



Ready Friends Befriending Forum, 18 June 2020

Rhiannon Stocking-Williams (Rhiannon), RVA's Ready Friend's Coordinator, welcomed over 30 participants, who joined the first ever Zoom-hosted Befriending Forum from across the Reading voluntary and community sector, Reading Borough Council, Berkshire Healthcare (BFHT), local business and Bradford University.

The event was themed around the mental health needs of local people, especially during lockdown, the needs of local communities and groups to support them and information on new and existing services as well as forthcoming events.

Feedback on the different sessions was very positive and many of the participants hadn't previously attended a Befriending Forum.

The slide presentations are available from the Ready Friends webpage. The following represents a summary (not verbatim) of the discussions during the event.

Questions and answers

Question / from who?	Action / response
From Michelle Berry, RBC To James Momoh, BFHT. Do you support people living with dementia? We have had an increase in individuals struggling since lockdown and their carers.	Talking Therapies (TT) is able to offer support to anyone with the cognitive capacity to engage with its services. If this is not the case with someone, TT then signposts them to more appropriate services. Carers are always welcome to contact TT for their own support, but there is nothing specifically designed for carers at TT. TT is offered according to the mental health need (e.g. anxiety, depression, PTSD).
From Rhiannon, RVA to James Momoh, BHFT: Please tell us about any waiting times within TT	Demand for TT has increased during Covid19, but there is capacity for everyone needing support. Callers get picked up quickly by our admin team and are offered an assessment within 2-4 weeks. TT will then offer the relevant level and kind of support needed within 12 weeks.
From Rhiannon, RVA to James Momoh,	TT is a highly-inclusive service and uses

BHFT: What kind of support can TT offer people who don't speak English?	interpreters via telephone, face to face and video platforms.
From Maggie Filipova-Rivers, City of Sanctuary to James Momoh, BFHT : How about services for people with No recourse to public funds? Refused asylum seekers in England do not necessarily have free access to free secondary healthcare and depends in part on urgency.	There is no barrier to TT for anyone asking for support. If someone is referred to a secondary service such as Prospect Park hospital, then they will be asked to evidence recourse to public funds.
From Hadil, RRSB to James Momoh, BFHT: How does TT support people from different cultures, as this can often be a barrier for many people? People from cultures where mental health is not discussed, may not be able understand or say that they need support.	TT offers a non-judgmental service delivered by staff who are regularly trained in diversity and cultural awareness. A person's understanding and expression of their mental health is unique to them and their cultural point of view. TT recognises this and seeks to constantly improve its delivery in this area. TT reflects and evolves with changes in society - like lockdown. It is constantly being replenished.
From Erick Nwanshi, private IT consultant to James Momoh, BFHT : During the initial assessment, if it's determined as heightened panic for instance, is there a place for community outreach like group therapy?	TT offers group therapy for a range of mental health needs. If the group environment is not appropriate or doesn't help resolve the mental health problem, that person will be referred to another kind of support.
From Katherine Shepherd, The Mustard Tree to James Momoh, BFHT : Are there plans to build capacity within Talking Therapies. As there is an expectation that there may be an increase in demand?	There is enough capacity in the TT system for anyone who needs it. I encourage anyone to refer themselves to TT or speak to their GP about what their options are.
From Rona Topaz : Have you found it necessary to increase your bereavement support in the wake of Covid-19?	TT doesn't offer specialist bereavement support, but is able to support people through a group CBT approach. TT can also signpost people to specific bereavement support services.
Please can RVA remove funding opportunities from their website that have now expired.	Rhiannon has passed this to relevant RVA colleagues.
Please can RVA look into the provision of free / low-cost PPE for VCOs.	Rhiannon will pick this up with the RVA team. Participants were asked to email Rhiannon or Heljeet at RVA with what items and services they need to purchase.

