

Highland Hospice

Evaluation of Befriending and Care at Home Community Partnerships

Executive Summary

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Produced by:

Dr Susan Warren

Kerrien Grant

Shona Sinclair

Commissioned by:



Executive Summary

Highland Hospice works in partnership with community-based organisations to deliver befriending and care at home services in remote Highland communities. This report provides an evaluation of the Hospice's partnership working to deliver these services. Highland Hospice commissioned SKS Scotland CIC to undertake this work between July and October 2023.

Evaluation aims

- To understand the community partner organisations' experiences of working with Highland Hospice to deliver befriending and care at home services, to include volunteer experiences.
- To understand the impact and value for service users of befriending and care at home services provided by Highland Hospice and community partner organisations.

Methodology

The evaluation was based on a qualitative approach, using a series of semi-structured interviews with 10 community partner organisations (staff and trustees); 9 volunteer befrienders; 10 service users (befriending or Sunflower Home Care); and 4 health and social care professionals. A thematic approach was used to analyse the interview data. Further desk-based research was used to inform case studies and vignettes to highlight some of the findings.

Key findings

Experiences of community partners

- All partners identified that the model of partnership working with Highland Hospice is invaluable in enabling the provision of befriending and care at home services within their local communities. Without the support of the Hospice, these services would not be available within many of these communities.
- Partners value the flexibility and understanding that the Hospice shows, supporting them to deliver the befriending service in a way that best supports the needs of their community.
- The Hospice provides a range of resources to its community partners to support befriending service delivery including information, training, promotion, networking opportunities, and small grants. This support is highly valued by the partners in supporting the establishment and ongoing delivery of these services.
- Partners highlighted the value of working in partnership with the Hospice, due to the organisation's reputation and standing within their local communities and with other organisations.
- Partners welcome the support and advice of the Hospice in helping them to develop approaches to widen access to befriending services and to attract a more diverse audience of volunteer befrienders.
- Better links are needed between befriending and Sunflower Home Care to ensure appropriate support for changing client needs over time.
- Partners welcome the Hospice's new Community Engagement Officer as a sign of their commitment to supporting and working with them to address community needs.

Experiences of volunteer befrienders

- All volunteers identified the importance of providing the service in their local communities.
- Volunteers greatly enjoy their role as befrienders, providing a flexible way for them to give back to their community by using their skills.
- Volunteers noted a number of challenges in delivering their role, including retaining clear boundaries of the befriender role, keeping to the allocated time for their visits, the formality of the befriender role, and ensuring confidentiality.
- Most volunteer befrienders welcomed the introductory information session and the opportunities for additional training. For some, the information session was challenging and onerous, especially in relation to requirements around safeguarding and responsibilities.

Impact and value of service delivery

- All befriending service users and Sunflower Home Care service users highlighted the excellence of these services.
- Befriending service users benefit in many ways including reduced loneliness, increased confidence, and maintaining independence. It also provides important respite for those with carers, supporting their wellbeing too.
- Sunflower Home Care service users benefit in many ways including improving their quality of life, being able to stay in their own home, and knowing that they will see someone every day. It also provides peace of mind for family members and provides a break for those with carers, supporting their wellbeing too.
- Health and social care professionals recognise the value and importance of, and the need for, this community-based third sector model of social care service provision within rural communities across the Highlands.
- Health and social care professionals would like better links between befriending and care at home services.

Future Challenges

- **Volunteer befriender capacity:** continuing to recruit, train and retain sufficient numbers and variety of volunteers to support service delivery.
- **Increasing demand for services:** with ageing populations, demand will only increase for befriending and care at home services, with partners needing to manage expectations in terms of their capacity to respond.
- **Service promotion:** ensuring high levels of awareness of the availability and access routes to befriending and care at home services.
- **Service evaluation and data management:** several partners want and need to update their data management systems, to ensure efficient systems are in place for managing, delivering and reviewing befriending services.
- **Funding:** the fundraising landscape will continue to be challenging for community partners, as they seek to respond to demand for befriending, care at home, and other social care services within their communities.
- **Limited social care services:** demands for all social care services are increasing across the board, which is putting a strain on community partners, who cannot respond to the needs of all those who are referred to them.

- **Links with GPs/health and social care services:** many partners need to build new and develop existing relationships with health and social care professionals, to facilitate signposting and referrals to befriending and care at home services.
- **Links between befriending and Sunflower Home Care:** finding ways to develop links between the two services to ensure that clients can access one or both services over time, depending on their needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This evaluation has provided a detailed exploration of (i) community partner experiences of working with Highland Hospice to deliver befriending and Sunflower Home Care services, and (ii) the impact and value of befriending and Sunflower Home Care services for service users.

