

Practical and Pastoral Response to Befriending

In John 10:10 Jesus says, *'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'*

The Church is already playing a vital role in many communities to address loneliness and social isolation. There is always more that can be done, and Befriending is just one approach that provides a safe and effective way to demonstrate the love of God in our local neighbourhoods. The Church is a family, and in a local corps Befriending offers an approach to include the lonely, vulnerable and isolated.

Befriending at the 'local level'

The key is to see Befriending in the local corps making a difference and attempting to bridge a gap to reach those 'others' who would not normally connect with programmes such as lunch club and over-60s groups.

Befriending has been identified as one of the most effective early interventions in relation to outcomes for people and cost effectiveness for the NHS. It is a unique voluntary relationship which is highly valued by social care services. Befriending provides a distinct type of support which is different from the practical and functional support provided by statutory services or paid workers. The social and emotional support from a trained befriender can often lead to significant and lasting improvements in emotional health and wellbeing, as well as quality of life.

The Older People's Ministries Team do provide detailed one-day training or shorter bespoke courses on Befriending as required. However, we hope the following summary might be helpful as you discuss the possibility of Befriending in your local context.

What are the different types of Befriending?

- Structured programme of telephone calls or conference calls
- Face-to-face home-based visiting
- Practical support, eg escorted services to shops, shopping services, or opportunities to interact with others

Befriending is a ministry which is over and above your normal pastoral corps rhythm. Befriending is about outreaching to the 'unchurched' in the community who would not normally cross the doorstep of our corps and centres.



To clarify: if you are keeping in touch with your older people within the corps, this is not Befriending as such; this is pastoral care. Befriending is where you meet new people who become 'friends' and so are befriended. If this shifts over into someone becoming a member of the corps, then they move to the pastoral care or visitation ministry of your corps/centre.

Is Befriending right for you?

Where there are successful Befriending projects across the UK Territory, they can often engage with other statutory or voluntary services in a local community to support older people. So, when looking at Befriending we would urge you to work with others to support older people experiencing loneliness and isolation – ‘Together we are stronger.’

It is also worth exploring these questions before starting your Befriending ministry:

1. Has God put the lonely, isolated and vulnerable on your heart?
2. Have you had enquiries or requests from people in your community/area?
3. Have other churches/organisations approached you with regards to the need for Befriending?
4. Have you got a nucleus of people who have shared their desire to address the issue of loneliness and isolation in your community?
5. Is there a need in your area?
6. Are there any existing befriending / neighbourly care projects already taking place?

Six Stages to Befriending

Here are six core principles before setting up any Befriending scheme. Contact us about this for more information.

1. Research: as indicated earlier, it is important that you know your city/town/village and the provisions already in place, if any. There are resources that can help clarify the context of loneliness and isolation in your area, such as the Census Data and Loneliness Heat Maps (provided by Age UK: www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/loneliness-research-and-resources/loneliness-maps/).

2. Communication and links with referring agents: building a network of link organisations including local GP surgeries (contact the practice manager), Social Prescribing schemes and/or local social services. This is how you will find the people who need a Befriending service.

3. Recruitment: recruiting the right volunteers and/or staff is paramount to the success and safety of a Befriending project. We advise that you need to seek support from your Community Territorial Engagement Lead (check the Community Services or Volunteering Department sections on OurHub) who can provide you with a copy of the Volunteer

Handbook and any training required for volunteers. You cannot do this alone without at least a Befriending Co-ordinator and a team of Befrienders (either voluntary or paid being required).

4. Safeguarding for all is a key factor: Safe and Sound for Vulnerable Adults information can be found on OurHub. The people you are dealing with are vulnerable adults and an induction including safeguarding training will be required. Continued support from the Befriending Co-ordinator for all Befriending volunteers must be offered along with regular supervision.

5. Mix and match: linking the befriender with the befriended and ensuring a good match. For any relationship to be successful, it needs to be a good match. With a limited number of volunteers this may prove difficult, but every care should be taken to get this right.

6. Monitoring, evaluation and reflection: it is important to record all information and regularly review and evaluate progress and areas for improvement or concern. It is good practice to review risk assessments at least once a year and when changes take place within the scheme, eg new tasks, new volunteers/clients, new venues etc.