

VOLUNTEER BEFRIENDING HANDBOOK

Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be part of the Befriending Network. We are passionate about enriching the lives of all involved in the Befriending and that includes yours. There are many aims of the Befriending such as combating isolation and promoting independence but fundamentally it is about the joy of social interaction and making new friends. So simple and yet something that we can all relate to.

How Befriending Works

The Befriending Network supports people over the age of 60 who would benefit from companionship. This may be due to bereavement, ill health, moving to a new area, all manner of reasons. Our service operates across West Suffolk.

We are often asked by our volunteers where our referrals come from and the answer is a wide variety of sources including GPs, Social Prescribers, Community Matrons, Family members to name but a few.

Our Befriending Co-ordinator receives and triages all referrals and the next step is for the Coordinator to go and visit any potential Face to Face befriendees to get to know them (their interests, history, support network etc) and to conduct a Risk Assessment. For the Telephone Befriending this is all done by the Coordinator over the phone.

If the above all goes well the Befriending Coordinator will then look for a befriending match amongst the team of volunteers, ideally someone who lives locally and who they will get on well with; sometimes it may be similar interests, shared experiences or it could be the same sense of humour.

The Befriending Coordinator will then take you the volunteer to meet your new befriender for an introductory meeting. It is a chance for you both to get to know each other and work out a plan for the befriending moving forward with the support of the Coordinator there who already knows both of you.

We suggest a face to face visit roughly once a week for about an hour and for the telephone befriending a weekly phone call for a similar length of time. However this is not set in stone.

We want the befriending to work for everyone and appreciate that people's lives can be unpredictable, its important our able to be open about what is sustainable for them. **To this end we do our best to be flexible and accommodate people's needs. The most important thing is that the befriending is consistent and meaningful**, that the volunteers keep the Coordinator and/or the person they are befriending in the loop so they are never left wondering whether visits/calls are still happening or not.

Once the match is established the Coordinator will keep in regular contact with both parties to ensure all is going well.

Volunteer Role Description

All of our Befriending matches are unique and we love the fact that we have volunteers of all ages and from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some key qualities of our volunteers include:

- A good listener
- Adaptable
- Reliable
- Patient and tactful
- Understanding and sensitive
- Discreet and able to maintain confidentiality
- Caring about the persons rights as an individual and ensure that they and their feelings are respected at all times.

Many of the people we support have led incredible lives and can sometimes feel they have little to offer in their current situation. Befriending well and truly debunks this myth and having an independent friend of their own who listens to their stories, experiences and views can be a huge boost to a person's self esteem. **Our volunteers often share what a positive difference it has made to their lives as well. Befriending is all about celebrating new and inspiring friendships, learning from each other and very often laughing with each other.**

Support for the Person you Befriend

As well as offering companionship the **Befriending Network aims to act as a gateway to other services and support as and when people require this.**

A Befriender provides an easier and more comfortable way of encouraging people to accept a small amount of 'low-key' help, which may delay the need for more intensive and intrusive intervention.

In your volunteer role you may notice that the needs of the person you befriend are changing and that they may need a bit more support with their day to day life. If this is the case please do let the Befriending Coordinator know and they can gently discuss this with the person and offer to make onward referrals or research options if this is appropriate.

Support for our Volunteers

Right from the offset we want you, the volunteer, to know that we are always here to offer support. **Some problems may seem trivial but may form part of a bigger picture.** We don't have the answers to everything but promise to be a sounding board and do what we can. **We don't expect our volunteers to carry the weight of responsibility for the person they visit** so please do always feel free to offload. Of course, we love hearing about the joyful aspects as well. **Please do always contact the Befriending Coordinator about anything, however big or small, we genuinely want to know.**

Guidelines for Befrienders

- It is not advisable to give out your home phone number or address in the early stages of befriending. **The Befriending Coordinator will never give out your number but leave it up to you as and when you feel comfortable doing this.**
- It is important not to let people down by making promises/appointments that you cannot keep.
- **Never** offer advice on treatment or medication. **Never cut nails or attempt any other form of treatment.** This could result in harm to the person you befriend and should only be carried out by an appropriate person.
- Avoid giving direct advice/information on any matter without checking the validity of that information. **It is important that people make their own decision,** where necessary, and with their permission, help them to seek appropriate professional advice.
- **Smoking is strictly prohibited.** It could be that the person you visit is a smoker and invites you to join them in this. But this is the only scenario in which it would be acceptable for our volunteers to smoke within their befriending role. Similarly our

volunteers should never be under the influence of drugs and alcohol when on befriending visits.

- **We cannot offer travel expenses** so will always endeavour to match you with someone who lives within your local area. **It's also worth bearing in mind that ostensibly the Befriending Network is about visiting someone in their own home.** Some of our befriending matches like to go out for coffee and this can be a lovely experience but this is your choice as individuals and cannot be funded by the Befriending Network.

