



Volunteer Befriender: Linked Minds

Project:

Linked Minds Befriending.

Location:

Ealing and Hounslow boroughs.

Arrangement:

Voluntary, 1-2 hours per week, agreed expenses reimbursed.

About the role:

Our Linked Minds Befriending Project supports people in Ealing and Hounslow who are socially isolated because of a diagnosed mental health problem.

On successful completion of specialist mental health training, Befrienders are matched with a suitable client by a Befriending Coordinator who then acts as a (non-clinical) supervisor for the befriending period, which is limited to a year.

Befriender, client and Coordinator devise a plan together with a goal for the client to work towards, such as getting a job, joining a club, or meeting other people.

Befrienders make a weekly 1-2 hour visit, sometimes to the client's home, where they might chat over a cup of tea or go out for a walk, sometimes at a café or other location. They might undertake a local activity together connected with a goal.

The aim is that, by the end of the year, clients feel better about themselves, more valued, resilient, empowered, more linked to their community and better equipped for their journeys in recovery.

These visits make such a difference for the client and, as a Befriender, you'll get to know inspirational people with fascinating stories, develop new skills, gain experience of working with complex mental health needs and be part of a supportive team that values compassion, connection and safety.

Many clients have been diagnosed with problems such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and personality disorders. Other common diagnoses we encounter are depression and anxiety, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

We also support many neurodivergent clients who are more likely to experience mental health issues than neurotypical people.

Most clients are under the care of secondary care (Mental Health Integrated Network Teams (MINT) or the Specialist Older Adults Mental Health Service (SOAMHS)).

Our Coordinators work alongside the NHS and charities in the area to help clients access additional support.

Where applicable, the Volunteer Befriender: Linked Minds role can form part of a placement.

Supervision:

We offer both one-to-one and group supervision.

- You will have one-to-one phone supervision at least once a month with the Coordinator.
- Participation in group supervision is optional but highly encouraged and is conducted in person with other volunteers every two months.

For those volunteering as part of a placement, Coordinators are happy to make special arrangements to adjust to specific requirements (for example the need for additional supervision, for submitting reports, etc).

Safety and security:

We maintain the safety and security of our Befrienders by ensuring:

- The mental health of our clients is stable.
- All clients live independently or with a family member in the community.
- All clients are deemed low risk.
- Coordinators assess clients and decline any referrals for clients who:
 - are acutely unwell or in crisis
 - have been discharged from a mental health unit in the last 3 months
 - currently use drugs and/or alcohol
- Coordinators visit clients' homes to assess their safety.

Becoming a Befriender:

You'll have an informal interview with a Befriending Coordinator, who will answer any questions you might have, then follow-up two character references and arrange your training and an enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check, the cost of which is covered by BEfriend.

The training is split into convenient courses:

- Part 1: A short online course that can be completed in your own time.
- Part 2: A 3-hour facilitated session, either in-person or on Zoom, where you'll be able to meet other volunteers.
- Part 3: An online Safeguarding Adults course.
- Part 4: A facilitated Mental Health Awareness session on Zoom.

Responsible to:

Befriending Coordinator.

Befriender responsibilities:

- To visit your client for 1-2 hours each week, usually for the period of a year.
- To let your client and the Coordinator know if you can't make a visit.
- To provide companionship for your client, encourage them to pick up old interests and discover new ones by accessing and engaging with activities in the local community.
- To help to empower your client to make positive choices on their journey to recovery.

- To raise any concerns or queries with your Coordinator as soon as they occur.
- To provide feedback to your Coordinator in a monthly online monitoring report form.
- Each month, on your monitoring report form, to either claim expenses, donate expenses back to BEfriend or declare that you have not incurred expenses.
- To attend 3-monthly reviews with your Coordinator, and optionally attend volunteer meetings (there are four annually).
- The DBS check is carried out as part of our Safeguarding Policy to protect our clients who are 'vulnerable people'. After three years the check needs to be done again.

Befriender requirements:

The abilities, qualities and skills we seek from a volunteer are:

- To have good listening and communication skills.
- To be passionate about supporting individuals affected by mental health problems to achieve life-changing goals.
- To be non-judgemental in your attitude towards your client.
- To see beyond the diagnosis to the person and to help your client feel valued.
- To be available once a week for up to two hours to visit your client.
- To be reliable and punctual when visiting your client, when returning your monthly monitoring forms and with any follow-up required for your client.
- To have an understanding of and willingness to work within the BEfriend framework, including following policies and procedures.

Additional criteria:

We welcome applications from people with lived experience. Many of our volunteers have this and helping others can be a great part of someone's own recovery journey, as well as giving them a unique insight and empathy with others.

If someone applying to be a Befriender is still under the care of psychiatric services, we would ask them to disclose this at the application stage to the Coordinator, who would seek a reference from a professional who's been involved in the applicants' care, asking about their suitability and readiness for the role of Befriender. This will help us to ensure the safety and support of both the Befriender and anyone they are matched with.

Additionally, we would speak to the applicant about how we could best support them in their befriending role, including identifying triggers and signs of their mental ill-health.

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