



# **Befriending – the way ahead: a review of befriending practice and resources**

## **A Summary**

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### Background to the review

As a Cabinet Office funded national strategic body, the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) offers support to mentoring and befriending practitioners and organisations in England. This support is provided through a range of resources and information, including written materials and a web site, and networking and training events.

The MBF increasingly influences the standards and quality of mentoring and befriending through applying and developing its Approved Provider Standard (APS). The process required to achieve APS encourages reflective practice and a standards-driven cycle of continuous quality improvement.

Historically, the MBF has established a reputation for excellence in supporting and developing the provision of mentoring. This has been widened in recent years to include the provision of befriending.

Mentoring and befriending are seen as representing different parts of the same mentoring-befriending support spectrum and many aspects of mentoring and befriending are considered complementary or interchangeable.

The MBF currently wishes to ensure that its resources are as credible to befriending as mentoring and relevant across the entire mentoring-befriending support spectrum.

#### **Aims**

- The MBF commissioned an independent consultancy project to investigate the relevance of its resources and training activities to befriending as opposed to mentoring, and to suggest how current and potential future MBF training activities and resources can contribute to effective developments in befriending practice.
- To make comparison of materials in this field from other organisations that would be suitable for befriending organisations.

In exploring these aspects with befriending services and related agencies, quantitative information about current befriending practice and attitudes to future service provision was obtained.

The services studied for this project were self-selecting by their use of the term 'befriending' to describe their activities and/or purpose. To allow for comparison between services, the befriending-mentoring spectrum developed by BNS (Befriending Network Scotland, 2003) was used to develop a four-point scale:

**COMPANIONSHIP/BEFRIENDING:** where the primary objective is to form trusting relationships over time usually in order to reduce isolation. Other outcomes are incidental.

**BEFRIENDING:** where the primary objective is to provide informal social support with stated objectives e.g. increasing involvement in community activities.

BEFRIENDING/MENTORING: where the volunteer provides a supportive relationship to achieve objectives discussed and reviewed between the project, volunteer and client

MENTORING: where the role of the volunteer is to work with the client to meet objectives that are agreed at the start of the relationship. A social relationship if achieved is incidental.

When asked to place their activities on this scale, the befriending services interviewed gave varying responses but all matched to a point from 1 to 3. Whilst still clearly involved in befriending, the variations in response related to variations in the focus on achieving objectives other than relationship forming.

*Working with teenagers can seem more like mentoring, but the key is the relationship*

*With our client group it is easy to draw volunteers away from task-oriented, mentoring-type relationships, towards a befriending based on relationship*

### **Clarifying the terminology – the language of befriending**

The befriending services sampled generally provide support for volunteers and paid staff which is labelled as support and supervision.

Some befriending services value the soft, less quantifiable and more qualitatively evaluated, nature of the support they provide.

### **Clarifying the terminology – supporting the case for befriending**

MBF would also benefit from clarifying terminology when marketing befriending and mentoring as making a difference. It is also important because of the high profile and availability of befriending opportunities in volunteering.

There is a gap which MBF is uniquely placed to fill in making materials available which identify the value and benefits of befriending (and mentoring) to the public, potential volunteers, and to those who advise on volunteering opportunities.

The diversity and complexity of befriending provision makes the activity difficult to define.

To add to the complexity and ambiguity, some services juxtapose terms and the provision of mentoring and befriending;

Some services avoid the term befriending.

### **MBF as a champion of befriending**

In testing perceptions of MBF as a support for organisations, it was clear from responses that befriending services relate to MBF as a national support agency for their activities.

Differences between mentoring and befriending are regarded as differences in emphasis between relationship building, goals and timescales.

## Befriending – the way ahead

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There was widespread agreement with MBF's contention that befriending and mentoring both involve the development of one-to-one relationships based upon **trust, confidentiality** and **mutual involvement**.

The befriending services sampled identified many common issues with mentoring services, such as generic training resources and volunteer management.

An increased profile for befriending was not seen by mentoring services as a threat to or diversion from MBF's support for mentoring service.

All the service providers – the practitioners - sampled, MBF members and non-members, expressed a ..need for a national body to make the case for befriending.

### **Timescale for change**

All the befriending services sampled perceived that mentoring has a higher public profile and understanding than befriending and called for MBF to raise awareness of the values and benefits of befriending through awareness raising and education.

