



## Report on Ready Friends Befriending Forum on 5 December 2019

Presentations and YouTube video links used during the Forum are available on the [Ready Friends webpage](#).

- **Summary**

Rhiannon Stocking-Williams (Rhiannon), RVA's Ready Friend's Coordinator, welcomed 18 people to the Community Hub in Reading Central Library for the December Befriending Forum, representing groups and organisations from the voluntary, community, and statutory sectors in Reading, and beyond. The event was themed around the role of technology in reducing loneliness and social isolation and offered a number of activities and presentations, 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.

Over half of the participants hadn't previously attended a Befriending Forum, which suggests that future Forums need to feature a variety of themes, to attract new members.

Attendees introduced themselves and their organisations and shared good news.

- **Teenage Loneliness and Technology**

Review and discussion of the recent [Talk Talk report](#). In lieu of Dr Rebecca Nowland, the academic involved in the research at the University of Central Lancashire who was unable to present at the Forum, Rhiannon highlighted the key findings from the report and asked participants to offer feedback from their personal or professional experiences and identify possible actions that could be taken locally:

- It's not all bad! Access to online forums can provide some young people with helpful and healthy (and sometimes their only) social contact.
- Encourage parents and other family members to look at the Top Tips for Parents in the report, which includes feeling confident in setting boundaries.
- The lack of real-world community resources needs addressing. More youth facilities are urgently needed, including internet café sessions where young people who are unable to get online at home can access the internet in a community setting. This may then result in young people meeting each other online but also developing friendships at the place itself.
- Suggestion to have 'screen time' TV/film nights at community venues for young people to get together, but with an activity which may help if they struggle with initiating social interactions.

- **Friendship Volunteering Project**

Rhiannon summarised the feedback from the successful and well-received Friendship Volunteers' Evening on 1 November and advised that more information is available in the Evaluation Report, available on the Ready Friends webpage.

Rhiannon promoted the Friendship Social happening on 6 December.

- **Get Online**

David Neale who coordinates the Get Online service at Reading Voluntary Action, delivered an interactive presentation about digital inclusion and the Get Online service. A key challenge is to ensure that everyone in Reading who'd like to get online, knows about the service and where's it's delivered from. Participants were asked to share publicity for the service with anyone they know but also to get in touch with David if they would like to host a drop-in session.

- **Remap Berkshire**

Robert Monk, Case Coordinator at Remap Berkshire, delivered a presentation about the work of this group and encouraged participants to spread the word to anyone with a disability needing equipment that either doesn't exist or could be improved by an adaptation. The service is free and there is "no fuss, no forms, no fee".

- **Wavelength**

Cherish Watton, Communications Officer at Wavelength was unable to attend in person, but provided a video for Reading's community sector. They have only worked with one organisation in Reading so far (Reading Refugee Support Group) so there's plenty of scope for more beneficiaries, who can be individuals or organisations. They provide free TVs, radios and tablets targeted at reducing loneliness and social isolation.

- **2019 Befriending Forum review and planning for 2020**

Rhiannon summarised the topics covered by the quarterly Befriending Forums during 2019 and asked for suggestions for themes in 2020, which included:

- Diversity and integration. Looking at the experience of loneliness and social isolation by different communities and the different cultural responses, such as gardening being an entry point that some people may feel more comfortable using. Also, looking at the work of the City of Sanctuary in relation to loneliness and social isolation.

- **Transport meeting**

This was attended by those interested in developing a project to support local people facing loneliness and social isolation to use public transport. Rhiannon will convene a project planning group in early 2020 to progress this. Anyone interested in more information should contact Rhiannon at RVA: [ready.friends@rva.org.uk](mailto:ready.friends@rva.org.uk) or 0118 937 2273

- **Befriending Forums in 2020** (all starting with lunch at 12.30)

12 March

18 June

24 September

3 December

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

