



Battersea Befriending Network (BBN)

VOLUNTEER POLICY

1. Introduction

Battersea Befriending Network (BBN) is a charitable organisation which exists primarily to provide one-to-one befriending relationships for individuals living in the London Borough of Wandsworth who have experience of mental ill-health. BBN recruits and trains volunteers to act as befrienders, and mentors and thereafter provides support to them on an ongoing basis. In addition, our Management Committee is made up of volunteers.

2. Diversity

BBN is committed to diversity and inclusion, and believes that only a volunteer force which includes diverse cultures, backgrounds, abilities and perspectives can fully be of service to the local community. In particular, past or ongoing experience of mental health problems, far from being viewed as a bar to volunteering, is considered likely to make a person potentially more effective as a befriender. See Diversity and Inclusion policy.

3. Becoming a Befriender

The befriending relationship offers friendship rather than professional support, while at the same time recognising the vulnerability of individuals referred to BBN and that befrienders have to be sensitive to their impact on the befriendees.

Volunteers interested in becoming befrienders are required to complete an application form, giving their personal details and interests, and the names of two referees, and to participate in a short training course, which is devised and run by the Professional Adviser and members of the Committee. Courses take place regularly, at weekends and are open to anyone who is interested, whether or not they have any relevant experience. Using a variety of teaching methods – presentations, group discussions, experiential scenarios and practical exercises – they aim to help participants expand their awareness of mental health issues and to develop their existing caring skills as potential befrienders.

Once the volunteer has successfully completed the course and is able to demonstrate the key qualities of empathy, openness and an ability to listen, he or she will be asked to complete an application for an Enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check and references will be taken up.

Subject to a satisfactory outcome of these safeguarding measures, the volunteer will be “matched” with a person who has been referred to BBN by local agencies as likely to benefit from a befriending relationship. The matching process is based on various criteria and decided by a designated team drawn from members of the BBN Committee. A BBN mentor is allocated to the befriender. The initial meeting between befriender, befriendeed and mentor takes place in co-ordination with a member of the referring agency, and at the meeting the arrangements for future meetings are negotiated.

Befrienders are asked to commit to remaining involved for a minimum of one year.

4. Expenses

Volunteers are entitled to claim reasonable travelling expenses to and from the place of meeting with the person they are befriending. No other expenses are expected to be incurred, but any claims made will be subject to the discretion of the Committee.

5. Support and Supervision

Befrienders are expected to attend bi-monthly support and supervision group meetings, conducted on a model of mutual support and facilitated by mental health professionals and experienced volunteers. This is a forum at which experiences can be shared and any problems encountered in the befriending relationships can be discussed.

Each befriender is allocated a mentor whom he/she can consult at any time in the event of an urgent problem arising between support group meetings. Mentors are expected to contact their befriender regularly, usually at least monthly.

All discussions, whether within the group or one-to-one, are on the basis of strict confidentiality, unless the befriender has information about the befriender or someone connected to them, that gives rise to safeguarding concerns. In this case the befriender must urgently discuss the concerns with their mentor, who will share this information with the Professional Adviser, the Befriending Co-ordinator, and Safeguarding Lead to decide what action may be needed, such as informing the professional network.

6. Becoming a Mentor

BBN mentors are recruited to support befrienders through being available to the befriender for regular discussion of the befriending relationship, and for consultation in urgent situations.

Mentors are expected to attend mentors' meetings every two months, to send regular updates to the Professional Adviser, and to raise any issues either in the group, or directly with the Befriending Co-ordinator or Professional Adviser.

7. Health and Safety

All referrals are screened to ensure that no person matched for befriending has a recent history of aggression or violent behaviour. All volunteers are covered by BBN's public liability insurance. See Health and Safety Policy.

8. Social Events

BBN organises social events from time to time to which all mentors, befrienders and those they befriend are invited. In addition to providing a relaxed atmosphere in which wider social interaction can be facilitated, these events are a way of saying "thank you" to volunteers for their valued contribution throughout the year.

9. Further Training

BBN is committed to helping volunteers develop, through the Support and Supervision group, mentors' group, and through the mentoring relationship. Further training is encouraged.

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