Through its promotion of mentoring, MBF has shown it has the ability to raise public awareness but this has been over an extended period of time.

### **Making the case – growing the evidence base**

Reviewing the evidence base from over 20 service evaluations on the effectiveness of befriending in achieving service objectives and adding value to the lives of both befriendees and befrienders, the case appears to be made to support the efficacy of befriending.

The raising of awareness of the value and benefits of befriending as a support intervention means producing a body of evidence to support the case.

### **A picture of befriending**

To provide a flavour of the diversity of befriending services, three outlines of sampled services are included in the full report, one is outlined below. Each service works with a different client group, a different profile of volunteers, and different management structures yet each is confident that they offer befriending and clear that they share common interests with other befriending services.

Outline A: This non-member service operates a mix of face-to-face and telephone befriending in a predominantly rural area and is a partnership of three providers, mostly funded by service level agreements and local trusts. There are 42 active relationships with older and socially isolated people.

The main activity is seen as providing experiences that would not normally be available and the main outcome as decreasing psychological distress.

The service anticipates joining the MBF, specifically to work towards achieving APS. The service manager would appreciate the MBF offering leadership and development training. She has accessed this at her own cost previously through Business Link.

The service manager feels that a big barrier to progress has been the Trustees' lack of understanding of the need to resource for quality. The MBF can support her at a strategic level by validating the need for investment in standards so that the service is safe, ethical, and attractive to funders and referrers.

The majority of service managers and co-ordinators interviewed related all aspects of the service back to the root provision of befriending.

### **Volunteer issues**

Many services consider themselves client/befriender-led and concern themselves first with issues raised in befriending relationships and how to approach these.

There is a commonality to mentoring and befriending of many of the issues of concern expressed by the sampled services.

Befriending volunteers were more likely to be motivated by a personal experience and to welcome forming a relationship as much as achieving an outcome.

### **Recruitment**

With one exception; *Don't have a problem recruiting – "we're 'picky'"* the sampled services were experiencing increasing difficulties in attracting recruits. This was felt to arise from a combination of increasing competition in the sector and changing expectations from potential volunteers.

All sampled services maintained high standards in recruitment and chose to delay initial training until sufficient high calibre participants emerged.

### **Retention**

Retention was not seen as a major problem, except that standards were sometimes compromised to retain active and effective volunteers.

Long-standing volunteers were unlikely to be de-selected following failure to attend a requisite number of supervision sessions.

Six of the service co-ordinators expressed frustration at inheriting long-serving volunteers who would now fail to meet selection criteria, but saw removing them without causing distress as a major challenge.

### **Volunteer Motivation**

There was a 50/50 split reported in volunteer befriender motivation between personal experience volunteers and those seeking career enhancements.

Some services rely almost exclusively on carers, counsellors, and social workers in training, who were perceived to have the necessary training and commitment arising from the need for practitioner experience.

To the extent that the information gathered supports a comparison, befriending volunteers are more likely to be experience motivated, less inclined to want professional training, than mentoring volunteers.

### **Matching**

Services displayed an apparent diversity in their approach to matching;

However, on further exploration, all services underpinned matching by what would make for a good relationship to be formed.

Despite this, services still saw matching as a trainable and transferable skill across the sector and hoped that MBF would take a lead in evaluating and building evidence on the challenges and effectiveness of, for instance, intergenerational matching or matching across genders and cultures.

### **Professional v Voluntary**

Befriending services place themselves firmly in the voluntary sector, seeing themselves as rooted in the culture of volunteering and responsive to the individuality of each volunteer.

Many tensions were expressed between the pressure to professionalise services and a resistance to imposing behaviours on befrienders and befriendees, which is seen as against the spirit of forming human relationships.

Tensions at the agency level were also expressed about maintaining a volunteer culture alongside the need to persuade professionally qualified referrers of the value of the befriending support offered.

In this context, services appreciated MBF's APS programme as a way of validating the quality of a service to outside professionals.

The bottom line for many sampled services was that they were rooted in a belief that volunteering in and of itself offers benefits.

