EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

AGE AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

SUBMISSION FROM BADENOCH AND STRATHSPEY COMMUNITY TRANSPORT (BSCTC)

Background:

Here 2 Help is a project of the Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company which is a charitable company limited by guarantee that has been delivering community transport since 1997.

The Here 2 Help project was initiated in response to information and individual stories reported by the company’s drivers from elderly passengers who were struggling with social isolation and loneliness. Often the driver taking the person to their appointment was one of the few people they would see in a week. We discovered that many people were no longer able to get out to either socialise or do their weekly shop, with many having their shopping or meals delivered to their home. Often the only visitors to their homes were paid professionals providing daily care. Family members were often no longer living in the area or were elderly themselves and having difficulty visiting.

Here 2 Help is a member of Befriending Networks and supports their submission.

Service delivery:

The project aims to recruit local people who are then matched with referred individuals to undertake activities of their choice, with the intention of connecting or reconnecting people with other local people, activities and their communities.

Clients can refer themselves or be referred by friends, family or professionals involved in their care. Whilst there is no age restriction related to referrals, the majority of people who are referred are older people aged over 65, with the majority of referrals being people over 80 and the oldest 102! Most people live alone and suffer from a medical condition which restricts their mobility and/or their ability to get out and about in the community independently.

The service understands that loneliness and isolation can occur in any situation and accepts referrals for people living in with own home, sheltered housing schemes and residential care. Our current client group takes in all of these groups.

To date referrals have been received from individual family members, friends, General Practitioners, the Occupational Therapy service and the Alzheimer Scotland link worker. All referrers have been concerned about the person’s lack of social contact, their inability to get out of the home, and the subsequent adverse impact of this on the persons mental health.
Befrienders visit people once a week on an agreed day and time. Befrienders discuss and agree the activity for the visit according to the wishes, interests, and skills of the person. They also share information with the person about events and activities available to them locally. All clients are registered with the company on the car scheme which allows them to access a volunteer car driver to attend appointments or events they would not previously have been able to attend unaided.

All Befrienders undergo PVG checks, induction, and training from the company. Regular meetings are held with Befrienders and the Befriending Co-ordinator to discuss issues and best practice.

At present we have Befrienders visiting people for coffee and chats; supporting people to get out shopping, visiting cafes, going out to garden centres, listening to music, and playing scrabble and cribbage. However, Befrienders can undertake any social activity with the person that a friend or family member could do. Befrienders do not undertake activities that would normally be done by a paid professional or anything which involves personal care, financial or medical support.

**Benefits of Befriending:**

Befriending benefits both the Befriender and the Befriendee! Benefits include an improved sense of wellbeing; a greater sense of self-worth; improved mobility and greater personal independence, all brought about by higher levels of social and personal interaction, community presence and having FUN! These benefits can apply equally to both the volunteer and the person visited.

**A client’s view:**

“*I referred myself to Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company after talking to my GP about my problems getting out and about. The lady I spoke to also suggested the Here2Help Befriending Project. The Befriending Co-ordinator then came out to speak to me about it.*

I had been looking forward to retiring and getting out and about more often, but then I developed health problems and couldn’t do it which was frustrating.

My Befriender comes every week. We go out because that’s what I want to do. I like to get out and used to enjoy travelling a great deal. I get stir crazy staying indoors.

I look forward to it every week. We arrange a time that suits us both. You can’t rely on family to do everything. I need to do things for myself. We do what I like to do….get out of the house. We go to cafes, garden centres, the bakers and visit local villages and towns.

I would definitely recommend it…you will feel alot better! Don’t be frightened of it.

I can’t praise the project and the company enough. I use the BSCTC bus to go shopping. The driver helps me put my bins out which I can’t do anymore. I also use
the car scheme to get to the doctors and have been on the Heather Centre trip. The Befriending Co-ordinator also put me in touch with the Patient Transport scheme when I couldn’t get to the hospital for my appointments. In the future I plan to get along to a music afternoon and other events to try to meet more local people.”

A Befrienders view:

“My background is in nursing which I adored. I was an SEN but was forced to retire early due to health issues in 2004. My job meant a lot to me and to keep active I started going on walks once a week with a voluntary group to stay active both physically and mentally.

About a year ago I heard about the Befriending Project that Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company was starting up to provide Befrienders to visit people in their own homes who were isolated or lonely. I have been visiting a lady with dementia who lives in a very isolated location for almost a year now. We read newspapers, chat and have a game of scrabble together. As part of this project I also volunteered to help with the pilot schools project which supports young people to visit older people in local care homes. I feel it is important that we help young people to get onto the right path in life. It’s also great to see the young and old getting on together and listening to each other’s stories.

I have benefitted from a number of training sessions as a volunteer such as: First Aid; Dementia Awareness; Winter driving; Deaf awareness and Sight Impairment. We have also had training in Boundaries which I feel is very important. It is so easy to cross boundaries when you want to help someone, but it’s important to stick to them and not go outside your role.

I feel satisfaction that I am helping other people. I appreciate being put into a position of trust which makes you feel good. Overall I get amazing satisfaction from my volunteering with the company and I have met lots of people in the community who I would never have met without being in this role.”

Helen Morris
Befriending Co-ordinator
Here 2 Help
Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company
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