

### Ready Friends Befriending Forum 7 December 2023

Rhiannon Stocking-Williams, RVA's Ready Friends Coordinator, welcomed 15 participants, who joined the Zoom-hosted Befriending Forum from across Reading's community and statutory sectors.

[Please click here](#) for the slides.

The event was focused on **exploring loneliness stigma**.

1. Welcome, introductions and event outcomes
2. Tackling Loneliness Stigma - Presentations by Emily Sawdon and Phoebe Weston-Stanley, Research Directors from the National Centre for Social Research
3. Small group workshop and feedback
4. Joy Marketplace
5. Forthcoming training, updates, news etc
6. Networking time!

#### **Outcomes expected from the event**

- Understand findings from research on loneliness stigma
- Reflect on how loneliness stigma impacts on our clients
- Be able to tackle loneliness stigma in our team with practical approaches
- Find out about Joy Marketplace
- Hear out about events and training coming up

#### **3. Breakout session and feedback**


Participants were asked to consider the following:

- Reflections on the findings - Do these resonate with your experiences? What have you noticed about loneliness stigma in your own work?
- Next steps - Do you already take steps to address loneliness stigma through your work? What has/has not worked? What else could be done?
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Feedback from the discussion included:

- A wide range of activities are needed to appeal across communities.
- Stigma is one of a number of barriers, including transport; cost of activities and travel to and from; lack of trust in others; cultural differences and language.
- Basic needs such as food, housing and warmth must be addressed first, especially for

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and check out <http://rva.org.uk/ready-friends/>



asylum-seekers..

- Staff and volunteers need to create a culture of empowerment and avoiding stigmatising and negative language such as “trying to fix” or “tackle” loneliness. These may sound like taking positive action to some staff and volunteers but may be interpreted as “being a problem to solve” to service users.
- 1-2-1 befriending services could offer an opportunity to socialise with other people and have shared experiences as well as supporting someone 1-2-1
- It is likely that loneliness can be reduced rather than eliminated

#### 4. Joy Marketplace

Rhiannon introduced the Joy platform which is used by most of Reading’s GP surgeries to refer patients to social prescribers as a case management system. However, it is also a directory of local organisations which is free for VCOs to register with. For more information, please [CLICK HERE](#)

#### 5. Forthcoming training, updates, news etc

- Thursday 18 January, 1-2pm - Introduction to First Steps towards Safe and Sound, [Reading library](#) (this room)
- Tuesday 30 January, 10am-5pm (also 29 Feb and 28 March) - [Mental Health Awareness](#) – free places for a charities or community groups Reading library (in this room)
- Thursday 15 February, 1-2pm Introduction to First Steps towards Safe and Sound – [February online session](#)

#### Feedback from participants on the event

On a scale of 1-5, most participants reported that the event met their expectations fully (5) or partly (4)

*What did you find most useful?*

Research into loneliness stigma

Networking

*How can we improve the event?*

More networking time

A PA system for speakers (especially those who are quietly spoken)

Hard copies of agenda and slides

*Possible themes for future Befriending Forums*

Mental health

Improving inclusion / intersectionality

Activities to promote social interaction

**Date of next Befriending Forum** - March 7, 1-3pm at Community Place, 3rd floor, Reading library.

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