*The fact that someone chose to spend time with me meant everything*

### **Volunteer Profile**

The information made available by sampled services suggests;

1 in 4 befrienders are male and there may be barriers perceived by males

Befrienders range from 13 to 87 years of age, median 54, sometimes specific factors in the client group dictate the age range of volunteers

1 in 5 volunteers are drawn from diverse and minority groups. However, underneath this trend are complexities. For instance, volunteer diversity does not match client diversity or the diversity within the community served

### **Articulating outcomes for befriendees**

The fundamental driver for services is the difference they make to people's lives.

MBF was seen as the single national organisation able to help service co-ordinators with training and support materials on how to present these outcomes as valid measures of the impact of services.

### **Organisational issues**

#### **Wider role for service co-ordinators**

Many service co-ordinators report frustrations in fulfilling their role

Again, a continued role for MBF was envisaged by service co-coordinators, as a provider of updates and workshop style training on organisational issues such as new legislation.

Many agencies already provide this, such as NCVO and Volunteering England, but the MBF was seen as more likely to relate training to the befriending context and recognise the particular challenges for smaller services.

### **Stakeholders**

Many complex and sometimes competing pressures were felt by services which had the potential to compromise the interests of service users.

A common example quoted was pressure from funders which could bias service delivery towards the funders own priorities, such as addressing identified health inequalities through service level agreements.

As might be expected, smaller services, dependent on one large grant, felt the most pressure.

MBF was again looked to as the organisation which could influence funding agendas in favour of befriending and predict trends so that befriending services could 'market' themselves more effectively.

The services sampled hoped that as national champion, MBF could also provide support materials for those providing governance .

### **Core and specific befriending elements**

A key feature of all the volunteer training encountered in this project was the natural divide between core generic and befriending specific elements of training.

Befriending services were clear that they saw some elements as solely and uniquely applying to befriending, yet when questioned further these were only substantiated as changes of emphasis, in line with the way the activities are defined.

An example of this would be training around ending relationships. This is in contrast to mentoring where the outcome commonly defines the ending and generic training on 'beginnings and endings' is considered sufficient.

### **Current training provision**

Without exception, the training services contacted provided in-house training.

Training capacity is seen as the largest in-house cost and resource after management.

Each service has developed its approach based on a complex matrix of reasons including size, budgets and funding, governance and structure, local demographics, and the availability of volunteers.

All the services believe their training is 'fit for purpose' - that is, to prepare potential befrienders to provide the chosen intervention in a safe and ethical manner.

Despite this, all volunteer befriender training studied were group based and consisted of a mix of experiential, interactive and didactic elements.

### **Volunteer Befriending Training**

#### **Resistance to external training providers**

There was widespread reluctance amongst sampled services to buy 'off-the-shelf' standardised training from an external agency.

Services increasingly see training as a potential income generator and some have developed models which are promoted for use by other agencies.

The combined effect of these factors is that services increasingly see themselves as in competition and there was an overt resistance from some co-ordinators to share any resources or training content other than in general outline.

This resistance was markedly lower in networking meetings organised by MBF where it seemed easier for services to recognise the need for mutual support and the value of shared learning.

Based on this kind of feedback, the possibilities for bodies like MBF providing external training for volunteer befrienders are limited.

#### **Training and volunteer assessment**

Two further important reasons for resisting external agency involvement in training were cited;

- assessment of volunteers is continuous beyond the application form and initial interview. Training is seen as an ideal basis for selecting and de-selecting volunteers;
- personal observation of the befriender relating to others is seen as crucial to making effective befriending matches.

When it came to matching, personal knowledge of volunteers acquired through training was considered critical to success;

#### **Initial/induction Training**

The response to MBF's training support and materials was, by contrast, enthusiastic. There was consistently high praise from service providers for the quality of MBF training and training materials from those who had accessed and/or attended these.

No service questioned the importance of good initial training to delivering quality outcomes which would have positive benefits for the lives of befrienders and befriendees.

This supports the modular approach adopted by MBF in 'Mentor Training' with reproducible resources which can be adapted into individual service settings.

All offered generic induction training common to volunteers, and befriending specific elements.

Five of the services sampled offered some form of personal development as part of the training experience.

### **Ongoing Training**

About 50% of services questioned offered ongoing training to volunteers, with a median of two days per year.

Only four of the sampled services specifically revisited skills in ongoing training in order to develop volunteers' abilities.

