

VOLUNTARY ACTION SHETLAND - SHETLAND BEFRIENDING SCHEME

MATCHING PROCESS PROCEDURE

Matching is the process that links volunteer befrienders to the service user. It involves making informed decisions on the suitability of two people to be matched to achieve an effective befriending relationship.

The aim of the process is to give the best possible chance of the relationship working by trying to match the needs and expectations of both parties.

The Importance of Matching

Matching is a process that enables care to be taken in deciding which befriender meets with which service user. The aim of the process is to ensure that by personalising each match, they are given the best opportunity to become established, and meet the needs and expectations of both parties. Matching, which involves careful consideration, also enables the organisation to provide its best service and be accountable for the decisions it takes.

Final matching decisions are to be made by a member of staff who has met both the volunteer and the service user. Matching decisions must take into account the service users needs and the volunteer's capability, and their profiles and preferences. All matching decisions are formally recorded.

Giving Choice in Matching

The matching process should involve asking both parties for their opinion on who they would best relate to and why. However this should be done in line with the organisations Equal Opportunities Policy in order that individuals are not discriminated against. (See Equal Opportunities Policy)

Information Sharing

The matching process will involve the sharing of some personal information either verbally or in writing.

Scheme staff should discuss with volunteers and the service user (and their parents/guardians/legal representative if appropriate) which information each needs to know about the other before they meet (bearing in mind the confidentiality policy), so that both parties are aware of the information that will be exchanged.

The scheme asks all volunteers and service users to complete a user profile about their hobbies and interests so that written information can be shared before an introduction meeting is organised.

Issues to Consider in Matching

The issues that can influence choice in matching volunteers and service users can be varied and complex. The overall goal is to achieve positive compatibility that meets the needs and expectations of those involved.

In order to reach a balanced decision it is important to be aware of the attitudes of everyone involved. Issues that may need to be taken into account can include:

- Volunteer's experience and abilities
- Availability – proximity/times available
- Age
- Gender
- Race, ethnicity, culture
- Interests
- Opinions of carer/relative of the service user
- Sexuality
- Safety of the volunteer and service user
- Commonality of experience – both parties having a shared similar life experience, it may prove either helpful or unhelpful

Waiting Times For a Volunteer

In some situations, the volunteer and the service user may wait some time to be matched. It is important for scheme staff to keep individuals fully informed of progress and likely outcomes in such situations. Also it may well be that staff are unable to offer a specific match that has been requested, i.e. a young boy may want a male volunteer however there is not one available and a female is offered. In such a case, encouragement to try the match for a couple of meetings is fully offered with a consideration for close support and supervision offered in case the match does not work out.

It may also be the case that a suitable volunteer cannot be found for a service user. Whilst the scheme endeavours to try to support everyone who is applicable for the service, there are times that a suitable match may not be found. If a service user's file is considered for a match three times over a suitable time period, and a match is not found, scheme staff would review the referral/application to consider if another service may be suitable to meet the service user's needs and would look to close the file.

“Gut Feeling”

Often the matching of a specific volunteer with a service user will “feel right”. Whilst these feelings can be helpful, it is important to clarify and articulate the underlying reasons.

Matching should not be based on gut feeling alone, but should allow much more detailed consideration of issues relevant to the scheme and those involved in it.

Rejection

Once information has been exchanged both parties should be encouraged to discuss any concerns they may have. The opportunity to reject the match offered before the meeting takes place is built in to be part of the matching process.

The negative effects of rejection after meeting should be emphasised to volunteers, along with the expectation for them to fulfil the commitment agreed with the scheme once they have been introduced to the service user.

Beginnings

The handling of beginnings and endings are important elements in a successful relationship. There are potential issues that need to be acknowledged. At the beginning of the relationship there is the potential of rejection for both parties, and both parties often report feelings of “What if they don't like me?”

The successful handling of beginnings by scheme staff can enable a relationship to get off the ground, and the sensitive management of endings is important so that any positive achievements of the relationship are not negated.

First Meetings

The way in which a relationship starts can often set the tone for what is to follow.

It is important for the scheme to be aware that volunteers and service users can be apprehensive about first meetings and find them stressful. The scheme will be sensitive towards this and provide the necessary support and close monitoring of the situation. Consideration will be given to suitable format and locations for first meetings, where both parties will feel comfortable.

Scheme staff will be involved at the first meeting to introduce volunteers and service users to one another as well as to establish practical issues, clarify the goals of the befriending, review the types of activities that are to be undertaken and practical issues such as meeting times and exchange of contact details. The first meeting will also be about confirming the first meeting plan arrangements and answering any outstanding questions.

