

Providing Support, Reducing Exclusion

The Extent, Nature & Value of Volunteer Befriending in Northern Ireland

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Praxis Research

The Praxis Research Department is responsible for undertaking research and evaluation of projects that inform and promote understanding of mental health and related health and social care issues.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend a large thank-you to everyone involved in this research – most notably, the befriendees, befrienders and volunteer coordinators. Your participation made this research possible.

Gratitude goes to all the members of the steering group for your time, input and support. To Marie Best (Carers' National Association); Una Doherty (NIACRO); Alun Kane (Barnardos); Joan McCusker (Homestart); Lisa McElherron (VDA); Valerie McGuffin (Homestart); Ruth Patterson (VSB); and Colette Ruddy (Newry Volunteer Bureau).

Thanks also to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for funding this research, and to the Western Health & Social Services Board and Praxis Care Group for assisting with dissemination costs.

INTRODUCTION

**The bird a nest,
The spider a web,
Man friendship.**

William Blake

People are social creatures, actively seeking out opportunities for social interaction. Research suggests that social interaction and social support have a positive effect on health and well-being: for example, decreasing the likelihood of illness and aiding speed of recovery (Kulik and Mahler, 1989); helping to reduce stress (LaRocco et al, 1980); and playing a role in reducing mortality rates (House et al, 1982). Research has also shown that a lack of social support can contribute to physical and mental ill health (Schaefer et al, 1981).

One way of increasing social interaction and community involvement is through volunteering. Volunteering is defined as

‘Any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment’

(Davis Smith, 1998).

By its very nature, volunteering is concerned with encouraging participation and promoting social interaction and cohesion.

Voluntary action plays an important role within the current social policy arena. There has been increasing emphasis on this ‘third sector’ throughout the 1990s, and a committed effort to make this millennium the ‘Giving Age’. In 1999, the Labour Government launched the Active Community Initiative, its aim ‘to help rebuild a sense of community throughout the UK by encouraging and supporting all forms of community involvement’ (DSD, 2001). Later this same year, the ‘Giving Time, Getting Involved’ report by the Working Group on the Active Community set out a strategy for promoting volunteering. Northern Ireland has been a dynamic force in this movement.

Volunteering in Northern Ireland

In October 2001, the Government consultation document, ‘Partners for Change’ outlined the Government’s 3 year strategy for the support of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. This strengthened its commitment to volunteering, as laid out in the 1998 Northern Ireland Compact between the Government and the sector. Initiatives have promoted volunteering as a key component of community development, encouraging citizens to be actively involved in community life.

Amid this political campaign, public interest in volunteering in Northern Ireland has flourished, with around 448,000 formal¹ volunteers in the province, a 17% increase over the last 5 years. There has also been a significant increase in informal volunteering during this time, with almost 760,000 individuals volunteering outside an organisational context (VDA, 2001). This is compared to just over 600,000 in 1995

¹ Voluntary activities carried out for, or through an organisation.

(Williamson, 1995). In one year, formal volunteers can contribute over 50,300,000 hours of voluntary activity, with an annual contribution to the national economy of over £452 million² (VDA, 2001).

Volunteers in Northern Ireland are active in a wide range of organisations, with sport/recreation organisations and religious bodies the most frequently cited. In relation to volunteering activities, involvement has increased in the areas of fundraising, committee work and befriending since 1995 (VDA, 2001). Volunteer befriending has clearly benefited from the current growth in volunteerism.

Volunteer Befriending

Volunteer befriending is a process whereby two or more people come together with the aim of establishing and developing an informal social relationship. Befriending can take place in either a 'formal' context, in which the activity is initiated and/or supported by an organisation, or informally, with the individual volunteering independently of any organisation, for example visiting a neighbour. While informal befriending plays an essential role in society, it is difficult to identify and not the focus of this study, which had an interest in the organisational nature of befriending. Therefore, we employed a definition used by Dean and Goodlad in their study of befriending in Scotland and England (1998):

'A relationship between two or more individuals which is initiated, supported and monitored by an agency that has defined one or more parties as likely to benefit. Ideally the relationship is non-judgemental, mutual, purposeful and there is commitment over time.'

Befriending services are used in a wide variety of contexts. For example, they support young mothers (Cox, 1993); provide company for elderly people living alone (Salvage, 1998); help individuals with mental ill health to reintegrate into society (Goodison, 1990); provide young carers with someone to talk to (Aldridge and Becker, 1994); and help people with various social problems to re-establish links within the community (Francis, 1995). There is a growing recognition of the benefits of befriending for service recipients. Research suggests that befriending services provide the socially excluded with the opportunity for social interaction, reducing isolation and loneliness (Skirboll and Pavelsky, 1984). Improved confidence (Bradshaw and Haddock, 1998) and increased self-esteem (Pound, 1994) have also been reported in users of befriending services. Mitchell (1986) suggests that befriending relationships, involving reciprocal and spontaneous interactions, provide a type of intimacy, authenticity and freedom from threat that cannot be accomplished by the professional. However, the benefits are not solely directed towards the befriended. The befriending relationship is a two-way process where the befriender also often receives benefits. For example, improved job prospects, new job opportunities and wider social networks (Goodlad & Dean, 1998).

More Northern Irish citizens are becoming involved in befriending. Research into voluntary activity in Northern Ireland (VDA, 2001) indicates that it is the 5th most popular formal voluntary activity here. 20% of formal volunteers now befriend, an increase of 3% since 1995. In real terms, this amounts to a possible 89,623 volunteers befriending across the province during 2001. It is therefore important that research is

² Calculation based on an average wage of £9.03 per hour, DETI

carried out on befriending to understand more about the patterns of activity in Northern Ireland.

Praxis Care Group: Our Involvement

Praxis is a voluntary organisation that aims to improve the quality of life of people who experience, or are vulnerable to experiencing, mental ill health through promoting the independence of such individuals and encouraging their integration into the local community. Established in 1981, one of Praxis' initial projects was the setting up of a befriending scheme in the greater Belfast area. Two decades later, Praxis provides accommodation and support services in 5 main areas:

- ❑ 7 Praxis befriending schemes across Northern Ireland enable over 100 volunteers to provide companionship and support to individuals with mental health difficulties;
- ❑ Approximately 190 people are housed and supported in a variety of accommodation types throughout Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. This includes residential care and supported independent living dwellings;
- ❑ A domiciliary model of care, called Home Response, provides over 25,000 staff hours per year in supporting people with mental ill health in their own homes;
- ❑ A work skills initiative in liaison with the Training and Employment Agency (TEA) Action Project equips individuals with skills in business and retail;
- ❑ Drop-in day services assist individuals experiencing health or social difficulties to reintegrate into society.

The Praxis Volunteer Befriending Service recruits and trains volunteers to support individuals who have experienced mental ill health. The aims of the service include assisting people with mental illness to re-establish personal interests and social contacts within the community; alleviating social isolation and exclusion; and helping to prevent relapse of mental illness in those considered to be at risk.

Praxis values the work carried out by its volunteers. In-house evaluations indicate the importance of Praxis befriending services and the value they add to the lives of those involved with them. However, on a wider scale, relatively little is known about befriending activity across Northern Ireland. The befriending research that has been carried out here, while useful, has been relatively small-scale and often confined to individual services. A few large-scale studies have been carried out on befriending in the U.K. but have either not included Northern Ireland (Dean and Goodlad, 1998), or have received a low response from services here³. Praxis recognised the need for information on the work carried out by befriending services in Northern Ireland – how many are there; how do they operate; who are the service recipients; who are the volunteers; how can befriending services be improved; and what are the costs and benefits of providing these services. To answer these questions, the research department at Praxis, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, carried out a large-scale two-year research project into befriending activity across the province. This report details the main findings from this research.

³ Research on befriending and mentoring services has been carried out by Meta Zimmeck, Home Office. These findings will be available later this year.

Terminology

Various terms have been used by the participants in this research to describe their volunteers (befrienders; visitors; volunteers) and the recipients of their services (befriendees; service users; patients; carers; families and so forth). For the purposes of homogeneity and to protect the confidentiality of participants, volunteers will be referred to as 'befrienders' and service recipients as 'befriendees' for the remainder of this report.

METHODOLOGY

To provide a comprehensive overview of befriending services across Northern Ireland, the research had 3 main aims:

- To assess the extent and nature of volunteer befriending activity across the province
- To identify the characteristics and motivations of volunteers involved in befriending
- To assess the value of befriending activity for both the befriender and befriender

The research consisted of 3 stages, each stage corresponding to a research aim:

- The Organisational Survey
- Motivation for Befriending
- The Value of Befriending

The present chapter provides an outline of how the research was carried out. More detailed information on the methodology can be found in the Appendix.

Organisational Survey

The first stage of the research involved mapping volunteer befriending services across the province and examining how they provided their services. The organisational survey consisted of 2 phases:

- (i) Postal Survey
- (ii) Interviews with Volunteer Coordinators

Before data could be collected, it was necessary to identify befriending services. At the outset of this research, no formal directory of befriending services existed in Northern Ireland. Therefore, a comprehensive list was constructed from which our research sample was selected. Services using volunteers in a service provision capacity across a diverse range of user groups were targeted. Services across the province were actively sought, as were services in the voluntary, community and statutory sectors. At this stage, the exact nature of the service was not known – i.e. whether they actually provided volunteer befriending. Using a ‘snowballing’ technique, 442 services were identified as possibly providing some type of volunteer befriending service.

Postal Survey

A 12-page questionnaire was designed to elicit information on the type and nature of befriending activity provided by the service. Questions were mainly ‘closed’ - the respondent was provided with a number of options and required to circle the most appropriate response/s. The questionnaire covered a number of relevant areas including: type of service (voluntary; community; statutory); geographical distribution; number and main characteristics of befrienders and befriendees; and issues that influence the operation of the service.

The relevance and appropriateness of the content of the questionnaire was established by an academic peer review and in consultation with the research steering group. The draft questionnaire was also piloted with 4 befriending services.

Prior to mailing the questionnaires, it was determined that a small number of the services on the initial list did not provide a befriending service. Therefore, 432 questionnaires were administered. 345 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 80%. Of these, 99 services provided volunteer befriending (29% of returned questionnaires).

Interviews with Volunteer Coordinators

The second phase of the organisational survey involved selecting a sample of volunteer coordinators to take part in a semi-structured interview. The purpose of this interview was to further explore the issues that arose in the postal questionnaires. To obtain a diverse and varied sample, participants were purposively selected according to user group, and, where possible, size of service, type of organisation and geographical distribution.

Interviews were held with the coordinators of 20 services (20% of those surveyed) and lasted between 45 minutes and 1½ hours. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee. 2 interviews were omitted due to the services not fully meeting the defined criteria of befriending. Therefore, 18 interviews were included in the research.

Areas covered in the interviews included:

- Setting up the befriending service
- Recruiting befrienders
- Befriender referrals
- The befriending relationship
- Managing the befriending service (including befriender support and training)
- Funding

Motivation for Befriending

Volunteering involves a decision-making process – volunteers decide that they want to engage in voluntary activity and then purposively select an area of service provision. The second stage of the research examined the characteristics of volunteer befrienders and explored their motivations for engaging in befriending activity. By identifying the type of people who befriend and their motivations for doing so, information can be gathered that will be valuable in the recruitment, management and retention of befrienders. This will have important implications for the successful operation and development of befriending services.

Motivation to befriend was assessed in 2 ways:

Volunteer Functions Inventory

The Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI: Clary and Snyder et al, 1998) is a standardised questionnaire that measures motivation to volunteer. It is based on the Functionalist perspective that there are six personal and social functions served by volunteering (e.g. a career motive or a social motive). This model proposes that volunteers can be recruited by appealing to their psychological functions and that those volunteers whose functions are met by volunteering will be more satisfied in their role, and will subsequently be more likely to continue to volunteer.

The VFI was employed to:

- ❑ Identify volunteers' main motives for befriending
- ❑ Determine whether befrienders' motives for befriending are being met through their volunteering
- ❑ Assess whether befrienders are satisfied in their role and the implications this has for their intentions to continue befriending.

To determine the type of people who befriend, relevant demographic data was also gathered. This included information on: age; gender; length of time volunteering; and typical number of hours volunteering per week.

While the VFI is a validated measure of assessing motivation to volunteer (Clary and Snyder et al, 1998; Okun et al, 1998), it had not been employed in a Northern Ireland context with volunteers who befriend. The Inventory was therefore piloted with a sample of 225 volunteers from 18 befriending schemes across the province. 137 questionnaires were returned completed, a response rate of 61%.

Befriender Interviews

To supplement the quantitative data obtained from the VFI, semi-structured interviews were held with 18 current befrienders to provide more detailed, qualitative information on why they decided to volunteer, why they continue to do so, their experiences of being involved in a befriending relationship and their training and support needs as a befriender.

These befrienders were chosen from the 18 schemes selected to participate in the VFI stage. To provide a rich and varied account of volunteer experiences, where possible, befrienders were selected according to type of user group, geographical distribution, and relevant demographic variables. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour.

The Value of Befriending

Measuring the effectiveness of a service enables us to determine whether it is successful in fulfilling its aims and to develop an understanding of how it benefits those who come into contact with it. It can also demonstrate to funders the value of supporting services.

Both the social and the economic value of befriending were explored in this research:

The Social Value of Befriending

Gathering the views of individuals involved in services provides first-hand accounts of the value of a service. The interviews with volunteer coordinators and befrienders provided information on how they viewed the value of befriending. This information was supplemented by interviews with individuals using the service – the befriendees.

