



Befriending
Networks



**Social Isolation and Loneliness
Winter Befriending Fund
Report: April 2023**

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About Befriending Networks

Befriending Networks are the national intermediary and network for befriending organisations in the UK, supporting 390+ organisations across the UK, with 160 member organisations based within Scotland. 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, in order 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
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Social Isolation and Loneliness Winter Fund 2023

Working as a respected partner of the Scottish Government, Befriending Networks managed a small grants programme which was available to our Scottish members in January 2023. Befriending Services have been a crucial part of the third sector response to tackling loneliness, but limited resources and rising costs remain a key challenge in meeting the needs of the many referrals they have received and some of the people they support. Many of these service users/befriendees are also those most affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

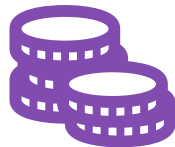
Our aim was to direct funds to trusted and experienced befriending projects and gathering direct feedback of the impact of befriending to help inform the National Implementation Group and delivery of *A Connected Scotland*.

A rolling programme of grant applications was established with 31 applications been received and assessed before the fund was closed due it being fully allocated. Unsuccessful applicants typically did not meet the fund priorities or had provided insufficient level of information in their application form. All applications were assessed against three criteria:

- Have proven track record of delivering successful befriending services to the target groups.
- Be able to respond quickly to receiving the funding.
- Able to demonstrate outcomes from the funding.

Project Partners and Fund Profile

£1647
average
grant
award



24 partner
organisations
delivering
befriending
projects



Grant Awards were made to **24 organisations** (see Appendix 1) to support 25 Befriending Projects

£41,171.71 was distributed to Befriending Projects with the **average grant award being £1647**. Grants ranged in value from £793 up to £2000 (the maximum which could be applied for).

Funded Befriending Projects created reach across Scotland with activities being delivered in **13 local authority areas**, and across **10 health board** areas.



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Befriending Projects - Beneficiaries

Each Befriending Project was asked to identify at the application stage who their intended beneficiaries would be. At the evaluation stage this data was collected based on actual delivery. The number is greater than 25 as Projects may have been reaching more than 1 beneficiary group or that the beneficiary have an intersectional identity.

	Projected	Actual
Young People 16-24	11	8
Disabled People	9	17
(Young) Carers	6	5
Young Parents	3	4
People aged 75+	17	17

The area of greatest variance from application to actual delivery was in increased number of beneficiaries who were Disabled People.

Across all the Befriending Projects **1313 individuals benefitted** from activities delivered by this fund.

The Fund supported the creation of an **additional 1875 hours** of befriending activity.



1875 hours of
additional
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1313
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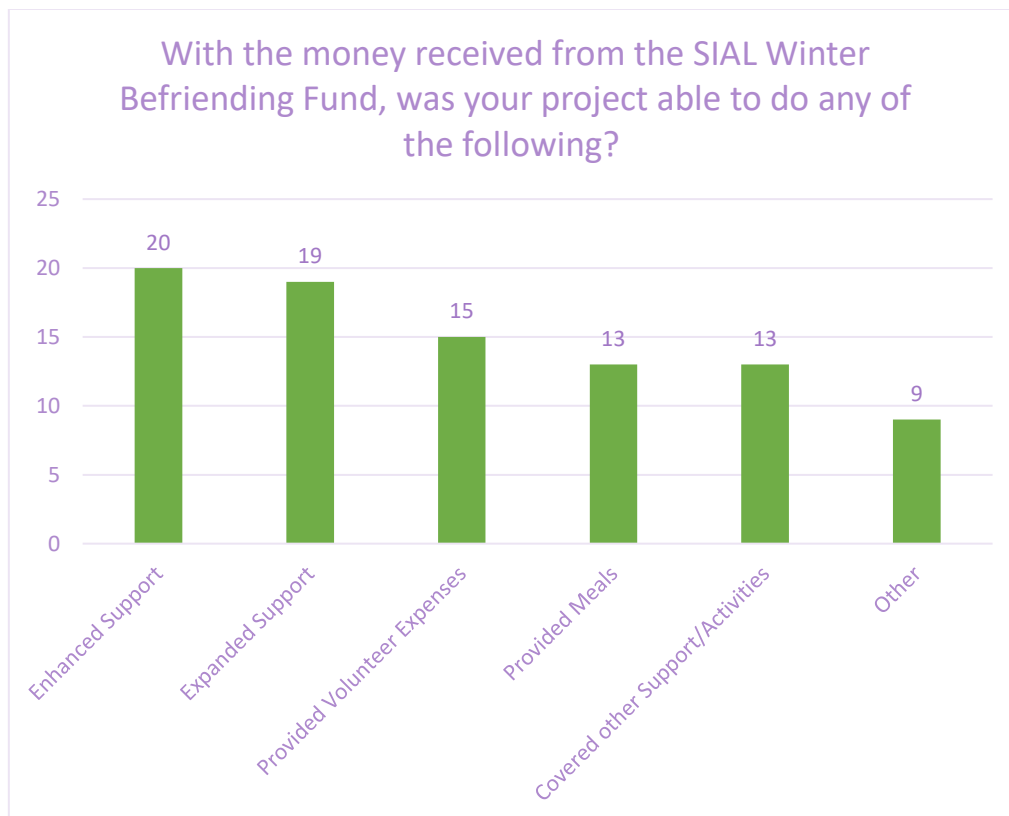
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Befriending Projects – Provision

