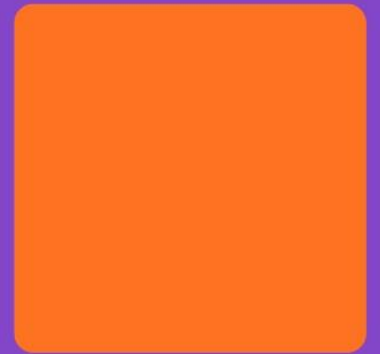


Supported Sector: The Voices of Befriending Networks Members



December 2023



Contents

Introduction	2
What we asked you	3
How do you best support volunteers?.....	3
How do you best support staff?	3
How do you best support service users?	3
Section 1: How do you best support volunteers?	4
You told us your challenges supporting long-service volunteers:.....	4
You told us your solutions to supporting long-service volunteers.....	5
You told us about your challenges on capacity:.....	6
You told us your solutions to working safely within capacity.....	7
Section 2: How do you best support staff?	8
You told us your successes in retaining volunteers.....	8
You told us what you do to reflect as a team... ..	9
You told us how you monitor and report on impact.....	10
Section 3: How do you best support service users?	11
You told us how you define inappropriate referrals.....	11
You told us how you manage and minimise inappropriate referrals.....	12
You told us your approaches to delivering safeguarding training... ..	13
You told us what activities you use in your safeguarding training... ..	14

Introduction

Befriending Networks are the national intermediary and network for befriending organisations, supporting 390+ organisations across the UK. We support our members to deliver high-quality befriending services that eradicate loneliness, promote well-being, and ensure everyone feels valued through knowing someone cares. We provide vital infrastructure for all these services, irrespective of client group, so that a consistently high standard of support can be maintained across befriending services, so referrers, family members and beneficiaries can have confidence in the service offered by befriending organisations regardless of size.

We do this by:

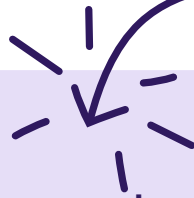
- providing a high standard of information, training, and consultancy in relation to befriending
- raising the national profile and understanding of befriending
- supporting the delivery and development of high-quality befriending services
- maintaining and expanding an effective and supportive network among our members

Befriending Networks hosted our annual membership conference on 1st November 2023. This report shares the outputs of three networking discussion sessions held with over 120 participants from our membership. The voices in this report are those of service managers, volunteer coordinators, or other leaders within the befriending sector in the UK. This report provides our network with access to experiences, ideas and practices which can be used by service providers.

The purpose of the networking discussion sessions and this report is to share experiences and suggest solutions to challenging situations in how we support volunteers, staff, and service users. The views within this report are those of our members.

For good practice guides, our membership directory and to book on to training and networking events please visit www.befriending.co.uk

What we asked you



How do you best support volunteers?

1. What challenges do you face when supporting long-service volunteers?
2. Do you have a capacity on the number of matches you can facilitate whilst providing safe and competent support to volunteers?

How do you best support staff?

3. What is your project doing well to retain volunteers?
4. How does your team reflect on what is working well and what needs to be improved? How do you monitor and report on impact?

How do you best support service users?

5. Is your service open to all, or do you have circumstances which you would describe as an "inappropriate referral"? What are the limitations on your service?
6. How do you deliver safeguarding training for volunteers? Do you have ideas for making it engaging?



Section 1: How do you best support volunteers?

Q1. What challenges do you face when supporting long-service volunteers?

We are often told that long serving volunteers help to deliver the service but as their experience grows, they may have less engagement with staff. For example: not attending support and supervisions, not submitting expenses, or do not report hours/data of their befriending activities.

You told us your challenges supporting long-service volunteers:

- You can experience low engagement with volunteers at reviews or support and supervision sessions.
- Volunteers who are trained and confident are often working independently without the desire for support.
- Introducing change to longer-serving volunteers can cause conflict or resistance.
- Volunteers can be reluctant to complete 'admin' or misunderstand the importance of paperwork on the project's ability to report impact.
- Working in a 'hybrid' world, in-person events can receive low interest and footfall from volunteers who would otherwise engage digitally.
- Onboarding new volunteers and supporting new matches can dominate staff capacity.
- You are sometimes concerned that whilst volunteers respect boundaries initially, this can reduce over time and risk can increase.
- Training on legal requirements and accountability can become a distant memory and the importance of sharing information with the befriending service can be forgotten by long-term volunteers who prioritise the social relationship with their match over monitoring and reporting impact.



