

Learning Snapshot: Telephone Befriending during Covid-19

Ageing Better is a test and learn programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

We collect information and insights from across 14 partnerships and use this learning to support service deliverers, funders and policy makers working to reduce social isolation in people aged 50+.

This learning snapshot details key findings and recommendations about how Telephone Befriending worked during lockdown. It remains relevant whilst people are isolating.

For now, we hope you find it useful to use as a summary of the full [learning report](#), to share practical tools with colleagues and in teams, or include in your own presentations and briefings.

<p>1. Why focus on Telephone Befriending?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides a person-centred approach. ● Offers a flexible, protective and personal service from a trusted source. ● Gives the individual access to a wider network of recommended services. ● Can provide practical assistance (accessing food and medication) as well as social and emotional support. ● Volunteers can provide an invaluable service, giving paid staff more time to deal with the more complex cases. 	<p>2. What are the challenges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● People’s needs and anxiety levels are unpredictable and changing daily. ● It cannot ‘fix’ every problem, particularly in complex cases which require specialist mental health support. ● Calls can be stressful for befrienders so training/support should be factored in. ● Referral routes can become overwhelmed by demand in lockdown. ● Lack of capacity to manage the new wave of volunteers stepping up.
<p>4. So what can we do with this learning? Be flexible in your offer. Some people enjoy weekly, one-hour calls whilst others prefer shorter but more frequent contact. Calls should happen at times when additional, professional support is available.</p> <p>Training should cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Process and protocols. ● Content (active listening, empathy). ● Safeguarding (managing risk, addressing concerns, escalating any issues). <p>All befrienders (staff and volunteers) need on-going support, supervision and reviews to make sure the service works for both parties and to reduce some barriers.</p>	<p>3. How can we improve engagement? Information sharing between agencies is key to avoiding any duplication/omission of contact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a local hub to share information about the range of support available (voluntary services, police, Local Authorities etc). ● Promote clear referral routes. ● Introduce a Triage system where skilled staff can assess each case and ensure appropriate support is provided - particularly for those with more complex needs (eg mental health needs). ● Invest time in compatible ‘Matching’.