With the funds received projects were able to enhance, expand or provide additional activities and services. The graph below shows the ways in which projects used the funding received. Projects were able to select multiple responses.



The nature of ‘other’ activities included: transportation and travel costs, training for volunteers and staff, increased supervision, and wellbeing support for volunteers.



“We successfully ran our ‘warm bank’ over the winter months, providing relief from the cold and free hot drinks and light meals for the community. This gave our befrienders and volunteers a comfortable place to meet and gave some a much-needed hot meal and social contact. We ran additional activities to encourage people to come in for their befriending meet ups and stay in the warm bank for longer, for example, a workshop on mindfulness, an information session about our BSL counselling service and a BSL accessible yoga class in addition to our regular weekly bingo events.” [Project Coordinator]

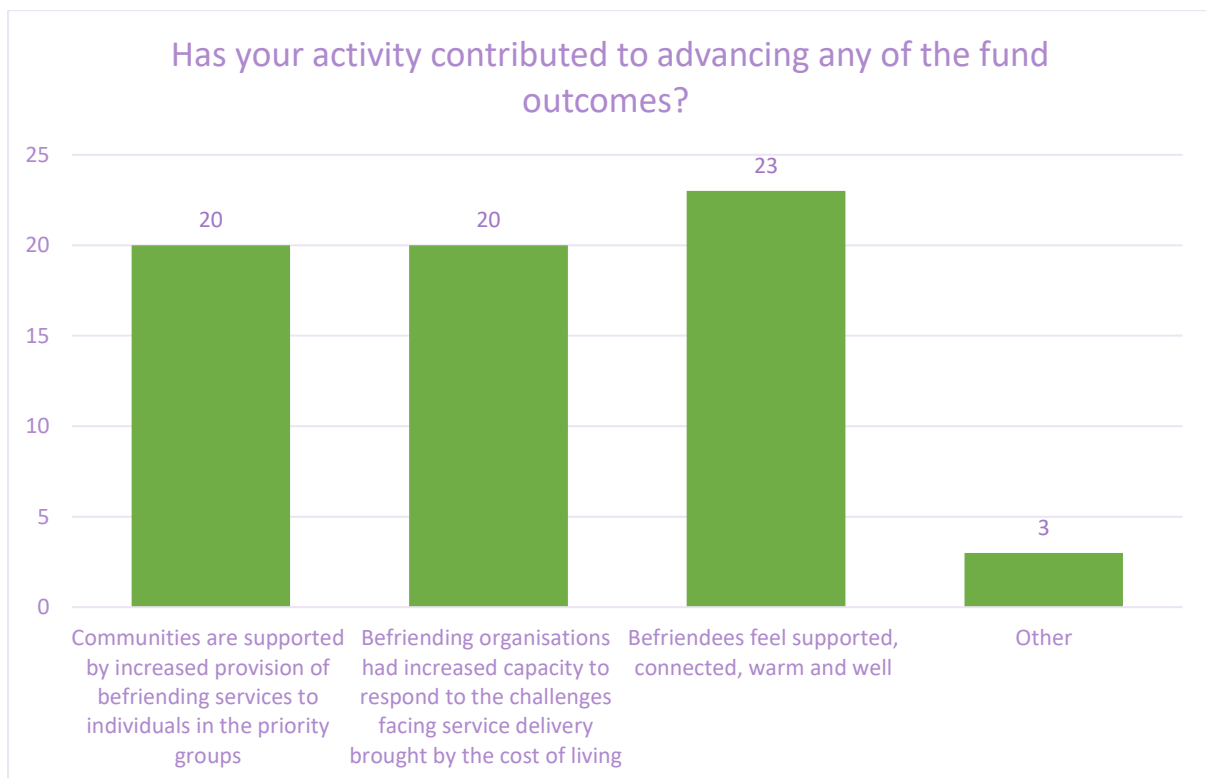


Funding Outcomes

Befriending Networks identified three intended outcomes from the provision of the small grants, these were outcomes which could be advanced during the short period of the fund (February – March 2023).

1. **Communities are supported by increased provision of befriending services to individuals in the priority groups**
2. **Befriending organisations had increased capacity to respond to the challenges facing service delivery brought by the cost of living**
3. **Befriendees feel supported, connected, warm and well**

80% of projects identified that they had advanced two or more of the fund outcomes. A small number of projects identified other outcomes which were advanced in their specific context.



“We were not surprised by the “soft” outcomes i.e. the kindness and warmth that participants showed to one another. In our experience, when people feel safe, respected, and not judged, one experiences human nature at its best.” [Project Coordinator]





“Young people were able to meet and connect with others in a safe environment, forming new contacts and making friends. It gave good opportunity for practicing social skills and exploring connections outside of their usual 1-1 matches. Activities delivered as a direct result of the befriending fund also enabled befrienders to feel more connected with each other.” [Project Coordinator]

“Today has been so brilliant, thank you so much. It was so lovely to meet up with other patients and the volunteers. This is an extra layer of support. A few of us (patients) have swapped numbers and will be meeting up for coffee. This doesn't take away from the support from our befrienders but its extra support for each other.” [Befriender]



“I've just been through so much recently and this has been a wonderful day. Thank you so much for inviting me. It's been lovely chatting with other patients and the volunteers and makes you feel less alone.” [Befriender]

