

Seton Care Befrienders

Making a difference in people's lives



Introduction

The Seton Care Befrienders project is a response to the gap identified by older people living in Berwickshire (the eastern part of Scottish Borders) and the north part of Northumberland around Berwick-upon-Tweed. They wanted company and friendship and someone to do things with when this was becoming harder.

Seton Care Befrienders began in August 2012. It is funded by Comic Relief and currently is due to run to autumn 2015.

The project's objectives are:

- To help vulnerable older people feel less isolated, and help them to improve their management of personal risk.
- To increase self-confidence, skills, and understanding of the needs of vulnerable older people, including older volunteers.

This report was put together by Anne Connor and Claire McKay from Outside the Box as the last part of the independent evaluation of the Seton Care Befriending project.

A longer report about the development of the project and the impact it had over the first 2 years is available at:

http://otbds.org/assets/uploaded_files/project/SetonCareBefriendingReportfinal-2.pdf

Main points in 2015 evaluation

- The feedback from the people taking part – older people getting support, carers and volunteer befrienders – all reinforced the earlier positive feedback about the outcomes and benefits for people.
- People were very clear about the need for a befriending service and how it filled the gaps between other sources of support, especially in reducing social isolation for older people.
- The ways in which the service is organised had built on suggestions raised in the earlier round of the evaluation. People were very positive about how the service is managed and the support that everyone gets from the Co-ordinator.
- The delivery of the service and the outcomes for people also reflect recognised good practice for befriending support.

We want to thank all the older people, carers and volunteers who contributed to the evaluation.

What the project does

Why the project is needed

Berwickshire is a lovely place but most of it is quite remote. It can get very lonely and you can feel a bit down, especially in the winter.

Many older people live a distance away from our families. For many of us, living close by means the family making a 50 mile round trip for every visit.

It is hard when someone is looking after their relative who has dementia or other health problems.

Some of us have complicated health problems. It's good to focus on what is lovely in our lives instead of worrying about our difficulties or the future.

There is no-one else in my life who is there just because they want to be.



Scale of what we do

This is what has happened so far:

- 62 older people receiving visits
- 27 volunteers
- 30 families where a carer is getting a break
- Over 800 hours of companionship to vulnerable older people
- Over 900 individual visits
- 19 group befriending sessions
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We've driven over 12,000 miles. We've eaten over 1,000 cakes and hundreds of bowls of soup.

How we adapt to people's circumstances

We listen to what people say – what they need and what works well for them.

We started the group sessions because there were 10 people waiting for a befriender in an area where we didn't have many volunteers. They've been a huge success and people want to continue with them.

We've put together a life story book for a lady with dementia.

What do we do when a befriender and the person they visit meet up?

We laugh a lot.

Sometimes we sing. My lady enjoys that.

Sometimes we just stay and chat.

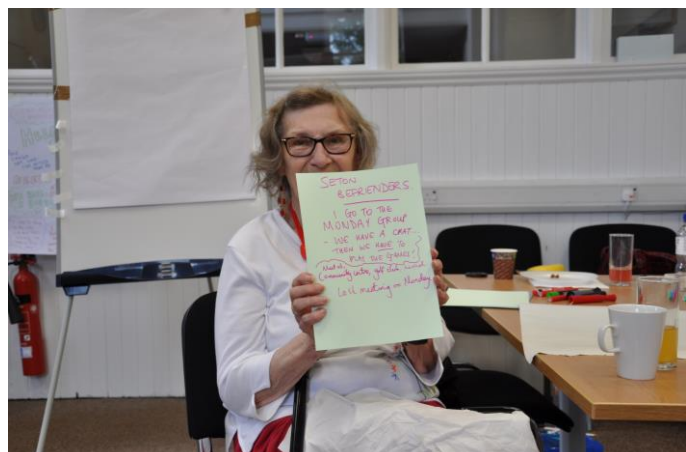
It's whatever the person wants to do.

We sing together at the Monday sessions.

We usually go out – to the shops, to visit a garden or go for coffee.

It can be going down to the village shop or an outing – whatever she wants. We talk about people's interests and their stories, people from different backgrounds who have had such interesting lives.

We talk about what they want to talk about most, whatever is on their mind that day.





A Typical Day Out

We share stories about our lives and families. I now make her recipe for cucumber salad. She's got a beautiful garden and she gives me lots of advice.

Only the cat disapproves, because on every other day he has her company all the time.



What people think of the project

It's such a great idea

We can all be ourselves.

It's a life saver. It's keeping me going so I can keep on caring for my wife.

Those 2 hours are the only time in the week when I don't have to worry about my husband.

What makes it work so well?



Terri's ability to partner up the right people (Terri is the co-ordinator).

It's important that the volunteers are unpaid and choosing to do this.

The way it is organised is right for all of us – people getting support, the family carers and the volunteers.

The training and support for the befrienders is excellent. We feel confident in ourselves and in the project.

It's flexible. It happens at the time that's right for us, not when someone else says it is happening.

It's time we can both enjoy and not rush.

It is people who care and who like people. It works well for both my mum and for me – the visitor is mum's special friend but she also asks me how I'm doing. It's a good break each week for both of us.

What makes a good volunteer befriender?

Taking time to listen, Compassion, Patience

Being a befriender – we all do it because we want to.

At the moment I've got someone coming to visit me, and that has been a great benefit at a time when health problems have led to changes in my life. But I'm determined to improve my mobility and then join befrienders.

I look back at my own parents and know how much they would each have got from a befriender, having someone else to talk to as well as each other.

Our befrienders give us confidence in ourselves because they show us that we matter.