"Trying to accommodate the time that volunteers are available is complex - staff time and capacity make it difficult to suit everyone."

"Befriending volunteers are often used to working alone, they often want to be alone, happily independent."



You told us your solutions to supporting long-service volunteers...

Communication

- ✓ Use e-mail, phone, or video call to communicate with volunteers in rural areas to accommodate distance and lower travel expenses.
- ✓ Request a read receipt on any emails sent with important updates, check-ins or meeting invites. This will help you monitor engagement.
- ✓ Audit the paperwork and check you are asking questions efficiently. Introducing tick boxes made it easier for volunteers.

Events and meetings

- ✓ Annual get togethers for volunteers build peer support and attract a stronger turn out.
- ✓ Offer flexibility: virtual meetings may be better for accommodating volunteer time and their capacity.
- ✓ Make meetings more engaging, offer refreshments or snacks.
- ✓ Prevent volunteer fatigue by offering a variety of events - encourage volunteers to help with the running of the event, bringing supplies etc. so that they are more invested in the event.
- ✓ Be flexible with training events: if you run training during the morning, make it an afternoon session next time, then an evening. Or use a poll system like Doodle to survey what date and time suits the most people.
- ✓ Use volunteer week in June and Befriending Week in November to gain data twice a year.

Relationships

- ✓ Create a buddy system of a long-term volunteers, who can be a great example of good practice, with a new volunteer.
- ✓ Do expenses in person to encourage opportunity to have a conversation and to discuss the match.
- ✓ Be personable and build rapport - keep notes on volunteer case files if you need assistance keeping track of volunteers and their circumstances.

Setting expectations

- ✓ Embed a strict and mandatory support system into the volunteer pathway from day one onwards. Ensure it is advertised in the volunteer application pack, volunteer training and volunteer handbook.
- ✓ Cover the importance of collecting and evaluating data for the sustainability and accountability of the befriending scheme within training and conversations. Don't just ask questions in reviews, explain why you are asking.
- ✓ When volunteers join the scheme, ask "What do you hope to get out of this experience?". This can be a monitoring tool to measure whether the project and support provided is meeting their expectations or needs.



Q2. Do you have a capacity on the number of matches you can facilitate whilst providing safe and competent support to volunteers?

We are routinely asked how many matches a service can safely manage. There are many variables to consider, including staffing hours, volunteer numbers, needs and purpose of your befriending service, and your befriending model. We will always support you with tools and training to assess risk, safeguard, and manage volunteers.

You told us about your challenges on capacity:

- Staff can hold many responsibilities and juggling these can be complex.
- Referrals keep coming - being over capacity and high in demand has become the 'norm'.
- Befriending scheme operated by volunteers not staff, creating a question of comfort and willingness rather than set guidance or paid hours.
- Match capacity can be hard to calculate as complex matches are much more time-consuming and you do not always know in advance how complex a match may be in the future.
- If the befriending scheme has no set number of matches or objectives to achieve, then it is a case of gut instinct and being honest on staff capacity and wellbeing - which can fluctuate.
- All staff expected to be on board with matches and monitoring which may be great for volunteers having access to support with their match. Putting volunteers first can mean that staff needs are overlooked.
- Support to matches must be offered in a triage method - reactive rather than proactive.
- The expectations from funders on matching capacity don't correlate with actual capacity, so there is a pressure to work over capacity.

"Our capacity is often pushed to its limits (and beyond) due to the lack of statutory support or services available elsewhere in our community."

"We are trying to calculate how many matches we *should* have and are considering setting a maximum capacity figure."



You told us your solutions to working safely within capacity...

