Guidance notes for volunteers befriending clients in their homes

Introduction
These are additional guidance notes applicable for volunteers who visit clients in their own homes. Please read them carefully, along with the general Volunteer Induction Handbook and notes. Do ask your supervisor if you have any additional questions or are unclear about any of the issues raised.

The Befriending Service
Age UK Barnet’s Befriending Service aims to reach older people who may experience loneliness or are living in circumstances that cause isolation. This may result in physical or mental deterioration which could put the older person at risk. (See Info Sheet and Service Criteria for more details).

Objectives
A volunteer will primarily provide companionship and mental stimulation to enhance the wellbeing of the client. Volunteers are not there to replace professional carers and currently only provide occasional assistance with tasks, such as shopping, pension collecting or transport within the context of an ongoing relationship and by mutual agreement.

Boundaries
In the initial meeting between you, the client and your supervisor we will attempt to lay down how often you will visit the client, what you will do together, how you will communicate and what you will be unable to do. As the relationship matures or circumstances change, things will inevitably evolve but do keep your supervisor informed of any changes and do not feel pressured to do more or be closer to the client than you feel comfortable with. It is important that both you and the client are clear about each other’s boundaries. Lack of clarity is more likely to cause problems than a client having unmet needs. You are not there to meet all their needs and feeling guilty could sour the relationship for you. If the client’s mental and physical health varies, it is important that you set your boundaries in line with the worst case scenario.

Confidentiality
You must not disclose any information about the user that you are visiting to anyone other than designated Age UK Barnet staff or volunteers. If a client asks you to keep something in confidence between yourselves, please insist that anything they tell you which may cause you concern will have to be reported to your Age UK Barnet supervisor and they have signed a form agreeing to this. In this way, you will be protected from the total responsibility and burden of any disclosure.
Mutual respect

Age UK Barnet does not tolerate discrimination in any form with regards to race, gender, religion, age etc. We do not expect either clients or volunteers to tolerate this. Please report any concerns to Age UK Barnet. Some isolated elderly people may be unaware of politically correct language and on occasions not mean to or realise they are giving offence. Again, do please inform your supervisor and they will diplomatically enlighten the client.

Gifts

We ask that volunteers do not personally accept any gifts or donations if offered to them by clients. A cup of tea or a small token on a special occasion may be accepted if refusal will cause offence, but the line between a gift and a payment must never be crossed. If you have any doubts, please discuss them with your supervisor. Gifts and donations to Age UK Barnet are gladly accepted but need to be recorded and officially acknowledged.

Telephone numbers

Volunteers must never give out their home, work or mobile telephone numbers to clients. If they need to contact you, this should be done through the office. You, however, will be given the client’s phone number. If phoning them yourself, please ensure you dial 141 prior to the number to withhold your number.

Safety

If at any time you do not feel safe or you feel uncomfortable in a client’s home, you should leave immediately and contact your supervisor or a senior Age UK Barnet staff member. Never ignore your gut instincts or place yourself in danger. Please see separate guidance on health and safety for home visits. Always carry the page of client notes with you when you visit them in case you need to refer to them in an emergency.

Tasks

Volunteers should never perform tasks that they do not feel comfortable with. Never do anything, such as electrical repairs, that require professional training and insurance cover. Never do anything that could put you at risk of physical injury. You are primarily there to provide companionship and a listening ear. You will be offered training in risk assessment and signposting, but the most important thing is to be able to listen, observe and articulate your client’s issues to someone who can help them. If you are unsure, always ask your Age UK Barnet supervisor, who can work with you to provide to you and your client with the necessary information or the help of other volunteers trained in the specific area of need.

Communication

Volunteers should ensure that if they make an appointment to visit a client they keep it or contact the person to make an alternative arrangement as soon as possible. You will be required to complete and return a brief monthly report on your activities to the Befriending coordinator.

Visits

When Age UK Barnet places a volunteer within a client’s home we have a responsibility to ensure both you and the person you are visiting are safe and well.
If you are unable to visit clients during office hours (Monday-Friday 9:00-5:00) and an emergency arises, please ring 07505 089 129 and Age UK Barnet staff will deal with it.

What is an emergency situation?

An emergency is when you feel that the health and safety of the person you support is under immediate threat and the situation demands swift and appropriate action. Please keep the client’s personal details with you when you visit and follow the Emergency Procedure Guidelines as closely as you can.

Emergency Procedure Guidelines

Introduction

We hope very much that you will not encounter an emergency and, if you do, we hope that Age UK Barnet staff can deal with it. They will be very dependent on you, the person on the spot, for as much accurate detail as possible. Do read and follow the emergency procedures detailed below. They are there to give you confidence and the ability to act in a crisis along with Age UK Barnet and the emergency services. These documents are not intended to cause alarm but will help ensure the safety of our clients and volunteers.