Boundaries & Confidentiality

- **Remember that all information is confidential** and gossip (even when not intentional) shows a failure of trust, which may be detrimental to a person's wellbeing. You should never discuss personal details about the person you befriend with people other than the Coordinator as this could make the person you befriend vulnerable.
- If the person you befriend shares something with you which concerns you please **do refer to our section on Safeguarding** and alert the Coordinator straight away.
- If the person you befriend begins to share views or beliefs that you find unpalatable please remember that **we do not expect you to ever feel uncomfortable in your befriending role.** If you feel you need some support managing these conversations please just have a chat with the Coordinator.
- **Do not accept donations of money or gifts.** Donations should always be for the organisation and not for individuals. Befrienders can lay themselves open to misunderstandings with the person and their families if they accept personal gifts or money. **Do not lend or borrow money and do not get involved with making wills or other financial dealings of the person you befriend.**
- As friendships develop and you become more familiar with the person you befriend, **please just be mindful of the boundaries that are in place to keep you safe. It is not your responsibility to meet all of the person's needs** and feeling guilty could sour the friendship for you. **We don't want our volunteers to feel under pressure to do more and we are always here to discuss this in more detail if it helps.** We would also advise people to stay under the umbrella of the Befriending Network however close friends you become **as you never know when one of you may need a bit of extra support. If in any doubt about this point just have a chat with the Befriending Coordinator.**

Practical Tips

- Do try the bell or knocker at least three times. **TV, radio or poor hearing may mean you are not heard at once.**
- **Allow plenty of time for them to answer the door** and stand back so you may be seen from the window.
- Wait to be invited in and asked to sit down and **do not sit in the person's favourite chair.**
- Speak clearly looking directly at the person and maintain eye contact. **We do have people with hearing issues who can rely on lip reading to a certain extent.**
- **Be guided by what your person wants to talk about**, they may need drawing out to begin with so try and remember things from the last visit that you can pick up on if this helps, e.g. How did your appointment go? What did you have when you went out for lunch last week?
- **Keep in touch**; if you cannot visit, a 'phone conversation would probably be appreciated.
- **Do not go too late or after dark** unless prearranged.
- Try to visit for about an hour, **long visits can overtire some people and short visits can be disappointing, unless otherwise arranged.**
- The intention of the service is for social contact; **do not be tempted to do more.** This service is not intended to collect pensions, to do housework, gardening, home maintenance etc.
- **Do not get involved in disputes with families or neighbours.** We know this can be difficult as it could be that your person likes to offload about family issues but be mindful that **it is often only one side of the story that we hear and we all know that families can very complicated!**

Health and Safety

All homes to be visited by volunteers are risk assessed by the Befriending Coordinator before the befriending match takes place. **However circumstances can change and so if you see anything on your visit that gives you cause for concern e.g. falls hazards such as worn or wrinkled carpets or electrical cables stretched across walkways, other dangers such as the smell of gas or poor lighting then please do alert the Befriending Coordinator straight away.** It could be that these hazards are easily fixed and just require a helping hand or it could be that they indicate bigger issues around the person's capacity to remain safe and independent in their own home. **Either way just discuss with the Coordinator and we can work something out.**

Another aspect of Health and Safety is protecting each others health. Due to Covid, we have all had to change our view on how much social interaction we have when we are unwell. **We just ask for our volunteers to be considerate and use their common sense.** If you know you are feeling under the weather then it is best all round to postpone visits until you are on the mend.

Fire Safety

If you ever do find yourself in a situation where there is a fire in the person's home and you are visiting then **please leave immediately and phone for help**, even if this means leaving the person you befriend in the home. **We do not expect you to compromise your own safety.**

Safeguarding

If you ever have any concerns about the welfare or wellbeing of the person you befriend please do let the Befriending Coordinator know as soon as possible. It could be that your person discloses something to you or that you pick up on something that you see/hear that worries you. **Never sit alone on that information and please share it with us straight away.**

Personal Safety & Lone Working

We would never knowingly put our volunteers into a situation where they are at risk. However accidents can happen and people under stress can be unpredictable.

Never do anything that puts you at risk. **If you have not been trained in manual handling do not attempt to aid your person with their mobility, this could result in injury to both yourself and them.**

Be careful where you place your handbag or coat; ensure that no one is able to trip over them. **If you or the person you are visiting has an accident, even if it is nothing serious, please do just let us know, it all helps us to keep you safe.**

If the person you befriend or another family member etc. does become aggressive in any way, **just try and stay calm and withdraw from the situation as quickly as possible and then let the Coordinator know.** As we are sure you are aware when people feel vulnerable or frightened this can impact on their mood and behaviour and family members in caring roles can also be very stressed which can come out in negative ways sometimes. **However we do not expect you to have to cope with this and do not expect you to stay in a situation where you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.**

Lone working is an aspect of the Befriending Network and this is why we always ask our volunteers for an up to date emergency contact. We do not record specific visits of all of our volunteers but we would never expect you to enter a property where you do not feel

comfortable and we suggest that you always let a family member/friend/neighbour know when you are on a visit just as an extra precaution for yourself.