Managing expectations

- ✓ Be honest with funders on matching and safety.
- ✓ Management need to redefine staff roles and responsibilities to allow focus on volunteer and match progression.
- ✓ Consider time spent on matches and calculate how best to proceed with matches and capacity, consider what is feasible on the resources you have.

Policy and procedures

- ✓ Ensure your out-of-hours policy and lone-working policy reflects staff capacity and availability.
- ✓ To keep volunteers safe, matches only take place during office hours so staff can be present.
- ✓ Launch a staff on-call system, so a member of staff is always available on the phone. Have this on a rota so the responsibility is shared across a team equally.
- ✓ If you run a telephone befriending service, using a system that records the calls can help provide both accountability and safeguarding without eating into staff time heavily.

Training and support

- ✓ Provide very thorough training so that staff can have confidence in the volunteers' ability to provide safe and competent befriending.
- ✓ If there is the budget or a local service to collaborate with, offer counselling to volunteers. This can allow a safe signposting and comfort knowing support is being accessed somewhere when staff are unavailable due to time restrictions or work pressures.
- ✓ Volunteers can have more than one match, meaning multiple matches can be checked on within one meeting.
- ✓ Create peer to peer support groups for volunteers to access support, and to allow volunteers to hold each other accountable.
- ✓ Run regular training opportunities to refresh their accountability and responsibility in their role.
- ✓ Embed conversations of safety within the befriending meetings and check-ins.

Section 2: How do you best support staff?

Q3. What is your project doing well to retain volunteers?

Recruiting volunteers is a time-consuming activity. One way of managing time is to ensure you retain existing volunteers. Volunteer retention is one of the most asked about topics at our networking events, training and through enquires to our team.

You told us your successes in retaining volunteers...

Relationships and understanding

- ✓ Though staff capacity is a struggle, finding time to build a genuine connection, rapport and trust with volunteers is important and makes a big difference.
- ✓ Being person-centred where possible to build rapport and loyalty with volunteers.
- ✓ Speak to volunteers directly to better understand their experience and ensure they are happy in their role. It is hard to know if volunteers are isolated and need support, or if they are confident in lone working. It is good to clarify this with volunteers when you do speak to them.
- ✓ Verbal support may be the only possibility, so make sure you are focused and not distracted when you do talk to volunteers.

Celebration and recognition

- ✓ Volunteers can be just as busy as staff in the third sector! Trying to match up calendars to offer support is a challenge. Be flexible and supportive of volunteers and their needs as best you can.
- ✓ Recognise and celebrate volunteers at set times. Take them for lunch or present a £10 voucher if possible (and budgets allow).
- ✓ If several volunteers are recruited simultaneously, make it a group affair to ensure volunteers feel part of something bigger.
- ✓ Provide social activities such as coffee mornings, befriending week celebrations, training - create a befriending community, not just matches.
- ✓ If you are a small project, handwrite and send personal thank you cards or letters - personalised gestures help volunteers feel valued and showcase time dedicated to volunteers.

Service Design

- ✓ Time-limited matches can support retention as the time-duration can provide focus and help demonstrate impact. Volunteers can then take on a new match and refresh the befriending experience.
- ✓ Use volunteer engagement opportunities such as support and supervision sessions to evaluate why they are still volunteering - they may advocate for something you do, and this could be promoted.
- ✓ Ensure clear expectations are encouraged in training materials, promotional materials, and volunteer resources. Be open and transparent about the role and responsibilities.
- ✓ Gain volunteer opinions on the organisation and the strategy - ensure they know they are a valued part of the project and embed volunteer wellbeing objectives into the project.

Q4. How does your team reflect on what is working well and what needs to be improved? How do you monitor and report on impact?

Collecting data for monitoring and reporting is a key task to demonstrate the impact of your service and improve your service design. Staff, volunteers, and service users may be contributing to or collecting data. Our discussion focused on staff reflection for service improvement.

You told us what you do to reflect as a team...

Team meetings can provide a dedicated opportunity to raise concerns, and bounce ideas and learnings with one another in the team, at different levels.

