



**Being Alongside / APCMH**

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Registered Charity No 1081642 Limited Company No.3957730

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## **Action Sheet: *Setting up a Befriending Scheme.***

**B**efrienders - in the Mental Health Foundation book "Strategies for Living" mental health service users underline the value of supportive relationships with people other than professionals.

**E**qual opportunities - where do you place adverts for volunteers? Will users of mental health services be able to become volunteers? Application form? References? Selection procedure

**F**unding schemes entirely managed by volunteers can run on as little as £1,000 per year. Budget for a scheme with a full time approx £30,000 Local Authorities often give grants, some projects have Joint Finance (Health / Social services). There are grant making trusts.

**R**eferrals. Most schemes have a referral procedure through a professional support person who can sometimes act as a "key worker". Some schemes take self - referrals but risk management can be more difficult. Usually people with a history of violence or drug / alcohol misuse are not accepted.

**I**nsurance. The Projects need to provide adequate insurance protection for everyone.

**E**ducation. Good practice provides adequate training for all volunteers. In many projects training is free. Usually one course a year, possibly two. Topics to include - role of the befriender, risk management, confidentiality, accountability, boundaries.

**N**eed to MATCH befriendees with befrienders. One annual exercise or on-going often depends on frequency of training. Who will do the matching? Many projects specify same gender pairs. Will befriendees be able to specify preference for ethnicity and religion?

**D**efined by a time boundary. Clear guidelines are needed about expectations. 6 - 12 months is an average commitment. Sometimes the relationship can be extended; in some projects 2 years is the maximum. Some projects have longer term relationships. Will meetings on set times and days be agreed? Are there circumstances in which these could be extended or changed?

**E**ndings need to be properly structured. Give thought to how the relationship will finish. This is likely to be important for many people. Not all matchings will be successful. Befriender and befriendee may need help to end a relationship which does not work out.

**R**elationships in befriending are not the same as 'friendship'. Befriending is based on a formal contractual relationship, is artificial to some extent and negotiated within a specific time frame. One party is likely to be more vulnerable within it. There is a specific expectation of confidentiality and its limits.

**S**upport. It is vital that befrienders are well supported - most projects have regular mandatory support groups, some also have 1 : 1 supervision. May be a danger that referrers see the befriender as an informal monitoring system for the agency. Befriender has a card with contact number of the relevant GP - can call the GP in the event of a crisis. Out of hours support?

#### **ACTION / TIPS**

#### **Form a Steering Group**

*A few may come forward from an awareness raising meeting. Recruit from church / other faith group, Community Health Council, Volunteer Bureaus, user forums, mental health resource centres, newspaper articles or letters, library. Contact Mental Health or hospital Chaplain. Affiliate to BA?*

#### **Set up committee**

*Steering group to appoint a committee - Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and 6-9 others. Should include at least 2 mental health service users. Talk to people in other projects who have done similar things - get ideas. BA may be able to give contact names.*

#### **Budget and funding**

*Cost of venue? Refreshments, training for volunteers, advertising, stationery /postage etc. Consider / research how funds can be raised. Create a year's budget.*

#### **Establish the need:**

*Find out what else is happening in your area. Talk to people in local group homes, resource centres, other voluntary groups. What is most needed?*

**Recruit befrienders:** *Advertise in libraries, local volunteer bureau, local churches and faith communities, advert in local press, talk to groups. Write a letter to the local paper. Ask people - and ask (them to ask other people! Word of mouth is the best advert. What are you looking for in a volunteer? Make time commitment clear. Design application form. References required? How many and who? Consider policy on users as volunteers.*

**Recruit befriendees:** *How will users find out about it. Be aware of equal opportunities - how will you welcome people from all sections of the community? What agencies will be able to refer? Will the referrer support the relationship - if so, for how long? Will you take self-referrals? Pros / cons?*

**Arrange Training course:** *Ideally this should give information on local mental health services, help people to look at their attitudes and assumptions, consider confidentiality, boundaries, accountability and the role of the befriender, listening skills and consider the place of spiritual needs and resources in mental health. Can Mental Health practitioners lead different sessions?*

**Selection procedure:** *Interview – two people to select? How will the decision be communicated - by post, at the time, on the 'phone? If application is successful take up references.*

**Matching and introductions:** *What will be the criteria for matching? Who will do it? How will befrienders and befriendees be introduced to each other - how will the contract between them be worked out and agreed?*

**Risk management:** *Is there a mental health crisis response number, Mental Health Chaplaincy or a link with local psychiatric hospital or resource centre.*

**Support:** *Groups and / or 1:1 ? Confidentiality and boundary issues e.g. not meeting individuals outside the agreed contract, exchanging 'phone numbers etc. Practical problems shared as a team. 12 or 6 times a year - one hour session? Selecting someone with experience to run it?*