Interviews were held with 13 befriendees¹ to gather their views on the service they received. These interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour, and covered issues such as: the befriending relationship; reasons for using the service; impact of the

¹ It was intended that 18 interviews would be held with befriendees. However difficulties were experienced in trying to fill this quota.

service; and satisfaction with the service. Participants were from a variety of user groups across Northern Ireland.

The Economic Value of Befriending

As well as looking at the social value of volunteer befriending, the financial value was also explored. Until recently, the economics of voluntary activity have been largely neglected. Organisations that use volunteers have been reluctant to place a monetary value on volunteer time. However, in this age of increasing accountability and competition for resources, volunteer-involving organisations are becoming more aware of the need to provide financial as well as social evidence of the effectiveness of their services, and to demonstrate the value of investing in volunteers.

In 1995, the National Centre for Volunteering estimated that volunteering contributed £41 billion to the national economy. Formal volunteering was valued at £25 billion per year. In 1997, Katherine Gaskin devised a procedure to analyse more precisely the financial contribution of volunteers, while quantifying the costs to organisations of involving volunteers. This procedure was initially called the 'Economic Equation of Volunteering' (Gaskin, 1997). It was developed and modified in 1999 and renamed the 'Volunteer Investment and Value Audit' or VIVA (Gaskin, 1999). VIVA highlights the value and importance of volunteers on the one hand, and the costs to befriending schemes on the other. The VIVA ratio is calculated by dividing the total expenditure on volunteers by the total value of volunteering. The resulting ratio indicates that, for every £1 invested in volunteers by the organisation, there is a return of £X in the value of the voluntary work generated.

VIVA had not been previously used with befriending services in Northern Ireland. Therefore it was implemented on a pilot basis with the 7 Praxis befriending schemes. Each scheme was managed by a volunteer coordinator and their consent was obtained prior to the implementation of VIVA. The VIVA process and findings are described in the section entitled: The Value of Befriending.

THE ORGANISATIONAL SURVEY

This chapter presents the findings from the Organisational Survey stage. The aim of this stage was to assess the extent and nature of befriending across the province. As indicated in the methodology, 99 volunteer befriending services were identified from the postal survey. However, 4 of these services were in the early stages of development and were unable to fully complete the questionnaire. Therefore, for the most part, findings are based on the questionnaire data from 95 befriending services. This information is supplemented with data from the volunteer coordinator interviews. The services that participated in the interviews represented a variety of user groups distributed across Northern Ireland. Specifically, these services worked with one or more of the following groups: carers; people with learning disabilities; the bereaved; the elderly; adolescents; families; people experiencing mental ill health; in-patients; victims of domestic violence; people with physical disabilities; and the physically ill.

Definition of Befriending

During data collection, an issue arose concerning what actually constituted befriending. Befriending relationships generally involve the matching of 2 or more individuals with the aim of developing an informal social relationship under the auspices of a scheme set up to provide befriending. However, in the interviews with the volunteer coordinators, it became clear that befriending was provided in 2 main ways – either through an actual befriending scheme, as indicated above, or through a service with a strong element of befriending, where volunteers befriend users in a general organisational setting such as a day centre or hospital.

After discussions and deliberation with coordinators regarding how firmly they felt their service adhered to the research definition of befriending, it was decided that both types of service, in their own right, provide befriending and should be included in the research. The term ‘befriending service’ has been used to denote both befriending schemes and services that provide a strong element of befriending.

The Extent of Befriending

Although 99 befriending services responded to the postal survey, over 50% indicated that they belonged to an organisation that provided more than one befriending service in Northern Ireland. This implies that there are at least 180 such services operating across the province. Almost all the befriending services (96%) belonged to an organisation that provided other services in addition to befriending, the most common being advice/information; support; recreation; and education/training. Many befriending services appear to be well established, with almost half operating for 10 years or more. However, just over one third have been in operation for 5 years or less, indicating that befriending services are still being developed.

Interviews with coordinators indicated that most of their services developed in response to an identified need – for example, to reduce the social isolation of a particular user group, or to assist integration into society after a period of hospitalisation. A number of coordinators reported that their service was set up to supplement existing statutory services, for example, to provide social stimulation. It was suggested that the need for befriending was often not fully realised until the service was set up:

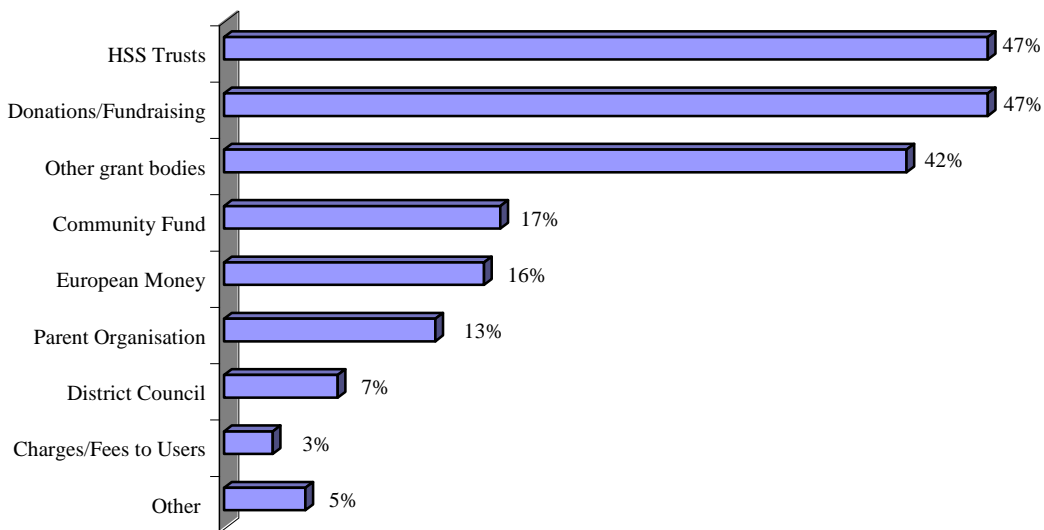
‘... The fact that a service like this is set up creates an awareness of the need for such as service. It’s not until people realise that something like this is available that they realise how much they need it.’

The questionnaire data indicated a predominance of befriending services being provided by the voluntary sector (90%). Only 6% of respondents identified their organisation as public or statutory-based.

Funding and Service Provision

Although statutory services did not often provide befriending services themselves, almost half of services received funding from the Health and Social Services Trusts (Figure 1). This indicates an awareness of the need for volunteer befriending services to complement statutory provision. Almost 50% of services also raised money themselves through donations and/or fundraising.

Fig 1: Sources of Funding



NB. Percentages exceed 100 as services could indicate more than one source of funding.

However, overall, the amount of funding received by befriending services within Northern Ireland is limited. 50% provided their service on a budget of less than £10,000 per annum¹. This percentage is considerably higher than State of the Sector (NICVA, 1998) figures, which indicate that around 36% of organisations in the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland receive an annual income of less than £10,000. Additionally, around 60% of befriending services were funded on a short-term basis of less than 3 yrs. 9% of survey respondents indicated that their service received no funding at all.

Concerns over funding were expressed in almost all of the coordinator interviews, with inadequate and short-term funding impacting on service provision. Only 2 coordinators indicated no current problems with funding. Interviewees stressed that

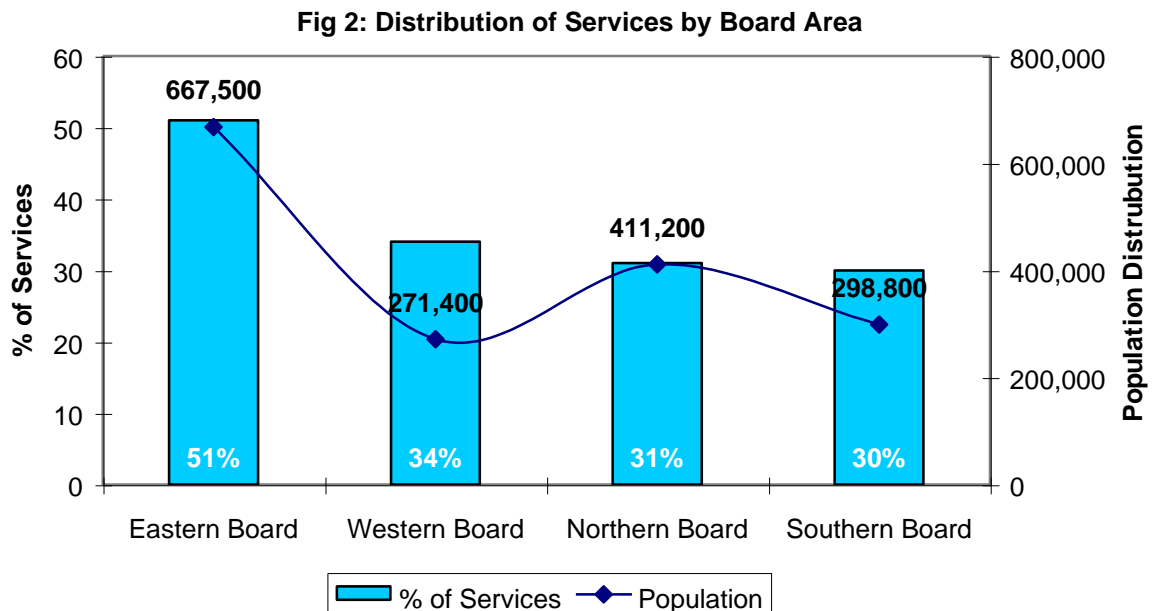
¹ 67 services provided information on the amount of funding they received

the need for befriending was evident, but that limited funds prevented them from developing their services, expanding them into areas of high need, and planning ahead. Funding problems were not confined to services within the voluntary sector. A coordinator in one of the Trusts indicated that his/her befriending service experienced difficulties in securing adequate resources:

‘... Money isn’t sort of getting down from government for volunteering ... the government doesn’t say there’s x number of pounds to run your volunteer scheme, it has to be found from within the Trust’s overall budget.’

Distribution of Services

While befriending services operated in all the Trust areas, there was greater representation in some Trusts than in others. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board had the highest proportion of services operating within its Trusts. As the Eastern Board also had the highest population² density, this finding was not unexpected. However, the Western Board, despite having the smallest population density, had the second highest percentage of befriending services. This may be due to a greater need for befriending services in this more rural part of Northern Ireland. Alternatively, individual services may be smaller and more widespread in a large rural area, resulting in larger numbers of services across the Board.



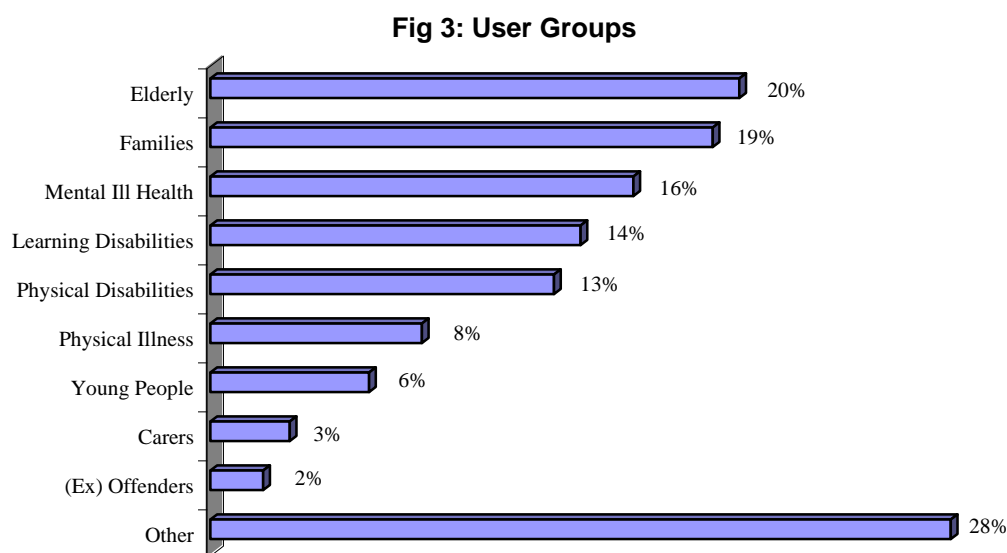
NB. Percentages exceed 100 as services operate in more than one Board area.

Befriendees

As shown in Figure 3, a variety of user groups received befriending services, the most common being the elderly (20%); families (19%); and people with mental ill health (16%). The ‘other’ category included groups such as in-patients; victims of crime; and victims of domestic violence. Befriending research in Scotland and England (Dean and Goodlad, 1998) also indicated that older people received most befriending

² Population figures from General Registry Office, June 1995

services. This was followed by people with mental ill health, sick and disabled people, and then families.



NB. Percentages exceed 100 as some services worked with more than one user group.

29 services were unable to provide information on their befriended. The remaining 66 services supported almost 10,000³ befriended, ranging from 2 to 4000 befriended per scheme, with an average of 41 per scheme. Questionnaire responses on the demographics of the befriended were incomplete. However, patterns indicated no main gender differences in the individuals that used befriending services, with both males and females likely to be involved. Most befriended were aged over 25 years. A small proportion of befriended were aged 16 years and under.

Around 55% of services provided information on the ethnicity of their befriended. The overwhelming majority of befriended were White, with other ethnic groups poorly represented: 8 befriended were Travellers; 3 were Black; 1 was Chinese; 1 was Indian; and no individuals were from Pakistani origin.

Over 50% of services indicated that they had befriended waiting to be matched, adding up to almost 800 individuals.

