

LINK

Fife Mental Health Adult Befriending Project
Scottish Charity No. SC027493

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24



INTRODUCTION

LINK provides a befriending service for people who are isolated due to ongoing mental health difficulties. The Project recruits, trains, supports appropriate volunteers, and matches them with people referred to our organisation by a recognised key worker. A befriender provides company, support and encouragement to service users who want to participate in social, leisure and recreational activities, or in the life of their communities, but need additional support to achieve this.

LINK began delivering a service in September 1997, the Adolescent Project was established in 2003, an adult service in the Levenmouth area began in 2018 and another for adolescents in Glenrothes in 2019 and Kirkcaldy in 2023. The Project is a member of Befriending Networks, is recognised as a Volunteer Friendly organisation by Fife Voluntary Action and works within their good practice guidelines. LINK is also a Scottish Living Wage Accredited employer.

At present, we employ and are funded for a Project Manager in East Fife for 27 hours per week to support and train twenty volunteers, many of whom have had mental health problems themselves and for a Project Coordinator for Levenmouth for 16 hours per week to support and train a further eight volunteers.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Chair:	Susan Matson – retired CAMHS Clinical Nurse Specialist
Vice Chair:	Neil Kinmont, Befriender
Secretary:	Dorothy Woolley – Volunteer
Treasurer:	Lisa Hainey – Solicitor
Member:	Becca Hutchison – CAMHS, Primary Mental Health Worker
Member:	Lee Graham, Senior Nurse Therapist
Member:	Justine Retford, Befriender
Member:	Alison Grace, volunteer
Link Worker:	Lee-anne Sloan- Social Work Services,

AIM AND PURPOSE OF BEFRIENDING

The aim of befriending is to enhance the quality of a befriender's life by supporting and promoting their welfare, personal development and capacity for self-determination. LINK does this with both 1:1 befriending and through various social outings and group events throughout the year. All of this offers the befriender an opportunity to form a trusting relationship with their befriender, which may enable him/her to:

- develop a greater degree of self-confidence and emotional growth.
- develop a greater capacity to make use of their own personal resources.
- develop a greater capacity to form and maintain relationships with others.
- attend social and group events with some support.
- form supportive friendships with peers.

The befriending relationship can be purely that; a friendship that allows the befriender to get active socially without any pressure to set goals or targets, or it may take more of a mentoring form as some individuals set themselves goals and work through them with the help of their befriender. LINK uses Individual Recovery Outcomes Counter (I.ROC) evaluations that allow individuals to reflect on their recovery and what they would like to work on or achieve; this is reviewed every three to four months. We know that people can and do recover from even the most serious and long-term mental health problems. For some people the recovery process can be long, slow, and at times difficult but the reality is it *can* happen. The unique nature of the recovery process can make it hard to define, but certain things come up frequently, these help us better understand what recovery means. Befriending can help this process.

- Recovery is living a satisfying and fulfilling life; more than the absence of the symptoms of illness. Some people describe themselves as being in recovery while still experiencing symptoms.

WHAT DO THE PEOPLE INVOLVED THINK ABOUT OUR SERVICE?

Through regular evaluations with the service users, volunteers and referrers, we get to know what has made a difference and where we might need to make changes. Often it is what people that tell us that makes the biggest impact though; here are some quotes from the voices that matter:

Befriendees

'She is pretty amazing. When I go out I feel like crap, but it puts me on a high when I've seen her. She's a very good listener and she doesn't judge.'

'C helped me to get out of the house in the evenings, to do something productive which improved my mood. C was easy to chat to, I felt relaxed in her company.'

I really value these times, she ('B') is a godsend, just lovely. We have a lot to talk about.'

'She is understanding. We have lots to chat about despite the age difference.'

'He listens to me, asks questions and takes an interest in my interests.'

'It benefits me a lot; gives me confidence, has made me want to get out there and not shut myself away in the house. A is brilliant!'

"Being befriended opened doors I never knew existed and allowed me to navigate challenges with a trusted guide. It's not just a connection; it's a lifeline to success."

Befrienders

'Working as a befriender with LINK was an incredibly rewarding experience. I knew I wanted to join the project to help make a difference to the community and improve the wellbeing of others. However, befriending is definitely an experience which benefits both parties involved and you will find yourself looking forward to the days/activities you have planned together.'