The befriending project is different from other contacts in people's lives

Most people who visit don't have the time. The paid care workers only get 15 minutes or less with each person, so it is all a rush.

It also gives other family members more time when they know someone else is with us during the week.

The family are trying to help with my shopping and the house and doing their own work and family. I don't like to put too much on them. But my befriender does have time and we don't feel rushed.

Benefits for people getting support

I go to the Monday group. We have a chat and then we have to play the games. I haven't laughed so much in years.

I've made many wonderful friends through Befrienders.

It gives people permission to talk about themselves. It makes a change from talking about what services you need and what is wrong with you.

It's opened up my world again.

It isn't just the time we spend together each week. For the next few days I'm remembering what fun it was and then I'm looking forward to next week. I see things in the paper and think, I must remember to tell her about that.

As well as that special friendship it's brought me into contact with people again. We go out and meet people in shops and cafes and see them going about the town. I feel like I belong again.

My own befriender has helped me keep in touch with my old friends.

It keeps me going and living in my own village.

We laugh out loud. I've missed that.

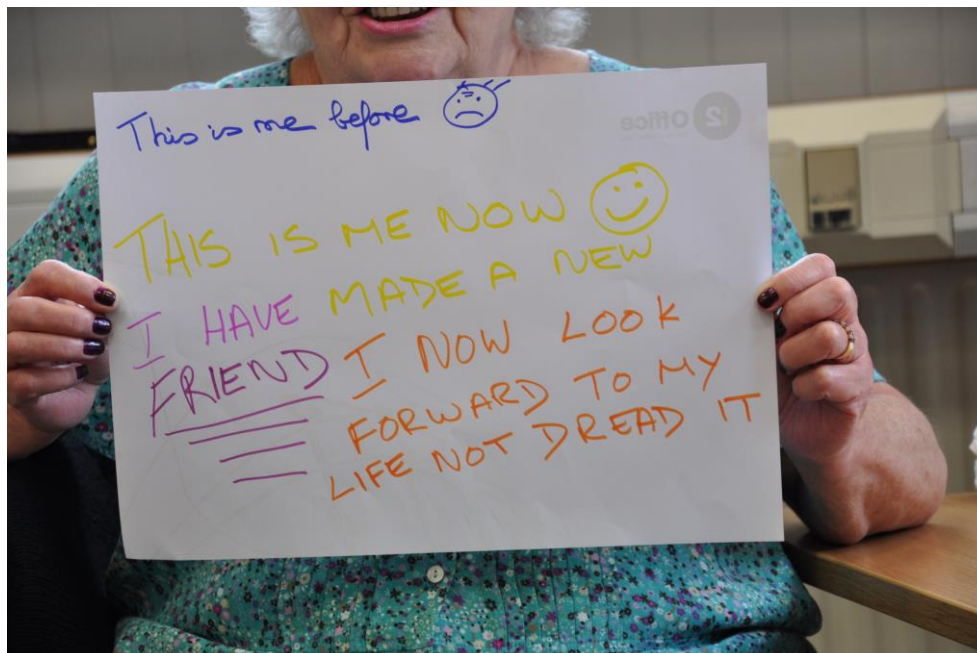
We enjoy spending time with people with dementia. We just go with their flow. It's ok when they keep telling the same story, we don't mind. But we understand that it must be difficult for family hearing it much more often.

We go for walks. She doesn't mind when I'm slow. We stop for a bit and then move on. You don't notice it when you're chatting away. I sleep well those nights.



I love the Monday get togethers. I'll miss all the people when it finishes.

The befrienders make the days happier because they fill the days with laughter.



David:

“Having the time with Simon each week is keeping my mind active. I’ve found someone who I can talk to about my interests. The things I’d lost are back in my life.

We have real, enjoyable conversations and debate.

The time I spend with Simon is a good, happy time. It’s bringing a happy space into my private space.”

Simon:

“I listen to things on the radio and think, that’s something I can talk to Dave about.

I’ve also found a friend who shares my interests too.”

Benefits for volunteers

She is my friend. We both get a lot from it.

It feels the right thing to do.

It gives a structure to my week and gets me out. I missed that after I retired.

It's part of a good quality of life for both of us.

A new experience always brings things to learn about life as well as about other people.

It's brought more people into my life too. I was beginning to get quite isolated, but now I feel I have people around me and I'm part of something bigger.

What would we say to people thinking of becoming a volunteer befriender

Do it. Don't think that not having much time each week is a problem. It only takes 10 minutes to make a difference to someone.

It's just being there to get to know people who want company.

It's a good feeling inside.

You'll meet wonderful people. You get more than you give.



Looking ahead

We want to develop the project and the ways we keep people well and having a good life in their own homes and in their own communities.

Everything must be done to keep the project going.

I wish we had more volunteers. That way we could give more people a friend in their lives.

Summing up – impact that Seton Care Befrienders make

The whole project is based on reciprocity. The friendships are valued by the volunteers as well as by people getting support. People taking part in both roles are contributing and benefitting.

The befriending project is providing support for people to stay in their own homes.

The support from the befrienders and the sorts of activities they do with people are part of preventing further problems and enabling people to keep well.

People are more active when they have a befriender – physically and mentally.

People have less social isolation. They have contact with more people when they go out in addition to spending time with the volunteer. Volunteers also benefit from the wider set of relationships.

Befriending complements what family carers do and what formal services do. It adds to the benefits they bring.

The older people who volunteer are also benefitting through the new relationships and from the skills and confidence they are gaining.



More information



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Outside the Box is a voluntary organisation which provides community development support to small voluntary organisations and to people who use support services and their families.

There is more information on the website: www.otbds.org