Culture and value

- ✓ Try to create an inclusive culture - let everyone, staff or volunteers, know that they are appreciated or that their opinion is valued.
- ✓ Give and create space for sharing our experiences, giving feedback comfortably and talking openly.
- ✓ Being conscious of staff capacity and availability so the team do not resent evaluation.
- ✓ Consider your time and financial constraints, create an impact system based on this that is inclusive of the entire team.

Tools

- ✓ Practice the "What we heard, what we've done, what we're doing" reflection exercise after events to encourage a learning culture in the team.
- ✓ Use of virtual spaces or platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Padlet or JamBoards.
- ✓ Encourage colleagues to share difficult situations, challenges, and proposals in a structured way.



“We do a meeting every three months but we are looking at changing this to give more space for sharing our experiences, giving feedback comfortably and talking openly.”

You told us how you monitor and report on impact...

Planning and expectations

- ✓ Check with funders what they need you to collect and report on, build your structure around that.
- ✓ When volunteers are recruited or referral forms received, we make it clear that evaluation and impact reporting is a mandatory responsibility of all stakeholders within the project.
- ✓ Staff hours were extended in a project to specifically cater to monitoring needs.

Opportunities

- ✓ Create a volunteering platform, somewhere for volunteers to build community, network and share their own reflections on the impact they are making, or the impact volunteering is making on them.
- ✓ Have paper tablecloths at events and encourage volunteers or attendees to use this to feedback information freely in a relaxed format.
- ✓ Ensure that any feedback forms circulated ask for ideas or suggestions for improvement.
- ✓ To improve quantity of survey responses, design them with purposeful and short questions.
- ✓ Diary sheets - have a volunteer keep a diary for befriending that is submitted regularly.
- ✓ Use phone calls or emails to gather information - take advantage of any opportunity.
- ✓ Have a straightforward online match-progression form submitted monthly by volunteers. This gives the volunteer the opportunity to submit case studies and quantitative data such as duration or expenses.
- ✓ Install a volunteer phone system where the volunteer calls in after every befriending activity, automatically generating impact monitoring, evaluating and, where applicable, reporting.
- ✓ Conduct an exit interview procedure that addresses short comings and room for improvement.



Section 3: How do you best support service users?

Q5. Is your service open to all, or do you have circumstances which you would describe as an “inappropriate referral”? What are the limitations on your service?

We regularly hear from members of their challenges in managing complex or inappropriate referrals: How do we say no to referrals? How do we determine what is appropriate?

You told us how you define inappropriate referrals...

- There can be a focus on social isolation and loneliness, but a lot of referrals are based around mental wellbeing and this can open the door to **complex mental health needs** and mental illness, which befriending schemes are often unable to accommodate.
- Complexity often comes from a good place - family or friends making a **referral without the consent** of the person being referred despite the general data protection regulation statement included on the referral form. Inappropriate that we then have the data.
- Complexity can come from third parties (referral agencies and bodies) **ignoring the remit of befriending** and making the befriending referral anyway, as the project is free, local, and readily available unlike the statutory or professional services that may be more appropriate.
- Referrals requesting professional support that is **more than a volunteer can provide** are inappropriate.
- Age specific projects being asked to have **wiggle room and make exceptions** for a referral is a common and inappropriate scenario.
- It can be a complex referral that leads to inappropriate behaviour or expectations when befriending project materials, website etc. are scan read and misunderstood by the reader.
- Self-referrals can be complex as **information can be withheld** or there can be a misunderstanding on why we ask what we ask, why we need set information.
- Not being given a true picture on referral forms - information may or may not have been added on purpose to get you to do the initial visit. The person who completes the referral clearly knows they are inappropriate and is **trying their luck**.
- Complex referrals can stem from being on a waiting list too long and can cause conflict / tension by a potential service user.

You told us how you manage and minimise inappropriate referrals...