What to do if you make an arranged visit and the person does not answer the door

In the main, the clients you visit live alone. In the majority of cases there is no emergency situation, but by making these few simple checks you could save a person’s life should they be injured and at home alone:

1. Ring the doorbell more than once and in case it is not working also knock loudly and rattle the letterbox to attract the attention of the person you are visiting.
2. Look through the letterbox (or a window if on the ground floor) and shout to attract the attention of the person you are visiting. Try the rear entrance if they have one.
3. Telephone the person from a mobile or call box and allow the telephone to ring for a long time.
4. Are the curtains drawn?
5. Are there any lights on in the home?
6. Are there newspapers in the letterbox or milk left outside?
7. Listen for any noise.
8. Check for any unusual smells, such as gas.
9. Telephone or visit neighbours to find out about the wellbeing or whereabouts of the person concerned. When did they last see them?
10. Ring the office (or mobile 07505 089 129 if evenings, Wednesday/ Thursday or Weekends) and report the situation, giving details of the checks you have made. If you do not have a mobile phone, please ring from the nearest payphone. The member of staff contacted will make sure the person is located by phoning their home again, contacting their next of kin and, if necessary, the hospitals to locate them. If we are unable to locate the person, we will make a decision as to whether we call the Police to force entry into the person’s home.
11. Check your list of contacts, GP’s surgery, meals-on-wheels, Care Line, etc., and see if any of them can shed light on the situation, but try not to alarm anyone unnecessarily. Their doctor should know if they have been admitted to hospital. **Barnet Assist if they have a panic button may help. Their number is 020 8359 4841 or 020 8359 2000 for out of hours.** Try to keep your clients emergency contact details with you whenever you visit.

12. If this situation occurs outside office hours and a staff member is unable to do so, please telephone the London Borough of Barnet Social Services out of hours emergency number **020 8359 2000.** Inform them that you consider the person to be at risk, give your name, tell them that you are a volunteer visitor and give them an Age UK Barnet contact number and request the out of hours service to report their findings to Age UK Barnet.

13. The local Police are also very experienced and very good at handling these situations and giving advice. They can be contacted via the switchboard on **0300 123 1212 (07:00am to 22:00pm daily).** However, if they force entry unnecessarily and cause damage, the client will have to pay for the repairs; hence why the above procedures are important.

**What to do if the person has fallen on the floor:**

1. Do not attempt to lift the person.

2. If the person cannot get up with minimal help, you must call an ambulance:
   - Dial 999.
   - Ask for the Ambulance Service.
   - Give the name, full postal address and telephone number of the person who has fallen. You may be asked to give accurate and specific information to help the ambulance crew find the address swiftly e.g. “on the corner of King Street and Church Lane, a brown door with an entry phone.”
   - Inform the Emergency Services of any concerns you now have about the person e.g. “he/she has osteoporosis” or “he/she is breathing with difficulty” or “he/she seems to be confused”.

3. Ensure that the person is warm and comfortable, cover with a blanket and do not attempt to move him/her.

4. Loosen any tight clothing and make sure that their breathing is unobstructed.

5. Stay with the person and talk reassuringly to him/her while waiting for the ambulance to arrive or arrange for someone else the person trusts to do so if you have to leave.

6. Ensure that the ambulance driver is given as much information as possible about their health and medication, especially heart conditions, diabetes, etc.

7. You do not have to accompany the person to hospital if you do not wish to do so. The person may wish you to contact a neighbour or next-of-kin and make arrangements for pets, cancelled meals, etc.

8. Immediately inform the Age UK Barnet office that the person has had a fall, tell us everything that happened and any requests as per point 7 above.
What to do if the person is unconscious:

- As above, but they will be more dependent on you to inform the ambulance driver of their general medical condition, their doctor and any medication they take. Ring the office for more information if necessary or give the ambulance staff the mobile number if we are closed.
- The next of kin and any supporting friends or neighbours should be informed if they go into hospital. The hospital should inform meals-on-wheels and carers but they may need to know from you what services they have.

What to do if the person is taken ill:

1. Telephone the person’s GP and, if unavailable, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.
2. If the person is acutely ill call an ambulance immediately:-

   - Dial 999.
   - Ask for the Ambulance Service.
   - Proceed as above.

What to do if there is a gas leak?:

- Telephone Transco Gas 24-hour emergency number 0800 111 999.
- Text phone 0800 371 787 and staff will talk you through the emergency procedure.

Water:

- Thames Water 24-hour leakline number to call is 0800 714 614
- Three Valleys Water Leaks 24-hour emergency number to call is 0800 376 5325, Sewage and Drains 08459 200 800.

Electricity:

- Emergency number to report loss of supply is 0800 0280 247.
General guidelines on Health and Safety for home visits by staff and volunteers

Introduction
All premises to be visited by Age UK Barnet volunteers are risk assessed by a trained member of staff of Age UK Barnet or a partner organisation. However, circumstances can change. Staff and volunteers undertaking home visits should comply with these guidelines wherever appropriate. Age UK Barnet wishes to support people who are elderly and support them to live full and independent lives. Some may become vulnerable due to isolation, illness or disability and not be able to always maintain their homes to ensure a safe environment for themselves and for other people. You can help prevent accidents in each home you visit by discussing the areas of risk with your supervisor and the client so that appropriate action may be taken to reduce the risk to health and safety. These guidelines highlight the main points of which to be aware. During your visit, should you encounter any situation or equipment which seems unsafe, talk to your client about it and report immediately to Age UK Barnet.

