



Ready Friends Befriending Forum 7 March 2024

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

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

The event was focused on **role that social prescribing plays in addressing loneliness and social isolation**

1. Welcome, introductions and event outcomes
2. Presentations from RVA's SP team; Torch; Age UK Berkshire; Age UK Reading; Enrych Berkshire
3. Small group workshop and feedback
4. Joy Marketplace intro sessions
5. Community Wellbeing Training offer
6. Community Wellness Outreach
7. First Steps
8. Forthcoming training, updates, news etc
9. Networking time!

Outcomes expected from the event

- Understand what social prescribing is (and isn't!), how it works locally and how people access it
- Reflect on the role that SP plays in addressing loneliness and social isolation
- Consider ways to work in partnership with local SPs
- Hear about RVA's Community Wellbeing Training offer; Joy Marketplace intro sessions; First Steps
- Events and training coming up


3. Breakout session and feedback

Participants were asked to consider the following:

- What has been your experience of social prescribing in Reading?
- Has your group experienced any challenges in liaising with RVA's social prescribing team?
- How can RVA and/or your group improve the patient's pathway for those facing loneliness and social isolation?

Feedback from the discussion included:

- One participant hadn't previously heard about social prescribing
- We have better conversations (about a client) when the referral is from an SP
- Waiting times accumulate (eg the wait for an SP assessment, followed by the wait for a befriender) and can run into months before a client receives the support they need. It's important that someone stays in touch with them, calling them every few weeks to remind them that they haven't been forgotten - it also gives them the chance to tell us their needs have changed.
- Referral forms (to and from SPs) can be incomplete, sometimes missing out information that would help shape the first visit.

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- For clients, we need to address a client's short and long term needs.
 - Having a better relationship with SPs strengthens the patient pathway.
 - Sometimes, client information is contradictory - this can be the client saying different things to different practitioners or down to different interpretations of what a client is saying.
 - We need to ensure that a client actually wants befriending rather than another activity that would connect them with other people.
 - People can fall through the gaps if they don't meet a service's criteria.
 - Coordination of social prescribing across Reading and with neighbouring boroughs would ensure consistency.
 - Specialist SPs? At the moment, SPs are deployed geographically within Primary Care Networks rather than by specialism.

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. Reading Voluntary Action is inviting local community groups and charities to a 45 minute information session on the Joy Marketplace. Please click on the date below that suits you best.

[20.3.24](#)

[17.4.24](#)

[15.5.24](#)

5. Community Wellbeing Training offer

Reading Voluntary Action has received funding to deliver an in-person 16-month training programme in our town centre training suite, for health and wellbeing practitioners (open to paid staff and volunteers) active in local voluntary and community organisations (VCOs).

Sessions will include the following (click on dates to book):

- ADHD / ASD awareness
- Alcohol – Brief Interventions [22.5.24](#)
- Dementia awareness
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (two half-days)
- Learning disabilities awareness

- Managing healthy boundaries [9.4.25](#)
- Menopause awareness
- Making Every Contact Count [10.4.24](#) or [12.3.25](#)
- Mental health first aid (2-day course)
- Motivational interviewing and behavioural change (whole day CPD accredited) [9.10.24](#)
- Safeguarding Adults [26.3.24](#) or [7.5.24](#)
- Time management

6. Community Wellness Outreach - see slides for info

How can you or your organisation get involved?

Can you host an outreach session?

Do you offer activities that are good for the heart?

7. First Steps towards Safe and Sound - see slides for more info

8. Forthcoming training, updates, news etc - see slides for more info and booking links

- 26 March, 10am-1pm Safeguarding Adults for VCOs LINK
- 26 March, 2-4pm Volunteering and You – Exploring Volunteering in Reading LINK
- 7 May 10am-5pm Safeguarding Adults for VCOs LINK
- 21.3.24, 18.4.24, 16.5.24 First Steps towards Safe and Sound LINK to Events page
- 22 May 9.15-1pm Alcohol Brief Interventions and advice

Feedback from participants on the event

“I enjoyed the session and found services I wasn’t aware of.”

“It was a good sized group and excellent facilities”

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?

Hearing about how different organisations use social prescribing

Learning about social prescribing/meeting the SPs

Hearing from other VCOs

The presentations

Networking

How can we improve the event?



More discussion time
How to support one another
Try doing the notices and networking at the beginning
Make it available online, too.
Inviting volunteers and the people they support to speak.
Room set up where we are facing each other
Start with ice-breakers to get everyone engaged and excited to be here.

Possible themes for future Befriending Forums
“Easy/acute” fixes for people versus long-term and typical requests
Loneliness and mental health
Activities to get people excited, engaged, interested.

Date of next Befriending Forum - June 25 (NB it's a Tuesday!!), 1-3pm at Community Place, 3rd floor, Reading library.



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