- ✓ Be honest and create a **clear statement on the limitations and capacity of your service**. Ensure all staff refer to this to provide an equal service across the board.
- ✓ Be conscious of your local community and wider area. Ideally, when saying no to a referral due to our own limitations, the person can be **signposted to a suitable service** that may be more appropriate.
- ✓ Clarify within a team meeting what can or cannot be adjusted or amended to accommodate a complex referral. A **consistent position** means that no case will be granted special treatment or cause a referral agency to become confused about what can or cannot be accepted in the future.
- ✓ If you are at capacity, with the maximum number of matches feasible or a shortage of volunteers, **be honest**. Be clear if there is a waiting list that this may not be a quick progress and explain your procedure and next steps clearly to minimise any confusion, lower expectations and protect staff from feeling pressured.
- ✓ Keep track of how many inappropriate referrals there are and why they are inappropriate - this can help you address limitations or need for additional support when communicating with local council, funders or reviewing the befriending scheme structure in strategic meetings.
- ✓ Limitations should be addressed at the beginning to all new volunteers and all new referrals. Staff should be transparent to remove pressure and to ensure no one is disappointed by the limitations of staff capacity or project resources.
- ✓ It is a key staff responsibility to **screen all referrals** to ensure volunteers are not taking on the role of professionals or paid staff. Volunteers are a limited support and cannot take on that pressure or expectation.
- ✓ Create clear communications with external parties - network and make it evident to other organisations what you can or cannot do. Have an open day, host a forum, build the reputation accurately to try and minimise inappropriate referrals.



**Befriending
Networks**

5-7 Montgomery Street Lane, Edinburgh, EH7 5JT
0131 261 8799 | info@befriending.co.uk
www.befriending.co.uk

Befriending Networks Ltd is a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in Scotland No. 195896. Charity No. SC023610 regulated by OSCR.

Q6. How do you deliver safeguarding training for volunteers? Do you have ideas for making it engaging?

Ensuring volunteers are trained and prepared to support service users is important to us. We often receive enquiries about how befriending services are delivering volunteer training and how to cover safeguarding without terrifying people, making it relevant, proportionate and engaging.

You told us your approaches to delivering safeguarding training...

- ✓ Approach it **matter-of-factly** and reiterate that it is not something to be afraid of, but a duty of the project and all stakeholders to ensure safeguarding is proactive.
- ✓ Use **anonymised real-life case studies** to ensure there is a level of authenticity to the scenarios and that staff can talk about them with confidence and a strong knowledge of what happened. Make sure to protect confidentiality and anonymise details of the people involved.
- ✓ Providing definitions of terms and never assume participants have any pre-existing knowledge. Ensure to **keep it simple** and remove complexity or jargon.
- ✓ Respectfully, make safeguarding fun! Be upbeat and ensure you aren't monotone in this section to keep it sounded interesting and engaging. For such a formal topic, we try our best to keep it informal!
- ✓ **Repeat safeguarding training** every two years for each volunteer - things change and safeguarding should not be dependent on a strong memory.
- ✓ Don't shy away from the reality - safeguarding as a topic can help highlight if a volunteer is or is not cut out for befriending with your service users. It is an important opportunity and can highlight the need for disengagement, or the need for additional support or training.
- ✓ Introduce a risk assessment form and safeguarding policy and procedure to ensure volunteers are aware of their role and responsibilities. Provide the necessary information while trying not to overwhelm volunteers.
- ✓ Outsource the safeguarding training to an **accredited safeguarding course**, which can be a pull for volunteer recruitment too.
- ✓ Focus on creating an environment where **volunteers are comfortable** raising any concerns or issues, no matter how trivial, and then allowing organisations to decide on whether it requires escalating.



"We send out a 7-minute video briefing every quarter, this a reminder of what to do if a safeguarding concern occurs."



**Befriending
Networks**

5-7 Montgomery Street Lane, Edinburgh, EH7 5JT
0131 261 8799 | info@befriending.co.uk
www.befriending.co.uk

Befriending Networks Ltd is a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in Scotland No. 195896.
Charity No. SC023610 regulated by OSCR.



You told us what activities you use in your safeguarding training...

- Role play
- Case studies
- Good practice procedures
- Take home resource pack to refer to at anytime.
- Videos – from trusted organisations and some made in-house using Canva
- Everyone gets a copy of the safeguarding policy.
- Anonymised real-life examples from our service
- E-learning
- Quizzes and games
- Volunteer Q&A to share examples.

