At the Eric Liddell Centre in Edinburgh we provide a Befriending Project which is open to all carers living in the city. We define carer as a person who provides unpaid help and support to a relative, friend or neighbour who cannot manage to live independently without the carer's help due to frailty, illness, disability or addiction.

The Carer Befriending Project aims to remove or lessen isolation and loneliness experienced by carers and promote development of self confidence and self esteem, enabling carers to live independently in the community and carry on caring with confidence.

It is now well known that long term caring can have a negative impact on carers' own health. Carers need to look after themselves in order to carry on caring with confidence. Many carers experience isolation and loneliness during their caring journey.

Carers are partnered up with a volunteer befriender and usually meet up once a week or fortnight for a minimum of one hour, although this can be for longer if required. What they do in that time depends on what the carer needs from the relationship. We have people who attend classes, go for walks, tours round museums or just sitting having a chat.

In some instances, meeting with their befriender is their only opportunity of meeting with another person outside their caring responsibility. In their caring role it is usually all about the person they care for, so the befriending allows them to do something for them.

Carers range in age from 31 to 85 but age has no restriction on them experiencing how lonely or socially isolated these individuals are. Continued feedback and monitoring from the carers indicate how meeting with their befriender has helped them cope in dealing in their caring role especially in combating loneliness and isolation.

We would advocate that befriending helps combat loneliness and isolation.

Sally Sorrie
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