Additionally, the training provided by the team helps increase your understanding of mental health issues and how to be a good befriender. It also increases your confidence before you eventually meet with your befriender. If I hadn't left St-Andrews, I would still be volunteering today.'

'Befriending with LINK has given me the opportunity to get direct experience working with people experiencing mental health difficulties. It was particularly rewarding to see the huge impact that social connection has on people, and being able to see their progress in gaining confidence and managing their wellbeing was invaluable. Befriending has also allowed me to gain essential skills and experience for work within clinical psychology roles. In particular, befriending allowed me to see the important

work third sector support has on people, as well as enhancing my interpersonal skills for clinical facing roles.

Befriending is such a rewarding experience, for both the volunteers and the people they work with, and I would always encourage people to take up a befriending role - the rewards are so special in these roles, I would love to get back into befriending in the future!"

'She has learnt how to live and be her again, and now has the confidence to go out, access public transport, visit relatives, go shopping. . . she really was housebound before LINK'

'I loved this trip and really felt part of a community.' (Group social event to V&A museum)

Carers

'It was wonderful to see our son develop a relationship and be able to socialise outside of our family group. It was really good for his self-confidence, independence and self-esteem. He looked forward to his visits.'

'Thank you for this wonderful service. We really do need it and value it greatly.'

Referrers

'I have already noticed a huge difference since F has had G. F has benefitted greatly from having a befriender.'

Clinical Psychologist

'H has benefitted greatly from his befriender. They share similar interests enabling him to be less isolated.'

'I'm a huge fan of your service, you do great work. I know how much I values it.'

Community Mental Health Nurse

'K's life over the past 2 years has improved considerably and having his befriender has contributed to this vastly. He clearly enjoys meeting up and regularly updates me on their activities. Although medication has helped, having his befriender has made a major difference.

CMHN

RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

At present we have 18 matches and 17 volunteers as some volunteers befriend more than one service user and Levenmouth has 3 volunteers matches and North-East Fife 15 matches. The Project has developed over the years and benefits from a good profile within the community and with other voluntary and statutory organisations. Currently 35% NE Fife and 80% Levenmouth volunteers have told us that they have experienced poor mental health themselves at some time in their lives. The Project provides an empowering opportunity for befriendees to become befrienders if they feel they would like to at some point.

We welcome volunteers from all walks of life and they are recruited through talks to various groups, recruitment fairs, posters in libraries, churches, cafes, local press, radio, word of mouth and using the local Volunteer Centre and Student Recruitment Services. People are often recommended to us by statutory services as wishing to volunteer to help in their own personal recovery and we recognise the value of people who have used the service and are now in a place to give back. Friends of current volunteers have joined us too; our volunteers are clearly good ambassadors for the service.

Our current volunteers live in St. Andrews, Cupar, Pittenweem, Dundee, Tayport, Newport, Anstruther, Kirkcaldy, Leuchars and surrounding areas. We have a fair few international students volunteering with us this year during their time in Scotland coming from England, India, Switzerland, Italy and Uganda and it's good to exchange experiences of attitudes to mental health and care in different places.

Between them, LINK's Adult Projects need 28 volunteers. We continue to attract and keep our volunteers, some for many years; our current longest serving volunteer has been with the project from the set up when she took a committee role, she has now volunteered as a befriender for the last 10 years.

Fig 1. and 2. Show age and gender of current volunteers.

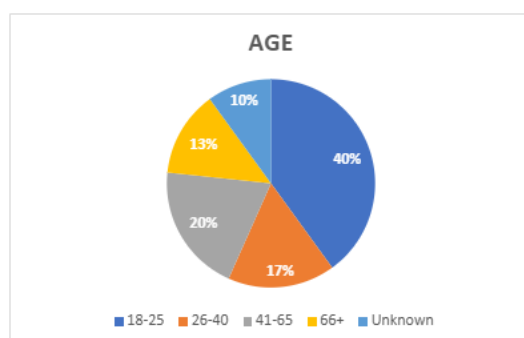


Fig 1.

