

Rainbow Befriending Project



Final Evaluation
Report:
End of Year 5



Rainbow Befriending Project End of Year 5 Evaluation Report

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the project beneficiaries, volunteers, and project staff who gave their valuable time to participate in the evaluation process.

Thank you also to all those involved in the project, without their support the evaluation would not have been possible.

Rainbow Befriending Project

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Opening Statement



I'd like to thank the BIG Lottery for enabling us to set up the Befriending Project 5 years ago. We are delighted to also now be thanking The Henry Smith Charity for granting us continuation funding for the next 3 years. The Befriending Project has been a great success in supporting the over 50's dealing with loneliness and isolation, and we are delighted that we are able to continue this support'



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Executive Summary

The Rainbow Centre (a Registered Charity) has been delivering services to the community of Wrexham Maelor South, in North East Wales, since 1994. The Charities Principal Aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of its rurally isolated community. The Rainbow Centre provides a range of support and services which empower people to retain their independence; access services in their locality; and to participate in their local community.

This report focuses on Rainbow Befriending Project (Befriending Service) at the end of its 5 years of funding from the Big Lottery. The project ran from 2011 - 2016 to provide a befriending service to the over 50's, within the rural community of Wrexham Maelor South, who are experiencing loneliness and social isolation.

This report formally evaluates Rainbow Befriending Project at its close, it documents the importance of the befriending service and evidences the project is effectively reducing the levels of loneliness and social isolation experienced by the older people using the service.

KEY FINDINGS

Demand for befriending activity continues and there is clear evidence that project activity is: effectively reducing the levels of loneliness and social isolation experienced by the older people using the service; whilst improving their general health and well-being.

Befriending Activity is enabling beneficiaries to;

- Effectively combat feelings of loneliness and isolation
- Develop friendships locally, and to feel happier and more confident;
- Improve their level of fitness and overall health;
- Feel part of their local community and widen their support networks;
- Access a wide range of activities responsive to their varying needs.

The Befriending Project provides:

- Older People with: the support and courage to try something new and make friendships; a strong sense of belonging and of being socially accepted; and support networks within their local community;
- Volunteers with; a greater sense of worth; improved self-esteem; stronger links within their local community; whilst tackling their levels of loneliness and isolation.



Introduction

Why Befriending?

Loneliness is a massive issue for people in later life in the UK. Half of all people aged 75 and over live alone, and 1 in 10 people aged 65 or over say they are always or often feel lonely – that’s just over a million people (Age UK, 2014). In addition, research in North Wales found that older women living alone in sparsely populated areas and experiencing poor physical and mental health are at greater risk of loneliness. (Burholt & Naylor, 2005).

Community care policies have led to unprecedented numbers of potentially vulnerable people living independently across the UK. In October 2013, Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, said that the acute loneliness of the UK’s elderly population is to our “national shame”. Despite this rhetoric, spending on social care for the elderly has fallen in the UK whilst the number of people aged over 85 has continued to climb.

Older people are particularly vulnerable to social isolation owing to loss of friends, family, mobility and income. The reasons for increased loneliness are complex, to do with changing family relationships, people living at greater distances from their relatives, and often a less strong desire to be the mainstay of frail older relatives. Social isolation can impact upon individuals’ quality of life and wellbeing, adversely affecting health and increasing their use of health and social care services. Loneliness has been seen to have a damaging effect on physical health, with research showing it has the same effect on mortality, as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. (Age UK, 2014).

A report in 2012 by the Commission for Rural Communities on social isolation experienced by older people in rural communities, highlighted a number of particular challenges for rural areas to consider around social care, transport and housing in the context of current public sector austerity measures.

- With dispersed populations, provision of social care services is more costly in rural areas, but a historical and persistent urban bias in formulae for calculating funding allocation leaves rural areas at a disadvantage.
- Eligibility criteria for services tend to have become limited to ‘critical’ and ‘substantial’ needs only, so that there is reduced scope for preventive services.
- Difficulties around transport costs and economies of scale mean that it is more difficult for personal budgets in social care to offer greater choice in a rural context.

There was also concern expressed about the financial security of voluntary sector services and their continued support from the statutory sector. Such services and partnerships were seen as playing a significant role in sustaining rural communities and tackling social isolation.