Befrienders

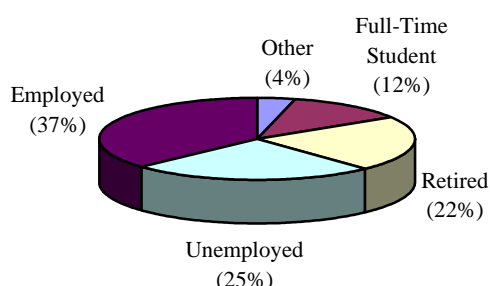
2704 volunteer befrienders⁴ were identified across 91 services. This ranged from 1 to 305 befrienders per service, an average of 17. The 'typical' befriender was female and aged between 26 and 59 years. Indeed, female befrienders outnumbered males almost 4 to 1. Befrienders were predominately White, with only 13 from ethnic minority groups. Almost 80% of befriending services provided information on the employment status of their befrienders. As indicated in Figure 4, the greatest percentage of befrienders were employed (37%). The 'other' category included individuals looking

³ Includes both matched and unmatched befriended

⁴ Includes both matched and unmatched befrienders

after the home/children and people in part-time employment. These befriender characteristics are similar to the profile of the typical volunteer in Northern Ireland (VDA, 2001) which indicated that formal volunteers were more likely to be female, in full-time employment, and aged between 35 and 64 years.

Fig 4: Employment Status



During the interviews, coordinators indicated that some befrienders were current users or ex-users of services themselves. For some services, personal experience was a prerequisite for their befriending role. Other coordinators reported that, while they had no objections to this, each case would be looked individually. Reported benefits of this type of befriending included increased self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth for the befriender. The befriender may feel more comfortable and have greater confidence in a befriender who has been through similar circumstances. One interviewee found that peer befriending worked very well in his/her service, reducing isolation for both parties:

‘Some of the befrienders are elderly people themselves, and it’s a service for themselves as much as the elderly person, because its getting them out and about where they would be lonely, sitting in the house with not very much to look forward to.’

However, coordinators identified a number of potential drawbacks with peer or ‘ex-user’ befriending. For example, some individuals may not be ready for dealing with personally relevant situations, increasing the possibility of a setback in their own progress. They might experience difficulties in detaching from such situations. Some may also need more support in their role.

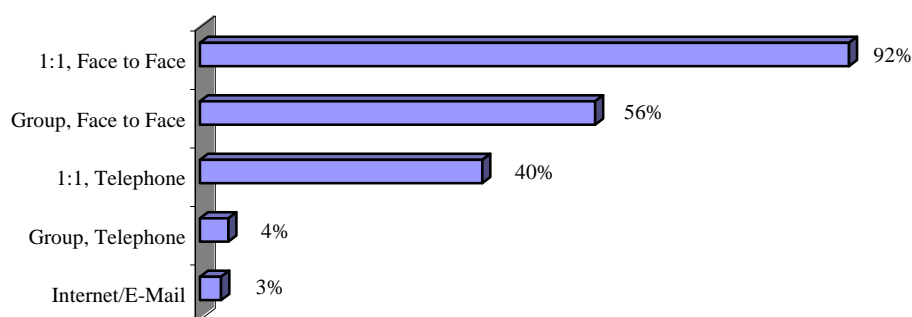
Almost 30% of services indicated that they had befrienders waiting to be matched, just under 200 volunteers. It is not clear from the questionnaire data as to the reason for this waiting list, however, data from the interviews with coordinators indicate that a possible reason may be lack of funding and resources to train and support these volunteers in the befriending relationship. This issue will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Befriending Relationship

Befriending can be provided in a variety of ways, although the common perception of befriending is on a one-to-one, face-to-face basis. As shown in Figure 5, this research supports this view, with 92% of the services surveyed providing this type of

befriending. Group face-to-face befriending was also popular with over half the services providing this. In this type of befriending, befrienders and befriendees meet on a group basis, usually to take part in activities. They do not necessarily need to be matched, with befriendees often outnumbering befrienders. Responses indicate that many services provide both one-to-one and group befriending.

Fig 5: Types of Befriending Provision



NB. Percentages exceed 100 as some services provided more than one type of befriending.

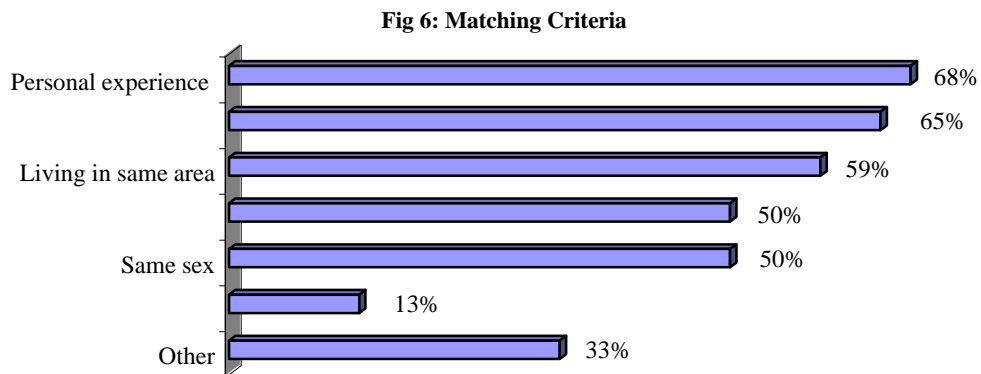
3 of the services that participated in the postal survey indicated that they provided Internet/e-mail befriending. This is a relatively new area of service provision and was explored further in the interviews with coordinators. Responses from coordinators were mixed. While only one coordinator revealed that his/her scheme operated ‘e-befriending’, a few indicated that it was a good idea, for example, for people with disabilities. However, the majority of interviewees were against the use of ‘e-befriending’, commenting that it was open to abuse as there was not enough control over it, and that people would need to have access to computers and know how to use them. They also strongly felt that it was too ‘cold’ and ‘a very impersonal way to be a friend’. One suggested that it was something that could be considered in the future, but only to complement existing befriending relationships.

Matching

The Befriending Network (Scotland) Code of Practice⁵ defines matching as ‘the process which links befrienders to befriendees. It involves making informed decisions on the suitability of each person to form a relationship with the other’. Questionnaire responses indicated that matching was frequently regarded as an essential component of the befriending relationship, with 81% of services matching befriender and befriender according to some criteria. As Figure 6 indicates, the most common matching criteria were befriender experience of the befriender’s difficulty/disability/illness, both parties expressing similar interests, and both parties living in the same area. Comments relating to the befriender’s personal attributes such as a caring nature; good listening skills; commitment; personality; communication skills; and motivation dominated the ‘other’ category. The survey of befriending services in Scotland and England (Dean and Goodlad, 1998) reported the majority of

⁵ Working Together to Promote Good Practice In Befriending. Code of practice. Befriending Network (Scotland). Stirling.

services matching according to shared interests/personality (67%); living in the same area (50%); and the befriender’s personal experience (47%).



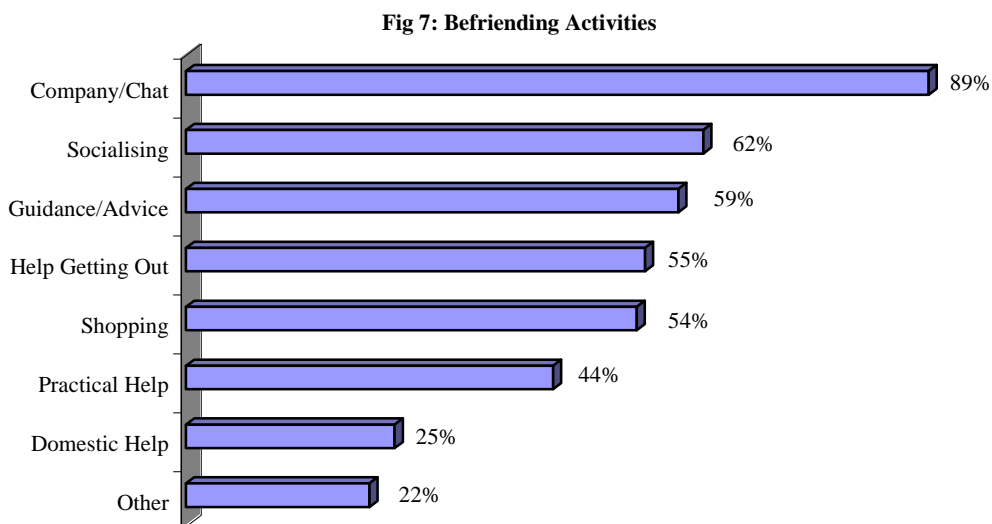
NB. Percentages exceed 100 as some services used more than one type of criteria.

During the interviews, coordinators emphasised the importance of a ‘good match’ being made for the success and sustainability of the relationship:

‘...If you don’t get it right I suppose there’s no point really in having a situation because neither party is going to get much out of it, certainly if the match isn’t right the volunteer’s not going to stay long ... I think 9 times out of 10 you probably get a good match, maybe after a few tweaks and adjustments.’

Befriending Activities

Almost 50% of services indicated that activities between befrienders and befriendees took place on a weekly basis, with just over 10% indicating more than once a week. As shown in Figure 7, various befriending activities were highlighted, the most common being providing company or ‘chatting’.



The 'other' category included listening, emotional support and personal development. The interviews with befriending coordinators provided a number of reasons for befriending activities, including to 'provide social stimulation'; to 'encourage new experiences'; and to 'cater to emotional needs'. Coordinators also emphasised the importance of friendships developing:

'... We've had volunteers on this programme over 2 years now and they're building up genuine friendships with people, and you know it's really amazing the way things develop from a volunteer/befriended thing and turns into a real friendship at the end of it which is great and what we want to see.'

Interviewees responded that sometimes close personal relationships were established which continued beyond the life of the service:

'Most of the [befriended] we've been supporting, there's a very good relationship built up there, and very often it does continue after the support has ended even, that they do keep in touch as personal friends.'

The value of the befriending relationship was explored in the interviews with befriendeds and befrienders and is discussed later in the report.

Length of Relationships

Almost 60% of services expected a minimum commitment from their befrienders, ranging from 1 week to 3 years, with an average of 9 months. During the interviews with coordinators, it was clear that the length of commitment required depended on the nature of the service. For example, some were set up to provide short relationships, such as 'one week befriending' which involved intensive contact during the befriended's week-long holiday. The coordinator of this service stressed that bonds did develop and relationships were built up over this time due to the intensive nature of the service. Other coordinators considered befriending to be more long term:

'If you feel that you can't give a long-term commitment then this is really not for you'.

Indeed, most interviewees indicated that, although befrienders did sometimes leave, overall turnover was low. This seemed to have a lot to do with the success of the relationship:

'I find that if its right at the start, and people seem to get on well together, there's very little reason to cause the situation to break down.'

Coordinators highlighted a variety of methods they used to encourage befriender retention, including:

- Valuing their befrienders
- Offering support and encouragement
- Ensuring they feel involved in the service
- Good communication
- Providing them with a good social outlet
- Giving them a break from their befriending role

However, some relationships are not successful and 82% of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they had a procedure for ending unsuccessful relationships. A variety of reasons were given by interviewees for relationships ending, including, changes in the personal circumstances of the befriender (for example, having children

or moving house) or the befriender no longer needing the service and being ready to move on. Some relationships also did not work out due to the different personalities of the people involved.

When relationships did break down, coordinators employed a variety of methods to ensure that the befriender was not affected, for example, keeping the befriender involved in group activities until another match could be made, and encouraging befrienders to explain to the befriender their reasons for leaving, emphasising that it was not the befriender's fault.

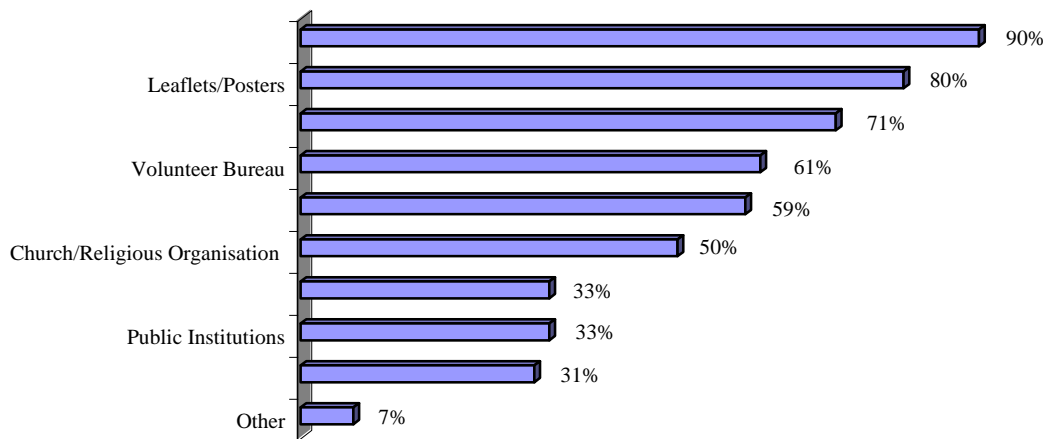
Operating the Service

Having a person or group to coordinate volunteers and manage the service can have important implications for the success of the service. For example, the 'Making a Difference' report on strengthening volunteering within the health service (DHSS, 1996) suggested a positive correlation between the presence of voluntary services managers and the number of volunteers active within in the Trusts. Almost 80% of the befriending services that took part in the postal service were managed by a paid staff member, with the remaining 20% managed by a volunteer. In managing the befriending service, the coordinator's role includes the recruitment, training and support of volunteer befrienders.

Recruitment

As shown in Figure 8, befrienders were most often recruited by 'word of mouth' and then by materials such as leaflets or posters. Respondents also indicated that these were 2 of the most effective recruitment methods.

Fig 8: Recruiting Befrienders



NB. Percentages exceed 100 as some services indicated more than one method.