If at any point you do not feel safe on your befriending visit and are unable to leave safely then please do contact the Coordinator on 01638 608048 say your name and ask for The Red Folder. We can arrange for you to have a mobile phone number to text this to if you feel this would be useful.

This section is not meant to scare you or put you off, it is very unlikely that such a scenario will arise but we just want you to be aware and know what options you have. One tip you may find handy is to only take on a visit what is absolutely necessary in the event of a quick exit, e.g. phone and keys.

Mobility Assistance Guidelines

It is the intention of The Befriending Network to enable people to be as independent as possible. Where mobility is concerned, this means that we must support people in helping themselves as much as possible and therefore people should offer minimal assistance.

Volunteers are not expected to be involved in assisting people with mobility .

It is important that all staff and volunteers ensure their own safety, and the safety of the person they are visiting at all times and not to do anything that may put either themselves or others at risk. This includes assisting people with walking, rising from a chair or sitting down.

Should you wish at any time to take the person you visit out for a ride in your car, you should be aware that this is beyond the Befriending role and so you will not be covered by The Voluntary Networks insurance. It is important that you discuss this with your Coordinator.

What to do in an Emergency

The vast majority of people we visit live alone though some may have carers attending regularly. **In many cases just making a few simple checks can ascertain if there is an emergency situation at hand.**

If you arrive for an arranged visit and the person does not open the door:

- Ring the doorbell more than once as well as knocking/rattling the letterbox to attract the attention of the person you are befriending. You could also then try ringing them on the telephone.
- Check and see if curtains are drawn, lights on, newspapers or milk left outside.

- Check for any unusual smells such as gas.
- See if there is a nearby neighbour you can ask about the persons whereabouts and wellbeing.
- **Ring the Coordinator and let them know the situation. We can then ring that person's emergency contact and if necessary their GP or local hospitals to locate them.**
- **If it becomes apparent that the person is inside the house and seemingly unwell or injured then you must call 999 and ask for help.**

If you discover the person you befriend is unconscious or has collapsed/ fallen:

- **Do not attempt to move them** and if the person cannot get up with minimal help then **you must call 999 and ask for an ambulance.** If they are able to get up but obviously injured or unwell then still call for an ambulance. Try to help the person remain calm, warm and comfortable.
- Ring the Coordinator and let us know what has happened. We can then inform the person's emergency contact.

If the person you befriend is taken ill while you are there:

- **Try to persuade the person that they need to see a doctor and contact their G.P or ring NHS 111.**
- Ring the Coordinator and let us know what has happened. We can then inform the person's emergency contact.

In any of the above situations if you are worried about the health of the person you befriend and you cannot get hold of the Coordinator then please call 999.

If you are one of our Telephone Befrienders and the person you telephone does not answer at the time of a pre-arranged call or you are struggling to get hold over them please let the Coordinator know and we can ring their emergency contact and check their situation.

Social Media

This is now a big part of many of our lives. The Voluntary Network has its own Facebook page where we can advertise our service and recruit volunteers. **However we never post pictures of any of the people within our service and neither should you.**

If the person you befriend asks to be friends with you on social media please discuss this first with the Coordinator before agreeing.

Managing Endings

There is no set time limit on our befriending matches but endings can happen naturally. This may be due to the death of the person you befriend which can be hard to deal with and please know we are always here to talk to and support you with this.

Some of the people we befriend go into long term residential care and if this is local then often volunteers continue to visit especially if a firm friendship has been established but people can also move further away to go into a care/nursing home or to live nearer family members. In these circumstances we are always happy for you to keep in touch via letter or telephone if this is feasible and something you would like to do.

Of course it may be that the friendship has not worked out for some reason or problems have developed with dependency or other issues. **We would always much rather know** if this is the case and we are not here to pass judgement, not all relationships do work out and sometimes it can just be a case of talking things through or maybe rematching. **Always feel free to speak to the Coordinator honestly. We aim to be as transparent as possible and value that in our volunteers as well.**

You may feel that you need a break from being a befriender due to changes or responsibilities in your own life. We know that volunteers cannot stay with us indefinitely and we wouldn't want anyone to feel under pressure to stay. **We want all our volunteers to have a positive experience of the Befriending Network and that includes being able to talk openly about needing to leave or take a break.** A chat with the Coordinator can help us understand where you are at and **we will always support you to take a break from the befriending should you need it, we would much rather that than you feeling as if your only choice is to leave completely.** We will be happy to welcome you back as and when you are ready and will always be interested to know how you are getting on.

Conclusion

We hope you have found this handbook useful and that it remains a helpful tool throughout your Befriending journey. **Do always feel free to call the Coordinator about anything you are not sure or about or would like to share.**

All that remains is for us to say a huge thank you and we hope you get as much joy out of Befriending as we do.