“Participants also expressed feeling excited and pleased to have the opportunity to eat at a restaurant, as due to their already limited budgets combined with the cost-of-living crisis, this is a space which they ordinarily wouldn't have access to.” [Project Coordinator]



Case Study Outcome 1: Communities are supported by increased provision of befriending services to individuals in the priority groups

Meet J:

J is an older young person, referred to INtegr8 several months ago. At that time, J was struggling to engage with any services and lacked supportive friends. He did mix with others who his referrer described as a bad influence with concerning behaviours. Engaging J was challenging. He recognised his need for support and wanted it yet was unable to withdraw from habits and behaviours associated with his negative peer group. With perseverance, we managed to engage J in Befriending just before the Scottish Government SIAL Winter Funding was awarded by Befriending Networks.

Funding enabled us to engage several young people and befrienders in group activities. J attended two activities: pottery painting and the escape rooms. He hadn't engaged in group activities like this before, and both sessions were new experiences. Pottery painting was rated 5/5, with J feeling it was very therapeutic. J enjoyed having his befriending in a group situation: "*being social – it does help*" "*It's less depressing in a group*".

Between the two activities that J took part in, he felt that: activities encouraged him to try future group or linked sessions. He had the opportunity to try new things his confidence and belief in his own abilities had increased. The activities had helped to reduced social isolation as he'd been helped to be more social and to mix with others. In one of the activities J said that another young person had really made him laugh, and in the other, he felt that he'd made a friend.

When asked what he enjoyed most about the group sessions, J said that it was, "*meeting new people*". J is engaging in his 1-1 sessions, is hoping to link more, and is keen to explore college as an option later in the year. Currently, he is not mixing with his previous negative peer group.

Meet C:

"I am very outgoing, enjoy learning new things and meeting a variety of people. I was diagnosed with sight loss due to glaucoma at the age of 18. As a result of this, I found it very difficult getting out and about and I struggled to find accessible information and activities. Glaucoma affects both of my eyes and means that I have tunnel vision in one eye and am only able to see colour out of the other eye. At the time of my diagnosis there was very little support available, which was frustrating and led to me feeling isolated. My visual impairment has meant that often the activities available to me makes it difficult to find people my own age to socialise with. Most of the information available regarding activities and groups is inaccessible to me.