The interviews with coordinators indicated that befrienders were in high demand. With the exception of 3 interviewees, who either had no problems recruiting or had

sufficient numbers of befrienders, all stressed that they needed more volunteers. Difficulties were often experienced in recruiting males, with some coordinators calling for more elderly volunteers and volunteers from rural areas. One interviewee felt that volunteers were not interested in befriending in this current climate where volunteering in more 'exciting areas' has been promoted – for example, building a playground. Another coordinator, who didn't have recruitment problems, suggested that the term 'volunteer befriender' might deter potential recruits:

'If I saw an advert for a befriender, I would just say I can't do that, if you say you need somebody to come and assist with [service-users] and talk to them or whatever, I could do that ... give them a role and if the befriending comes along, which it has done with every single one of my volunteers ... they like the ...contact, they love it, that's why they're here.'

Coordinators proposed ways of encouraging more people to befriend, including:

- Targeting advertisements to appeal to the volunteer, indicating how they would benefit from the experience
- Keeping volunteers interested during the sometimes lengthy recruitment process of reference checks etc, by getting them involved in other parts of the service, or by shadowing another befriender
- Raising the profile of the organisation and the work it does
- Asking current befrienders to 'sell the experience' from their perspective.

While most befriending services experienced difficulties recruiting befrienders, less had problems attracting befriender referrals. The majority of referrals came from Social Services, with self-referrals and health care referrals (for example, doctors; care staff) also common. In the interviews, coordinators indicated that it was important that referrers provided accurate information on the referral forms to increase the likelihood of a successful match being made and to reduce the possibility of issues arising. The appropriateness of some referrals was also raised, with one coordinator indicating:

'... Sometimes I find when you're getting referrals from the Trust you can be the first port of call and the last port of call. If you're the first port of call, it's usually because they've no money to put any service [in place] ... If we're the last resort, it's usually because they've been through every other service and all the paid services have said no'.

Coordinators were also asked why they used volunteers to provide the service. Many felt that volunteers offered something extra to the service. Volunteers wanting to be involved and their commitment were also cited as benefits of using volunteers. The issue of not having to pay volunteers was also raised:

'... Volunteers want to do it. It's not a paid job for them ... they want to be there ...the other aspect is that it is free. We can't forget about that because funding is such a big problem within the voluntary sector ...I think they're more committed as volunteers than they would be if they were paid.'

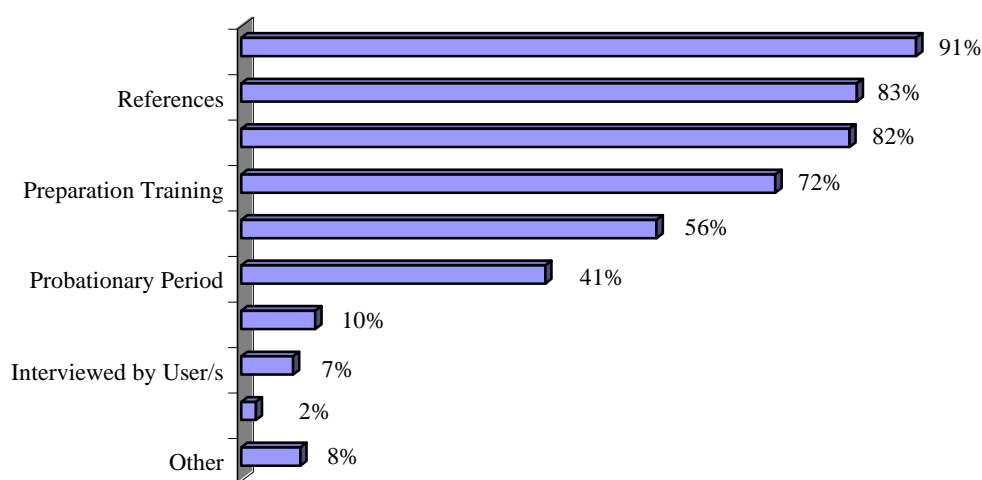
'Volunteers bring with them the energy and motivation and a different way of going about things and doing things and we value that immensely.'

Coordinators were very aware of the issue of job substitution, where volunteers are used in place of paid staff. This has long been an issue of concern for volunteer-

involving organisations, and an area of mistrust for trade unions (Browne, 2001). The National Association of Volunteer Bureau acknowledges that there is no simple test for knowing whether substitution has taken place, indicating that it may ultimately come down to individual judgement. During the interviews, coordinators strongly indicated that their volunteers did not perform paid staff duties, emphasising that befrienders were not home-helpers. To highlight this to volunteers, some coordinators provided job descriptions, outlining the befriending role. Indeed, findings from the postal survey indicated that 75% of services supplied their befrienders with a written description of their role.

Befriender suitability was most frequently assessed by staff interview (91%) and references (83%) (Figure 9). One interviewee explained that interviews were important as they enabled the coordinator to find out more about the volunteer and assess whether they were appropriate for the role. Few coordinators involved befriendees in the selection of potential befrienders. This is significant given the current user involvement movement (Bewley and Glendinning, 1994; Thompson, 1995; Simons, 1992). However, in the interviews with coordinators and befriendees, many indicated that befriendees were consulted before being matched with the befriender.

Fig 9: Methods Used for Assessing Befriender Suitability



NB. Percentages exceed 100 as some services indicated more than one method.

Training

Most services provided induction training (96%) and on-going training (86%) to either some or all of their volunteers. During the interviews, coordinators provided information on the type of training offered. Although training differed according to service, the main types of training included:

- The role of a befriender
- Information on befriendees' difficulty/disability/illness
- Confidentiality
- Dealing with challenging behaviour

- Boundaries
- Listening and communication skills
- First Aid

Interviewees generally indicated that training was important for some, if not all befrienders. Benefits of training included equipping befrienders with the necessary skills to do the job correctly; giving them confidence; helping new volunteers to decide whether they are right for the befriending role; and also enabling the coordinator to find out more about the volunteer to assist matching. While some befrienders were happy to take part in training, coordinators reported that some were not interested in training and preferred to be involved in the practical side of befriending. One pointed out that older volunteers were more reluctant take part in training. In some services, training was compulsory. However, other coordinators felt they could not force their befrienders to take part in training as they were volunteers. One coordinator revealed that, rather than calling it ‘training’ (‘how do you train somebody to be a friend?’), s/he called it ‘preparation’.

Support

Questionnaire data indicated that the majority of services provided formal support/supervision to their befrienders (90%), with over one third providing this on a monthly basis. However, in the interviews with coordinators, most revealed that the support they provided was often informal, for example, regular contact around the office/centre; in general conversation; and during coffee mornings/group events. They also emphasised that befrienders were aware that they could contact them at any time if they needed support or had a problem. All felt support was fundamental for befrienders as befriending can be an isolating activity. They also felt that it was important that befrienders could off-load any problems or concerns they had:

‘...[Support is] totally necessary. Because you’re dealing with people’s personal problems, and ... if the volunteers don’t have somewhere to offload it, either they won’t stay volunteers for very long or else the relationship with the [befriendeed] suffers’.

Group support for befrienders was also felt to be important. Most interviewees indicated that they held group meetings or events where befrienders can meet on an informal basis.

Expenses

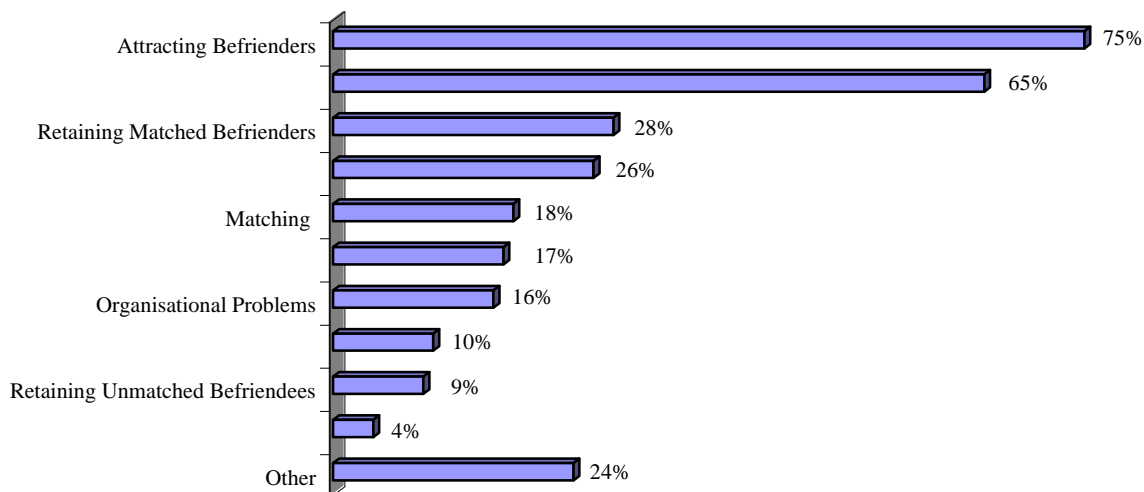
Government directives on volunteering emphasise the payment of volunteer expenses as good practice (Home Office, 1995, 2001). The majority of befriending services in Northern Ireland operate this policy, with almost 90% of respondents reimbursing all or some of their befrienders travel expenses. 80% provided other ‘out-of-pocket’ expenses.

Problems Experienced

In the interviews, the majority of coordinators stressed that issues for their services included the recruitment of befrienders and limited funding. A similar pattern was revealed in the survey. When respondents were asked to indicate the main problems experienced by their services, the majority reported attracting befrienders (75%) and funding (65%) (Figure 10). A variety of responses were put forward under the ‘other’ category, with many of these concerned with need, for example, too many people

needing befriending; referral overload; geographical distances; and not being able to support befrienders.

Fig 10: Problems Experienced by Services



NB. Percentages exceed 100 as services could indicate more than one problem.

Future Development

In the interviews, coordinators were asked how they saw their service developing over the next few years. The majority responded that, to develop their services, they needed more funding and more befrienders. They were then asked, if they had a blank cheque for their service, what they would spend it on. Most replied that they would recruit more staff to help them operate the service; they would also recruit more volunteers; provide more volunteer expenses; expand their services to meet need in other areas; and increase support and training for befrienders.

DISCUSSION

The findings from both the postal survey and the interviews with coordinators raised a number of issues for consideration:

Mapping

- While every effort was made to identify all befriending services across the province, some may have escaped detection. This is suggested in the finding that, although 99 services replied to the survey, their responses indicated that at least 180 services were operating here. Therefore, while the questionnaire data from respondents is valuable in providing an impression of befriending services, the sample is not inclusive of the whole population of befriending services. Neither is it representative. Consequently, caution must be exercised when interpreting this data.

Provision & Funding

- This research highlighted that, while the statutory sector financially supported 50% of befriending services here, they were only involved in providing a small percentage of these. Volunteer representation in public services is low. The National Survey of Volunteering (Davis Smith, 1998) reported that only 24% of volunteers were active in a public or statutory agency. The recent research on volunteering in Northern Ireland (VDA, 2001) indicated that as little as 6% of individuals volunteered for statutory organisations here. One reason for the low representation of volunteers within statutory agencies may be that, volunteerism, by its very nature, is perceived as inherent to the voluntary sector. It may therefore be best placed to provide the majority of volunteering services, with the support of the public sector. The importance of a partnership between public and voluntary sectors in providing health and social care services are highlighted in the Government Compacts (Home Office, 1998; 2001). These Compacts recognise the value of the role played by the voluntary and community sector, and the support they should receive from the public domain:

‘The underlying philosophy of the Compact is that voluntary and community activity is fundamental to the development of a democratic, socially inclusive society. Voluntary and community groups, as independent, not-for-profit organisations, bring distinctive value to society and fulfil a role that is distinct from both the state and the market ...[The] Government can play a positive role both in promoting volunteering and in supporting the work of voluntary and community organisations.’
(Home Office, 1998)

The opportunity does exist for services within the statutory sector to provide befriending themselves. A survey of 316 Trusts in England (Institute for Volunteering Research, 1998) indicated that in-patient based befriending was the third most common area of involvement for volunteers. Other research suggests that befriending within hospital settings can offer important benefits such as providing company and support for patients without visitors. (Neuberger, 1998).

However, this research has raised the issue that, regardless of which sector provides befriending services in Northern Ireland, increased funding does need to be made available to enable these services to function effectively, develop actively and meet need.

Ratio of Befrienders and Befriendees

- The amount of people using befriending services in Northern Ireland greatly outnumbered volunteers. As highlighted throughout this chapter, coordinators have expressed concern over recruiting befrienders amid the increasing tide of befriender referrals. Although information on waiting lists suggested that there were volunteers waiting to be matched (N=200), the waiting lists of befriendees greatly exceeded those of befrienders (N=800). This indicates that reducing volunteer waiting lists alone would not alleviate the problem.

A few solutions can be proposed. For example, group befriending enables a smaller number of befrienders to befriend a larger number of befriendees, and telephone befriending allows the befriender contact with a significant amount of befriender callers. Alternatively, shorter befriending relationships would enable

the befriender to be matched with new befriendees on a regular basis. However, these types of befriending may not be suitable for all befriendees or befrienders. The other, more obvious alternative is to increase the number of befrienders – however, despite a lot of effort and the utilisation of a variety of methods, coordinators have experienced problems doing this.

The Northern Ireland survey of volunteering (VDA, 2001) indicates that more people are now involved in befriending activity. Additionally, the majority of the non-volunteers cited visiting or befriending people as the kind of voluntary activity they would be most interested in doing. When related to the population of Northern Ireland, this suggests a pool of 17,064 potential volunteer befrienders across the province. This raises the question as to why there are difficulties in recruiting befrienders here?

