**Guidelines for Telephone Befrienders**

Many vulnerable people have been struggling with loneliness and anxiety during these difficult times. If Covid restrictions or longer-term issues have led to enforced isolation, then they will be feeling especially alone and anxious.

The regular Befriending Home Visiting service is currently more limited in the assessment and support we can provide to the people who need us. If a client is in a high-risk category and is shielding, telephone/digital contact or brief chats at the door are the only means of communication we can provide. In some circumstances, we may be able to have some limited and risk assessed, ‘Covid compliant, contact’ in the coming months. However, our practical support services, telephone or virtual support will be our primary means of providing a connection between those who are isolated and lonely over the coming 6-18 months.

The purpose of our **Telephone Pals service** is as follows:-

* To offer at least 40 minutes of phone or digital contact with clients per week. This will be at pre-arranged times and either in one long call or multiple shorter calls.
* To provide emotional support and companionship to the lonely and isolated who are over 55 years of age and live in the Borough of Barnet.
* To help provide access to information that may be hard for those who are isolated and digitally challenged to access.
* To provide volunteers able to help the isolated identify problems and issues that are worrying them and, with the assistance of Age UK Barnet staff, signpost them to the help they need. This may involve getting our Handyperson to change a lightbulb, researching information or talking through how they feel about the options open to them.
* Updating befriendees on safe options to pursue their interests and re- engage with society. (we have specialist volunteers who can assist with Digital Inclusion)
* Encouraging and motivating clients where appropriate to resume social interaction and interests.
* Optional occasional ‘Covid compliant’ face-to-face meetings. These chats in the garden, short walks or whatever the guidelines allow need only be every 1-2 months to strengthen the bonds between befriender and befriendee.

**Thank you for your help during this difficult time.**

Though it may feel strange at first, you can deliver a high quality befriending service and your calls can provide a form of comfort, connection and community during this current crisis and beyond. We hope you find this guide a help in setting up and building your phone relationship.

For ease of reference you the volunteer are referred to as the “Befriender” and the person you are chatting to is the “Befriendee”

During this period please let us know should you or any of your household have Covid symptoms or a Covid diagnosis.

**Skills for Telephone Befriending**

Delivering telephone befriending can be difficult at first, especially if you are more used to face-to-face interactions. Here are some good practice guidelines to help you.

 Discuss with the Befriending Manager what they know about the client’s circumstances, history, interests and what they might like to talk about.

Try to ensure you are relaxed and have a calm setting. Cut down on any distractions, both internal and external, like the radio, TV etc. Allow yourself the time and space to focus on the conversation with your Befriendee.

 Put the service user at ease and allow them time to get comfortable at the start of the call. Don’t be afraid of silences.

 Make sure the time of the call is appropriate for both the client and yourself. Ask them if they are ok to talk now or would they like a call back and agree a time for this.

 Respect and care about your Befriendee. Listening to them, their stories and their feelings is a privilege. If they mention things that make you feel uncomfortable, talk to the Befriending Manager about this.

 Explore the current issues: use open questions, reflecting. Do not interrupt, but give them clarification that you are listening by repeating back to them what they’ve said. Perhaps think about some topics of conversation that could be of interest in advance of the call.

 Allow your Befriendee to set the pace and tell the story in their own way.

 Listen carefully; consider what is being said between the lines.

 At intervals, sum up what your Befriendee is telling you to ensure you have understood them correctly.

 Ask questions, take an interest in what they are saying.

 At the end of each call, make a day and time for the next call.

 Once the call is finished, you may want to make a few notes of your conversation to help you with your next call. Maybe jot down any names they mentioned, eg their son’s name, to help you remember next week.

**During the Covid-19 pandemic, please speak to your Befriendee to check on their welfare:**

 Do they have a supply of food and general household supplies like soap and washing powder? Are they eating well? Do they have enough supply of their regular medication? How are they getting these?

 Do they have neighbours or family checking on them?

 How are they feeling regarding isolation and loneliness during this pandemic?

 Are they happy with you continuing to keep in touch with them in this way?

 Provide them with the numbers for our practical support services, if this is all that is required, and inform the member of staff that connected you to the client. (see end of document)

**Promote having a structure, trying to keep meal times and a sleep pattern.**

* Establish a routine. Suggest some of the following where appropriate:
* Exercise – online You Tube workouts on our website promoting indoor exercises.
* Nature – if they have a garden or outside area, spend time looking after it and relaxing in it. Tending houseplants, flowers etc.
* Entertainment and relaxation – books; jigsaws; tv; music (listening, playing an instrument, singing), write a poem or short story, colouring in, crosswords, baking, painting, make cards, write a letter. Check our website regularly for possible activities and suggestions <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/barnet/>
* Do a focused activity – tidy a wardrobe, paint the hallway, sort through old photo albums, batch cook some of your favourite meals for the freezer.
* Promote turning off the news sometimes; it may lower stress levels to have a break from it.
* If things start to feel overwhelming, talk to a member of staff. The Befriending Manager is available on 07505 0899129 or you can ring another member of staff.

