



AGE BETTER
IN SHEFFIELD

Telephone Befriending Service

A Guide for Volunteers



South
Yorkshire
Housing
Association



syha.co.uk

Introduction

In response to the Coronavirus outbreak, Age Better in Sheffield are currently offering a telephone befriending service for people aged 50 and over.

Telephone befriending is a wonderful opportunity for people to hear from a friendly voice, to share stories, and to find out more about services that are available in Sheffield during this time (including medication pick-ups, food delivery, support and more).

Providing this service is especially important for those who are not online, and it is one way that older people can share connections with others whilst we are all advised to stay at home.

This booklet includes all the information you will need to start volunteering as a telephone befriender.

Contact Details

If you have any queries, or experience any issues during your telephone calls please do get in touch with us:

Paul Woodhouse - Programme Co-ordinator:
P.Woodhouse@syha.co.uk 07947 238 290

Edyta Bancer - Programme Manager:
E.Bancer@syha.co.uk 07517 216 574

Where do I start?

- Before making contact as a volunteer it is worth thinking about how often you will be able to offer a phone call. Some people may like daily calls, some may prefer weekly - if you know how much time you can provide this will help manage expectations from the beginning.
- In the first phone call introduce yourself as being part of the Age Better in Sheffield befriending service. The person you are calling will have expressed an interest in having a call. Explain that you are calling to offer a listening ear during this difficult time and ask them how they would like to be addressed.
- Explain that what is said during the call is confidential, unless there is some concern that they might be at risk to themselves or others, in which case we have a duty of care to share this information with others.
- It is helpful to agree on whether the person being befriended wants to discuss Coronavirus or not. Calls don't have to ignore Coronavirus and it is okay to create opportunities to discuss it.
- At the end of the phone call refer to the check-list at the end of this guide.

Some suggested topics and advice to discuss with participants

- How are they **feeling** today, and do they have any concerns or worries?
- Ask about their own **personal history**: family/ work/ where they were born/ grew up.
- Any **pets** living with them? People generally enjoy speaking about their pet.
- Are they able to do anything that's **bringing them joy** at the moment? What do they enjoy?
- The **weather** is often an easy way into a conversation!
- **Food and mealtimes** e.g. What are you having for lunch today? What time do you usually have breakfast? What do you think you might cook today?
- How people are **spending their time**? Do they have household chores they do each day? Are there any programmes they like to listen to on the radio/watch on television?
- What time are they on? Are they going to **watch/listen** to something today? Do you read/do **crosswords**/enjoy any **craft activity**?
- Are they in touch with **friends and family members** by telephone/ video? When do they usually hear from them?
- Don't assume to know what people want but don't be afraid to ask them.

- Check their **confidence or ability to access online resources**, and consider **signposting** them to the wide range of online resources or help them navigate the elements that may be particularly interesting for them.
- Are they **regularly calling a friend** for a catch up or a relative, or a neighbour? During this time of isolation, it is important we all reach out and feel connected.
- Ensure that you **talk about topics other than Coronavirus** and negative things.
- Ask if they listen to **podcasts or audio books**. There is an endless supply of free podcasts available through Apple/Spotify/Google etc. **The Sheffield Library has invested huge amounts of resource in its online library** which includes free access to audio books if you already belong to the library. There really is something for everyone.
- Is there **a job around the house** that you've been meaning to get to, or **a hobby** you never got around to starting?
- Do they have a **garden?** Are they able to make use of it? Are they able to go out for a walk once a day?
- Exposure to the **news and media**: How much time are they spending watching or listening to the news? - Is there a news programme they feel is best at keeping them up to date? **How does watching/listening to the news making them feel?**

Helpful Tips for Listening

Remember that your role is to listen - you are not calling to fix any problems, or necessarily have answers. You are there to provide a listening ear to those that are possibly feeling lonely, anxious or isolated.

With that in mind, here are some helpful tips:

- Verbal cues such as 'oohh' or 'mmm' can indicate that you are listening and that you are engaged in what they are saying
- Don't be afraid of silences
- Use open questions to find out more about people and what is important to them
- Share your experiences, but try to avoid talking about yourself
- Try to avoid interrupting people
- Be clear when you speak

Frequently Asked Questions

What if they don't answer?

They might not be answering because they are having phone problems or had a last minute appointment and haven't had time to tell us. We advise that you wait five minutes if you can and try calling them again. If they still don't answer, you might want to try another time to call them.

What if I don't get on with my friend or we have nothing in common?

Sometimes it may take time to build a relationship with your telephone friend, so we would always recommend having a few calls before making a judgement.

If you're really struggling, then please let us know and we'll talk you through the options available.

How often should I call?

This is your decision. At the end of each phone call, you can arrange with your befriender when you would like to speak again.

What should I do if the person I call starts to talk about something I am uncomfortable with, or I am concerned about their safety/wellbeing?

A befriending relationship is one that works within clear boundaries, which apply to both you as a volunteer and the older person you share friendship calls with. Should you be concerned about the safety/wellbeing of the person, or you have concerns about the appropriateness of the call, then please use the contact points listed on page 1.

Checklist

- How often would they like to be called? Please arrange calls ONLY between Monday-Friday, 9-5.
- Do they have access to any technology (internet, email etc)? If so, would they like any help with accessing things via those tools?
- Is there anything they need? If they do, please pass it on to Paul.
- Give feedback to Paul Woodhouse on how the calls are going.



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