From this work, it is evident that the Hospice has built excellent partnerships with local community organisations across the Highlands. The model of partnership working is operating well and enabling the delivery of vital social care services within local communities.

Volunteers enjoy their crucial role in delivering of much needed befriending services. Whilst the role can be challenging at times, befriending provides a flexible way for them to give back to their community, utilising their skills. It also provides opportunities for them to gain new knowledge and skills, through information and training sessions with the Hospice and community partners.

Befriending and Sunflower Home Care are highly rated and valued by service users. The support they receive has a significant positive impact on their quality of life in key ways, including reducing loneliness, increasing confidence, helping to maintain independence and being able to stay in their own homes. These services also provide important respite for carers, in turn supporting their health and wellbeing, and peace of mind for family members.

Looking ahead, all ten community partners are keen to keep developing their partnership working with the Hospice, and no partners identified the need for significant changes in the partnership model at this time. In addition, health and social care professionals recognise the value and importance of this community-based partnership model as a means to support community need.

This model of partnership working effectively places Highland Hospice in the role of 'anchor organisation' for the range of befriending and care at home services that are delivered by voluntary organisations across the Highlands, ensuring service provision, strengthening local delivery, and facilitating the opportunity for services to grow to fill gaps in current provision.

Drawing on the findings of this evaluation, a series of recommendations have been identified to help inform the future development of partnership working and service delivery. These recommendations cover both logistical and strategic elements and are strongly grounded in the Hospice ethos of partnership working. They will require additional capacity and resources to deliver, and it will be important for the Hospice to manage expectations with their partners and local communities, as to the pace at which future developments can be taken forward.

1. Volunteer recruitment

Work with community partners to identify opportunities and pathways to attract new and wider audiences into volunteering, moving away from the reliance on the recently retired demographic. This will involve (i) diversification and awareness raising of who can be a befriender/what a befriender might look like and (ii) awareness raising of the different types of service users within local communities.

2. Training

2.1 Community partners

Provide training and support to partner organisations to enable a more systematic approach to data management and evaluation of befriending service delivery, ensuring that evaluation work considers the views of volunteers, service users and health and social care professionals.

2.2 Volunteers

Work with community partners to develop and deliver training to meet the needs of volunteers and service users as befriending services develop and evolve over time. This will include both the content of training, and the timing and nature of the delivery model, to facilitate and maximise opportunities for engagement.

3. Service promotion

Maximise opportunities to raise awareness and understanding of the value of befriending and care at home services for local people and continue to promote the services using a wide range of media most appropriate to potential audiences.

4. Service delivery models

4.1 Befriending

- Continue to develop support for partner organisations, in line with organisational and community need.
- Build on existing work with partners and develop work with others to support the diversification of the befriending model to include a range of options in terms of (i) mode of delivery e.g. face-to-face, group, telephone and (ii) location of delivery e.g. at home, in local venues, in hospital, in line with community needs and organisational capacity.

4.2 Sunflower Home Care

- Work with community partners to explore opportunities to develop the care at home model to enable a larger number of local people to self-refer and pay privately for the service, rather than going through the NHS referral pathway.
- Explore the potential for care at home services to include respite and one-off support e.g. after a fall and/or returning home from time in hospital.
- Work with community organisations, health and social care partners and other organisations to identify opportunities to extend service delivery into new areas of need.

- 5. Building links between Sunflower Home Care and befriending services**
 - Train and encourage befriending volunteers to identify and report if they think a client needs more support.
 - Explore ways to share data in an appropriate manner between Highland Hospice, community partners, and health and social care professionals.
 - Provide opportunities for awareness raising with Sunflower Home Care staff to ensure that they know about their local befriending service and are able to contact the community partner if they see their client's needs changing, or to help support their carer with e.g. respite care.

- 6. Developing partnerships: health and social care professionals and wider networks**
 - Continue to develop and build new relationships with health and social care professionals within each locality, to ensure that they are fully aware of befriending and Sunflower Home Care services, and of the referral pathways for their patients.
 - Continue to explore and develop wider partnerships within individual and across multiple communities to support the needs of the community partners and their communities.

- 7. Building understanding of the role of Highland Hospice**

Increase understanding and awareness within local communities of the role of Highland Hospice as an organisation that supports generic social care, not just cancer and palliative and end of life care.

- 8. Promoting a third sector model of social care delivery**

Engage further with the NHS and local authorities to showcase and raise awareness and understanding of the value and importance of a third sector partnership approach in delivering crucial social care services across the Highlands.

To read the full report go to highlandhospice.org/community or scan the QR code below

