

Summary Report

b:friend Wardens

b:friend

Healthwatch Doncaster

Engage, inform, influence

2nd August - 22nd November

1 Introduction

1.1 Details of activity

This grant intended to allow b:friend to visit some of the hardest to reach individuals and gain insight to their experiences of community, health and support them to further engage. Each visit involved a short survey where the older neighbour answers questions on select topics.

The warden in a specific area during this pilot will focus on the same individuals, unless existing ones decline support or new ones become known. This pilot project aimed to allow b:friend to test the volunteer market to see if any of our new or existing befrienders would engage in a more advanced project (in terms of time and requirement) and how effective their regular visits are for the older neighbour. If this pilot proves successful we would apply for funding to role this project out more widely.

1.2 Acknowledgements

Angela Cooper, sessional worker for b:friend, was instrumental in this pilot project. We also worked closely with partners at: Re-Read, Public Health Doncaster, Well Doncaster and Doncaster Social Prescribing.

2 What was the purpose of the activity/session?

2.1 Purpose

Over the 15-week pilot, our aim was to meet and engage with isolated members of the community that otherwise do not participate in social activities in their area. Since the recognised warden scheme in Doncaster was replaced with electronic pendant alarms, there has been an increase in the number of older people going for long periods of time without face-to-face interactions with others.

Our organisation aims to increase community connectedness through 1:1 and group befriending and, by engaging some of the most isolated, this project intended to uncover reasons for lack of connection along with signposting options they could pursue.

We intended to pay one sessional worker to pilot this project in the Denaby and Conisbrough areas of Doncaster with the aim of introducing volunteer wardens once the model was established.



2.2 What did you do?

The warden project pilot launched on 2nd August 2018 with the aim of running for 15-weeks. In total the pilot ran for **17-weeks** (until 16th November 2018) visiting **ten older neighbours** at home, calling an additional **seven older neighbours** on the phone and delivering **51-hours** of community connection for the most socially isolated older residents in the population of Denaby, Conisbrough and Mexborough.

Our warden, Angela, spent three-hours each Thursday visiting referrals that were unable to attend social groups in their community due to ill physical or mental health or limited mobility. These were identified as the most 'at risk' of loneliness and who would benefit most acutely from face-to-face contact. The warden would arrange a visit, usually a 30-45 minute slot, and spend time discussing their health and social requirements, signposting services available to them (ranging from financial support to accessible taxis) and building trust and confidence in the b:friend charity.

We consider the model we took as a form of micro-befriending: building a connection with a vulnerable adult with the intention of providing opportunities to self-help at the conclusion of the pilot.

If we were to describe this project in 3 words, they would be:

1. Quality
2. Frustrating
3. Potential

2.3 Results of the activity/session(s)



b:friend first visited Betty (84) following a call from HM Prison Service after the arrest of her relative, with whom she lived. A combination of now living alone, along with the pressures of a criminal trial, was having a hugely negative impact on her wellbeing. In our initial visits she expressed a desire to end her life and refused to leave her home for fear of rejection within her community.

The warden began on a weekly basis, sitting for 45 minutes with a cuppa and having a chat about her circumstances and topics more widely. Over the weeks a trust was built between the pair and an agreement was made to attend the Denaby Social Club, held by b:friend, on a Thursday morning. Extremely anxious Betty attended and immediately settled in, reconnecting

with people she recognised from many years prior and making new connections. She has attended the group every week since and, where she would have spent Christmas Day alone, her involvement through this project meant she attended the b:friend Christmas Day meal sharing the day with new friends. None of this would have been possible without the warden pilot and Betty will go on to benefit from these connections indefinitely.

Feedback from people who took part

After initially meeting our warden in her home, Val said: “This group is the best thing I have done since arriving in Denaby. Before I never went anywhere except medical appointments. I don’t have family and friends nearby and this lovely group has got me out of the house on a Thursday and I have made quite a few new friends and for that I am eternally grateful.”

“I was very depressed before and family had been my life but when I was ill they were all busy working and planning their own holidays. I now have something to look forward to” - Jean

Feedback from staff/volunteers who took part

“It’s a fabulous scheme – How a simple 5 minute phone call or 20 minute visit can bring so much “Positivity & Value” back into any person’s life – It’s just so great so see and hear the difference and I am just so proud to be a part of it” – Angela Cooper, warden

2.4 Conclusion

The pilot warden project allowed b:friend to learn how important the phase is between referral and attendance at social activities. It’s one thing to signpost people to local community groups but prolonged periods of isolation breed social anxiety and the first step alone becomes bigger.

This scheme enabled a number of individuals to be accompanied along that route where now, months later, they benefit from new social connections, a support network and companionship they otherwise would not have accessed.

b:friend also realise this is a project that needs a paid worker rather than a reliance on volunteers. While, as a charity, we’ve been successful in enabling the public to befriend, this added commitment of multiple beneficiaries is a hurdle to many volunteers and doesn’t fit in with personal schedules as easily. In order to run this scheme longer term we would require a significant financial commitment to even cover the numbers

demonstrated in this report, which are not particularly high. While the impact to the individuals involved is huge, this is unlikely to be a scheme that can make changes to a large number of individuals.

The long lasting improvements to the individuals supported through this pilot are connections with 1:1 befrienders or Social Clubs in their community which could, in theory, last for many years should they continue to engage.

Our key takeaway from this project is that face-to-face interactions have made changes to isolated neighbour's lives that the alternatives simply cannot achieve. Sending someone the details of a community group, or speaking to them via a pendant scheme, does not allow for a growth of trust, understanding and crucial person-centred support to change a person's circumstances and reconnect them.

We do accept that this is a more resource intensive and financially demanding approach but the outcomes achieved in this pilot demonstrate that, if we truly believe in person-centred solutions for long-term community benefit, it may be worth the investment.