Carers (Scotland) Bill

Befriending Networks

Befriending Networks broadly supports the Carers (Scotland) Bill, and legislation that sets out the rights of unpaid carers and young carers. However, we would like to make some observations about aspects of the Bill which we believe may require further attention.

- Befriending Networks supports the requirement for Local Authorities to give consideration to whether support for carers should include a break from caring, and a requirement to set out the short breaks available. We would ask the Scottish Government to consider the inclusion of befriending services when determining the forms of support which may constitute a break from caring. There are a number of befriending services across Scotland who provide valuable respite for carers by matching a carefully trained volunteer befriender with someone who is cared for in the home, giving the carer the opportunity to take much needed time to themselves for a short period every week. Our evidence suggests that this brief respite constitutes a lifeline for many carers, allowing them to recharge their batteries sufficiently to continue their caring responsibilities. Befriending organisations also support young carers directly, giving them the opportunity for some respite, and also to form a relationship with a trusted adult.

- Befriending services which are part of Befriending Networks’ membership have unique access to training, information, support, resources, shared learning and advice. They can also undertake the Befriending Quality Award, which is a robust process designed to ensure that befriending services operate to the highest possible level. Befriending services have a particular contribution to make to the lives of carers by providing support to people with extremely disparate and at times challenging conditions, such as motor neurone disease, learning disabilities, dementia, heart disease or COPD, as well as providing respite to young carers. Such services are responsive, accessible, person-centred and cost effective, and we believe that befriending activity should be included in any definition of short breaks.

- Befriending services are usually run by third sector organisations, many providing very locally based and responsive services within their communities. We believe that the increased duty on Local Authorities to provide support to carers will inevitably impact on the wider third sector in terms of increasing demand for their services, and this should be recognised in the wider policy context, particularly in the current financial climate which sees smaller third sector services in particular unable to plan properly from year to year due to uncertainty about funding.

We would be happy to provide more information, if required, about befriending services in Scotland and their role in supporting carers and young carers.

Befriending Networks