- Some of the most rural areas are those hardest hit by public and community transport cuts.
- Planning for age-appropriate housing needs to consider the importance of location close to services and friends or family.

Older People are turning to Befriending Services in an attempt to alleviate their feelings of loneliness and isolation, and a body of evidence is emerging to show that Befriending Services are effective in reducing depression, improving health, and are also proving to be cost-effective and reducing the use of Health Services.

Beneficiaries are reporting they are less lonely and socially isolated following intervention; it also gives local communities a real opportunity to volunteer locally. For most older people, the best thing is to stay near to home, but have volunteers taking them out for a treat, visiting them, and providing basic support when needed.

Supporting the needs of Wrexham Maelor South

The Rainbow Centre deliver services to the rural communities of Wrexham Meador South in North Wales; lack of access to a car (24% of people (ONS 2014)) and inability to access public transport makes rural deprivation a key issue for the projects catchment area. In addition, research in North Wales found that older women living alone in sparsely populated areas and experiencing poor physical and mental health are at greater risk of loneliness. (Burholt & Naylor, 2005).

The village of Penley is central to an area of 150 square miles covering approximately 15 major villages, hamlets and scattered housing under Wrexham Maelor South. Loneliness and isolation in older people is of particular importance in our rural area; our dispersed population has made peer support groups and social care harder to access locally, transport costs are higher than those living in local towns, and eligibility criteria for funded services is limited to 'critical' and 'high' support needs, resulting in many people failing to qualify for any funded services despite evidencing clear need.

Prior to the Rainbow Centre opening there was no meeting place for the community in the local area, where people could access support and services. Many of our clients were only offered access to services if they travelled over 12 miles to Wrexham town; with very weak transport links, reduced mobility and/or poor physical health this was not always possible. Locally we lacked a village hall which was fit for purpose. More recently we have lost the local pub and post office and transport links have been subject to further cuts, all of which has exasperated feelings of social isolation for many of our community.

In 2014-2015 Wrexham Social Services Department supported 2,786 people aged over 65 years; with the vast majority (2,227) being supported in the community. The percentage of reviews of care plans undertaken in respect of people who were in receipt of a care service fell



during the 2014 from 81.5% to 61.8%. The council states that resources are being concentrated on those service users who receive complex, high-cost care packages. The result is that large numbers of service users are not receiving a timely review of their care needs. This has been identified as an improvement area for the council (WBC, Performance Evaluation Report).

Characteristics of those using the Befriending Service

The Befriending Service supports the over 50's who are experiencing transition (i.e. through retirement, ill health, bereavement or caring responsibilities); experiencing isolation or loneliness,

Rainbow Befriending Project



perhaps exacerbated by their loss of confidence to go out or reduced mobility making public transport inaccessible, all of which has resulted in depression and isolation.

Beneficiaries fall into one or more of the following categories: aged 70 – 89 years of age, living alone, widowed, suffering from a disability. All report a need for companionship, however there is no 'typical' beneficiary, people come into contact with the service for a variety of reasons, but with a common experience of feeling lonely.

Befriending Service Volunteers recruited are predominantly 50 – 60+, either in the latter stages of their career or recently retired, wanting to 'give something back', 'develop new friendships' and 'regain their sense of worth'.

Most access the service via self referral ie.via a poster or mail out, or via a health professional, social worker or family member who suggested they come along.



"it's 40 years since I last went to a pantomime, they encouraged me to try something new and I actually enjoyed it, it was good fun, I would never have gone if it hadn't been arranged for me!"



The Befriending Project

Rainbow Befriending Project (2011-2016)

Rainbow Befriending Project was established in 2011, to respond to a gap in provision for those over 50 who were experiencing loneliness and social isolation, but who did not have the support needs to access day care. Beneficiaries commonly reported a sense of isolation. This isolation was related to practical difficulties such as a lack of transport, while for some transition (ie. bereavement, retirement or relocation) contributed to social isolation. Befriending was seen as one way to address the isolation felt by people in all of these groups.

Service Statistics (2011-2016)

Outputs: 433 beneficiaries have been actively involved in the Befriending Project

Age: 43% were aged 50 – 64 years old, but the majority; 57% were aged 65 and older.

