



The Wee Blether

Winter 2019 Edition

Hello everyone, I hope you all had a lovely summer (those warm light nights are a distant memory I know) but here we are just weeks away from the festive season and approaching the end of 2019. But before that we can't wait to share some of our fantastic news on what's been going on at Befrienders Highland in the last few months.

Yet again, we have a packed Wee Blether for you, so put the kettle on, grab a Kit Kat, put your feet up and enjoy! ☺

Message from David Stallard, Convenor

As always at this time of the year, I and everyone on the Befrienders Highland Board wish you all the very best for Christmas and the New Year.

I said earlier this year that we were anxious about the big review NHS Highland was carrying out of all its voluntary sector funding. I'm delighted to be able to say that we recently heard that our bid had been successful and that our funding continues next year at the same level as this one. This was a huge relief after a very drawn-out process. I pay tribute to the hard work which our staff did to achieve this and to you all for the quality of the services you produce. I'm sure it was the evidence of this that brought us success. Sadly, some other voluntary organisations have not been so fortunate.

This has been another good year for Befrienders, with face/face befriending up and running in Skye and Lochalsh and a new face/face service developing in Easter Ross. We've also seen excellent developments in our Memory Loss and Carers' services. It was a great pleasure to be there when we were given the Carer Positive

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Award last week. I've heard heart-warming stories from friends and volunteers regularly through the year.

Befrienders Highland is a wonderful service to be part of. I welcome all the new friends and volunteers who joined us this year and thank you all for all that you do.

Message from Susan White, Executive Director

The last few months have seen some changes in the Befrienders staff team, as we said our goodbyes to Rebecca and welcomed Malcolm to the Coordinator role. Sarah, our administrator has also gone on sabbatical for 6 months, and Rachel has joined the team until Sarah returns in April 2020. Both have made a very smooth transition into their new roles, so be sure to say hello and welcome next time you call in to the office.

For the first time this year we had sponsored places in the Loch Ness Marathon raising over £1,000 for the charity. A huge vote of thanks to our director Scott, and his fellow runners Ed, Sean and Alison. We have also had amazing support from the staff associations from Reay Forest Estate in Sutherland, and Scottish Natural Heritage, Great Glen House, who are both fundraising in aid of us this year.



Sean, Scott and Alison at the Marathon

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Befrienders Highland have also been nominated as the charity partner for the Inverness Choral Society Carolthon in Eastgate Shopping Centre this year. This is a marathon carol-singing event located just outside Marks & Spencer on the first floor of the shopping centre, so if you are free on Saturday 14th December, between 10.30 and 16.30 we would be delighted to have friends and volunteers join us to help us.

We hope to have 4 “bucket holders” for each singing session (about 2 hours), so please contact your coordinator to put your name on the rota if you can support us on the day to collect funds.



Finally, we have been successful in our bid to NHS Highland to continue our funding until March 2021, but we continue to identify and apply to funding organisations to support the work that we do in the longer term. We are also extremely grateful to The Allen Lane Foundation, The ALLIANCE Health & Social Care Partnership, Life Changes Trust, The Robertson Trust, Stafford Trust, Camster Windfarm, Barratt Homes, Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association and the ongoing funding from The Lottery Community Fund for the financial support that they have provided for 2019/2020 through a variety of grants.

Wishing you the very best for the Festive Season, and I hope to meet many of you at the Annual Mince Pie Event this year, to thank you personally for your support of Befrienders Highland.

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Mental Health Service Update

Our Mental Health service has had another very busy year. Sadly, demand for our service is as high as ever and we have a number of referrals being processed at the moment. Fortunately, we are also continuing to receive volunteer applications so we are able to carry on providing a service that is obviously very much needed.

We continue to support around 75 friendships and it's always a pleasure to chat to people and see how they are getting on and how much the befriending is helping them. The volunteers are also very keen to tell us how much volunteering benefits them too. We are continuing to roll out our Face to Face befriending in the Skye and Lochalsh area and we are also branching out into the Alness and Invergordon area. We hope to take Face to Face befriending to other areas in the future too.

Next year we are hoping to offer some group training sessions for volunteers as this has proved to work very well in Caithness. This also gives volunteers a chance to meet up, share experiences and gain new skills.

Finally, we are very pleased to say that we have retained our 'Quality in Befriending Excellence Award' for another three years following a successful assessment by Befriending Networks. We have held this now for 6 years so we are delighted to have it for another three.

Message from Malcolm himself

Hello, I have recently joined part of the mental health coordinating team. I am based at the Inverness office but will also be helping to develop the befriending service in Alness and Invergordon area. I have been a volunteer with Befrienders for a few years now and have thoroughly enjoyed the experience. "It has been a really interesting journey with my Friend. I am now extremely happy to be able to be in the position to help others be matched with friends and support the friendships in any way I can."