I was paired with a befriender at Seescape and had started meeting up with them regularly. Recently my befriender and I were invited along to a tactile art class at Seescape. It was the first time I'd attended a class like this, and I was unsure what to expect. The people in the group all had Visual Impairments but had variety of ages and eye conditions. During the session we were given the opportunity to use various resources such as tissue paper scissors a hot air gun and we enjoyed a cup of tea and biscuits. I hope that more things like this can be made available.

Being part of society and interacting with people who have similar eye conditions is essential. Being able to share experiences and learn from each other about how to cope with day-to-day living and offer emotional support to each other is a vital part of support for many people like me."



Case Study Outcome 2: Befriending organisations had increased capacity to respond to the challenges facing service delivery brought by the cost of living

Meet F:

One of our volunteer befrienders, F, is a gentleman in his 80s, was a regular attendee at The Soup Stop and our public living room. He described the social benefits he experienced as a result: "I got to meet a lot of new people that I would not have met had it not been for The Soup Stop. I made new friends and felt I got to know some of the regulars pretty well. I also met someone who I knew from when I volunteered as a minibus driver some years ago. It was lovely to be reacquainted with someone I hadn't seen in years and catchup".

He went on to say, "Overall it was such a good experience for me, the soup was not only a blessing to me socially but also turned out to have health benefits too. Due to my diabetes, I keep a close eye on what I eat and weigh myself regularly. I lost half a stone over the period The Soup Stop ran. I would normally have a sandwich each day for lunch, so there were clear health benefits to the soup too!"

He also recognised befrienders and befriendees from past group events attending and commented, "It was great to see everyone who came get such a warm welcome and be there to help and support each other".

As a longstanding volunteer, he was able to speak to people not only about the work that Befriending Lewis & Harris do but also about the broader range of services Third Sector Hebrides offer, as Befriending Lewis & Harris shares a building with other local charities. "It was a great chance for me to talk to people about Befriending Lewis & Harris and my own experience volunteering as a befriender. And I was also able to let people know about some of the other services I was aware of at Third Sector Hebrides, such as the Cost of Living Fund grant".

Meet D:

"I joined the group because my husband died and my boys live far away in Manchester. I didn't really have a lot of friends in Fife and after Covid I was afraid to go outside even to the shops. My GP suggested that I join some groups or get a befriending volunteer.

My next door neighbour went to our local church and told me they had a group on a Tuesday morning. I phoned Crossroads Fife and spoke to a lady who invited me attend the group. I was a bit scared to begin with because I didn't know anyone. I was made to feel very welcome by all the volunteers and the people who were already at the group. I have made so many friends and like that we get to choose the activities.

I sometimes have hot soup and a sandwich it is really nice and when it was cold the room was really warm and I didn't have to worry about my own heating bill, my son said I shouldn't worry but I do because I only get my pension. I feel a lot happier now."



Case Study Outcome 3: Befriendees feel supported, connected, warm and well

Meet K and M:

Our Befriender K and her friend M have been meeting for almost a year now. K is a retired nurse. M has memory loss and her only relative, her son works full time - since covid many of M's friends and neighbours have stopped visiting; in addition, she is no longer able to go to church on her own and she misses the social interaction enormously.

K and M Visit weekly, often going out for coffee and drives in K's car. They are regular attendees at Visiting Friends events - M often gets her hair done especially for them! K has recently had a difficult time supporting a neighbour whose husband died by suicide. She said "*Visiting Friends has given me a purpose since I retired - I love my visits with M and having this extra opportunity to come out with her has really helped take my mind off things at home - I love seeing how animated M becomes in company*".

M added "*I love coming to the coffee mornings - February is such a bleak month and this has given me something to look forward to - the flowers on the table are so cheerful and there is always a happy buzz*".

Meet G:

G was a fit, active, social man but in recent years his physical and mental health has deteriorated and he struggles with daily life. Although he has a supportive family, many of his friends have passed away and he says he misses their banter and the activities they did together. G was feeling lonely and increasingly isolated because his mobility issues limit his physical activity. Walking any distant and/or using public transport is a trial for him.