Gender: The gender split, shows that the project is engaging with more women (86%), than men (14%) reasons for this are discussed in the last stage of the report.

Disability: 28% of beneficiaries recorded themselves as disabled.

Beneficiaries of the project principally fall into one or more of the following categories:

- aged 70 – 89 years of age,
- living alone, often widowed,
- suffering from a disability.

There is no 'typical' beneficiary, however all report a need for companionship and share a common experience of feeling lonely.



'I struggle to get around these days, without these trips I would never get out the house'.



'Having recently had hip surgery, Swimming offers me a way to keep fit whilst also enabling me to get out and meet new people locally'.



'Lunch and Learn has given me social contact again, I am learning new things and making new friends'.



Project Activity & Outputs

Demand for the Befriending Service continued over the 5 years, with new beneficiaries engaging with the service each year, usually accessing 1 or more of the peer support groups on offer for a 6 month period or longer.

At the end of Year 5 (July 2016):

- 433 beneficiaries have engaged with the project (actively attending sessions and/or receiving 1-2-1 befriending)
- 80 volunteers have actively supported the project

In July, 2016:

- 105 beneficiaries were actively involved in the project
- 18 volunteers were active

The Befriending Project continues to offer a wide range of peer support groups, all of which promote active ageing and reduce isolation. Peer support groups are developed after consultation with beneficiaries to ensure they are demand led, there is an active calendar of groups running 5 days a week (Monday - Friday) with the exception of High Tea and Home (which is ran on a Sunday from a hosts home).

Peer support groups enable beneficiaries to join in with group activities at the Centre to; combat feelings of loneliness and isolation; enable people to develop friendships with their peers, and to build confidence in participating in group activities.

All newly forming groups are facilitated by the staff team; whilst longer running established groups are encouraged to be user led.



'I've made a truly great friend and feel a lot happier in myself, my social worker says he can see how much the project has improved my life, and how much happier it has made me '



Peer Support Groups ran during the life of the project included:

- Lunch and Learn (1st Thursday of the month, 10.30-2.30pm, taught activity and 2 course meal with refreshments).
- High Tea at Home (Sunday, once a month for 4 hours) supported by a team of volunteer drivers, and a volunteer host who provides high tea.
- Caring for the Carer
- Bereavement Support Group
- Knit, Natter, Crochet and Stitch (1st and 3rd Wednesday mornings of each month)
- 'Green Fingers' Gardening Group (running the community garden) 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month
- Action on Hearing Loss (monthly)
- Nordic Walking
- Games Day 'Darts, Dominoes and Drafts'
- Monthly Outings & Seasonal Events, with accessible transport and volunteer 1-2-1 support provided
- Free Swimming for the over 50's
- Pilates, Yoga, AND Qigong - all weekly
- e-learning opportunities (supported within the café environment during café opening times)
- Art Classes (Tuesday mornings)
- Touch for Health (monthly)

- Community Café open weekdays
- 'Meals to You'
- Home Fire Safety Checks are available but must be pre booked.
- Outreach at local GP surgeries (bi monthly).

The last 4 services listed were specifically established in the hope that they would attract new users into the Befriending Service, who are isolated and traditionally harder to reach.

Accessible transport remained available for all who needed it, when they needed it.

And Enfys Community Café opened weekdays to support project activity, acting as a safe and informal meeting space for newly forming friendships and peer groups before and after sessions.



'When dad died mum became very withdrawn, then she became very ill and we thought we were losing her too. It's really great to see mum come to life again, she has something to get dressed for and is a lot happier'.

A beneficiaries daughter



Aims of the Final Evaluation: End of Year 5 Evaluation

To evaluate the impact of Rainbow Befriending Project has had on its beneficiaries over the 5 years.

The main aims of the evaluation are to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of befriending activity- what difference has the project made over the 5 years?
- Evaluate the impact of the project on older peoples' lives.
- Capture final thoughts on the befriending service with lead staff involved in running the project.

To conduct the research and evaluation we engaged with older people in receipt of the service, project volunteers and project coordinators.

Methodology

To report on the final Befriender Satisfaction Survey conducted in Year 5, and collate these findings with those for Years 2, 3, and 4.

To collate the Evaluation Activity and Findings which has taken part during the life of the Befriending Project, which includes a range of interviews, case studies, focus groups, and surveys.