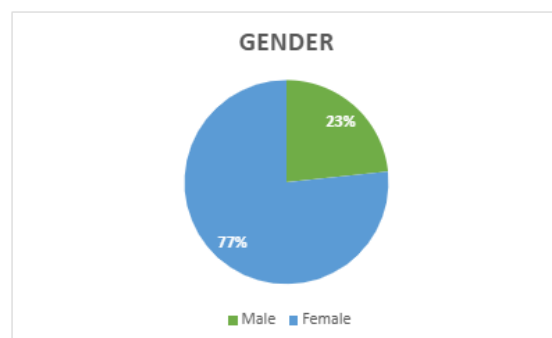


Fig 2.

TRAINING

Seven new NEF and three Levenmouth volunteers have been trained this year, one male and six female in East Fife and three females for the Levenmouth Project. Training covers the befriending process, stigma, common mental health problems, safeguarding and common scenarios that the befriender might encounter. Volunteer talks have been held too.

Chris Dobry gave us an excellent talk on LGBTQ+ awareness and Danielle Wong from 'With You' did a talk on Drug Awareness. This will be the last volunteer talk for now as we have struggled to get volunteers to attend. The Manager has attended courses of Neurodiversity in the Workplace and Equality in the Workplace.

SOCIAL EVENTS AND THE LINK COMMUNITY

In August we held our summer picnic at Craigtoun Park which was a lovely day and we all enjoyed the get together. As always, we took advantage of the facilities at Craigtoun and tried out the crazy golf, the train and the boats. In November some of us went to the bowling alley at Glenrothes and enjoyed a game of bowling and a snack. Our Christmas meal this year was again at the Bank in Anstruther and as always had a good attendance.



The walking group this year has been to Cambo, Craighall Den, Kingsbarns, Cupar, The Lade Braes and on one occasion joined Mental Health and Exercise coach Fiona Oxley at Craigtoun Park for her weekly walk/jog round the park. This was followed by a lovely cuppa and some home baking at the Sunshine café.



In January we held a ‘Great Winter Get Together’ in the supper room in St Andrews Town Hall, which was open to our members and to the general public to encourage people to come out and have a cuppa and a chat together. Maria facilitated a craft stall and Neil was there to help out and make people feel welcome. The Great Get Togethers are inspired by the Jo Cox Foundation.

The Project publishes a quarterly newsletter giving information on events and training, information about funding and donations, people’s experience of befriending and some light-hearted articles. Befrienders and befriendees are encouraged to contribute and there have been articles contributed by both over the last year.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

LINK is registered with the Saltire Awards Scheme, which gives our organisation the chance to reward the hard work put in by our young volunteers (aged 18-25). Certificates are given after 10, 25, 50, 100 and 250 hours of service. Older volunteers are also rewarded with our similar in-house scheme. These certificates are just another little way to say thank you and recognise how much work individuals put into their role. It also provides evidence for the volunteer to take to future employers/educational courses. This year we have had volunteers gain certificates for between 25 and 720 hours.

REFERRALS

Since the very first referrals to the project in August 1997, the NE Fife project has received 383 referrals that fit our criteria and some previous service users rereferred after a period of time. Many more have been out of our geographical remit or out with the age group specified by the Project. Since getting started the Levenmouth project has received 36 referrals.

Since April 2022 there have been eleven people referred to LINK's Adult Project that meet our project's criteria. Six of those referrals were female and five were male... Since April 2023 the Levenmouth Project has received 6 new referrals 4 of which are female and 2 is male.

Referrals this year came from St. Andrews, Cupar, Auchtermuchty, Leuchars, Anstruther and surrounding areas for the East Fife area. For the Levenmouth project referrals came from Leven and Methil

Current service users for the project are aged between 18 and 65, with the largest group being in the 41-65 age bracket with the larger number of service users being female.

Fig 4. and 5. Shows age and gender of current service users. Fig 6 shows where service users live.

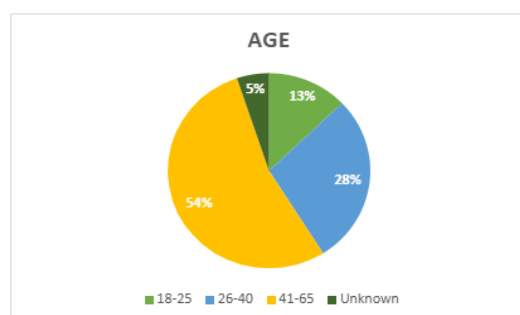


Fig 4.