Scheme staff will meet with the volunteer for some time before their meeting with the service user. This is to enable the staff member to share relevant information about health and safety in terms of activities when out, provide a copy of the parental consent form to the volunteer for service users under 16 years of age, provide a monitoring/expenses claim form for the outings and offer support to the volunteer for first meeting nerves.

Scheme staff will be available after the initial meeting to support and discuss with both the volunteer and the service user any concerns or anxieties they may have. Scheme staff will contact both parties separately after the first meeting out to review and check if both parties want to continue. If so, the staff member will contact both parties again at the 6 week point to review match progress, and once again at the 3 month point. Regular support will continue through the match with 6 weekly contact with the volunteer and 3 monthly with the service user and an open door policy for each party to contact the scheme at any time when they need support.

Extra support, reassurance and opportunities to talk about how the relationship is developing will always be available from scheme staff if both parties feel they require it in order to establish their own confidence levels.

Relationship Development Monitoring

There is no set pattern for how a relationship might develop, but the potential for teething problems or a settling-down period must be appreciated. The scheme has set in place a trial period of 6 weeks which then follows a review. Scheme staff will conduct individual meetings with the service user (and their family, carer or legal representative where appropriate), volunteer, and referring agent (if appropriate) at this point to ensure all parties are still happy for the befriending to continue. Staff will always be available to provide extra support to any new match which may be taking time to settle.

At any time if the match is not working for either party there is the opportunity to seek support to talk through things with staff and it may be that the best option is to conclude the match. Encouragement will always be offered to continue, however, it may be in the best interests of either party to end the match appropriately and look for an alternative match.

Endings

The importance of the handling of endings cannot be underestimated. Unless dealt with appropriately and positively there is the potential for undoing a lot of the good work achieved throughout a befriending relationship.

It is recognised that endings can be planned or unplanned events. Ideally endings should come about as a mutual agreement between both parties and the scheme will encourage this to be the approach. The scheme does not necessarily see the end of a match as a negative thing, no matter how short the match has been. The decision to end a match will seem right for the individual making that decision at that time.

People may find endings difficult because of the range and intensity of emotions that can be attached to them. There is also the danger in letting a relationship 'drift' on through an unhealthy dependency, or because broaching the notion of an ending feels uncomfortable. It is vital for staff to acknowledge to all parties that endings can be difficult and complicated, and sometimes they may illicit feelings of sadness, loss or possibly failure. On many occasions, endings can be a reason to celebrate and to look forward to the future, especially if the relationship has been successful and the individual has been able to "move on".

Essentially the intention should always be to plan for endings and the scheme encourages 3 months notice to be given from either party before a match comes to a formal end. That will be made explicit in the volunteer initial training.

No matter how the relationship comes to an end both parties will be given the opportunity to reflect on their relationship. Scheme staff will meet with both parties to explore these issues and discuss where they feel they are now and what, if anything, they feel they have achieved within their original goals set out.

Once the befriending relationship does end it is important that the scheme makes a formal statement to both parties clarifying the fact that it is no longer accountable for the relationship. Great care must be taken to explore the motivations and expectations of people who may choose to keep in contact with each other.

Endings need to be handled sensitively by the scheme and this is another time when staff must offer extra support to the volunteer, who will be dealing with their

own feelings about the ending, along with responding to those they were matched with.

Unplanned Endings

It is recognised that the relationship may be terminated without notice and these abrupt endings may cause the other party to feel abandoned and rejected.

Occasionally the volunteer or service user may terminate the relationship without notice. An abrupt ending by the volunteer may be experienced by the service user as a severe rejection, abandonment or even punishment – particularly if the relationship has been one of their few experiences of building up trust. It is crucial that any such feelings are recognised and responded to. Similarly, the volunteer may experience feelings of rejection, hurt and anger and it will be the responsibility for the scheme staff to support the volunteer through their feelings.

In exceptional circumstances, the organisation has the right to, and may have to decide to, terminate the relationship for the welfare or safety of either party. Such circumstances must be very carefully managed by the scheme.

The support of the scheme staff will be important in these instances to ensure that both parties are able to work through the feelings that this raises.

Demand for further matches

The scheme understands that some service users will be keen to consider a second and even third match in order to help support them in the long term. The scheme is also very aware of the need to move service users forward so that there does not become a dependency on the service.

Due to the high demands for the service, the scheme is unable to offer extensive long term support to all who access support.

In order to reach as many people as possible who require the support, the scheme is able to offer a maximum time of two years' service provision to each service user. This may be delivered through one, two or even three matches. Throughout this time it will be important for scheme staff to be clear the reasons why there is a limit on the provision.

Discretion will be given to a service user where their matches have not been considered a success, then consideration would occur regarding further provision.