Mental Health Caithness

The Mental Health Service in Caithness is continuing to be busy with both face to face matches and supporting distance matches. There are 11 trained volunteers, three fundraising volunteers with a further 4 waiting for training which will begin in the new year. We are pleased to report that for the first time, two Christmas events have been organised for Friends and volunteers. This is an opportunity to gather socially for a cuppa and bite to eat. The Friend event is on Thursday 5th Dec in the community Café Thurso and the volunteer event is on Friday 6th Dec in the Community Archive in Wick.

More Good news, if you are shopping in the Wick **TESCO'S** in January- March please consider dropping your token into the Befrienders Highland slot as we have been selected as one of the charities in the **TESCO** Bags for Life fund.

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Groups Update

Bespoke Cycling Program

We are pleased to announce that the first Befrienders Highland members participating in Velocity's Bespoke Cycling Program has started in November. We hope the group enjoy the experience and are able to use the skills they learn to continue cycling!



If you are interested in participating in future sessions, please contact Alan to register your interest & we can give you more information. The program runs for 6 weekly sessions of around two hours and is all about enjoying cycling to improve physical and mental wellbeing. Velocity's friendly team lead the program and all routes are within group member's comfort zones on quiet tracks.

All equipment can be provided by Velocity. This includes bicycles, safety equipment and waterproofs if necessary. The Bespoke Cycling Program is currently available to our members up until March 2020.

No previous experience on a bicycle is required. The course is designed for all abilities of cyclists.

Stepping Stones Fitness Group

As previously mentioned our amazing volunteer & fitness instructor Malcolm has now joined the staff team at Befrienders Highland! The Stepping Stones activity sessions are on the first Friday of the month at 11am. Mental wellbeing is at the core of the group's ethos. It is a small & friendly group of up to 6 and is designed for all abilities. The group is perfect for those who are looking to get back into exercise & build confidence. The sessions can be tailored around the individual's requirements.

If you would like to come along and try out a session, please get in touch & you will be welcome to attend. We also have a small stock of equipment in the office that you can borrow to try a new activity, such as badminton or tennis.

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Film Group

The Film Group has had another enjoyable year. This year we have seen some great movies. We have seen such films as: 'A Dangerous Method', 'Yesterday', 'Blinded by the Light' and Scotland's very own 'Connect' The group will now be meeting again in the New Year.

You are welcome to join the group and receive notification for upcoming film meetings, please contact Alan in the office. Group membership is completely free and there is no obligation to attend if you don't fancy the film! The group meet at the cinema to share a drink before seeing the film together. The group operates a 'pay what you can afford' policy for tickets. We are small and friendly group usually of 4-6 members.

Suggestions are always welcome. If you see something coming up in the cinema and would like to put it forward for the group to see please let us know. See you next year! ☺



Memory & Carers

We were delighted to have Sue McLintock from Carers Scotland join us recently to present Befrienders Highland with an award for being a Carer Positive Engaged



employer. Some of our volunteers and carers were also able to join us for some tea and cake to celebrate. Sue McLintock said afterwards "It was lovely to meet the team, volunteers and carers – specially to hear at first hand the valuable service that Befrienders provides in the area, it really is a lifeline for people"

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New Groups for Carers

The Memory and Carers service have been successful in securing funding from The Alliance. This will enable us to start two new groups for carers in the new year – a Carer Peer Support Group and also a Carer Steering Group. If you are interested in finding out more about these groups or wish to become involved please contact Carol on 01463 712791 or email: carolsummers@befriendershighland.org.uk



Sue presenting the Carer Positive Award to Carol and Susan

Festive Get-together

Do please join us for a natter, mince pies and a cuppa in the lead up to Christmas. If you're not keen on mince pies (really?!), there'll be plenty of other festive nibbles to enjoy!

**Monday, 9th December, 4.00 – 6.00 PM in the Inverness office
or**

Tuesday, 10th December, Noon to 2.00 PM in the Nairn office

Thursday, 12th December – Time & Venue to be confirmed in Thurso/Wick

To help us organise catering, please let us know if you plan to join us by contacting Rachel on Rachelwelsh@befriendershighland.org.uk or calling 01463 712 791

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A Wee Reminder on Gifts



Some of our friends and volunteers like to exchange gifts at Christmas – and some mark birthdays too.

We are delighted to act as a forwarding office, but do ask you to remember these few guidelines;

- The value of your gift should not exceed £5.00
- Try to send a gift which is light in weight and small in size, to help keep BHL's postage costs down. Remember, small is beautiful! 😊

Dates for your diary

And last, but by no means least, some dates for your diary ..

Monday 9th December, 4.00 – 6.00 PM – Festive Get-together, Inverness office

Tuesday 10th December, Noon - 2.00 PM - Festive Get-together, Nairn office

Thursday 12th December, Festive Get-together, Time & Venue to be confirmed in Thurso/Wick

Saturday 14th December, 10.30 – 4.30PM – Carolthon, Eastgate Shopping Centre, just outside Marks & Spencer on first floor

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