The increase in the number of befriending services in Northern Ireland during the last 5 years may have been met with an increase in need, or awareness of need, for befriending, resulting in coordinators being continually under pressure to recruit more volunteers. Additionally, some services may attract more befrienders than others (25% of survey respondents did not express a problem attracting volunteers, as did some of the coordinators in our interviews). Services may also overlap, resulting in befrienders being spread too thinly.

Incomplete survey data on the number of befrienders and befriendees involved in befriending services prevents us from exploring these issues further at this stage. For example, the type of user group, the kind of befriending relationship, or the geographical location of the service may each have an effect on the number of volunteers recruited. Motivation for befriending and recruitment methods are discussed in the next chapter and will address the issue of how potential befrienders can be recruited. Further research in this area would be beneficial for services seeking to recruit more befrienders, and go some way to addressing need across the province.

Ethnicity and Befriending

- The present study indicated that a very small percentage of people from ethnic minorities were in receipt of befriending services in Northern Ireland. The ethnic minority population here has grown rapidly in recent years, well in excess of the growth of the general population. Estimates place a figure of between 6,000 (Irwin and Dunn, 1997) and 15,000 (Women's Racism Awareness Group, 1994) on the size of the ethnic population in the province. Research suggests that ethnic communities are among the most vulnerable and socially excluded in society, with difficulties often encountered in accessing educational, health and social services (Chinese Welfare Association, 1996; Irwin and Dunn, 1997; Mann-Kler, 1997). The under-representation of people from minority groups as users of befriending services may be a reflection of the wider picture of lower uptake in health care provision here. One reason for this under-representation in befriending services may be that people from ethnic minorities are not referred to them. Alternatively, they may prefer not to use them. As only 55% of coordinators responded to the survey question on the ethnicity of befriendees, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from the data. It may be that the services that did not respond had higher numbers of users from ethnic minorities but failed to provide the data.

A greater percentage of coordinators provided data on their befrienders. This indicated that individuals from ethnic minority groups were also poorly represented as befrienders, with only 13 being identified. Research indicates that people from ethnic minority groups tend to volunteer within their own ethnic communities (Bhasin, 1997). Therefore, if people from ethnic minorities are not befriending, then it may lend support to the suggestion that ethnic minorities are not using befriending services in Northern Ireland.

The UK average of volunteers from ethnic groups is estimated to be 41% of Asian and Black people, and 36% of individuals from other ethnic groups (Davis Smith, 1998). The 2001 Northern Ireland survey of volunteering does not provide information on patterns of volunteering by ethnic group. However, the figure of people from ethnic groups befriending in Northern Ireland appears to be very low. Are people from ethnic minorities not volunteering in Northern Ireland, or are they not volunteering for befriending services? The lack of data in this area makes answering this question difficult. However, if people from ethnic minorities are not volunteering in Northern Ireland, they may be failing to profit from the benefits associated with voluntary activity. For example improved health and reduced isolation (Graff, 1991); and raised self-esteem and confidence (Merrell, 2000). Alternatively, if individuals from ethnic minorities do volunteer here, then the reasons for their absence from befriending activity should be identified. Further research into ethnic minority involvement in befriending in Northern Ireland would help to address these issues.

The Organisation of Befriending

- The 1997 National Study of Volunteering (Davis Smith, 1998) reported that, compared to many other types of voluntary activity, volunteers involved in befriending were more likely to have been recruited using recognised techniques such as an interview and/or references, to have received a job description, and to have received training and support. The present research supports this finding, suggesting that befriending has thorough organisational procedures compared to many other types of service.

However, this research also indicated that users of befriending services were rarely involved in the volunteer recruitment process. There has been a strong movement for active user involvement in the planning and delivery of services during the last decade. The NHS and Community Care Act 1990 emphasised the importance of ensuring that community care services were appropriate to the needs of service users by involving them in the development of services (Bowl, 1996). The debate has been concerned with not *whether* user involvement should take place, but *how* (MIND, 1993).

User involvement has manifested itself in a number of ways including: 'service brokerage', where service users purchase their own services (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995); users making informed decisions concerning the services they receive, for example, in care planning (Bewley & Glendinning, 1994); and involvement in organisational processes, such as staff recruitment and training (Mitchell, 1992). It is recognised that users should have a say in the recruitment of the staff that work with them. This principle could be logically applied to the

recruitment of volunteers. However, users will need relevant training and support for this role. Befriender involvement in the recruitment of befrienders will therefore have important funding implications for befriending services in Northern Ireland as 50% operate on a budget of £10,000 or less. The involvement of befriendees in the matching process is good practice and should be promoted throughout befriending services here.

E-befriending – the way forward?

- A small percentage of coordinators in this research pointed out that they either currently used e-befriending or planned to do so in the future. E-befriending involves providing support, friendship and advice via the Internet. The Internet boom has increased the accessibility of computers (for example, through cyber-cafes; public libraries; schools) and therefore provides an opportunity for this type of befriending. The Samaritans have found e-befriending to play useful and productive role in the service they provide, indicating that in 1999, 25,000 people contacted them via e-mail (Volunteering, Dec 2000 – Jan 2001). Advantages of e-befriending include being able to cover wide geographical distances at limited costs, and overcoming difficulties in access and transport for people with disabilities.

A number of concerns have been raised regarding the issues of confidentiality and abuse when using this type of service (although The Samaritans reported it to be an extremely secure means of communication). Responses from coordinators in this research emphasised the importance of personal contact for befriending, indicating that they felt e-befriending to be too impersonal and cold. E-befriending may not always be appropriate and it is unlikely to replace other forms of befriending. However it could, in some cases, be used to complement existing provision. Nonetheless, it may be a while before befriending services in Northern Ireland fully take up the mantle of e-befriending.

MOTIVATION FOR BEFRIENDING

This stage of the research involved examining volunteer motivations for befriending. As stated in the methodology, motivation to befriend was assessed in 2 ways: using a standardised questionnaire called the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary and Snyder et al 1998); and during semi-structured interviews with befrienders. This section places motivation for volunteering and befriending in context, before moving on to discuss the findings from the questionnaire and then the befriender interviews.

Motivation for Volunteering

While there are several motivational characteristics associated with voluntary action, they appear to fall into 3 main categories: Intrinsic (helping others for altruistic reasons); Extrinsic (helping others for external rewards); and Self-efficiency (helping others to impact on one's own sense of fulfilment (Hiatt, 2000). Research on voluntary activity suggests that volunteers become involved in volunteering for a variety of altruistic and self-interested reasons. For example, the UK National Survey of Volunteering (Davis Smith 1998) indicated that the main reasons for spending time in an unpaid activity included: offering to help; being asked to help; reasons connected with the needs and interests of family and friends; and reasons connected with own needs and interests. In Northern Ireland, research has shown that individuals often volunteered in response to a perceived need in the community; followed by a personal connection to, or knowledge of, the need/issue; having time to spare; or a moral/religious conviction (VDA, 2001).

Large-scale research on motivation for befriending is limited. However, the research that is available suggests that befrienders are also motivated by a variety of altruistic and egoistic reasons. For example, Dean and Goodlad (1998) reported that the befrienders in their research were motivated to work with a particular group, or after being told about the service by family, friends or professionals. Befrienders in a mental health setting volunteered because they were interested in mental health, and/or to gain experience to help them in a future career (Parish, 1998).

Motivation, Recruitment and Retention

Recruiting and retaining volunteers is an integral part of any volunteer-involving organisation. As highlighted in the Organisational Survey, the effectiveness of this process is particularly important for the successful operation and development of befriending services. Research suggests that volunteers can be recruited by appealing to their motivations and demonstrating how the voluntary experience can meet their needs (Clary and Snyder et al, 1994). Furthermore, volunteers who are happy in their role may volunteer longer (Gidron, 1984; Clary and Miller, 1986). It follows then that, to retain volunteers, organisations need to ensure that they are satisfied, and one way of increasing volunteer satisfaction is to meet their motivations. Therefore, identifying the motivations for volunteering may be important for the successful recruitment and retention of volunteers. This reasoning forms the basis of the Functionalist Approach to understanding volunteer motivation.

The Functionalist Approach to Volunteering

Functionalism is concerned with the reasons and purposes, plans and goals that underlie and generate psychological phenomenon (Clary and Snyder et al, 1998). It proposes that people strive to meet these personal and social objectives. In relation to

volunteering, the Functionalist Approach advocates that volunteers engage in voluntary activity to satisfy important goals and that volunteer satisfaction depends on the matching of needs and goals to opportunities available in the volunteering environment. Furthermore, volunteers whose needs are being met will continue to volunteer:

‘People can be recruited into volunteer work by appealing to their own psychological functions, that they will come to be satisfied volunteers to the extent that they engage in volunteer work that serves their own psychological functions, and that they will plan to continue to serve as volunteers to the extent that their psychological functions are being served by their service.’
(Clary and Snyder et al, 1998)

Based on this Functionalist theorising, Clary, Snyder and associates developed an inventory to measure motivation for engaging in voluntary activity. The Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) is a standardised questionnaire consisting of 2 scales:

❑ **A 30-item ‘functions’ scale with 6 subscales**

Each subscale measures a component or ‘function’ of motivation:

Values: Expressing deeply held beliefs about the importance of helping others

Understanding: Engaging in activities that promote learning and self-development

Social: Strengthening one’s social relationships or conforming to the norms of significant others

Career: Seeking ways to get started or advance in the field of work

Protective: Escaping negative feelings about oneself (for example guilt over being more fortunate than others)

Enhancement: Enhancing one’s own self-worth

❑ **A 17-item ‘benefits’ and ‘satisfaction’ scale**

This scale measures volunteers’ perceptions of the benefits they receive from volunteering (12 items) and their satisfaction with their volunteering experience (5 items).

An additional ‘Intention to Volunteer’ question asks volunteers to indicate whether they intend to volunteer with the same organisation, a different organisation, or not volunteer over the next 12 months.

The Volunteer Functions Inventory

225 Volunteer Functions Inventories were administered to befrienders across 18 befriending services¹. 137 were returned completed, a response rate of 61%. 22 of the returned questionnaires had multiple missing responses and were therefore omitted

¹ These were the same 18 services that participated in the Organisational Survey

from analysis. The following findings are based on the analysis of the remaining 115 questionnaires. The befrienders who participated in this part of the research were not drawn from a representative sample and therefore caution must be exercised when interpreting this data. However, the findings do shed light on some of the motivational patterns associated with volunteer befriending.

The Befrienders

Demographic data was gathered on all the befrienders who completed the VFI. This information indicated:

- ❑ The befrienders were predominately female (72%)
- ❑ Their ages ranged from 16 years to 75 years old, with an average age of 45 years. 50% were between 35 and 64 years old
- ❑ Almost half the befrienders were married/cohabiting (49%)
- ❑ 59% of the befrienders in this sample were protestant; 41% were catholic
- ❑ 27% of respondents were retired; 20% were in full-time education and 16% were in full-time employment
- ❑ Most had been living in Northern Ireland for 10 or more years (94%)
- ❑ All respondents were White

Patterns of Volunteering

The participating befriending services supported a variety of user groups. As these services were purposively selected for this reason, conclusions cannot be drawn regarding the types of groups volunteers preferred to befriend with. Therefore, it is sufficient to point out that the befrienders in this study volunteered with: the physically disabled; the physically ill; individuals with learning disabilities; the elderly; families; in-patients; the bereaved; carers; the socially isolated; and women's groups.

The smaller proportion of male befrienders in this study restricts any conclusions being made concerning gender differences. However, the male respondents were most likely to volunteer with people with physical disabilities. No males volunteered with carers, bereaved parents or women's groups. Females volunteered across all the groups.

Time Spent Befriending

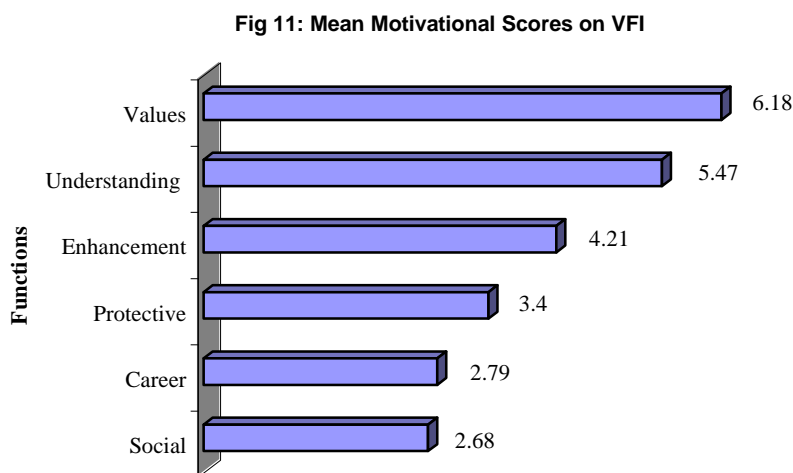
36% of befrienders had been volunteering for their befriending service for less than 12 months. 6% had been volunteering for 10 years or more. 90 respondents provided information on the number of hours they spent in befriending activities in a typical week. The majority of befrienders volunteered for 3 hours per week, although this ranged from 1 hr to 30 hours per week. The total number of hours volunteered by befrienders in a typical week was 581 hours. This suggests over 30,000 hours of befriending per year. Males, on average, volunteered more hours per week (5 hours) than females (4 hours). However, this finding must be treated with caution given the small male representation in the study.

The amount of hours spent volunteering in a typical week was greatest for the 16-24 year age group (averaging almost 7 hours per week); followed by the 65-74 year old age group (4 ½ hours per week). Befrienders that had been volunteering for the longest time (10 years or more) were most likely to volunteer more hours per week

(11 hours per week). Befrienders that had been volunteering for less than 12 months volunteered, on average, for 5 hours per week.

