

Aberdeen City Befriending Partnership

The Aberdeen City Befriending Partnership scheme was Change Funded to provide an older peoples' Befriending service across Aberdeen City based on a Collaborative Advantage Model, which brought together five third sector organisations to work together as one.

The scheme was offered to people over the age of 55yrs and in its first year of operation received over 500 referrals from over 65 different referral agencies throughout the NHS and Local Authority. It provides a community resource before a person is admitted into hospital and strengthens their community connections in terms of lunch clubs, community activities, access to social transport and the ability to make friends which can be renewed and strengthened on release from hospital, which avoids and can reduce readmission.

"I get to do the things I enjoy again and it is much better when you do it with someone you get on with."

Evaluation of the project highlighted that just an hour or two a week can make a vast difference to a person's well-being, enabling them to stay as well as they can and feeling more independent and in control of life.

Being befriended enables people to build their confidence through increased social contact and encourages them to develop their own social networks. The comments received showed that the service is highly valued by those who have been befriended. They demonstrate that providing a relatively small amount of time to enable people to visit the shops, go out for a walk or just to have a chat can have a greater impact on their well-being.

Responding to a survey;

- People reported feeling more positive, more able to make decisions about their daily life and feeling more in control of life after receiving the service,
- 73 per cent of people rated their ability to take part in activities higher after receiving the service than before,
- 54 per cent reported that they left their home more often,
- 68 per cent reported that they spoke to family and friends more often,
- 77 per cent reported more social outings,
- 48 per cent reported fewer contacts with healthcare professionals

The initiative also enhanced the volunteer experience available in the city, involving over 100 volunteers from five different organisations. Many of those volunteers have formed strong bonds with their 'Befriender' and have acquired health benefits by volunteering themselves, especially if they are recovering from loss themselves such as bereavement, moving to a new city/country and gaining confidence and feeling part of a community.

The project highlighted that 'Befriending' as a concept has huge potential, in reducing isolation, reducing GP workloads, reducing the need for medication

especially after bereavement, and enabling people to become more active in their own community, increasing social capital.

“Chatting about things. I don’t feel pressured to talk about things that make me feel uncomfortable, but I am able to share things with her that bother me. I like having a quiet and friendly person visit me.”

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