The content of ongoing training emerged from a variety of 'drivers';

- the need to update existing information e.g. new legislation in mental health
- client group specific e.g. dementia training for those working with the elderly
- befriender/volunteer led topics such as working with difference, cultural training, dementia, working with other family members.

### **Training other stakeholders**

All but two sampled services saw no training need for any other stakeholders, seeing this as a promotional, marketing, activity.

Similarly, preparing befriendees was seen as part of the ongoing matching process. However, two services provided training to prepare befriendees;

### **A role for MBF in training**

#### **Current training and development**

Services expressed a clear demand for support from MBF to continue existing delivery and develop new resources for training in three areas.

MBF is recognised as already partially providing these elements, albeit these being perceived as labelled as 'mentoring' rather than 'befriending'.

Those service co-ordinators who had used MBF training resources and attended training had found them helpful, but a significant minority (five) had accessed no MBF support at all.

The bulk of feedback can be grouped under two headings;

1. more modular type frameworks please which can be used as a tool translated into context
2. breaking down of the elements of training into core and specific

Service co-ordinators also welcomed MBF's current provision of basic information to signpost issues to be addressed in establishing services.

The services sampled also appreciated targeted training and support, such as themed networking meetings and conferences and one-off workshops on topics such as funding, intergenerational working, attracting difference and diversity.

The service co-ordinators were easily able to identify the value of some training developments MBF could offer but were not always realistic in their expectations of the time involved in developing training tools.

### **Managerial and professional development of the co-ordinators**

Most service co-ordinators expressed frustration about the lack of development in their own roles and would like MBF to provide a management development programme to enhance their expertise and status.

Some service co-ordinators saw the value of the focus on befriending and mentoring which an MBF-based training would provide, if only for the chance to exchange and network.

### **New Developments**

Some coordinators also suggested a role for MBF in providing regionally based, affordable (£25 per head), ongoing training days for befrienders in cross-sector aspects, such as working with non-verbal communication, mental health diagnoses.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

**There was a unanimous request from service co-ordinators for training and support for evaluating services**, with a specific focus on defining and evidencing 'soft outcomes' such as increased self-esteem and confidence.

When examined more closely, the desire for training around soft outcomes is driven almost entirely by the need to convince funders of the impact of befriending on the particular client groups. Referrers also need convincing but they are usually in contact with the client group and can judge the benefits for themselves.

MBF has a strategic national lead role to play here in supporting befriending (and mentoring) services by developing training in impact measurement of soft outcomes.

For any initiative by MBF on impact measurement to be most effective, in-house expertise needs to be developed. A partner consultant, advising and training on impact measurement would both build this knowledge and expertise base and add credibility to MBF's lead role as this related to befriending and mentoring.

### **Accreditation/certification:**

Although a few services have negotiated accreditation for their courses, the take up by volunteers has been disappointing in relation to the time and resources expended delivering the schemes (one service quoted only two volunteers in three years taking the accreditation route).

Several more services have certificated courses to which volunteers have responded more positively. These range from certificates evidencing attendance through to those having an external scrutiny element, where MBF might play a role.

The motivation for accreditation has often come from volunteers themselves rather than service coordinators. However, there is some degree of enthusiasm for accreditation from service co-ordinators, with the strong proviso that it does not take

up too much staff time or resource. This is where MBF could be particularly helpful in providing a tool, perhaps as an extension of the APS.

### **Future delivery**

Various approaches to MBF's provision of training in future were suggested, such as working in partnership with a service to develop in-house training expertise or providing resource materials for services to adapt in-house - a tool to apply in context.

Or MBF signposting services to appropriate external sources of support and information on training and accreditation.

In providing an accessible, cost effective solution for befriending service members, MBF would cement membership support and recognition as the strategic leader in this field.

### **Support and supervision**

Many of the services sampled identified supervision and support as an issue in relation to training. Whilst they see supervision as part of accountability and quality, it is also seen as an ongoing route for learning.

The chief issue reported by sampled services is *difficulties with attendance* and the consequent concerns about accountability

### **Current Resources**

#### **Publications**

The current publications, Information Sheets and audio-visual materials offered by MBF at the time of this Project were predominantly tagged as mentoring, though the general leaflets and more recently produced materials have been written with befriending in mind as well.

The consensus view was that they were "interesting" but geared towards mentoring. They were perceived as promoting MBF and mentoring and not of specific relevance to befriending.

