending Awards.
- Focus on supporting members to support volunteers.
- Training and support which is accessible, flexible, and clear about what it is and who it is for.

### Resources

- Improve the website user experience.
- Make resources easier to find and up to date.
- Ensure resources are inclusive and accessible to all.
- Increase member involvement in both the content and examples used in good practice guides.

### Evidence and Research

- Make it easier to find relevant research and share it with members.
- Research the benefits of befriending.
- Campaign and influence governments about befriending.

### Networking

- Develop peer support between members.
- Establish micro-networks by theme, type, geography.
- Continue networking forums



# Our strategic objectives 2024-2029

## Objective 1

### Supporting a network of quality befriending services

Our members will be well supported to deliver quality befriending services. We will provide networking events, training, guides, toolkits, and awards which are reflective of the needs of the befriending sector.

#### As a supportive organisation, we will:

1. Deliver a comprehensive programme of training for those working with befriending projects.
2. Facilitate networking events on topics reflective of the needs of our members.
3. Publish Good practice guides and toolkits specifically developed with and for the befriending sector.
4. Provide a membership service team that can respond to enquiries and requests for support in policy and practice related to befriending.
5. Design The Befrienders Training Toolkit, a comprehensive training pack for befriending coordinators to deliver to befrienders.
6. Offer Quality in Befriending Awards, developing our awards to ensure that they are accessible, affordable, and valuable to our members.

#### Performance Indicators

- Annually we provide at least 50 opportunities for training, learning and development attended by more than 400 staff within the befriending sector.
- Annually we provide at least 40 networking opportunities for the befriending sector attended by more than 600 staff within the befriending sector.
- Our three Good Practice Guides are reviewed annually. Combined, they achieve more than 6000 downloads each year.
- At least 25% of membership accessing The Befrienders Toolkit annually.
- At least 12% of the membership holding a Quality in Befriending Award.

#### Service Standard

- All members have the opportunity for a personal interaction with our staff at least every six months; with all members receiving emails at least fortnightly from our membership or training teams.
- Member enquiries are acknowledged and responded to within 10 days.



## Objective 2

### Sustaining a valuable network

Our members will value the connection and association that comes from their involvement in Befriending Networks. We will develop our network of befriending services through membership growth and empower all members to utilise their membership benefits.

#### As a supportive organisation, we will:

1. Redevelop our membership criteria and exclusive membership benefits.
2. Develop and implement a membership growth and retention strategy.
3. Provide every new member with a welcome call and all members a mid-year contact from our membership team.
4. Offer Making the Most of Membership sessions for all members.
5. Check with our members annually that they consider that membership is good value.

#### Performance Indicators

- Sustain the size of our membership to achieve 10% growth between 2024 and 2029.
- Retain at least 80% of members in each year.
- Annually, provide at least 8 Making the Most of Membership sessions with all new members. All new member contacts will be notified of forthcoming dates.
- Annual membership evaluation collects data from members regarding the value of membership with an aim to achieve a positive response from more than 85% of members.
- Development and implementation of an annual equality, diversity and inclusion action plan.

#### Service Standard

- Publication and implementation of revised membership criteria and benefits by April 2025.
- All new members receive contact at 2 months and 6 months by telephone, email, or video call.
- All members receive contact at 10 months, prior to expiry, by telephone, email, or video call.



## Objective 3

### Facilitating an empowered network

Our members will shape Befriending Networks. We want to work for and with our members. We will facilitate and enable members to share their knowledge and expertise, strengthening peer support whilst advancing good practice in befriending.

#### As a supportive organisation, we will:

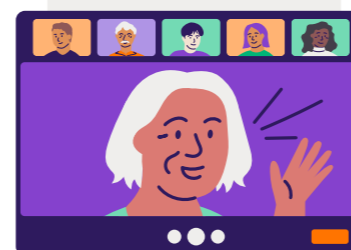
1. Involve members meaningfully in the review and creation of our guides and toolkits.
2. Co-deliver our networking events and annual conference with members.
3. Enhance opportunities for us to be informed by the views, needs and experiences of our members. This includes our annual membership evaluation, event evaluation, and through our elected member trustees.
4. Develop the capacity to facilitate "peer-to-peer micro-networks" of topical, thematic, or geographic befriending communities.
5. Secure investment to pilot a leadership and development programme for the workforce of established befriending projects.