**Covid 19 Information Guidance**

As a befriender you are able to help befriendees access information so they can make informed decisions and, in a non–judgemental way, help them identify and process their options. You are not able to **advise** clients about what actions they **should** take. If they need advice, they need to be referred to our Later Life Planning Team, the local CAB, Social Services, or to their GP. See end for list of useful contacts. Your Befriendee may not have access to the internet or be able to leave their home. You may be their only connection to the community. It may be your role to update them on the pandemic, so please do this responsibly. Let them know the current official NHS Guidance. If it has been risk assessed and agreed you can meet, remind the Befriendee about the need to keep to the current social distancing guidelines. Be aware they may have lost mobility and strength if they have not been out for a while and discuss this with them and the need to make small steps to start.

You should only provide information taken from reliable sources such as Public Health England. Information https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus or NHS https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

In addition, there is a wealth of information on our Website <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/barnet/> or the national website <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/> for fact sheets.

This may need to be broken down into bite-sized chunks. If the client has memory issues, you may need to repeat information on many occasions. Check they have understood the information before moving on. It is important to use appropriate language and pace. If they ask you a question and you don’t know the answer, please admit this. You can offer to look into it and get back to them with the correct information.

**Structuring the conversation: Don’t:**

* Don’t - Reassure the client that everything will be alright, and you can make things better.
* Don’t - Divert the conversation away from what the person is saying
* Don’t - Tell the person what to do
* Don’t - Assume you know everything about the situation
* Don’t - Use Closed/Unhelpful Questions/statements such as: What are you going to do about it” “You’ll be fine, don’t worry**”**
* Do use phrases like:-
	+ “Perhaps you can tell me more about that”
	+ “It might be helpful if you could tell me what happened”

**Here are a few other things to think about when offering telephone befriending:**

* Do recognise your own boundaries and think before you say yes to things. We don’t know how long people might need to self-isolate for, so don’t take on more than you feel you can manage over a potentially long period of time. Keep the Befriending Manager informed of your availability and the client’s needs for ongoing support. Do not feel guilty if we have to transition to another volunteer but try to provide time for us to do this.
* Do remember that the main focus of the relationship is the needs of the other person.
* Don’t give out your telephone number or home address. See below on how to hide your number.
* Do let the client know when you will next be calling them. If they have call-barring this may be especially important. Some clients will only pick up the phone if they hear the caller speaking and recognise their voice or you may have to call twice in quick succession if they struggle to get to the phone. Check when they have carers coming or if they have other commitments.
* Don’t take them to your own home or bring other people to meet them without discussing this with the Befriending Manager.
* Don’t accept gifts other than very small special occasion items and note when this happens. You can send them birthday cards but do not offer gifts that they may feel they should reciprocate.
* Do encourage them to express their appreciation for the service to you and to the organisation by offering a donation or becoming part of a case study story (can be anonymised)
* Do let them know if possible how much you enjoy talking to them.
* Don’t become emotionally over involved, and if you feel the Befriendee is becoming over dependent then let the Befriending Manager know.
* If they have an email address or know how to use social media and you are happy to make contact by a digital platform, do set up a new email address to protect your own. If you need help with this, email Howard Chapman (howard.chapman@ageukbarnet.org.uk).

**Privacy of numbers**

You should ideally never share your personal details, especially your phone number or address.

* In order to hide your number from a landline – dial 141 and then the number
* From an iPhone go into Settings - Phone - Show my Caller ID
* From an Android device – press the vertical 3 dots for a drop down menu and select ‘settings’, select supplementary services, select ‘showing caller ID’, click ‘hide my number.

If a client does obtain your number or email, explain politely that they should leave messages for you on 07505 089129 or befriending@ageukbarnet.org. It is ok to block their number.

**Further Support and Safeguarding Concerns**

If your Befriendee mentions anything to you in a phone call that makes you feel uncomfortable or you feel needs a follow up, make a note and let the appropriate member of staff know by email or phone. Non – urgent issues are to be noted in your fortnightly logs. If the matter is both urgent and potentially very serious and you have not managed to reach a member of staff by phone, then you may contact the emergency services directly. However, you must then let us know, preferably by email, at the first opportunity.

If you lose contact with a Befriendee and are concerned for their welfare, please check the password protected document provided, for details of their emergency contacts, GP, care agency or call service numbers. Always check these first, then the local hospitals before calling the emergency services for a welfare check. When you contact the NHS, social worker or emergency services, you will need to supply the client’s name, address and date of birth. If you are unable to do this, the Befriending Manager will do so.

Do note that if you call the emergency services for a welfare check, they may force entry, so these checks are important. If they are lying injured and unable to summon help they will be very grateful but if their phone is not working or they return from hospital to find their door wrecked and padlocked, it may be quite another matter.