You will be supplied with a risk assessment tool kit and training. We would like you to look through this every few months and to return the forms to Age UK Barnet annually or whenever significant changes have taken place. This kit contains two forms. The first deals with the client’s home safety and the second is more general and designed to point out issues that the client may need help to resolve, usually by signposting to other services. One of the benefits to isolated visitors of having a regular visitor is that they can be kept informed of all the means to live their lives more safely, independently and enjoyably. Do let them know they can turn to us for information.

Electricity
- Electric flexes, plugs and sockets should be in a good state of repair.
- Power points should not be overloaded with several appliances plugged into the same point.
- Flexes should not trail across hot or wet surfaces.
- Portable mains operated appliances should not ever be used in the bathroom.
- Electrical appliances, plugs and flexes should not ever be used with wet hands.
- Electric kettles and steam irons should be unplugged before pouring from them or filling them.

Do not carry out any electrical repairs yourself.
Do not replace fuses.
Do not rewire plugs.
If you have any doubts about any equipment or item, do not use it.

Gas
If you smell gas in a house and if you detect or suspect a gas leak:
1. ensure that all naked flames are extinguished and do not turn on or off any light switches;
2. open all doors and turn off all gas taps; and
3. contact Transco Gas 24 hour emergency service 0800 111 999 and report the gas leak.

Fire
If a fire should occur whilst you are with a client, the following procedure applies:-

1. Do not put yourself at risk;
2. Remove yourself and client to a place of safety;
3. Dial 999 and ask for the Fire Service;
4. Try and check that the client has a smoke detector that works and inform Age UK Barnet if they do not. In order to prevent fires, Age UK Barnet encourages all elderly people to take advantage of the Free Home Fire Safety Check, whereby a member of the London Fire Brigade will install smoke detectors with 10 year batteries in a person’s home. The number to book an appointment is 0800 028 4428.

Cooking
• If a person becomes unable to cook for themselves, please inform Age UK Barnet.
• Many fires start in the kitchen, and people who find it hard to look after themselves can easily be scalded or burned.
• If you are asked to put meals in an oven, please check pan handles are kept clear of lighted burners or hotplates.
• Tea towels should not be placed or kept over a cooker.

Heating
• If a person seems unable to heat their home adequately, please inform Age UK Barnet or put them in touch with the Warm Front Team on 0800 512 012. You could also look through the relevant pages of the Help Yourself Guide with the client if that is appropriate.
• All fires and heaters must be adequately guarded.
• Clothing should not be dried over an open bar heater or near a flame.
• Heated rooms should be kept ventilated but free of draughts.
• There should be no smell of gas.
• Gas taps/knobs should not be loose and gas connections should be in good repair.
• Portable heaters should be kept well clear of furniture and not placed where people can trip over them.
• Oil heaters should not give off smoke or smells.
• Paraffin and bottled gas should be stored in their proper containers.

Living and bedroom arrangements
• Beds and chairs should not be too low or high for comfort and ease of use.
• The arrangement of furniture should allow for freedom of movement.
• Window catches should work properly.
• Mirrors should not be located over the fireplaces.
• Cigarettes and matches should be stubbed out in deep ashtrays.
• The client should understand the dangers of smoking in bed.
• A proper bedside light or a torch should be kept by the bed, discouraging the use of candles and nightlights.
• It is good practice for disabled people to have an additional phone beside their beds.
• Hot water bottles should be new and in good repair.

Safe movement
• Being able to move about the home in safety is vital.
• Doorways, halls, passages, stairs and landings should be well lit and free of clutter.
• Doors should open and close easily.
• Floors, stairs, steps and outside paths should not be damaged, uneven or slippery.
• Carpets, rugs, mats and linoleum should not be worn, torn or wrinkled.
• Rugs and mats should not be placed over polished floors where they pose a risk of slipping or tripping.
• Stairs should have firmly fitted handrails.
• All areas should be free of trailing flexes and cables.
• Handrails and rubber mats should be used in the bathroom as appropriate.
• Anything spilled on the floor should be cleared up at once.

Financial or other concerns
• If the client has any concerns regarding any issues affecting their daily lives, do ring your supervisor, who will either advise you on how to sign post them appropriately or deal with the client directly.
• Some useful numbers for clients who can seek help with only minimal assistance are:-
  - National Helpline run by Age UK: 0800 169 6565
  - Benefit Enquiry Line: 0800 220 674
  - The Local Pension Service can also do home visits, as can the local CAB or Advice Centre
  - If the client’s concerns are re their housing, try the Elderly Accommodation Council website (www.eac.org.uk) and Advice Line on 020 7820 1343, which are very helpful or Barnet Homes (0800 389 5225)
  - The Older Adults Social Services Duty Officer can also be very helpful 020 8350 5000 or 020 8359 2000 out of hours
  - Independent Living Advisory Service 020 8205 9976
  - Pets - Try Cinnamon Trust 01736 757 900 or the National Animal Welfare Trust 020 8950 0177