
Community Befriending Initiatives in Rural Scotland



Introduction



Befriending Networks

A charity supporting befriending organisations, globally.

Based in Scotland with a membership of more than 300 befriending initiatives in the UK and internationally.



Community Befriending Projects

Focus on social participation.

Aim to reduce loneliness and increase social connection.

Help people feel more connected to their communities.

"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."

Understanding Befriending

Definition of Befriending

- Volunteers spend time with lonely or isolated individuals
- Can be through visits, phone calls, or online chats

Goals of Befriending

- Build friendships, provide support, increase social connection
- Offer a sense of belonging and companionship

Matching Process

- Organisation will match volunteer befrienders with those needing support
- The match has boundaries, a beginning and an ending
- The relationship is monitored for the duration of the match



What is befriending?



Befriending
Networks

What is befriending?

Ageing in Rural Scotland



Ageing Population in Rural Areas

- 1 in 4 aged 65 years and older, compared to 1 in 5 nationally
- Younger people leaving for opportunities elsewhere

Demographic Imbalance

- More older people relative to youths and working-age adults
- Straining traditional support ratio
- Financial and workforce stresses in health and social care

Geographical Remoteness

- Barriers in accessing daily services and social connection
- Poor transport links and distance from hospitals or care facilities
- Older people may go without timely or specialist care

Loneliness as a Risk Factor

- 58% of over-50s in Scotland experience loneliness at least some of the time
- Rural living often heightens the risk of loneliness
- Older adults in rural areas, increased likelihood of living alone

Case Studies

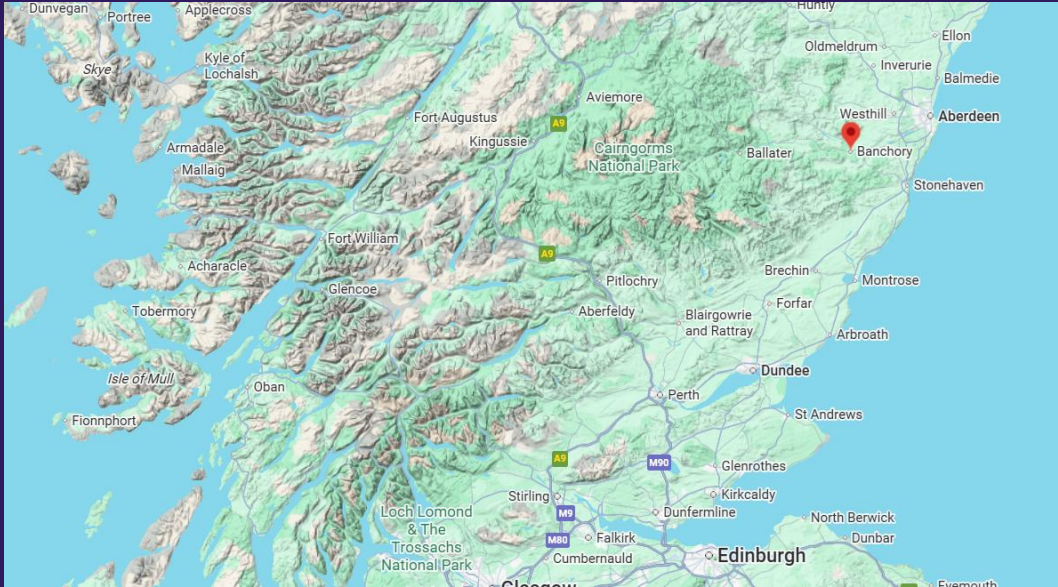


Active and Healthy Ageing in Rural Scotland
Community Befriending Initiatives

Caraidean Uibhist

Kincardine and
Deeside Befriending
Project

Berwickshire Housing
Association BeFriend



Kincardine and Deeside Befriending, Aberdeenshire

Located in the north east of Scotland, to the south of Aberdeen City. Kincardine and Deeside is within the Aberdeenshire Council area.

The area spans a diverse landscape from coastal cliffs along the North Sea to the inland reaches of the River Dee valley and the Grampian Mountains.

Much of Kincardine and Deeside is rural, characterised by farmland, forests, and small villages. The area supports agricultural activity with a low population density.



Kincardine and Deeside Befriending, Aberdeenshire

Activities

- Volunteers visit elderly residents once a week
- Engage in conversations and share a cup of tea
- 127 older people supported annually, 90 volunteers
- Assistance with Daily Tasks: help with small tasks around the house, gardening and running errands
- Companionship and Support: provide practical support to make daily life easier, offer companionship to reduce loneliness, accompanied to medical appointments.

Positive Impact

- Reduced feelings of loneliness among the elderly; improved mood and self-esteem.
- Increased connection to their community.
- Reaching those who are housebound, 70% of clients are aged 80 years and older



Berwickshire Housing Association (BHA) BeFriend, Scottish Borders

Berwickshire is in the south east of Scotland within the Scottish Borders local authority area.

The landscape is characterised by low hills and agricultural land, with the Lammermuir Hills marking the northern boundary. The River Tweed forms much of the southern boundary with England. The eastern boundary is coastal.

43.6% of its population (9,605 people) live outside settlements of 500 people. This reflects a dispersed population across hamlets, farms, and small villages

There is also a slow but steady trend of people moving away from isolated hamlets and farmsteads, towards established settlements.





Berwickshire Housing Association (BHA) BeFriend, Scottish Borders

Activities

- Group and 1:1 befriending service
- Volunteers support isolated individuals for friendly conversations through community events.
- 122 older people are supported annually, by 41 volunteers.
- 90 group events were participated in.

Positive Impact

- Formation of friendship groups, independent of ongoing BeFriend support
- Increased confidence with group activities, less need for 1:1 support
- Enhanced sustainability of local community events

Caraidean Uibhist, Outer Hebrides

The combined area of Eriskay, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, and Berneray is home to approximately 5,000 people, with a population density of just 9 people per square kilometre.

The islands are linked by a series of causeways, forming a continuous route from Eriskay in the south through South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, and finally Berneray in the north.

The landscape is strikingly varied: rugged hills dominate the east, while the west features sweeping beaches, machair grasslands, and intersecting lochs.



Befriending Networks



Caraidean Uibhist, Outer Hebrides

Activities

- Regular befriending, at home or in the community and telephone befriending
- 75 befriending matches

Positive Impact

- Improved mobility, social life, and mental health.
- Reconnection with hobbies and interests
- Home safety improvements via Fire Service visits
- Clients become volunteers when they are able, adding to project sustainability
- New community activities and age-friendly centres within the wider community have emerged and are sustained

Importance of Befriending



Isolation in Rural Areas

People live far from neighbours and family
Limited transport options
Lack of access to social activities



Consequences of Isolation

Feelings of loneliness
Low wellbeing



Role of Befriending

Creates connections and provides companionship
Improves mental health and overall well-being
Can facilitate the removal of barriers in rural areas or support the sustainability of other services and resources



Importance of Social Connections

Crucial for mental and physical health

Conclusion

- Befriending is a planned social interaction, it is flexible, adaptable, and cost effective.
- Befriending contributes to increased social participation and reducing isolation and loneliness.
- Befriending is building stronger communities, it encourage community engagement, civic participation, volunteerism, fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening community bonds.





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