

Volunteer role Description, Telephone Befriending



Thank you for signing up to volunteer with AgeUK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove!

The community response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been incredible, so thank you for being a part of this.

The role of 'Telephone Befriending' is an important one - it will help improve the wellbeing of residents who have been isolated for some time now and will enable them to feel safe, knowing that someone is checking in on them regularly.

We've put together this brief role description and ask that you read it carefully.

General

Firstly, we are hugely grateful for you offering your time to volunteer. Even if you help just one person, this will make a difference to them.

This role is about having a conversation and being a listening ear. Ultimately this is a befriending role. They may be experiencing a range of emotions that they may want to talk about but as you will read later on, please be very aware of your own boundaries and remember to remain professional at all times.

Role requirements

This role requires:

- Good communication
- Good listening skills
- Friendly, comforting and approachable manner
- Patience, caring and non-judgemental approach
- Respect for difference
- Reliability

The task

- Phone the client on a regular basis, this may be weekly, fortnightly or monthly dependant on the clients needs. Please let us know if you can no longer do this.
- Let us know straight away if you have any concerns or if the client has any needs that Age UK West Sussex, Brighton and Hove (AUKWSBH) can deal with.

Conversation Guidelines

The call should not last for more than 30 minutes.

Beginnings:

1. Introduce yourself
2. Explain to the client the Age UK WSBH confidentiality agreement that you have agreed to.
3. Informally let them know how long you have time to speak for today to set the time limits of your call, "I'm looking forward to a 30 minute call with you today, is now a good time?"
4. How are you today? What did you have for lunch today?

General conversation:

- Keep things light-hearted
- Avoid topics like politics, religion or money

- Don't try to solve problems, we are not counsellors or medically trained. Do let us know if there are any concerns, speak to your line manager.

Endings:

- Remind the person a few minutes before the call is over that you shall have to go in 2/5 minutes
- Remind them when you are next going to call
- If they have raised a problem - reassure them that you will pass this on and let them know that they can expect to hear from someone within 2/3 working days

Confidentiality

We expect you to maintain confidentiality - please don't talk about the client's personal details to anyone, including your partner or friends. The only exception to breaking confidentiality is safeguarding and you should then only discuss the concerns with your line manager. If you are talking about a client in a group debrief session, please only discuss the case details that are relevant to the session and ensure you anonymise .

Safeguarding

You may come across clients who are at risk of abuse, neglect or harm. We need to ensure these cases are followed up and you can help us to do this. It doesn't matter if you cannot provide all of the information required or if you are unsure about what kinds of potential harm you are reporting.

These risks might include: scamming, being physically harmed, medication error, indications of being a victim of crime, significantly mentally confused, or at risk of harming themselves.

Even if someone tells you something in confidence, you must say that you are now worried about them and have a duty to let someone else know.

Please remember that in an emergency situation, where there is immediate risk of serious harm to a person or property call 999.

Boundaries

Boundaries are important to maintain safe relationships for both parties.

It is really important not to give advice, ask invasive or leading questions or probe into areas that may leave the person feeling more unsafe or vulnerable at the end of the call. This will make sure that you are also safe and not taking on any emotional stresses that will leave you feeling vulnerable or anxious and/or worried too.

Someone may have a practical or emotional difficulty that they need help with and you can pass that on. It is natural to want to help someone, and the right services have the qualified social workers, therapists, medical professionals or financial advisers that are able to do this. This is their role and they have the right information, support and supervision in their organisations to do this safely.

When boundaries are not maintained you can be left feeling taken advantage of, the recipient can ask/expect unrealistic things from you and ultimately it can leave people feeling as though they are not getting what they need from the volunteer role or from the service. If you feel that someone is asking for or discussing something that you are not comfortable with, then talk to us and we can support you with how to work this through.

Do

- Agree and keep to 'set days' and times to call.
- Listen and let the person talk - they are likely to have no-one else to chat to.
- Respect the client as an individual.
- Raise any concerns about the client to AUKWSBH via email or phone

Please do not

- Give your personal contact ie: phone, address
- Discuss your own family/friends
- Visit the client at their home - you must not go into their home or sit with them outside, even if social distancing. This is a phone relationship only.
- Discuss money or take any form of payment for your calls.
- Become involved in family disputes or personal affairs.
- Talk about religion or political opinions.

Further guidelines on communication

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, people are experiencing many emotions and could be feeling alone, hopeless, angry and frustrated. It is important to acknowledge this but also remain caring and reassuring:

1. Acknowledge - "I'm hearing how hard this is for you."
2. Empathise - "I'm really sorry to hear this, that sounds challenging for you."
3. Move the conversation on - "You were telling me about x earlier, tell me more about that."

Mental Health guidance

It is very likely that many people you see or speak to will be anxious or worried about the current situation and the future. In these circumstances anxiety and worry is normal and giving some simple reassurance is helpful. You can say things like:

"It is a worrying time" or "many people are feeling like you are". If you are also worried or finding it hard you can share this. "I do understand, I am finding it difficult too."

Often responding as another human in the way you would to a friend or family member is the most helpful thing you can do. There are simple things people can do to manage anxiety about what is happening now which you could share. Eating and sleeping well, trying to be active, trying to do positive activities and connect with others by phone or internet will all help. Also, some people find avoiding or limiting watching the news helpful.

However, you may see or speak to some people who are struggling with their mental health in a more significant way. Where anxiety or feeling worried or other mental health difficulties are really impacting on their life and ability to cope. They may tell you that they have mental health problems or that they are not coping well. Alternatively, you may notice or feel this when you speak to or see them.

Things to look out for are if people tell you that they are not sleeping or their sleep is very disturbed, if people tell you they are finding it difficult to eat or concentrate. If they have stopped being able to do the normal day to day things which they usually enjoy and which would normally help them to cope with life. Where people are struggling with their mental health help is available and you can offer to connect the person to this help:

“It sounds like you are finding it hard at the moment. If you would like I can get someone from a local mental health charity, Mind, to ring you. You can talk to them about how you are feeling and they will be able to explore with you what could help?”

Some people may not want to get help and will decline this offer. If you are still concerned or unsure you can email us at:

and mark as urgent- we will return your call quickly.

Very occasionally you may speak to or see someone who you are really concerned about. This could be where someone is telling you that they can't manage or cope at all or where you feel their well-being and or safety is seriously being affected by their mental health. In these circumstances you must email us on: information@ageukwsbh.org.uk or call 01903 731800

Supporting you - we're here for you too!

- Was it a heavy conversation?
- Is the client asking for something you cannot do?
- Is the client telling you something that is putting them in harm's way?
- Is the client asking for you to call them more often or via video?

- Are you finding it difficult to end the phone call with your client?
- Is the client talking about something that is difficult or uncomfortable for you?
- Has the client said something that you feel should be challenged? For example, something that is racist, sexist or homophobic?

Debriefing is important and we want you to know that we are here to talk to should you have any concerns or worries.