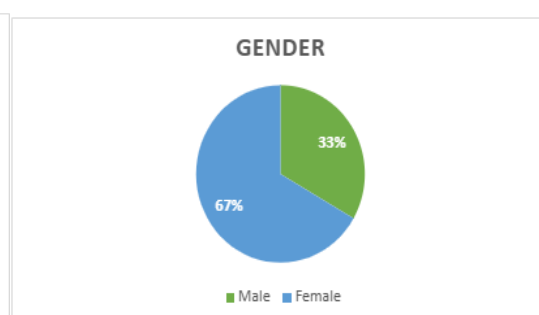


Fig 5.



100% of service users stay within green circle - 15 mile radius
 36% of those service users stay within blue circle - 5 mile radius
 *down from 39% last year

Fig 6

LINK'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE OTHER SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

LINK works with and refers service users to the North East Fife Community Hub, Change, Andy's Man's Club, The Express Group, Men's Shed, Kennoway Community Shed, The Shed at Bayview, Contact Point, SAMH and The Curnie Clubs.

When a service user grows more confident these places are very useful, enabling a volunteer to encourage and support their befriender to socialise and join in the varied activities on offer. Befrienders are encouraged to go along with their befriendeds to these services for the first time to see what is on offer. We have close bonds with these groups, which offer an invaluable service to the community and work closely with the group coordinators, sharing resources and knowledge where we can. Sincere thanks to all the groups for making befrienders, befriendeds and staff so welcome.

THANK YOUS

The Project could not function without the commitment and support provided from a wide range of individuals and organisations. Thank you again to all of you who have contributed to the running of the Project:

- The organisations that fund us:

The National Lottery Community Fund who funded us with £32,152
Fife Council Health and Social Care £11,975.12 and an additional £10,242.00
Mary Moore Trust £7,000
Agnes Hunter Foundation £6000
Allen Lane Foundation £3,500
Cervus Trust, Foundation Scotland £2205.00
Kathleen MacKenzie for donating her expenses

- Neil Kinmont for sharing his time and experience at training with our new volunteers.
- The Management Committee for their hard work and ongoing support throughout the year.
- The staff at Fife Voluntary Action (F.V.A.) for their help, advice and access to their training courses for staff and volunteers.
- My wonderful colleagues who have been such a supportive team as always.
- The staff at Befriending Networks for their invaluable support.
- Fife Primary Care Trust represented on the Committee by CAMHs workers Becca Hutchison and Lee Graham.
- Fife Council Social Work Service who is represented on the management committee by Lee-Anne Sloan our Link worker.
- NHS Fife for their free Health Improvement training programme
- Linda Leighton for independently examining our accounts and preparing them for OSCR.
- Caroline Rochford for HR Services.
- Dorothy Woolley, my supervisor for her support and guidance throughout the year.
- Maria Suttie, my admin worker yet again I have to thank her for her patience, hard work, organisational and IT skills that have supported me through the year.
- Corne Storm and at The Lottery Community Fund for her valuable support as funding officer.
- Chris Dobry and Danielle Wong for giving up their time to talk to our volunteers and staff about their projects.
- St. John's church for allowing us to use their rooms for training and meetings.
- As always the biggest thank you is for my wonderful volunteers because without them the project would be nothing, Thank You!

EAST FIFE PROJECT MANAGER'S REPORT

It has been another busy year for LINK, my thirteenth in post. This year started on a rocky foundation financially as our funding from the Big Lottery Improving Lives had ended and I was spending a lot of my time applying to various different funds and trusts to try to keep the organisation running. Luckily, in August we received the good news that my application to The Big Lottery Improving Lives funding had been successful for a further 3 years. Throughout the early part of this financial year the project was also organising fundraising events such as stalls at local fayres and events and the staff and some supporters took part in the Dundee Kiltwalk raising over £900.