VFI Scales

As shown in Figure 11, the befrienders in this sample were primarily motivated by the ‘Value’ function. This indicates that befrienders volunteered because they felt strongly about the activity and wanted to help others less fortunate. The second most important motivation for befrienders was ‘Understanding’. Befrienders motivated by this function were interested in learning more about the world and promoting self-development. Befrienders were least likely to be motivated to strengthen their personal relationships (‘Social’ function) and to improve their employment skills/prospects (‘Career’ function). Similar findings were reported in a series of studies by Clary and Snyder (et al, 1998).



NB. Scores ranged between 1 and 7. The higher the score, the greater the importance of the motivation.

Scores on the VFI functions scale were examined in relation to the scores on the benefits and satisfaction scales. The results were in the predicted direction for the ‘Value’; ‘Enhancement’; ‘Social’; and ‘Understanding’ functions. This indicated that respondents scoring highly on both the function scale and the benefits scale for any of these functions also reported higher satisfaction scores. In other words, befrienders who felt these motivations to be important, and who reported greater benefits related to these motivations, were more satisfied with their befriending role than befrienders who did not receive as many relevant benefits and for whom the motivation was not important. This pattern was not true for the ‘Protective’ and ‘Career’ functions. Respondents scoring lowly on these functions and highly on benefits exhibited higher satisfaction scores.

There were no main gender differences in any of the mean functions scores. However, there was a significant relationship between the age of befrienders and the career

motive. Younger befrienders tended to have higher mean career functions scores, indicating that, as befrienders got older, career became less important. However, across all age groups, a career motive was of relatively low importance for most befrienders.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt they would still be volunteering with the same befriending service in one year's time. The majority (86%) stated that they would be volunteering for the same service, while 8% indicated they thought they would be volunteering for another service. Only 6% reported that they would not be volunteering at all.

Befrienders' Views

Interviews were held with 18 befrienders. 14 were female, 4 were male. They were aged between 23 and 72 years, with a mean age of 48 years. Time spent as a befriender varied from 7 weeks to 4 years. Their befriendees experienced a range of difficulties/disabilities/illnesses as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Befriendees' Difficulty/Disability/Illness	No. of Befrienders
Physical Illness	4
Family Difficulties	3
Learning Disability	3
Mental Ill Health	2
Carers	2
Elderly	2
Physically Disabled	1
Elderly and Physically Disabled	1

Befrienders gave their views on a number of areas including their motivation for befriending; why they continue to befriend; what encourages volunteer retention; and how more befrienders could be recruited.

Motivation for Befriending

The majority of the interviewees had not intended to befriend. Indeed, most of them had not heard of befriending before getting involved with their respective schemes:

‘I didn't know this existed you know, taking people out’

‘I hadn't a clue what it was going to be like’

‘I didn't even know what it was.’

Many befrienders had responded to an advertisement calling for volunteers (for example, a newspaper ad; church bulletin) or through leaflets. Some of these were advertising befriending roles, while others were for non-specific volunteering duties within an organisation or service. 2 interviewees indicated that they knew the volunteer coordinators who had suggested that they would be suited to the role.

Befrienders were motivated to befriend for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons cited was a desire to help others:

‘...I thought it could help me make somebody’s day a bit brighter and give something back to somebody’.

‘I would like to help somebody that wasn’t as lucky as me, that maybe wasn’t as healthy as me, that wasn’t as happy as me’.

‘One of the reasons I got involved [was] because I like to help people, and that’s rewarding for me – to see somebody changing for the better’.

This last comment also reflected a further, reciprocal reason for befriending – some volunteers befriended, not only to help others, but to benefit themselves:

‘I thought it would be nice doing it, and I thought it would be good for me too, to give a little bit to somebody else that maybe was in more need [than] myself’.

Further mutual motivations were to ‘get out of the house’; to alleviate loneliness; and to improve career prospects/C.V. A few befrienders had personal knowledge of the difficulties experienced by the user group and wanted to help for those reasons:

‘...Through my experience I hope to give back to somebody else who would be in need’.

Retention

Befrienders were asked why they continued to befriend. The overriding factor for most befrienders was that they enjoyed befriending and the feeling they got from helping others/community:

‘I don’t see any reason to break it because I don’t see it as a chore ... It’s part of my life ... and it gives me great satisfaction to see that I am partly responsible for somebody having a better quality of life ... and that’s what gives me the motivation to keep on going’.

‘Why do I keep doing it? Because I like putting something back into the community when I’m not too bad off in the community myself ... I can’t see why I would stop because I’m happy ... I’ve made a lot of friends and a bit of the way of a close family’.

Seeing the benefit of the voluntary activity also encouraged retention:

‘I enjoy it and it’s more rewarding than, say, standing in a shop collecting money ... What I’m doing is hands on. You’re there’.

Only one interviewee indicated that s/he continued to befriend because s/he would not want to let his/her befriender down.

Befrienders were also asked whether they foresaw any reasons that would prevent them from continuing to volunteer in the future. Most stated that their intentions to befriend were long-term, and that they would only stop befriending if they were unable to, for example due to illness or family issues. Others indicated that, if or when they took up employment or training courses, they would have to either reduce their

befriending hours or discontinue their service. Time constraints were cited as the main reason for this.

Having a supportive environment was considered to be important for encouraging the retention of befrienders:

‘I would be quite happy to continue so long as the [service] is behind you’.

Feeling part of a team and group support from other volunteers, where they could meet up, share experiences and have fun, was also advocated as a process that would encourage retention. Other influencing factors included ensuring befrienders were enjoying their role and feeling valued; and enabling them to see the benefits of their actions. If the befriending relationship was not working, befrienders recommended ending the unsuccessful relationship and setting up a new match.

Recruiting Befrienders

Interviewees felt that more people should be encouraged to befriend, and that one of the main ways to do this would be to raise the profile of befriending and emphasise the personal benefits volunteers can receive:

‘I think if people got to understand what it is, they’d get more interested in it because I think a lot of people don’t know what it is’.

‘... People are not aware of how much they can receive from volunteering’.

Befriending services could either improve upon the advertisements they produce:

‘... You read it in the paper but it doesn’t stand out enough. It’s not dynamic enough. It doesn’t impress upon you the problems these people have.’

or the coordinators/befrienders could go out and tell people about the service. Indeed, befrienders felt that word of mouth was a very useful recruitment method. This approach can attract people who want to volunteer, but who feel they do not have the necessary skills or qualities.

Timing was felt to be an important contributory factor in whether or not a person volunteered. Some interviewees indicated that the person had to be ready to volunteer, at the right stage of their lives and want to do it.

DISCUSSION

As indicated earlier in this section, the participants were not drawn from a representative sample and therefore caution must be exercised when interpreting the findings. Nonetheless, a number of interesting issues were raised, both in the VFI responses, and in the interviews with befrienders:

The Befrienders

- The profile of the befrienders who participated in this stage of the research was similar to that of the ‘typical’ volunteer as indicated in the Northern Ireland volunteering survey (VDA, 2001): female; aged between 35-64 years old; and married. However, whereas the largest proportion of volunteers in the VDA survey were in full-time employment, the greatest percentage of befrienders in the present study were retired. Given that the befrienders were most likely to be aged

between 35 and 64 years old, it appears that befriending may have appealed to individuals that had taken retirement. This indicates that targeting individuals in their 'third age' may be a useful recruitment method for potential befrienders. However, as some befriending services match according to age, services providing befriending to older user groups may benefit most from this approach.

Motivation

- Responses to the VFI indicated that the befrienders in this study were most likely to volunteer to help others less fortunate and because they felt strongly about the aims of the service. While this was reinforced in the interviews with befrienders, they also emphasised the reciprocal benefits of befriending, for example, experiencing enjoyment at seeing the benefits of their volunteering. According to the VFI responses, befrienders were least likely to be motivated by a 'social' function. In other words, they did not generally volunteer to strengthen their personal relationships. However, in the interviews with befrienders, the social benefits of befriending were highly valued, for example, getting out and about and increasing their own social networks. This issue is discussed further in the next chapter on the value of befriending. However, it appears that while befrienders were primarily motivated by altruistic reasons, they also received personal benefits, and this was then something that they valued about befriending. This may have had an impact on their intentions to continue to volunteer.

Retention

- Responses from the coordinators in the organisational survey indicated that there was a relatively low turnover of befrienders. This finding has been reinforced in this stage of the research with the majority of VFI respondents indicating that they intended to continue to volunteer with the same befriending service over the next 12 months. Interviewees also expressed long-term intentions to volunteer.

For the befrienders who were motivated by the 'Value', 'Enhancement', 'Social' and 'Understanding' functions, when these motives were met (that is, when they received benefits relevant to them), they were also likely to report feeling satisfied in their role. Furthermore, the befrienders who were most likely to feel satisfied were also more likely to indicate that they would continue to volunteer. Therefore, for these motivations, ensuring that needs are met may encourage volunteer satisfaction and subsequent retention. More research is needed to understand why the 'Protective' and 'Career' functions did not follow this pattern.

Interviewees suggested that volunteer retention could be improved by ensuring that befrienders are supported by both the befriending service and other volunteers, and enabling them to see the benefits of their actions.

Recruitment

- This research indicated that befrienders could be recruited by appealing to their altruistic motives while indicating the social benefits of befriending. Although the befrienders saw and replied to volunteer advertisements, most pointed out that they had not known what befriending was prior to their involvement with their services. This suggests that raising the profile of befriending and generating awareness of the befriender's role may help to improve befriender recruitment. In the organisational survey, coordinators indicated that 'word of mouth' was an

important and popular recruitment method. Befrienders also expressed this view, indicating that it would be a useful method to raise awareness. They also felt that it would encourage the recruitment of individuals who may have been thinking about volunteering but were reluctant to initiate contact due to uncertainty about possessing the necessary skills.

The organisational survey also indicated that female befrienders outnumbered males by almost 4 to 1. The small proportion of males participating in this stage of the research made drawing conclusions difficult regarding whether male and female befrienders were motivated by different reasons. No main differences were observed in this survey. However, research on general volunteering patterns indicates that males are likely to volunteer in response to their own needs and interests, and for social reasons. Females, on the other hand, were more likely to volunteer in response to the perceived needs of families and friends (Davis Smith, 1998). Recruiting more males to befriend is an important issue for coordinators as 50% of services matched according to gender. If female volunteers are only matched with female befriendees, then this will ultimately result in larger numbers of male befriendees remaining on waiting lists. Gender differences in befriending should be examined further by actively targeting males to participate in motivational studies on befriending.

THE VALUE OF BEFRIENDING

Measuring the value of voluntary activity is very important as what is not measured may not be fully recognised or appreciated. This chapter explores both the social and the economic value of befriending. As indicated in the methodology section, the value of volunteer befriending was examined using 2 approaches. Social value, the benefit of befriending for those involved with befriending services, was examined through interviews with relevant stakeholders – namely befriendees; befrienders; and volunteer coordinators. The economic value was examined using the Volunteer Investment and Value Audit (VIVA: Gaskin, 1999).

Social Value

The Befriendees

13 befriendees participated in the interviews. 9 were female and 4 were male. Their ages ranged from 18 to 90 years, with an average age of 49 years. They experienced a variety of difficulties/disabilities/illnesses, as indicated in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Difficulty/Disability/Illness	No.
Mental Ill Health	3
Learning Disability	2
Physical Illness	2
Carers	2
Family Difficulties	1
Elderly	1
Physically Disabled	1
Elderly and Physically Disabled	1

All interviewees were involved in one-to-one and/or group befriending, with some befriending relationships involving peers or ex-users.

Befriendees provided a number of explanations for their involvement with the befriending service. Around two thirds explained that they wanted to “get out of the house” more:

‘...Those two days are for you, get yourself dressed up, or you’d be sitting in the house watching television.’

Other reasons included having company; meeting people; building confidence and increasing self-esteem; and to receive help with practical tasks (but not a home help). Various befriending activities were highlighted, including going shopping; having coffee and a chat; going out socially to the cinema or pubs; and sharing experiences.

Befriendees were asked to describe their befriending relationship/s. Responses differed according to whether the befriendees was involved in one-to-one or group befriending. Those involved in one-to-one befriending often described very close,

almost familial relationships: ‘like a brother’; ‘like a sister or mother’. The terms ‘friends’ or ‘friendship’ were also commonly used:

‘That’s my good **friend**.’

‘We’re more **friends**.’

‘As the weeks have rolled on, we’ve got more familiar with each other ... because I was nervous of using [service] in the beginning because it’s so strange a woman coming into your house ... but the service has worked out really well ... it’s just a **friendly** face coming in ... a close **friend**.’

‘I do value her **friendship** a lot.’

The nature of friendship in befriending relationships will be discussed later in this chapter.

While group befriending relationships did not appear to have this element of closeness, they appeared to play a very significant role in the befriendeds’ lives, particularly for those involved in peer group befriending. One befriended used the words ‘life saving’, ‘constructive’ and ‘non-judgemental’ to describe his/her peer relationships.

Therefore, regardless of the type of relationship, all interviewees were very positive about their befriending experiences. They were also complementary about the befriending service/organisation itself:

‘It creates a supportive environment for me. It’s an environment where I’m no longer ashamed about having a mental health difficulty. I feel comfortable and confident about it.’

‘It has been my salvation.’

‘I’m glad I ever knew about it.’

‘You’re accepted for what you are and that’s very important to me’

One interviewee, who had initially been reluctant to use the service, stated:

‘I have to admit it, I enjoy coming up here.’