He was referred for our service and now has a befriender. He loves the visits, and they chat about fishing, golf etc – all the things he used to love doing. The befriender has also taken him for a run in his car and for tea and cake. G wanted to meet similar aged men and was keen to give our Monday lunches a try, so a taxi was arranged, and he came along; he loved it so much that he has come along every week since!

He is so grateful that we are able to arrange a taxi for him as he says he wouldn't be able to come otherwise. He has also enjoyed coming along to our film afternoons the last couple of months and again this funding allowed us to organise a taxi for him and he was delighted to get some chocolates and a choc ice! G says Monifieth Befrienders has changed his life.



Ongoing Challenges experienced by Befriending Projects in Scotland

In addition to project evaluation, we also invited optional feedback from befriending projects regarding ongoing challenges their organisations face in regard to cost-of-living and/or social isolation and loneliness. All projects provided a response. These can be grouped into the following themes – with illustrative comments.

Volunteer Recruitment	<p>“Our referrals continue to increase and there are challenges nationally and locally recruiting volunteers.”</p> <p>“We continue to face the challenge of more referrals from third sector organisations and not enough volunteers to meet the need.”</p> <p>“Volunteer 'recruitment' is increasingly difficult post covid - the pool of volunteers locally is very sought after and we are in effect in competition with other third sector organisations, so we must be able to support the volunteers as well as we can to build our reputation, attract them to our organisation and most importantly retain them!”</p>
Mental health and wellbeing	<p>“The financial worry for some of our befriendees is having a huge impact on their mental wellbeing, causing raised anxiety and low mood.”</p> <p>“Covid has exacerbated the problems of social isolation and loneliness with many people understandably anxious about going out and many seniors having "lost ground" that will not easily be regained.”</p> <p>“We are experiencing high referral levels and the continued decline of other supports for elderly people since the pandemic has left us filling more service gaps than ever before.”</p>
Cost of Operating Services	<p>“There is also additional pressure regarding the potential loss of staff because we cannot compete with wages being offered in the private and public sector.”</p> <p>“Our charity cannot afford to keep wages in line with inflation but our staff cannot go on strike for a better a deal so many are really struggling and if support isn't made available for the third sector, the absolute power of work done by charities through the pandemic and ongoing cost of living crisis will be undone as staff leave to find work that allows them to pay their bills.”</p> <p>“Cost of living increases have a direct impact on the prices of social and recreational activities available within befriending sessions. With funding being frozen or cut, befriending session expenses have not increased over recent years making it more difficult to stretch resources.”</p> <p>“We have also been hit with a huge rise in core overheads to maintain our premises and keep the organisation running. We are trying to address the difficulties our staff are facing by proposing a cost-of-living wage increase, but we are completely unable, as a charity, to match the 10.4% inflation rate. We are an accredited Real Living Wage employer, but many of our staff are still feeling the impact of the crisis.”</p>



Funding

“We also are finding that not enough easily accessible funding is available for a grassroots organisation such as ourselves, who are acknowledged locally as a vital part of our areas mental health strategy but receive no statutory funding or the proper recognition - we need more resources to employ staff full time - not just a few months/a year funding if we are lucky.”

“Funders are increasingly reluctant to contribute to core funds or full cost recovery in project budgets, with the increasing costs affecting the organisation we are less able to contribute / support *full* costs of running projects and supporting volunteers.”

“If resources are not made available on a longer-term basis so that services can be planned and sustained, then the cost of failing will be unacceptably high.”

“Our biggest challenge now is volunteer recruitment and funding. Without more volunteers we need paid staff to deliver services. Without funding we are unable to recruit more staff.”



Appendix 1: Delivery Partners

1. Beatson Cancer Charity
2. Befriending Lewis & Harris (Volunteering Hebrides Befriending)
3. Beith Community Development Trust
4. Caithness Voluntary Group
5. Cancer Support Scotland
6. Caraidean Uibhist SCIO
7. Community Info Source
8. Cowal Elderly Befrienders SCIO
9. Crossroads Fife
10. Cyrenians
11. Deaf Action
12. FAMS
13. Getting Better Together (Shotts)
14. Interest Link
15. Leap
16. Monifeith Befrienders
17. People Know How
18. Seescape
19. Space Broomhouse
20. Vintage Vibes
21. Visiting Friends
22. Volunteer Edinburgh
23. Volunteer Glasgow
24. West Lothian Youth Action