LINK has continued to be funded by Fife Council Health and Social Care Fund, receiving £11,975.12 again this year and an additional £10,242 from the Rural Poverty Action Group and the National Lottery Community Fund which gave us £32,152. We also received funding from the Mary Moore Trust, The Cervus Trust, The Agnes Hunter Trust and The Allen Lane Foundation.

Recruiting volunteers has again been challenging and I have been running under capacity for most of the year but the end of the year has looked more positive with a good few new volunteers attracted and eighteen matches.

The walking group gets out monthly and have managed some lovely walks at Craighall Den, Lade Braes and Hill of Tarvit to name but a few. It is good to be able to exercise in the fresh air with good company and a lot of informal peer support happens along the way.

Our social events have included our summer outing; a picnic at Craigtoun Park, ten-pin bowling, our Christmas meal and a visit to the Dundee Tapestries at the V & A.

Two volunteer talks took place this year; Chris Dobry came and talked to us about LGBTQ+ awareness and Danielle Wong about Drug Awareness. Sadly this will be our last Volunteer Talk for a while as numbers were dwindling so much.

I trained seven new volunteers over the last year, and all are matched and providing quality support to their befriendees. Our volunteers continue to receive certificates recognising the time they have given; Saltire Awards for the 18-25 year olds and LINK certificates for everyone else and volunteers have earned certificates for between 25 to 720 hours. Our longest serving volunteer, Frances McBride has been with us for 26 years, first on the Committee and then as a befriender. There have been twelve new referrals this year, many have been matched and are experiencing the difference befriending can make. Any time donated from a couple of hours to thousands of hours makes a difference to the lives of our service users and may be the best couple of hours in their week. I was reminded just how much of a difference these wonderful people make when I befriended a service user earlier on this year; she had waited a long time for a befriender and there was no-one suitable in her area. As I knew it was only going to be short term I took on the role myself but what a difference it made to this person's life and I can truly say I spent some really enjoyable times with her. So a big thank you to all our wonderful volunteers who do this on a regular basis.

I would like to thank my fantastic colleagues for their support and friendship over the last year. I would also like to say thanks to the Trustees for all their work and to my supervisor Dorothy, who all work away to support the projects. It truly is a great team to be a part of!

Finally, I would like to leave you with some quotes from some of our service users and referrers which is what our service is really about.

Senga Smith, Project Manager

LEVENMOUTH COORDINATOR'S REPORT

What a nice busy year the Levenmouth Project has had, with many social events, volunteer training and wellbeing walks. While volunteer recruitment remains a struggle within Levenmouth, I trained three volunteers last year, however only one of them went on to volunteer for the project, but they have turned out to be a wonderful volunteer. Volunteer training takes place online and covers topics such as different mental health issues, policies related to volunteering, adult protection and mental health and confidentiality. The need for befriending in Levenmouth is clearly necessary as I receive a lot of referrals to the project which come from statutory services, but over the past year I have seen more referrals coming from other charities. For volunteer recruitment we have attended volunteers fairs within Levenmouth, Kirkcaldy, St Andrews and Glenrothes, as well as placing posters amongst the community, posting on social media and advertising through Fife Voluntary Action and Volunteer Scotland.

Our social events and walks are always popular amongst our volunteers and befriendees, with both adult projects coming together for these. This year we had our summer picnic at Craigtoun Park again, which is always a popular choice, we had a nice picnic in the picnic hut within the park with music and games, then had fun on the boats, train, tractor and crazy golf. We went bowling in November, which nearly didn't happen because of the flooding within Fife which meant having to postpone this event. Our Christmas meal was held again in the Bank in Anstruther, where we tucked into a lovely two course meal. We then had our Spring event at the V&A in Dundee where we marveled over the Dundee tapestry followed by a lovely lunch at the café.

Our wellbeing walks are also a lovely way to socialize and are open to all staff, volunteers and their befriendees. We always aim to have these monthly and have explored some nice areas in Fife including Kingsbarns, St Andrews, the East Neuk and Cupar. They always end with a cuppa, which gives people a chance to get to know each other.

I'd like to end with saying a big thank to my wonderful volunteers, the committee, my work colleagues and Senga for being a supportive and understanding manager.

Rebecca Manley, Levenmouth Project Coordinator