Another commented on the importance of the work carried out by volunteers:

‘I don’t know if I could do what the volunteers do ... going into someone else’s home to offer them some of your time, because everybody’s time in today’s world is so precious, you know, without getting paid for it ... I couldn’t fault the service at all.’

Most befriendeds did not identify any changes that could be made to their services. However, one pointed out that some individuals experienced transport problems in accessing the service. Another stated that s/he would like to see their befriender twice a week rather than once.

Interviewees were asked whether they had benefited from using the service. All felt they had benefited, although this was expressed in different ways. Some specified personal benefits, such as increased confidence; feeling better; ‘somebody caring’; and providing a purpose to life:

‘There’s days I just say, ach, what am I getting out of bed for? I can’t do nothing ... then on the [service] morning ... it suddenly clicks, I’m going out there, and I get up then and know I’m getting out.’

Others expressed more practical benefits, such as the service being ‘reliable’ and ‘dependable’; it allowing them some time for themselves; and giving them a social outlet:

‘Now I get out more, and I have friends to talk to. I have a wee bit of craic’

There were also clear benefits from peer befriending, with an interviewee involved in a one-to-one relationship commenting on how it helped him/her to cope:

‘I think that makes it easier because we can talk about [similar experiences] and we understand how we feel.’

This individual, also indicated that the service had improved his/her sense of well-being:

‘I feel very much more relaxed, and it has helped me mentally ... and emotionally.’

Some felt that that the service had helped people close to them. For example, one interviewee explained that her husband was able to rest when she went out. Another pointed out that the befriender spent quality time with his/her children.

Befriendees were asked how they perceived their future need for befriending. Some felt that their circumstances would not change and that they would continue to use the service. Others responded that they planned to move on from the service, with one commenting:

‘I think this organisation will take me to that place where I don’t need it as much as I do ... the idea is to help people to recover ... and I’m hoping that I will recover.’

A few befriendees stated that they would like to eventually volunteer for the service, while a further interviewee revealed that, although s/he would maintain contact, it would become less frequent as his/her need decreased.

The Befrienders

As indicated in the previous chapter, interviews were held with 18 befrienders. These befrienders were also asked about their views on the value of befriending.

The Value of Befriending for Befriendees

Befrienders were asked to describe the benefits they felt befriendees had gained from being involved with the service. Their comments were based on either feedback they received from their befriendees or their own observations. One of the most frequently reported benefits was getting out more, a theme that was also dominant in the interviews with befriendees. Befrienders also indicated that befriendees valued performing everyday tasks such as going shopping or having a coffee. One befriender

emphasised the importance his/her befriender placed on being able to do his/her own shopping:

‘S/he says, I’m only used to getting people to bring me in things. If I’ve asked for a loaf, I’ll get a loaf ... nobody asks me if I want a white one or a brown one, or do I want a thick one or a thin one.’

Providing new experiences and increasing social networks were also commonly reported:

‘I’ve got him/her out on the social circuit again ... to meet people, something s/he hasn’t been doing for over 4 or 5 years now.’

Some befrienders observed increased confidence, self-esteem and independence in the people they befriended. One befriender responded that it was important for his/her befriender to have a friend to talk to that wasn’t a family member. Group befriending was also viewed as beneficial in that it gave befriendeds the opportunity for social interaction and facilitated peer support mechanisms.

Furthermore, some befrienders pointed out that their befriender’s families benefited from the service in that it gave them a break and relieved pressure.

Benefits of Involvement for Befrienders

Befrienders were asked what the benefits of befriending were for them. Many emphasized the mutual benefits of befriending, revealing that they got as much out of befriending as the befriendeds. Comments included:

‘It’s a two-way thing. S/he is as good for me as I am for him/her.’

‘I enjoy it ... [I] probably get as much out of it, I think, as what the people I’m going to visit.’

5 main themes emerged from the befrienders’ responses:

Helping Someone

Being able to help someone was a very common reply. Befrienders reported that being able to help others through befriending was personally rewarding and gave them a feeling of achievement. Comments included:

‘It gives me a sense of satisfaction in the sense that I feel I have done something that is helpful. It helps me forget my own little cares in the world in order to reach out to others. I feel I’ve done something worthwhile for a person. It’s a good feeling.’

‘I like just knowing that I’ve done something worthwhile that day ... made somebody’s day that wee bit brighter. I enjoy it. I enjoy the chat, and I know that here’s somebody appreciates what I do.’

‘I do get great satisfaction out of it at the end of the day. I go home and say I have been out there and I have tried to help somebody ... It is very rewarding.’

Increasing Social Network

Many interviewees also indicated that befriending helped them to increase their own social networks, gave them something to do, and got them out of the house:

‘I like the meetings because you meet other women, and that’s a way of making friends, and getting to know other people.’

‘I find it very interesting and it keeps you off the streets.’

‘[It’s] a lot better than sitting in the house all day.’

Personal Benefits

Personal benefits of befriending were also highlighted, for example, improvements in mental health; feeling happier; greater confidence; increased self-esteem and self-worth:

‘... It has helped boost my confidence as well, knowing that I can help someone.’

‘I feel I’m a richer person. I’m a happier person. Much happier within myself.’

Personal benefits were particularly salient for befrienders that had been users themselves:

‘... It’s therapy for me myself because ... I’m one of those people that would be sitting in the house all day every day myself if I hadn’t got this facility ... it’s doing me a favour. It’s getting me out of the house and giving me a routine.’

‘I would put it as strongly as if I had not taken up volunteering, I would not be here today ... volunteering has helped me to improve my mental health, to improve my confidence, my self esteem, and my self worth.’

Giving Something Back

A few befrienders also felt that by volunteering, they were giving something back, either to a service they or a family member had benefited from, or to help the community. One befriender commented that helping the community was paramount to helping oneself:

‘It makes you feel like you’re more worthwhile to the community and you’re really helping the community, really helping yourself.’

Friendship

Some of the befrienders involved in one-to-one relationships responded that their relationships had developed into friendships with their befriendees:

‘I wouldn’t go around as saying, well I’m a befriender to such and such. I’d just say it’s my friend because to me, he’s equal.’

‘You do become friends with the person. It’s not an official thing.’

‘I’ve made a friend of [befriendee]’

Disadvantages of Befriending

Befrienders were asked whether they had experienced any disadvantages or a negative side to befriending. Only one interviewee indicated a disadvantage – s/he felt that the organisation did not appreciate its volunteers enough, and explained that s/he was sometimes ‘out of pocket’.

While most befrienders stressed that they had not experienced any disadvantages, they did raise a few issues. One befriender explained that, while s/he enjoyed the befriending relationship, the complexity of the befriender's disability could be frustrating at times. Another expressed initial concerns about knowing her befriender locally before they were matched, however this didn't cause any problems in the relationship. A befriender indicated feeling sad when befrienders passed away. However, s/he received advice and support from service in how to deal with this.

A befriender who is also an ex-user commented that s/he sometimes experienced difficulties when dealing with issues that were similar to his/her own personal experiences. However, s/he pointed out that there were support mechanisms to help him/her deal with this.

General Benefits

Befrienders were also asked to indicate whether they felt there were any other general benefits of befriending services. All responded that befriending was a very important service, with terms such as 'an excellent idea'; 'a worthwhile service'; and 'brilliant' being used. One befriender felt that befriending helped to reduce the stigma surrounding disability.

The importance of expanding and developing befriending services was advocated by befrienders, with more volunteers needing to be recruited and more money and resources assigned to them:

'I wish to God there were more befrienders that would take people out because I just think it's necessary, and I can see the value. I can see the value to me and the woman I'm taking out.'

Feeling Valued

All the befrienders expressed feeling valued by the coordinator and/or befriender. Befriendees commented that coordinators valued them by having social events; providing support; or just saying thank you:

'People just say thanks. That to me is worth a fortune'.

Being appreciated by their befrienders also helped befrienders feel valued:

'...Her face lights up when she sees me'

'It's nice to feel wanted ... You're needed.'

A few befrienders thought that awards or 'recognition' events were a good idea. Others indicated that they were not volunteering for recognition, and that enjoying the experience and seeing improvements in their befriender was reward enough:

'You can see it in his/her face, s/he's looking forward to getting out'

'I know in my own heart what I'm doing. I'm not in it for awards. I'm just in it to help someone.'

Two interviewees indicated that they could be valued more by their befriending services, for example, through 'little gestures'; or more contact being made:

‘...I would like that little bit of interest in me and what I’m doing ... no one has ever asked me how I’m getting on’.

Befrienders believed it was important to acknowledge volunteers in all areas of activity, indicating that sometimes, they could be valued more:

‘Without the volunteers, the whole society would crumble. I think volunteers should be ... acknowledged ... They deserve all the praise that’s heaped on them’

‘A lot of people do a lot of good work and they’re never acknowledged for it’.

Ways of acknowledging volunteers included: keeping in contact with them and what they’re doing; award ceremonies; letting them know they’re appreciated; and a simple ‘thank-you’.

Views of Coordinators

Coordinators highlighted a number of benefits of befriending services. Reinforcing what befriendees and befrienders stated, they felt that both befrienders and befriendees experienced increased confidence and self-esteem from their involvement in befriending relationships. One coordinator stressed the significance of befriending for befriendees:

‘It’s an hour a week in which very little happens and yet for the [befriendeed] its been the highlight of their week ... the human side of the relationship, two people just talking about nothing in particular but just relieving that burden.’

Coordinators also indicated that befriendees valued the unpaid nature of volunteering, in that the volunteer wants to spend time with them. Other benefits for befriendees included improved quality of life; greater independence; and increased opportunities for social interaction.

Benefits for the befrienders included the acquisition of new skills; personal satisfaction; and increased opportunity for social interaction:

‘I think that it’s a friendship that they get as well as giving a friendship. Some of the volunteers perhaps live on their own and it’s a source of social interaction for them and the clients they take out.’

They also emphasised the reciprocity of befriending, indicating that befrienders often received as many benefits and as much satisfaction from the relationship as the individuals they befriend.

DISCUSSION

The first part of this chapter raised a number of issues:

Benefits for Befriendees

- Befriendees reported a variety of reasons for getting involved with befriending services and indicated that their needs were being met. Main benefits included greater confidence; improved mental health; having a purpose; and increased social interaction. Befrienders and coordinators also identified many of these benefits for befriendees, indicating a sense of awareness and cohesiveness between the key players. Research indicates that befriending services aim to

reduce social isolation (Taggart et al, 2000); provide opportunities for social interaction (Walsh, 1985); and improve the mental health (Cox, 1993) of the individuals that use these services. The befriending services that took part in this research appear to be successful in meeting these aims.

Benefits for Befrienders

- Research on voluntary activity indicates a number of benefits for individuals that volunteer including improved health (CSV, 2001); greater social interaction (Graff, 1991); and an increased sense of well-being (Wheeler et al, 1998). The befrienders in this study reported receiving almost as many benefits from the befriending relationship as their befriendees. Benefits included: a feeling of satisfaction at helping others; a larger social network; greater confidence; and increased self-esteem and self-worth. As indicated in the previous chapter, volunteers who benefit from, and enjoy their volunteering experiences, are more likely to continue as volunteers (Clary et al, 1998; Clary and Miller, 1986; Gidron, 1984). Therefore, ensuring that befrienders are satisfied in their role may have important implications for retention. Furthermore, highlighting the benefits of befriending may have a positive effect on the future recruitment of volunteer befrienders.

Future Need for Befriending

- The length of the befriending relationship varies according to the ethos of the service. Some support the befriendees for a specified period of time (for example, 2 years), while others have no time limit on the length of the relationship. However, all befriending services share the common goal of assisting befriendees to the stage of no longer needing the service.

The befriendees that participated in this research expressed mixed views concerning their need for befriending in the future. While some felt that they would no longer require the service, others explained that their circumstances would not change and that they would continue to need befriending. This raises a number of issues. For example, if more befriendees continue to use befriending services for an infinite period of time, fewer befrienders will become available to befriend new users. In other words, befriending services may become saturated. It also raises the question of the length of service expected from the befriender.

Ensuring Value

- The befrienders and befriendees that participated in this research highly valued the befriending relationship and the work carried out by befriending services. However, a few isolated areas were highlighted that could be improved upon, namely; providing adequate out-of-pocket expenses for befrienders; ensuring that all befriendees have access to services; and valuing volunteers.

Most of the services that participated in this research provided travel and out-of-pocket expenses to all or some of their volunteers. Providing reimbursement for costs entailed is an important feature of volunteering, with the Government Compact on Volunteering emphasising that volunteers should not be out of pocket through their volunteering (Home Office, 2001). Failure to reimburse expenses may discourage people from lower-income and disadvantaged communities from volunteering (Home Office, 1995). Many befriending services in Northern Ireland

operate on limited budgets. Therefore, funding must be made available to all befriending services to facilitate the payment of expenses to all volunteers.

Removing barriers to accessing services is a fundamental objective in current health and social care provision. While befriending often involves the befriender travelling to visit the befriended, some services involve all individuals meeting on a group basis at a centre or social venue. Therefore, befriending services need to ensure that all individuals can access these places, for example, through providing assistance and transport.

The majority of befrienders expressed feeling valued in their role. However, the importance of valuing volunteers to maintain, and retain a satisfied volunteer workforce must be emphasised.

Befriending: A Service or Friendship?

- The nature of the befriending relationship - whether it is a service or friendship - is often debated (for example, Dean and Goodlad, 1998; Schneider, 1992). The Scottish Befriending Development Forum (1997) maintains that befriending is not equivalent to friendship:

‘Friendship is a private, mutual relationship. Befriending is a service.’