Evaluation activity captured the views of 220 beneficiaries involved with the Befriending Project over the 5 years.



Impact of Peer Support Groups: Befriender Satisfaction Survey

Background: Peer Support group sessions offer a safe space for people to meet socially and take part in an activity. Transport is provided to enable those with reduced mobility and/or those with no transport options (due to their rural location) to attend. For many beneficiaries, these social group activities will be the preferred option when being initially accessed by the befriending project, and it has proven to meet their needs. Peer Support Group activities also offer those receiving 1-2-1 befriending the opportunity to make wider friendships within the community and mix with their peers, either accompanied by their volunteer befriender during or after the 1-2-1 befriending period, or once the 1-2-1 befriending period has ended.

A snapshot of Peer Support Group activity was evaluated at the end of Years 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Befriending Project. All beneficiaries attending sessions during this week were asked to complete a short questionnaire to capture:

- their initial reason for joining the group,
- if the group is meeting their needs and expectations; and
- their perspective on any impact attending the group had made to their everyday life.

In total, 151 beneficiaries completed the questionnaires over the 4 years.

Questionnaire Findings

Respondents' initial motivation for accessing the befriending project fell into 5 distinct categories;

- 1. Friendship (68%)**
- 2. Learn something new or improve existing skills (25%)**
- 3. Involvement in local community (21%)**
- 4. Physical health / maintain mobility and fitness (14%)**

'its provided me with a break from caring for my husband who is dying; I get some me time and can forget about my worries'.

'everyone is so lovely and I have made some good friends'.

'I've always been interested in art but have never had the chance to attend something locally, preparing for a exhibition was really exciting and something I thought I would never do!'



5. To have some 'fun time' / enjoyment (10%)

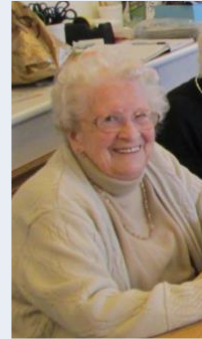
The main motivation respondents expressed for attending groups was to gain friendship, this is consistent with the findings of each of the 4 annual evaluations. Beneficiaries principally joined the group to meet people, develop friendships and reduce feelings of loneliness; followed by a motivation to learn something new or improve an existing skill; and to have more involvement within their local community.

All respondents (100%) reported that the group activities were meeting their needs.

Respondents were asked about the perceived benefits of attending social group activity, they reported the following.

Benefits of social group activity were reported as follows:

- **95% had an increased sense of something to look forward to**
- **84% felt less lonely**
- **88% felt more involved in their local community**
- **80% had made new friends and developed support networks they could call on**
- **52% felt they had more energy for everyday life**
- **47% saw an improvement in their physical health**



'I live alone so it's great to mix with people and the food is great'.

'it gives me something to look forward to, and helps with my depression and anxiety being in a small supportive group, first time for years! 😊'.

'it gives me a sense of wellbeing and confidence, my life would be lonely without this project'.



It is apparent from the findings that beneficiaries believe that the group activities increase their sense of something to look forward to and reduce feelings of loneliness; it has enabled them to develop new friendships and support networks within their local community; and improved their physical and mental health.

Social group activities are having a positive impact on reducing loneliness and isolation for beneficiaries; whilst also improving beneficiaries overall sense of well-being and physical health.

When respondents were asked to sum up what attending the group/s meant to them, emerging themes were:

- A strong sense of belonging
- Being socially accepted
- Gaining friendship and social stimulation
- Being in a supportive environment
- Having choice
- Learning new skills
- Seeing improvements in their physical fitness
- Experiencing increased levels of happiness

Having a strong sense of belonging and being socially accepted are critical factors when addressing peoples' perceptions of loneliness. For some people being in company is not enough to stop them feeling lonely, it is an effort to befriend people, and it is only when people make meaningful connections/feel a sense of belonging that loneliness can be tackled effectively.

Additional Comments (provided by 40% of respondents) focused on the role of the staff team and the atmosphere of the Rainbow Centre.

Two key themes emerged, which were the inclusiveness of the organization and the strong sense of community people felt as a result of getting involved.

'It's a wonderful place where you are always welcome, and managed by a team with wonderful ideas and a great sense of community'.