#### Performance Indicators

- 100% of newly created guides and toolkits will contain content from members – such as case studies, examples, and insights from practice.
- 50% of our networking events (excluding training) will be co-delivered with members, involving at least 20 different members each year in co-delivery opportunities.
- From 2025, at least 5 "micro-networks" will be established, and this number will grow annually by 20%.

#### Service Standard

- All members will be invited to give their views in our annual membership evaluation survey, aiming to achieve a 20% response rate.
- Member trustees will form a majority on the board of trustees.
- Funding applications are made to secure investment for leadership development.



## Objective 4

### Developing a digitally connected network

Our network of befriending services will be connected and informed as we expand our digital presence. We will develop our infrastructure and digital content to support our members to connect, learn, develop, and succeed.

#### As a collaborative organisation, we will:

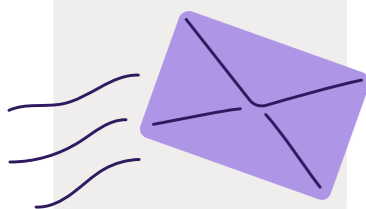
1. Launch our new website to streamline the experience of members joining our network, as well as renewing memberships, booking events, finding resources, and connecting with other services.
2. Create and deliver a communications strategy which considers the targeted use of social media and the introduction of long-form media including blogs, podcasts, and video content.
3. Scope opportunities for increased e-learning and blended learning models to support the delivery of our training programme.
4. Improve the accessibility and inclusivity of our digital content to meet the needs of all users.
5. Share knowledge and skills within and beyond our network to expand the digital literacy of the befriending sector.

#### Performance Indicators

- Our website will perform well through SEO. We will baseline website analytics in 2025 and set performance targets accordingly.
- We will distribute 22 newsletters each year to more than 1000 recipients; with subscriber growth at 10% annually.
- 100% of new digital content will be accessible and inclusive using our brand guidance, alt text on all images, voice-over, and closed caption subtitles. Plain text alternatives will be routinely offered.
- At least 4 events each year (networking/training) will have a focus on digital literacy for the befriending workforce.

#### Service Standard

- Communications Strategy will be published by December 2024 and will include performance indicators for annual monitoring.
- Moodle and My Skill Camp will be reviewed in 2024/25 and the way forward for our e-learning platform will be determined.



## Objective 5

### Recognising an impactful sector

The befriending sector will be better understood and recognised. We will make research more accessible to our members and will identify opportunities which will advance the knowledge, evidence, and evaluation of befriending.

#### As a collaborative organisation, we will:

1. Host a research event each year in partnership with an academic institution and share relevant and contemporary research at our annual Befriending Week conference.
2. Secure investment to commission and collaborate on research with trusted partners in academia or policy think tanks.
3. Prioritise the identification and dissemination of research relevant to the befriending sector and produce quarterly written research briefings for our members.
4. Integrate contemporary research into our training and good practice guides.
5. Demonstrate openness to collaborative opportunities for studentships across a range of disciplines including social connectedness, community development, public health, and wellbeing.

#### Performance Indicators

- Annually we provide 2 events which include the dissemination of relevant sectoral research, to reach at least 150 delegates.
- Annually, 4 research briefings are written and distributed to all members.
- 100% of our Good Practice Guides include contemporary sectoral research and evidence.
- Annually we conduct a census of the befriending sector from our membership data.

#### Service Standard

- Funding applications are made to secure investment for research.
- Requests for studentships and sector research are responded to with openness.



## Objective 6

### Championing the befriending sector

The befriending sector will be represented as we use our collective voice to raise awareness of befriending. We will lead and contribute to campaigns which support the needs of our members and advance our policy priorities.

#### As a leading organisation, we will:

1. Coordinate Befriending Week with and for our members and supporters. We will put an increased emphasis on reaching out beyond the sector and working collectively to use this as an annual opportunity for recruiting volunteer befrienders.
2. Support existing and emerging national and global campaigns that align with our policy priorities and consider opportunities for purposeful engagement with the media.
3. Participate in parliamentary and government forums such as APPGs, CPGs, advisory groups, and round-tables that will benefit the befriending sector, our membership and our policy priorities.
4. Communicate our advocacy and representational activity to our members at regular intervals.
5. Create and share space for and with members to represent the sector directly to audiences, including governments and funders at events, policy forums, campaigns, and media opportunities.

#### Performance Indicators

- Befriending Week resources will be downloaded more than 2000 times, with 15% annual growth.
- More than 75% of the membership will indicate that Befriending Week has positively impacted volunteer recruitment.
- Our staff will participate in at least 40 meetings each year for policy and influencing activities.