However, in this research, many befriended expressed having a friendship with their befrienders. Furthermore, comments from some befrienders revealed that these feelings were reciprocal, emphasising that their relationship had progressed to being friends. A number of factors may influence the development of friendships in these situations. For example, the coordinators often matched volunteers and users according to similar personality traits and experiences. As these are important ingredients for fostering friendship in any situation, it may logically follow that friendships do develop between individuals. Additionally, peer befriending, a model which may be described as offering a more ‘equal’ relationship, may also facilitate the growth of friendship.

The fact that befrienders actively seek out befriending opportunities as opposed to other, less intimate types of voluntary activity indicates that at least some may be interested in providing something other than ‘a service’. This research has suggested that, what initially begins as a manufactured relationship may progress into a strong and lasting bond, one that withstands the length of the service involvement. This is illustrated in the popularity and success of dating agencies, which ‘organise’ relationships between individuals unknown to each other (although it is true to say that both parties are involved on a more ‘equal’ basis). The existence of an organisational structure may not necessarily prevent true friendships from developing.

Not all the participants in this study indicated that friendships had developed. Indeed, the progression of ‘relationship’ to ‘friendship’ depends on a number of factors such as personality characteristics; similarity of experience; motivations for involvement with the service; and expectations of the relationship. However, this research suggests that, for at least some individuals, befriending can develop into friendship, and befrienders and befriended can become friends.

Economic Value

The first part of this chapter examined the social value of befriending and how it benefits befrienders and befriendees. This section is concerned with the economic value of befriending activity. There has been a growth in interest in the economics of volunteering during the last few years. Volunteering is 'big business' and can bring millions to a country's national economy. For example, in 1995, the in-kind revenue from volunteering in Ireland was estimated to be worth £470.7 million to the non-profit sector (Donoghue, 1999). In South Korea, the economic value of volunteering was estimated to exceed \$2 billion per year¹.

The ardent promotion of volunteering during the last decade has nurtured a keen interest in the values and costs of voluntary action. There has been a drive for volunteer-involving organisations to become more effective, efficient, accountable and transparent (Ellis, 2000). A notional figure based on the average wage is frequently used to estimate the contribution of voluntary activity to the economy. For example, the Northern Ireland study of volunteering employs the average wage of £9.03² to calculate an economic contribution of over £452 million per annum for formal volunteers (VDA, 2001). However, while such estimates are useful they provide only a generalised indication of the financial contribution of volunteering. As volunteers are involved in a variety of roles, a method that costs activity at appropriate wage rates would provide a more accurate account of the economics of volunteering. The Volunteer Investment and Value Audit (VIVA) facilitates this approach.

What is VIVA?

VIVA is a method of assessing how much an organisation spends on its volunteers, the financial value of the work carried out by volunteers, and the relationship between the two (Gaskin, 1999). It involves:

- Determining the amount and kind of work volunteers do
- Calculating what it would cost at appropriate market wage rates
- Quantifying the costs to organisations of involving volunteers
- Comparing the market value of volunteers' work and the organisations' expenditure on volunteers using the VIVA ratio.

Implementing VIVA

7 Praxis befriending schemes participated in this stage of the research. They were located across Northern Ireland, covering both rural and urban areas. 117 befrienders volunteered across the 7 schemes. The befriendees were 233 individuals experiencing or recovering from mental ill health.

Based on the guidelines set out by Gaskin (1997), 2 pre-coded VIVA forms were constructed. The 'Expenditure Form' gathered scheme expenditure information on volunteers and volunteer-related activities during the previous 12-month period. This covered: advertisement and recruitment; induction and training; supplies and equipment; travel expenses; accommodation and food; other volunteer expenses; volunteer administration costs; and management time. The 'Volunteer Time Form' was concerned with the amount of time the befrienders spent in scheme-related

¹ Source: Ministry of Home Affairs and Government Administration (1999).

² DETI

activities during the previous 12 months. This included contact with befriendees; supervision/support; and occasional activities/events (for example, training; summer barbeques). The formalised structure of these forms aimed to reduce discrepancies between schemes and facilitate understanding of the data collection process.

Prior to the implementation of VIVA, the researcher met with the coordinators on a group basis to outline the procedure and answer queries. The content of the VIVA forms and their relevance to Praxis befriending was discussed and the forms amended accordingly.

Coordinators were administered a copy of each of the revised forms, along with an information leaflet explaining how to complete them. The researcher also met with each coordinator individually to assist with filling in the forms. These meetings lasted approximately 2 hours each.

Feedback from coordinators on the VIVA process indicated that they would have experienced difficulties in filling in the forms without the guidance of the researcher. However, the coordinators kept detailed financial and volunteer records on each of their schemes and were able to fully complete both forms. On occasion, 'best guess' estimates had to be provided for items that were purchased at an organisational level (for example, stationary³). Coordinators also had to estimate the time spent by befrienders in some befriending-related activities, for example, average weekly time spent in contact with befriendees.

The Ratio

The researcher calculated the total amount of time volunteered by befrienders and the total expenditure for each scheme. The value of befrienders' time was calculated by multiplying the total time spent in befriending-related activities by the hourly rate of a similar paid job. A local befriending scheme paid its volunteers an hourly rate of £4.30 per hour and this figure was used to calculate the ratio.

The main findings from this analysis were:

- During the 12-month period, the 117 Praxis befrienders had volunteered for 18740.5 hours. This was an average of 160 hours per volunteer per year
- Total befriending activity was valued at £80,584.15, an annual value of almost £700 per volunteer per year
- The total yearly expenditure on befriending across the 7 schemes was £70,634.10. This indicated that, during the 12-month period, it cost the organisation just over £600 per volunteer
- The VIVA ratio was calculated by dividing the total value of volunteering by the total expenditure on volunteers:

$$\text{VIVA RATIO} = \underline{\underline{\text{Total expenditure on volunteers}}}$$

³ Items such as stationary were included as expenditure when they were used for the purpose of the befriending scheme – for example, sending letters to volunteers or referral forms to social workers.

Total value of volunteering

$$\frac{\underline{\pounds 70,634.10}}{\underline{\pounds 80,584.15}} = 1.14 \text{ or } 1:1.14$$

- This ratio indicates that for every £1 invested in befrienders by the organisation, there is a return of £1.14 in the value of voluntary work generated.

DISCUSSION

Employing VIVA to calculate the economic value of befriending activity raised the following issues:

'Replacement Cost'

- The VIVA ratio indicated that volunteer befriending services within Praxis were cost-effective. A total 'replacement cost' for the service can be calculated by adding the total expenditure on volunteers to the total value of volunteering (Gaskin, 1997). This indicates that, if this service were purchased, its total cost would be £146,577.88; or £20,939.70 per service per year. This indicates the added value of volunteer befriending. As Ellis (1999) observes:
'Volunteers extend the budget beyond anything you could otherwise afford.'

'Hidden Costs'

- Employing the VIVA ratio with this sample of 7 befriending schemes highlighted, not only the value of befriending services, but also the 'hidden costs' of providing these services. These findings indicate that, while volunteers had a positive value in unpaid time, there were also high running costs associated with these services. The main areas of expenditure were staff wages and volunteer travel expenses, particularly for schemes which covered large rural areas.

The ratio for the Praxis schemes falls below those reported by Gaskin (1999) of between 1:2 and 1:13.5. Gaskin indicates that different ratios can be expected from different organisations and caution should be exercised when trying to compare ratios between services. A number of factors may affect the cost-value ratio, including type and size of organisation; user group; nature of volunteer roles and management and support systems. For example, Gaskin (1997) reported that paid management jobs contributed to lower ratios. Befriending schemes, due to the nature of their user groups, require a high degree of support and training for their volunteers. Paid staff are often an integral part of the service. Therefore, the payment of staff wages across the 7 schemes may be partly responsible for the lower ratio observed here.

The VIVA Process

- Coordinators were each given individual ratios for their own schemes. They felt that involvement in the VIVA process was a useful exercise, commenting that it heightened their awareness of the work actually carried out by their befriending schemes and volunteers. Coordinators also indicated that the VIVA results would be useful for future funding applications and contract bids.

Coordinators indicated that they would have encountered difficulties in completing the forms without assistance from the researcher. The forms should be modified to make individual completion easier. However, contact with the coordinators was beneficial from the research perspective as the researcher was able to gather information that the coordinators may have overlooked.

Reducing Reliance on other Services

- The cost of the service per befriender could be calculated by dividing total expenditure by the number of befrienders. This indicates that it costs the service just over £300 per befriender per year. Befriending services may reduce hospital readmission rates and user dependence on other services such as GPs and social workers. For example, Faccincani et al (1990) found that greater levels of social support were associated with reduced use of psychiatric inpatient services. Therefore, befriending may be a particularly cost-effective method of providing services to people with mental ill health.

The Value of Volunteering

The VIVA ratio is not a measure of the productivity or efficiency of an organisation. It should not be looked at in isolation to determine a service's effectiveness:

‘VIVA measures an aspect of volunteering which is quantifiable, has validity and is informative. But measures of cost effectiveness should be assessed in the wider context of all the values and benefits of having volunteers.’

(Gaskin, 1999)

VIVA is only one measure of value and should be examined in association with the social value of befriending, as advocated in this report.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to examine the extent, nature and value of volunteer befriending activity in Northern Ireland. Using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, the research painted a broad picture of befriending across a wide range of user groups, while providing depth through personal accounts of befriending experiences. Good practice in befriending was identified, providing a blueprint for future quality service provision. The data on motivation highlighted issues that can be used to facilitate befriender recruitment, satisfaction and retention. The benefits of befriending have demonstrated the value of investing in befriending services and their volunteers. Identifying the financial implications of using volunteers may assist with the prioritisation of budgets and for the future funding of befriending services.

This research has been timely. It came amid a growth in the popularity of befriending across the province, with considerable numbers of Northern Irish citizens becoming involved in befriending here. Many significant issues were raised throughout this report which require further consideration. For example, many services operate on limited funding, yet provide a much needed and valued service to many people across the province. This has identified the need for further resources to be made available to befriending services. Information on recruiting and retaining befrienders will be valuable for the future expansion of services. The low turnover of befrienders suggests that investing in volunteers is not misplaced.

Befriending is a valuable resource in Northern Ireland. The results of this research suggest that it should be supported, expanded and developed to enable it to continue to play a significant role in promoting the health and well-being of citizens across the province.

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APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

Organisational Survey

Identifying befriending services

In constructing the ‘befriending directory’, contact lists for services that used volunteers were obtained from the two main volunteer umbrella organisations in Northern Ireland – the Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency (VDA) and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). These lists consisted of 268 and 642 possible contacts. Listings of all Volunteer Bureaux (13) and all the Health and Social Services Trust Boards (19) were also obtained.

The various lists were combined and modified – duplicated organisations were omitted, as were those that did not use volunteers or did not operate in Northern Ireland. Some organisations operated more than one service. When this was identified, each service was included individually as many operated independently.

Where possible, telephone contact was made to determine whether an organisation operated a befriending service as a personal approach can positively influence response rates (Oppenheim, 1992). However, this approach was found to be very time consuming with the number of call-backs high. Consequently, the majority of organisations were contacted by post.

Although effort was made to target all services using volunteers, it is acknowledged that all relevant services might not have been identified.

Contacting Services

Before administering the questionnaire, introductory letters and leaflets providing information on the research were mailed to the 442 services on the contact list. In addition to informing coordinators about the research, conducting a mailing before the distribution of questionnaires helps to increase response rates (Oppenheim, 1992). At this stage, 11 services indicated that they did not provide volunteer befriending and were subsequently removed from the list.

After 2 weeks, the questionnaires were mailed to 432 (an additional contact had been made) services. A prepaid envelope was included to encourage return of questionnaires. Services that did not provide befriending were asked to return their questionnaires uncompleted. Reminder letters and an extra copy of the questionnaire were mailed on 2 additional occasions to maximise response rates.

‘Church Befriending’

The issue arose regarding the inclusion of church ‘befriending/visiting’ services in the research. Interviews were held with representatives from each of the four main churches in the province – Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian and Catholic to determine the nature of these services. These interviews suggested that, while the visitation work carried out was widespread, it was often informal, with little matching, supervision and monitoring of relationships. It also often occurred independently, at individual parish level. Given the number of individual places of worship across Northern Ireland, it was decided that inclusion of this type of visitation

was beyond the scope of this research. However, it is an area of importance and it is recommended that further research in this field is recommended.

Motivation to Befriend

Volunteer Functions Inventory: Sampling

The 18 befriending services that took part in interviews during the first stage of the research formed the sampling frame for this stage. These services represented a variety of user groups, were of various sizes and were distributed across Northern Ireland.

882 befrienders were identified across these 18 services. Given both the practical and monetary resources available for the research, it was decided that a 15% sample (132 befrienders) would provide an adequate base upon which to pilot the questionnaire. Previous research (Okun et al, 1998) indicated an expected response rate of between 51-55% for this approach. Therefore, to obtain the required number of returned questionnaires, 249 questionnaires were administered.

Implicit stratification was employed to ensure that the number of questionnaires administered to each service were proportional to the number of befrienders at that service.

Volunteer Functions Inventory: Administration

Questionnaires were circulated to befrienders via the volunteer coordinators. Coordinators were asked to distribute these questionnaires to a variety of befrienders – for example, males and females; various ages; long-term befrienders, and those that have been volunteering for a short time. To increase response rates and reduce acquiescence bias, the questionnaires were anonymous. Befrienders were asked to return them in a pre-paid enveloped provided. In the event that they could not identify enough befrienders to complete the questionnaires, coordinators were instructed to return them uncompleted to the researcher, indicating how many were distributed. 23 were returned uncompleted. Therefore, the total number of questionnaires administered to the befrienders was 225.