	Herjeet can also offer legal advice regarding an organisation's responsibilities as lockdown eases.
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Comments

<p>From Jane Stanford-Beale, Autism Berkshire A 2 to 4 week wait is really good. We have had good feedback that Talking therapies have delivered short waiting times and a good service to clients and carers at Autism Berkshire. Sorry a comment, not a question! There are lots of resources about Anxiety and Children. They are on the Autism Berkshire website.</p> <p>The AnDY clinic at Reading Uni also has some resources on their website.</p>
<p>From Laura Davis, BFHT : In Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, we have recruited over 60 volunteers and one of the roles is making well-being calls to both individuals and carers who may be socially isolated. BFHT has been conducting a patient survey for feedback on services during lockdown and is making changes informed by the responses.</p>
<p>From Michelle Berry, RBC : Compass Recovery College also have (MH) support groups that anyone can access. (Rhiannon added that TT could publicise its services and, particularly, any developments in TT, through RVANews, RFNews and the RBC Wellbeing Newsletter.)</p>
<p>From Rhiannon, RVA: RVA would be happy to work with James and his team to ensure that TT staff are aware of the many community groups in Reading that support people with mental health needs.</p>
<p>Hi all. My email is Dr Ria Vaportzis e.vaportzis@bradford.ac.uk and the project I'm preparing at the moment is about evaluating phone befriending services for older adults that are digitally excluded. Please feel free to get in touch with me about this or ideas about other potential projects. I would also like to hear from anyone wanting to conduct research (into older adults' experience of loneliness), which could be helpful in strengthening their application for funding.</p>
<p>To register for the Let's Get Reading Online conference (Tuesday 30 June 2.00-3.30pm) please visit www.rva.org.uk/lgro</p>
<p>From Evelyn Monaghan : Thanks for organising this event. From Rona Topaz : Thank you for organising. From Aisha Malik : thank you so much for this meeting, really informative From Ria Vaportzis : Thank you Rhiannon. It was a great meeting. From Jane Stanford-Beale: Thank you for organising such an interesting and informative event. Great to hear more about Talking Therapies.</p>

Feedback from 3 Breakout Groups on these questions:

1. What has worked well so far and what have we learnt? What are we planning for the next 6 months?
 2. What do Reading's people and communities facing loneliness need today and over the next 6 months and where are the gaps?
 3. What do Reading's community groups need most to support their service users?
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- Social distancing may be here to stay but a Covid Virus has passed its third clinical trial.
 - Lockdown especially difficult for the mental health of younger people.
 - In Reading Community Learning Centre, people of diverse cultures gather there to learn as well as to socialise. On top of the learning was people coming in to speak on specific topics - health, women's only, etc. Plus the social aspect of meeting other people. But people who use the centre do not have technology readily available to them because of children/income/other issues. The Centre has been transferring classes and services online, but it works well with groups that have already been previously established face to face. Doing things "virtually" isn't ideal for many - some people don't have the equipment, the language skills or a safe space in their home to speak. Missing the visual contact which is essential for many. Reports of increased in children's behavioural problems (being cooped up together), feeling more tired than usual. Not getting time for themselves.
 - Autism Berkshire - Workshops for parents have worked well, but by zoom have been only 1.5 hours, instead of a day long one (5 hours). But there have been benefits for those who couldn't have attended the day long sessions because of work - they've been able to join in the zoom calls.
 - Age UK - reported many more young people getting involved in the community and those who have been involved with their grandparents suddenly want to become involved with community work. People want to meet their neighbours and help their neighbours. This has been a really encouraging aspect of the pandemic.
 - Simone's residents group has had the best take up ever.
 - Tamsin (Age UK Berkshire) we can use COVID as a way of learning to do things differently.
 - Zoom has broadened accessibility. But some client groups this isn't appropriate for (elderly, people with hearing difficulties). Shielding has further isolated some people (those in the shielded groups). We need to come up with a variety of resources to meet the requirements for some groups and also the finances to pay for the support to be provided.
 - Important to capture and share more widely what has worked well. Technology has really helped some groups in terms of accessibility (not needing to travel and being able to see/hear, be in a more comfortable home environment.
 - Katherine Shepherd (The Mustard Tree): It's been great that Engage Befriending has been able to extend its offer to the 18-55 age group, but we need to ensure that they have support around befriending once additional 'Covid' funding streams have finished.

Date of next Befriending Forum: Thursday 24 September