Without exception, services produced their own promotional material.

The notable exceptions to this were the literature on volunteer training and monitoring and evaluation.

Service co-ordinators also asked if MBF could produce some specialist support materials.

#### **Website**

From the perspective of befriending services, it is still seen as mentoring focused; a simple search for resources on 'befriending' produced 8 results, whereas 'mentoring' produced 36.

The services sampled would welcome the website being more 'user friendly' for befriending services with sector specific pages. At the moment, services have to read

mentoring entries as applying to befriending. It would encourage more use of the site, and persuade more non-member befriending services to join MBF, if access to befriending specific materials was more direct and straightforward.

### **Research and information**

The small size and resource restrictions for most befriending services means they are hungry to be fed information they could not possibly research themselves, e.g. health and safety legislation etc.

Many service co-ordinators/managers were simply too busy to pay attention to the research signposted by MBF both on its web site and through an e-mail network. Those who had time, however, found this facility increasingly helpful as more items are befriending related.

The services sampled also found it helpful to have materials available to circulate to other stakeholders and interested parties.

### **Networking, conferences and workshops**

Befriending service co-ordinators consistently expressed a sense of isolation, reminiscent of the social isolation many services seek to reduce through befriending.

The networking opportunities at regional meetings, workshops and national conferences organised by MBF were singled out by every sampled service as the most significant piece of support offered to befriending service co-ordinators/managers.

Befriending services do not want MBF to lose the authoritative position attached to mentoring. Put crudely, they want to 'piggy back' on this success.

### **Further developments**

#### **Signposting**

MBF's signposting of other support agencies and materials was singled out for praise by three services.

#### **Other support areas**

Some co-ordinators identified some 'boutique' areas for MBF to offer support, for instance when considering the need to screen and train volunteers working with especially vulnerable groups like at risk children, where MBF could provide accessible and cost effective screening as a registered CRB provider whilst at least covering costs.

### **Standards and Quality Assurance**

#### **Approved Provider Standard**

The key stakeholders in terms of credibility are seen as funders and referrers. Funders need to trust that their investment is safe. Referrers need to trust their clients are safe.

Services seek approval for their area of activity from other agencies, such as the Telephone Helplines Association for telephone befriending and the BACP for counselling skills.

Other services choose to apply quality standards drawn from sector wide schemes, which are signposted on MBF's web site through a link to Volunteering England.

### **Sharing good and best practice**

Services have noticed an increased focus on befriending since the Home Office funded MBF to take a strategic lead in this area.

In singling out the APS process for particular praise, some service co-ordinators could evidence that the quality mark had attracted funding and increased referrals.

Some services also pointed up the value of external evaluation;

### **Strategic Recommendations**

The following are recommendations for areas which MBF can helpfully address when considering strategic development of its support for members to the benefit of befriending services.

**SR1. MBF continues to consult with members and other agencies to provide a quantitative and qualitative mapping of befriending services in England and Wales.**

**SR2. MBF establishes a nationally recognised definition of befriending which has universal applicability yet respects the variety of approaches to befriending represented in its membership.**

**SR3. In promoting befriending nationally, MBF demonstrates significant qualitative outputs as valid impact measurements of the benefits of befriending, building an evidence base to illustrate the difference befriending makes to individual lives.**

**SR4. MBF to be a 'beacon for befriending' and develop its reputation and lead role as promoter of befriending across England and Wales to match its current status in the field of mentoring.**

**SR5 MBF continues to provide and develop materials and training to support befriending service co-ordinators in their wider roles.**

**SR6 MBF to develop a management development programme for service co-ordinators with core elements common to befriending and mentoring and additional elements specific to a befriending service.**

**SR7 MBF to develop core and specific elements which apply uniquely to befriending in its generic training pack and resources for training volunteers.**

**SR8 MBF to develop national standards for training as a focus for accreditation in partnership with a nationally validated programme.**

**SR9 MBF to continue to produce promotional materials generic to mentoring and befriending, including guidance on how to decide which approach best fits the service need.**

**SR10 MBF to make its website more relevant to befriending by providing pathways to elements and pages which are specific to befriending.**

**SR11 MBF to continue to influence best practice and the organisational standards and quality of befriending schemes through its flagship APS programme.**