#### Service Standard

- Twice each year we will inform our members of the advocacy and representational activity we have undertaken in the previous six months.
- Where possible, space will be shared with members to represent the sector directly.



## Objective 7

### Succeeding as an organisation

We will be the recognised authority in all matters related to befriending. We will succeed through enterprising thinking, living our values, and valuing our people, resources, and partnerships.

#### As a leading organisation, we will:

1. Develop and market our bespoke training, ensuring it is responsive, customised, and valuable to our customers in the UK and internationally.
2. Scope the development of enterprising consultancy services for the befriending sector, which may include evaluation, service design, and service re-design.
3. Govern the charity effectively. Regularly review our governance arrangements, policies, and procedures to ensure that they are fit for a sustainable future.
4. Increase the use of our available data to support our decision-making, prioritisation, and organisational improvement.

#### Performance Indicators

- We will generate at least 10% of our income each year from enterprising activities, including consultancy and bespoke training.
- All policies and procedures will be reviewed and approved within the agreed time frame.
- Annually we conduct a census of the befriending sector from our membership data.
- Annually we conduct a membership evaluation to determine progress against this plan.



# Our befriending policy priorities

Befriending Networks aims to work cooperatively and collaboratively with a range of stakeholders including third-sector organisations, funders, and governments. With limited resources we must prioritise activity related to influencing policy and always consider where we can add the most value to the benefit of the befriending sector, where we can create space for members, and where we provide a supporting role under the leadership of others.

## Our priority policy areas

→ **Social connection**  
– loneliness, social isolation, and mental wellbeing.

→ **Volunteering**  
– support, recruitment, retention, and recognition.

→ **Age and ageing**  
– children, young people, adults, older people and intergenerational.

More broadly we are interested in policy and practice which reduces health inequalities, is preventative and which strengthens communities through social connection.



## Our stakeholders and partners

Governments

Campaigns and Alliances

Academic Institutions and Researchers

Civil Society Organisations

Think Tanks and Policy Institutions

Volunteer Agencies

Funders, Commissioners and Investors

Communities

# Our resources

We are a small charity but have significant reach by geography and membership. Our greatest resource is our staff team through their collective years of experience in our sector and the specialist skills and knowledge that they contribute. When this plan starts (April 2024) we will have nine employees (6.4 full-time equivalent roles). We have fixed-term funding arrangements with a small number of grant-makers and government departments and we have generated income from charitable activities. In the last financial year our income was circa £320,000.

## How you can help to further our vision

### Members

- Support us and value the power and strength of association through the network.
- Collaborate with us and with other members.
- Support the sector with peer support and the exchange of knowledge and experiences.
- Give us feedback and put forward your ideas.
- Recommend us to others as we grow the network.

### Stakeholders

- Create space and collaborate with us.
- Advocate for befriending when we are not in the room.
- Explore and establish partnerships.

### Funders and Commissioners

- Support our vision through direct investment in our projects and activities.
- Support the befriending sector and include funding in grant awards to pay for the membership fees and workforce development of befriending projects.
- Collaborate with us strategically in supporting the befriending sector to achieve Quality Awards and invest in bespoke commissions.

# Monitoring our plan

Our plan will be put into action by our staff team. Monitoring of performance will be the responsibility of the CEO, supported by the board of trustees.

Each year we will produce an annual report, publishing our progress against the performance indicators set out in Appendix 1.

Each year we will ask our members for feedback on indicators which directly relate to

their experiences of how we are delivering the vision and objectives of this five-year plan.

At the mid-point of the plan, we will engage in a light touch review of our objectives and indicators and make the necessary updates to reflect the circumstances at that time.



Our vision is of a society where quality befriending support is available to everyone who needs it, and the importance of meaningful connection is recognised.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to support organisations to deliver quality befriending services that promote wellbeing and meaningful connections, ensuring that everyone feels valued.

## Our Activities

Connected Network of Members

Information, Resources, Training and Quality Awards

Profile and Impact of Befriending

Befriending Week 1-7<sup>th</sup> November



## Our Outcomes

### Sphere of Control

Staff and volunteers in befriending services have increased skills and knowledge

Our members can share knowledge and expertise to advance good practices in befriending

Our members value the connection and association that comes from involvement in Befriending Networks

Members, policy makers and other stakeholders have improved understanding of befriending sector impact

### Sphere of Influence

Befrienders are well supported to provide nurturing, enriching and trusted befriending relationships

### Sphere of Interest

Quality Befriending Services are available to everyone who needs one

Service users experience increased social connection in healthier more equal communities