'They are so supportive and welcoming, and will help you with anything'.



'I'm socially accepted as part of the group, as a result of kindness shown
I will join in more activities in the future'.

'I feel a sense of belonging'.

'I'm not alone, and have a strong sense of camaraderie'.

Rainbow Befriending Project



'A great project run by fabulous caring people who enrich many lives'.

'I will join more activities as a result of the kindness I have been shown'.

Comments from respondents support the inclusiveness of the peer support groups, the project as a whole, and the wider organization based at the Rainbow Centre. It also evidences the important role the project team plays in facilitating the sessions and supporting people to attend sessions, gain a sense of belonging, and be accepted as part of their community.

Peer Support Groups have provided beneficiaries with:

- ❖ Support and courage to try new things and/or meet new people
- ❖ An increased sense of something to look forward to
- ❖ Interaction tackling social isolation and loneliness
- ❖ A strong sense of belonging and being socially accepted
- ❖ Friendship and stronger support networks within their local community



Evaluation Activity and Findings

Table 1: Project Evaluation Activity and Main Findings

Intervention	Evaluation Methodology	Sample size	Outcomes/ Evidence on Beneficiaries
1. One-To-One Befriending	Interviews	3	One-to-one befriending relationship provided beneficiaries with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a link to the outside world • opportunity for natural conversation • support in a trusted relationship • reduced levels of isolation and loneliness • greater confidence to engage with the wider community after 1-2-1 support was given for a period of time • improved levels of self-esteem, confidence and happiness • improved well-being / health • safer, having someone there for you • acted as a stepping stone to become more engaged with the wider community / peer support groups
2. Peer Support Groups 2.a Generic Peer Support	Snapshot Survey	151	Peer support provided beneficiaries with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an increased sense of something to look forward to • effectively reduced levels of loneliness and isolation • opportunity to make new friends and develop support networks they



			<p>could call on in times of need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gave them more energy for everyday life • improved their physical and mental health
2.b Gardening Group	Interviews	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits of the Gardening Group: • Friendship • Satisfaction from growing things • A sense of worth and pride in their achievements • Greater belonging within their local community • A sense of ownership and responsibility for the community space • Improved happiness • Decreased feelings of loneliness
2.c Lunch and Learn	Participatory Observation	12	<p>Beneficiaries reported they gained:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to learn • Reduced feelings of loneliness • Friendly and supportive environment • Community spirit <p>When asked to sum up the day, the dominant themes were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • companionship and • good fun! <p>Comments included: <i>'A good fun day, good fellowship, good value for money'</i> <i>'Very enjoyable, good to have some company, interesting activity'</i> <i>'Brilliant, good food, good company, great day'</i> <i>'Learned new skill and enjoyed friendship of the group'</i></p>



			<p><i>‘Thoroughly enjoyed the day, very helpful cheerful staff, nice venue, pleasant group’</i> <i>‘Great place to meet new people & good fun!’</i></p>
2.d Knit & Natter	Focus Group	8	<p>Overall Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation • Effective peer support • Companionship • Confidence to try something new • A sense of purpose • Increased sense of pride in their achievements
2.e. High Tea at Home	Interviews	5	<p>Provided company to vulnerable elderly, over 75 who live alone, and have limited/no weekend contact or support.</p> <p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing loneliness & isolation: ‘break from sitting alone all weekend’ • Increased sense of something to look forward to • Supportive and trusted ‘safe’ environment • Able to support vulnerable group members especially those with limited mobility and confidence issues • Transport is essential
2.f High Tea at Home	Case Studies	3	<p>Project has been a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘lifesaver’ for beneficiaries and their families • offered respite in times of great need • pulled them out of depression at a time of great sadness / recent bereavement
3. Volunteering	Focus Group	8	<p>Overall, Volunteers had viewed the volunteering experience as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being prompted by a need to help others or give something to their local community



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • was a rewarding use of spare time • required good listening and social skills • was personally rewarding and had a positive impact on them • had increased their involvement in the local community • provided an 'opportunity to make a difference'
Volunteer Satisfaction Survey	27	<p>Main motivation to volunteer was a common desire to help people.</p> <p>Benefits of Volunteering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76% helping my local community • 65% stronger sense of purpose • 65% developed new friendships, support networks and contacts they can call on • 65% more involved in community • 65% are putting their skills to use • 53% felt healthier / had more energy for everyday life <p>When respondents were asked what attending the group/s meant to them, emerging themes were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared sense of doing something '<i>worthwhile</i>' • A 'joy' from helping and giving something back • A personal sense of worth from using skills and being useful • Gaining new friendships • Being part of the community • Highly valued the service provided • Helped combat feelings of depression and isolation.



