

THE WEE BLETHER



JANUARY EDITION



Happy 2011

Last year was a year of change and development at Befrienders, with money received from the Big Lottery Fund enabling us to do much more than we had ever been able to do before.

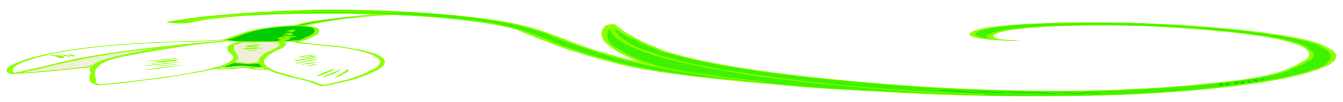
Having Sally join us, has allowed us to continue to expand the number of distance friendships that we can support, a process that will continue for more than a year more, when once again we will be at full capacity. Sally has also given much time and effort to redesigning our website, designing a database, organising an open day and generally being very busy filling gaps that others would have been unable to fill.

Yvonne as well as being the friendly contact who looks after friendships has been busy developing the concept of virtual groups i.e. groups to which people can belong even though they live many miles apart. WISH (We're in stitches Highland) is the first group to be developed and this allows people who are interested in needlecraft to have contact through a regular magazine, to which every member can contribute. WISH also had a meeting in Inverness in the summer which included a demonstration of spinning. Yvonne also spent time training some volunteers to take on the role of Senior Volunteer. This has proved successful and 2 Senior Volunteers are now successfully supporting friendships.

In August, we were joined by Debbie, again with funding from the Big Lottery. Debbie is concentrating on face to face befriending in Inverness and is rapidly developing new friendships. Debbie's hard work is allowing Graeme to spend more time working at activities that will ensure the long term future and development of Befrienders.

Heather continued to develop the Nairn service and is delighted with her new home in the Community Centre. She now has a sea view and a balcony, but assures us all, that she doesn't spend all her time looking at the view and drinking pina colodas. We know that she is being truthful, since the requests for help from Befrienders in Nairn increased considerably last year and Heather was very busy training volunteers and organising new matches.

2011 should be a good year for steady progress, building on foundations laid down last year. Yvonne will be recruiting more people to take on a Senior role and the success of WISH has encouraged her to begin more groups for the Distance service. Sally has been looking at extending the breadth of our work and hopes to initiate a pilot study for befriending people with early stage dementia in Caithness and Sutherland. If this proves successful then we would look to introduce this throughout the Highlands, possibly sometime in 2012. Debbie and Heather will be primarily focused on supporting friendships and beginning new friendships this year. Graeme will continue to focus on the long term well being of Befrienders.

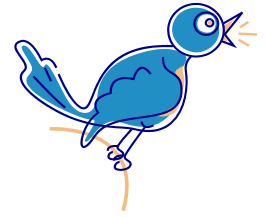


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From our Convenor

Hogmanay feels so long ago now that it seems wrong to be wishing you Happy New Year but I'm going to do it anyway. A Happy New Year to you all. I hope 2011 will be good to you. The daylight is noticeably starting to creep out that little bit longer, which I always like to see.



I'd like to bring you up to date with a few things which have been happening. We have sadly had to say goodbye, at least for a time, to one of our longstanding Management Committee members. Anne Mason has been part of our Committee for many years. She was one of the two people who did the independent research into, and evaluation of our first venture into Befriending at a distance. She has made a huge contribution over the years which we are very grateful for. Anne has gone off with her family to work as a volunteer in Zambia where she will be helping to establish new community mental health services in a country which has very limited provision at the moment. I am sure she will be a great asset to the Zambian people and we do wish her well.

We have been fortunate to welcome some new members onto our Management Committee over the last year. Sarah Fraser, Alison McKinnon, Lizzy Richardson and David More have all joined us. The last 3 of these are Volunteer Befrienders themselves and bring this excellent experience to our discussions. Sarah has very wide experience of marketing, business, lecturing and many other things and has added a very useful fresh perspective to Committee and Directors' meetings. We are very grateful to every one of these new members. Committees do need to renew and refresh themselves from time to time and we have welcomed the new approaches and ideas all four have brought.

We are, as I don't have to tell you, working in a very difficult time of pressures on public sector spending. We have to keep our eyes open for where new funding might come from. We are having some interesting discussions with the NHS at the moment. We are looking at the scope for offering befriending at a distance to people with early onset dementias in the Sutherland area. We have also been in contact with mental health services in Argyll and Bute. Very similar to the Highland Council area in its geography, Argyll and Bute's health services are now managed as part of NHS Highland. There does seem to be scope for offering distance befriending to this area on at least a small, trial basis. We have had some promising discussions but this possibility is still at a very early stage. I hope I will have more to tell you about both these developments as the year goes on.