## Our Befriending Policy Priorities

**Social connection**  
– loneliness, social isolation, and mental wellbeing.

**Volunteering**  
– support, recruitment, retention, and recognition.

**Age and ageing**  
– children, young people, adults, older people and intergenerational.

## Our Values

Support

Collaborate

Lead

## Our Objectives

Supportive a network of quality befriending services

Sustaining a valuable network

Facilitating an empowered network

Developing a digitally connected network

Recognising an impactful sector

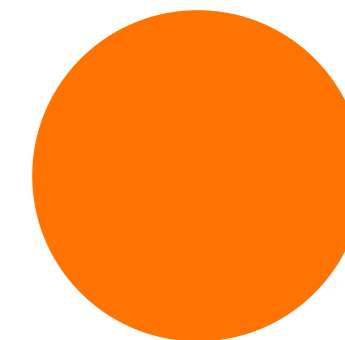
Championing the befriending sector

Succeeding as an organisation

# Strategic Plan 2024-29 Logic Model

# Performance Indicators

	Description	Responsibility
1a	Annually we provide at least 50 opportunities for training, learning and development attended by more than 400 staff within the befriending sector.	<b>Learning and Development</b>
1b	Annually we provide at least 40 networking opportunities for the befriending sector attended by more than 600 staff within the befriending sector.	<b>Membership Services</b>
1c	Our three Good Practice Guides are reviewed annually. Combined, they achieve more than 6000 downloads each year.	<b>Learning and Development</b>
1d	At least 25% of membership accessing The Befriending Toolkit annually.	<b>Learning and Development</b>
1e	At least 12% of the membership holding a Quality in Befriending Award.	<b>Quality</b>
2a	Sustain the size of our membership to achieve 10% growth between 2024 and 2029.	<b>Membership Services</b>
2b	Retain at least 80% of members in each year.	<b>Membership Services</b>
2c	Annually we will provide at least 8 Making the Most of Membership sessions with all new members. All change of member contacts will be notified of forthcoming dates.	<b>Membership Services</b>
2d	Annual membership evaluation collects data from members regarding the value of membership. Aiming to achieve a positive response from more than 85% of members.	<b>CEO</b>
2e	Development and implementation of an annual equality, diversity and inclusion action plan.	<b>CEO</b>
3a	100% of newly created guides and toolkits will contain content from members – such as case studies, examples, and insights from practice.	<b>Learning and Development/Quality</b>
3b	50% of our networking events (excluding training) will be co-delivered with members, involving at least 20 different members each year in co-delivery opportunities.	<b>Membership Services</b>
3c	From 2025, at least 5 “micro-networks” will be established, and their number will grow annually by 20%.	<b>Membership Services</b>



	Description	Responsibility
4a	Our website will perform well through SEO. We will baseline website analytics in 2025 and set performance targets thereafter.	<b>Communications</b>
4b	We will distribute 22 newsletters each year to more than 1000 recipients, with subscriber growth at 10% annually.	<b>Communications/Quality</b>
4c	100% of new digital content will be accessible and inclusive using charity brand guidance, alt text on all images, voice-over, and closed caption subtitles. Plain text alternatives will be routinely offered.	<b>All</b>
4d	At least 4 events each year (networking/training) will have a focus on digital literacy for the befriending workforce.	<b>Learning and Development</b>
5a	Annually we provide 2 events, which include the dissemination of relevant sectoral research, to 150 delegates.	<b>Learning and Development</b>
5b	Annually, 4 research briefings are written and distributed to all members.	<b>Learning and Development</b>
5c	100% of our Good Practice Guides include contemporary sectoral research and evidence.	<b>Learning and Development</b>
5d/7c	Annually we conduct a census of the befriending sector from our membership data.	<b>CEO</b>
6a	Befriending Week resources will be downloaded more than 2000 times, with 15% annual growth.	<b>Communications</b>
6b	More than 75% of the membership will indicate that Befriending Week has positively impacted volunteer recruitment.	<b>Communications</b>
6c	Our staff will participate in at least 40 meetings each year for policy and influencing activities.	<b>CEO/Quality</b>
7a	We will generate at least 10% of our income each year from enterprising activities including consultancy and bespoke training.	<b>CEO</b>
7b	All policies and procedures will be reviewed and approved within the agreed time frame.	<b>CEO</b>
7d	Annually we conduct a membership evaluation to determine progress against this plan.	<b>CEO</b>



**Befriending Networks Ltd** is a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in Scotland No. SC195896, Charity No. SC023610

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