The Project Perspective and Final Lessons Learned:

Findings at the end of the Project

The befriending project team were interviewed to investigate their views on the:

1. Overview of the Befriending Project aims and its target beneficiaries
2. Project Activity
3. Key successes over the life of the Befriending Project
4. Lessons learned and life after BIG Lottery Funding ends

1. Overview of the Befriending Project

The team remained clear throughout the 5 year duration of the project, that the befriending service was established to provide companionship, reduce loneliness and isolation, and to strengthen social capital.

One to One Befriending had worked for some, but Peer Support Groups had proven far more popular, and they had also allowed natural friendships to develop, which were effectively tackling loneliness and isolation on a longer term basis and build social capital outside the confines of the project. The whole team saw this as a real success of the project.

Target group

Beneficiaries of the project are typically aged from 50-104 year old. They were not seen as homogenous group in terms of the support they require, their interests, or their age. But, they do normally fall into one or more of the following categories: aged 70 – 89 years of age, living alone, widowed, suffering from a disability. All reported a need for companionship, however there is no 'typical' beneficiary, people come into contact with the service for a variety of reasons, but with a common experience of feeling lonely. With this in mind, staff were clear that the service needed to be designed flexibly, be client led (e.g. bereavement



Rainbow Befriending Service:

from left to right: Jane Wrench (Administration & Finance Officer), Rebecca Cupit (Volunteer Coordinator), Geraldine Vaughan (Befriending Development Manager)



counselling), and respond to gaps in local provision (e.g. lunch club).

Befriending Service Volunteers recruited are predominantly 50 – 60+, either in the latter stages of their career or recently retired. They want to 'give something back', 'develop new friendships' and 'regain their sense of worth'.

2. Review of Project Activity

At the end of Year 5 all Peer Support Groups were perceived to be running well in terms of both attendance and in meeting the needs of beneficiaries' and the objectives and outcomes of the project. Transport provision played a key role in enabling those most isolated to attend.

Many Peer Support Groups have gone on to be self funding by the close of the project; although staff coordination and facilitation was still in demand from all the groups.

'Lunch and Learn' remained a real success throughout the project, it is self-funding and requires only low level staff intervention; in planning the programme, booking artists, and coordinating the lunch which is cooked at the Rainbow Centre.

The Programme of 'Art Classes', the 'Day Trips' and 'Knit, Natter, Crotchet and Stitch' have also been a great success, and are predominantly self-funding now the project has reached its final year.

'High Tea at Home' was later to get started, commencing in 2014, but it has remained very popular, the groups are always full, and it has attracted a new set of volunteers into the organisation. Running this group on a Sunday has been really important in combating feeling of loneliness and isolation for the over 75's living alone, and has been a real tonic for breaking up the 'dreaded weekend alone'.

The 'Green Fingers Gardening Group' is well established, with a core group of volunteers maintaining the garden year round. The team have been delighted with the commitment shown by the gardeners, they have taken ownership of the space and have reported a real sense of achievement and pride in their efforts; it's a place they can always visit when they are feeling low and where they will 'be met by a friendly face within the centre'.

Enfys Community Café is employing 2 café workers now and is proving popular with young and old alike. The café has free access to the internet and is popular with the 6th formers at the school opposite and young parents and children; the project team are hoping to build on this in the future to conduct some intergenerational work with the wider community. Positive effects are already being observed within the café; it is providing opportunity to socialize, increased levels of neighbourliness, and is enabling access to wider services at the Centre.



The café is in operation providing refreshments and food at affordable prices for the whole community. As well as supporting existing beneficiaries it is also attracting potential new beneficiaries who would 'rather have a look at the place before they commit to coming along' to a group, some of whom are male which is an exciting development for the project, having struggled to get men to engaged previously. It is hoped that the accessible garden will be an asset to the café, enabling further informal socializing and the project hopes it will attract wider members of the community to promote more intergenerational work.