I will finish by wishing you all well and passing on the appreciation of us all on the Management Committee for all that you do.

Kind regards. David Stallard



Inverness

Having Debbie in Inverness is fantastic and she is having a huge impact on what we do and will soon begin to dissolve the backlog of referrals that we had built up. Debbie is currently supporting 7 friendships. Since Debbie came to us in August we have had quite a few new volunteers and she is currently training six. Many of these are young volunteers and it is heartening to see so many young people enthusiastically embracing befriending.

Befrienders Highland likes to work with other organisations as much as possible. We have long hoped to have closer links with Birchwood Highland, but unfortunately we did not have the capacity to support friendships with them. The Lottery money that is supporting Debbie's post, now allows us to do this. Friendships initiated when people are still at the recovery centre can continue once they move on to independent living in the community. We hope that having a Befriender will assist people to make this transition more effectively and are excited by this development.

Graeme



Distance

The distance befriending service is doing well with 8 new volunteers in training at the moment, including 1 French volunteer! Our French recruit had worked in Scotland for a while but has now returned to France so that should make a very interesting match!

Sally and I will be busy the next couple of months getting out and about to mental health teams to promote the service and remind them what a valuable resource it is. We are ready for more referrals and hope to see a steady stream between now and the summer.

We also have been seeing if there is any interest among distance friends and volunteers for a Book Group. This follows the success of our Stitches Group which is growing steadily and seeing more members participating in the WISH (We're In Stitches Highlands) newsletter. The Book Group would need to be more of a 'discussion' group but we think that could be a possibility either by online 'chat' or by phone conference calls. It really will depend on the folk who want to be involved, so if you are interested do let us know!



Nairn

Nairn is steadily growing in numbers and it is hoped that we will have around 20 matches by the spring. However we still require more male volunteers.

Nairn joined with Inverness and the rest of the world for the roller ball Match but sadly this time we lost to Inverness but fear not we will make a come back this year. We might need a secret practice.

Volunteers and Friends got together before the Christmas period when they met and enjoyed the benefits of the Moray Firth Money, which we get every year for face to face, but unfortunately we will no longer get this money from MFR as they changed their criteria and it is Cash for Kids now. I was about to seek a replacement fund when out of the blue I was contacted by John Urquhart from the Accidental Choir from Nairn, who told me that they had raised £600 in December at their Christmas concert and wanted to donate it to a local charity and that it was to come to Befrienders Nairn and Ardersier. With delight I accepted and can't thank them enough for their generous donation. This will enable us to continue with our Christmas treat and will also help with other aspects of befriending.

Reflections Shared

Last year we had two major sorrows at Befrienders Highland. Two long standing and very precious volunteers died.

Isobel Miller became a volunteer for Nairn in 2001 as a face to face volunteer and later due to ill health became a phone volunteer. Isobel will be remembered best for her wicked sense of humour as well as her genuine care for other people. Isobel was a great volunteer befriender as she was able to relate to people of all ages and could talk about anything and everything, which made everyone feel relaxed in her company. Isobel died in July 2010.

Margaret Dods only moved to the Highlands four and a half years ago but in that short time she managed to do more in her community than many people do in a life time. She started with us as a distance volunteer just over 4 years ago and then 3 years ago she became a face to face volunteer as well. Margaret's genuine interest and concern for people made her a very warm and approachable person. She had many wonderful qualities but the fact that she was always good to be with stands out. Margaret died on 4th December 2010

Both Isobel and Margaret provided a great deal of support to Befrienders Highland and were an inspiration for other volunteers and the staff. They have left a big gap in the hearts of all of us who knew them.

Thank you to both their families for donations to Befrienders



Revenge is Sweet

The 2008 Befrienders Highland Roller ball match saw the Rest of the World i.e. the combined forces of Nairn and Distance Befriending, take on and beat Inverness. As you might have guessed from the title, the tables turned in 2010 and victory deservedly went to Inverness who undoubtedly outclassed the Rest of the World team. The stars for Inverness were Debbie, Christine and Harry and it was delightful to see that the ladies outclassed the men, with Debbie and Christine having the highest scores in the competition.

Watch these pages for news about the return match.



HELPERS REQUIRED

Ross County Collection

Ross County have very kindly agreed to allow Befrienders to have a can collection at their gates on Saturday 23 April 2011. County are playing Dundee this day, so there should be a reasonable crowd.

We are looking for 4-5 helpers to come along and hold a bucket at the turnstiles on the day. If you are interested in doing this (and possibly going to see the footie after) please contact Graeme on 01463 712791