



Report on Ready Friends Befriending Forum on 26th September 2019

- **Summary**

Rhiannon Stocking-Williams (Rhiannon), RVA's Ready Friend's Coordinator, welcomed 21 people to the Community Hub in Reading Central Library for the September Befriending Forum, representing groups and organisations from the voluntary, community, and statutory sectors in Reading, and beyond. The event offered a mixed menu of activities and themes, to suit the varying needs of the participants. Feedback on the different sessions was very positive with 100% saying they found it useful and would come to future events.

Attendees introduced themselves and their organisations and shared good news.

- **Outcomes and impact in reducing loneliness and social isolation**

Sandra Marsden from the national organisation [Befriending Networks](#) introduced the work of Befriending Networks (BN) and the benefits of membership. BN has much to offer people wanting to set up a new befriending activity or service as well as larger, well-established organisations. BN has a seat on the **All Party Parliamentary Group** looking at loneliness and social isolation and has been raising key voluntary and community sector issues since its inception.

Sandra delivered an interactive workshop which included the purpose of monitoring and evaluating impact and the methods, frequency and challenges that involves.

Purpose

Funders requirement; proof of organisational objectives; demonstrating you make a difference; boosting staff and volunteer morale; helpful for future funding; identifying organisational/service strengths and weaknesses; contributing to strategy and service planning.

Methods

Evaluation forms; case studies; spreadsheets comprising qualitative and quantitative data; online surveys; hard copy questionnaires; team days; outcomes stars; diaries; videos; photos.

Frequency

This very much depends on the capacity within the team/organisation and the requirements of funders and trustees. Anything from monthly to termly and annually.

Challenges

Time available; pressure to provide for clients rather than collect and present data; varying requirements of funders; continuity (coopering like with like over time); expectations of stakeholders; reliability of data (if people are worried about losing their service, they may always report as being '100% satisfied' when they may not be!)

- **Local funder perspectives – information and discussion**

What information on impact and outcomes local funders want to (and don't want to!) see from projects. Funder representatives included Elisha Russell from *Berkshire Community Foundation (BCF)*, Lara Stavrinou from *RBC Cultural Commissioning* and Deborah Wilson from *The Earley Charity*.

Key messages included:

- Funders aren't looking for the 'right' or 'wrong' of a project and are more interested in what the learning has been – even if that includes elements that didn't go well or to plan.
- Funders have an obligation to their trustees, donors and the Charity Commission in evidencing the impact of the investments they've made or are responsible for.
- Deborah stressed that activity and number of people helped does not equal the impact on them of that activity. Funders want organisations to move away from outputs towards impact.
- Funders like reports that convey the passion and that avoid just a dry representation of data.
- Elisha reported that BCF is currently reviewing its reporting template and is keen to hear from grantees and would-be applicants. Elisha also advised that BCF is focusing on offering core funding in response to the historic call from groups and organisations.
- Case studies are powerful tools but need to be backed up by impact data that goes across the project or activity.
- Some funders (e.g. NHS) stipulate the use of specific, approved methods such as [WEMWBS](#)
- Lara highlighted the use of *action learning* which enables organisations to reflect, interrogate and develop their own practice. This is a current requirement of the Great Places Cultural Commissioning initiative at RBC.
- Funders differ significantly in their reaction to costs for impact work being included in an application's budget, and it's better to ask this early on and respond according to the funder's policy.
- Funders need to get the balance right in asking for impact reports, as this can be very time-consuming for organisations and groups, some of whom are entirely volunteer-run and focussed on delivery rather than reporting.
- Elisha advised that corporates may be able to help with producing videos as a method of impact reporting.

- Sandra urged groups to get to know their funder and Deborah encouraged would-be applicants to phone first, especially if they are unsure of any of the sections in the application form.
- Lara advised on the UCL wellbeing reporting measures:
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/ucl-museum-wellbeing-measures>
- Chris Bloomfield (RBC) stressed the important role that RVA has in helping local groups to identify funding and to support them through the application process.

BCF Due Diligence for Applicants

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByFkXYk5vQviWW40NERtdXNIV0ltbldOSkpreGk5WVfSTjIB/view?usp=sharing>

BCF Applying for Funding Hints and Tips

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByFkXYk5vQviQnNbnlWRERPZHVsMmRjdUZZWnNjR0pXOVlz/view?usp=sharing>

- **Data visualisation**

Demelza Hookway (DH), RVA's Information and Communication Officer delivered a workshop of how to make the most of the data we collect in immediate and accessible ways. DH's presentation is available on the Ready Friends webpage.

- **Friendship Volunteering Project – 1 November evening event at The Crowne Plaza**

Rhiannon notified attendees that booking is now open to Ready Friends subscribers who would like tickets for any volunteers helping to reduce social isolation and loneliness. They could be befrienders, buddies or community drivers or they could help out at a social or a lunch club. Or maybe they host a chatty table in a cafe or help with gardening or crafting sessions.

Whatever they do as a volunteer to take action on loneliness and social isolation - they are very welcome to go along. The event will help raise awareness in Reading, of the benefits of friendship volunteering and help local groups to recruit new volunteers. Film footage from the event will be included in the production of a new short film by RVA, which will be launched in Spring 2020 and available to all groups looking to recruit new volunteers.

Please note that tickets are available on a first-come, first-served basis and each organisations has been allocated 3 tickets for volunteers and 1 for a staff member who coordinates their activity.

Rhiannon will be sending out invitations via email in week beginning 30 September.

- **Reimagining impact**

Rhiannon delivered a workshop using real examples of impact reports to get inspiration, support and feedback to help attendees with future impact and outcomes work.

Success factors identified by attendees:

- Use a mix of case studies, graphics, statistics (but don't overuse!), photos of real people, quotes from stakeholders, especially service users – to clearly show what change your project has made.
- Ensure there's something for everyone and don't go heavy on one audience. If you are, that may mean you need different kinds of impact report for different audiences. If you do produce different kinds of impact report, be clear in the introduction who it is aimed at.
- Not too long.
- Use plain English in a reasonable size font and avoid white writing on dark backgrounds. High contrast may work, if you have to do this, so avoid mid-tones for the back ground.
- Include an intro or summary – if it's long, then an executive summary can be helpful, and may be all that many people read, so make it count!
- Make the front page eye-catching.
- Include interesting facts that are not in every other impact report, to make yours more memorable in the sea of impact reports that a funder may have to read each year
- If relevant, say what your project's next steps are and where your direction relates to what you have discovered through your impact data
- Don't over-claim what you've done – keep to what you can prove.
- Ensure you fulfil the requirement of funders' logos. Some funders are very specific about how their logo has to be displayed. Even if they don't require you to, displaying your funder's logo in your annual report is courteous, and helps other groups understand the kinds of projects they fund.
- Use people who are good at writing and be ruthless in your editing! It's best to say a few things well than cram everything in.
- Aim for a good balance across your report, using an even, uncluttered mix of photos, graphics, text and diagrams.
- Avoid jargon and expand all abbreviations.
- A consistent theme can be helpful in carrying your reader through the document. This could be a colour palette, a concept like a restaurant menu or a process like making a cup of tea.

It was noted that lots of organisations include a highly visible section on their website on impact but don't make downloadable reports available.

- **Any other business**

The next Befriending Forum will be held on 5th December 2019 at The Community Hub, 3rd Floor, Reading Central Library.

Information, links, presentations and other resources from Befriending Forum events will be available on the RVA Ready Friends webpages: rva.org.uk/ready-friends

We look forward to seeing you again at the December Befriending Forum!