Due to data protection laws, agencies cannot give **you** much information, but you can supply GPs etc. with relevant information if you have the Befriendee’s consent or even without it, if you feel the client is at serious risk. However, try to discuss this with a staff member first unless the client’s life is at immediate and serious risk. If the person came to us in the early stages of the Covid crisis, we may not have all the relevant information on them, so please check and let us know if this is so.

Due to sensory impairment or a lack of access to the internet, a Befriendee may request you make a call or email on their behalf, such as changing a medical appointment. If this happens, do make sure you delete anything containing personal information about them from your devices. If possible, post them a printed copy of any such emails.

**Most relevant Contacts Age UK Barnet**

* **Befriending Manager** Sian Jones: Monday -Thursday 020 8432 1416 or emergency and after hours 07505 089129 email befriending@ageukbarnet,.org.uk
* **Volunteer Manager** Lisa Robbins: 020 8432 1422 mobile 07535 536588

email volunteering@ageukbarnet.org.uk

* **Handyperson and Covid Practical Support** coordinator for shopping, prescription collection and meal delivery: 020 8150 0963 or

email handyperson@ageukbarnet.org.uk

* **Reception:** 020 8203 5040 email info@ageukbarnet.org.uk
* **Digital Inclusion:** Howard Chapman 020 8432 1415 or email howard.chapman@ageukbarnet.org.uk
* **Later Life Planning Service:** 0208 432 1417 or email laterlifeplanning@ageukbarnet.org.uk

**Other useful contacts**

* **NHS Direct:** 111
* **Older Adults Social Services Duty Officer** can also be very helpful: 020 8359 5000 or 020 8359 2000 out of hours
* For serious mental health crisis: **Barnet Wellbeing Service** on **03333 449 088** or **The Samaritans** on **116 123**
* **National Helpline run by Age UK:** 0800 169 6565
* **Benefit Enquiry Line**: 0800 220 674; Minicom 028 9031 1092
* If the client has concerns about their housing, try the Elderly Accommodation Council - website ([www.eac.org.uk](http://www.eac.org.uk)) and Advice Line on 020 7820 1343 - or Barnet Homes (0800 389 5225). Outreach Barnet take self-referrals from those who need practical assistance with all that is involved with moving: [www.outreachbarnet.org.uk/referrals](http://www.outreachbarnet.org.uk/referrals). We can also supply lists of local supported living facilities
* **MIND in Barnet offer an Advocacy Service** to assistwith accessing services where there are problems. Telephone: 020 8906 7500 email: advocacy@mindinbarnet.org.uk. They also offer counselling services.
* **Pets:** Try Cinnamon Trust 01736 757 900 or the National Animal Welfare Trust 020 8950 017
* **Royal Free Hospital:** [**020 7794 0500**](https://www.google.com/search?q=royal+free+hospital+london&oq=royal+free+hospital+&aqs=chrome.2.69i57j0l7.6111j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)
* **Barnet General Hospital:** [**020 8216 4600**](https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALeKk03sO6G08sp6fQ3jd3J8BZhKULPjMw%3A1591972952705&ei=WJTjXrTSKs6AhbIP08CD6A0&q=barnet+general+hospital&oq=barnet+generla+&gs_lcp=CgZwc3ktYWIQARgAMgQIABANMgQIABANMgQIABANMgQIABANMgQIABANMgQIABANMgQIABANMgQIABANMgQIABANMgQIABANOgcIIxDqAhAnOgQIIxAnOgQIABBDOgcIABCxAxBDOgcIABCDARBDOgUIABCDAToFCAAQsQM6BQgAEJECOgYIABAKEEM6BwgAEBQQhwI6CggAELEDEBQQhwI6AggAUMzJAViu4QFgsfEBaAFwAHgAgAGMAYgBkguSAQM5LjaYAQCgAQGqAQdnd3Mtd2l6sAEK&sclient=psy-ab)
* **Finchley Memorial:** [**020 8349 7500**](https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALeKk00BieKnG_O3LFcSRGoH_NXr3m8aug%3A1591972985354&ei=eZTjXvijFcvdgQacu6zYDQ&q=finchley+memorial+hospital+london&oq=finchely+memorial+&gs_lcp=CgZwc3ktYWIQARgBMgQIABBDMgQIABBDMgQIABAKMgQIABAKMgQIABBDMgQIABAKMgQIABAKMgQIABAKMgQIABAKMgQIABAKOgQIIxAnOgcIABCDARBDOgUIABCxAzoFCAAQgwE6AggAOgUIABCRAjoHCAAQsQMQQzoHCCMQsQIQJ1CgzAJYxO0CYLj-AmgAcAB4AIABcIgB0QuSAQQxNS4zmAEAoAEBqgEHZ3dzLXdpeg&sclient=psy-ab)

**More information available on;**

[**https://www.ageuk.org.uk/barnet/activities-and-events/social-isolation-links-pagee/**](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/barnet/activities-and-events/social-isolation-links-pagee/)

**or**

[**https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/**](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/)