At the End of Year 5 the team are continuing to see organic social capital developing beyond the project scope. Some 'real' lifelong friendships have emerged. Beneficiaries are meeting up with each other in Enfys Café independently of formal sessions, they are keeping in touch with each other outside of the sessions, and have people they can say hello to or call on within their own village, which are key indicators of increased social capital.

Value-added services, which go beyond the scope of the project, are accessed whilst at the Rainbow Centre, and are promoting wellness and self-care. Beneficiaries enter the Rainbow Centre for befriending services; are now also accessing services at the Centre, including beauty and pampering treatments, which contribute to their overall feelings of well-being, good health and self-worth. Touch for Health has proved very popular and will continue past the life of the project.

3. Key Successes

Key successes achieved during the Life of the Project, were perceived to be:

- ✓ A reduction in Social Isolation and Loneliness felt by many vulnerable elderly in our rural community
- ✓ Community ownership of the Peer Support Groups, particularly the Gardening Project
- ✓ Attraction of new beneficiaries via the Enfys Community Café
- ✓ Popularity of all the Peer Support Groups: evidencing the project is planning and delivering activity which is user led
- ✓ Increased Beneficiary participation in the development of our newsletters, publications and website
- ✓ On-going Sustainability of core Peer Support Group Sessions, including 'Lunch and Learn'



4. Lessons learned, and life after BIG Lottery Funding

The project team discussed the fine line they must tread when recruiting beneficiaries and volunteers, many volunteers saw themselves as a distinctly different group from beneficiaries but at assessment stage it was often apparent that this group were lonely and would benefit from support to participate in activities as much as the wider group of beneficiaries. With this in mind the project team have increased volunteering opportunities to encompass Peer Support Groups such as the Green Fingers Gardening Group.

Many volunteers who had agreed to do one to one befriending initially then chose to support people via the Peer Support Groups, so that they too could engage in social group activity. They had enjoyed supporting people, but felt they would like to support the project through other ways. This has meant that there was a shortage of volunteers for one to one befriending over time.

Some older elderly needed one to one befriending that was not time limited or encouraging them to leave their home; this was outside the scope of the project under BIG Lottery Funding but would be acted upon going forward if enough volunteers could be attracted to carry out this role. Despite the 1-2-1 befriending being harder to manage, the project team felt was important to continue with if the project were to engage with those who were vulnerable and most isolated. High tea at Home went some way to engage with this group, but 1-2-1 befriending was also required.

In terms of sustainability and future staff involvement, it was evident that demand for the project remained and that some staff facilitation would still be required to take the project forward. Fortunately, funding has been approved via the Henry Smith Charity to keep the project running for the next 3 years, and the team were also developing charging models to enable the Peer Support Groups to become self-sufficient.



Conclusions & Recommendations

The research set out to evaluate the impact of the Rainbow Befriending Service has made, at the end of the Befriending Project (End of Year 5), on older people who are experiencing loneliness or social isolation.

The study gained an insight into the experiences and views of 220 participants involved with the befriending service over the 5 years.

The most important finding from the study was that the befriending service was impacting positively on older peoples' quality of life, providing them with friendship and a sense of belonging, ownership and choice; all of which promote happiness and improved wellbeing.

Key Findings

- Clear evidence that project activity is effectively reducing the levels of loneliness and social isolation experienced by the older people using the service, whilst increasing their general health and well-being.
- The community café is providing a new route into services for beneficiaries.
- Challenges of delivering a befriending service in a rural location is reduced by having accessible transport
- The project has been providing older people with the support and courage to try something new and make friendships; a strong sense of belonging and of being socially accepted; and a support network within their local community.
- Volunteers report that they have a greater sense of worth; improved self-esteem; have made stronger links within their local community; and feel less lonely as a result of volunteering.

The service has offered a vital link to the community and had been instrumental in helping beneficiaries develop skills, build confidence and self-esteem, make friends and feel part of their community again. In addition, it is providing beneficiaries with choice, ownership and a sense of belonging to the project and within their wider community, which is directly building social capital in the rural catchment area the project serves.



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