



The Wee Blether

Spring 2020 Edition

Hello everyone, I hope you all had a lovely time over the festive period and over indulged 😊. Christmas seems like a lifetime ago now, with all that is going on with the Covid-19 Coronavirus outbreak, and the need for social isolation. We hope you are taking care of yourselves and your loved ones, staying at home as much as possible, and maintaining the social distancing of 2 metres that the current recommendation. We have made some changes to how we work at Befrienders Highland but we are still offering befriending services, albeit with a few tweaks! As soon as possible, we will get back to our face to face meetings between our friends and volunteers. In the meantime, please bear with us if it takes a little longer to return your phone call, or to respond to anything you send us by post. The office will remain closed until further notice, but all our staff and coordinators are working from home, and they will be in touch as usual.

So, whilst you have the chance, take some time out to read what we have been up to at Befrienders, put the kettle on, grab a biccys, put your feet up and enjoy! 😊

Message from David Stallard, Convenor

You gave me a special treat last month. I was having one of those birthdays with a nought at the end, celebrating (or mourning!) ten years of having a bus pass. And Susan suggested to my complete surprise that Befrienders Highland would like to link a social event to this and celebrate it with me. We had a lovely event at Artysans cafe with balloons, banners, cake, cards and presents. I was touched to see so many there, including several people from the very beginnings of our service as Befrienders Inverness. Thank you all so much. I treasure the memories of that day and the kind thought behind it.

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We're just entering a new financial year. Last year was an anxious one, mainly because of concerns about the funding we receive from NHS Highland. But we came through it well and saw no reduction in our core funding. There are still further rounds of an NHS review of all its awards to the voluntary sector continuing. But we have come through the first of these and this must bode well for the future. As I've said before in the Wee Blether it's the quality of what you do that enables us to show the value of our service. Thank you all.

As I write this the spread of the Coronavirus is having a big impact on us all. Organisations and workplaces are all having to follow government guidelines to slow and reduce the spread of the illness. The situation is changing from week to week, almost day to day, just now. But I want to reassure you that we will do everything we can to reduce the risk to all our friends, volunteers and staff. Unfortunately, this will unavoidably cause some disruption and require some changes to the way we work. We all appreciate the cooperation you are giving and the flexibility you are showing as we try to manage this. Please bear with us as this develops. I really do hope that you all stay well, and that normal service will be resumed very soon.

We are into Spring now, they tell us. I hope it soon starts to feel a bit more like it! Best wishes to you all from me and all on the BHL Board.

Message from Susan White, Executive Director

We have ongoing financial pressures at Befrienders Highland, in common with many of the small charities around the Highlands, so we have really been concentrating on fundraising, applications for grants, and looking for ways to save money throughout our service. We have received very generous donations from Pears Foundation, and grants from The Stafford Trust and Allen Lane Foundation, which have enabled us to review our training workbooks for volunteers, and to start to work on reducing our waiting list. We hope to

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launch our new workbooks in April, and if any of our existing volunteers would like to help us to review them, and give us some feedback before we do so, please get in touch with your coordinator.

Last time I told you that we were chosen as the charity partner for the Inverness Choral Society Carolthon in Eastgate Shopping Centre, and thank you to all the staff, board members, friends and volunteers who came along to support us. Recently I collected the cheque for our half of the fundraising and sponsorship money, which was a massive £1,800.00. Here are some photos from the event, which everyone really enjoyed!



We have also been listening to your feedback for more training and opportunities to get together socially or for support with other friends, carers and volunteers. Our Carer Support Group had just started to meet, and we had invited some friends and volunteers to participate in Decider Skills Training and to give feedback to our staff and Board so that we know if this will be a useful addition to our organisation. And just last month, we had a get together of friends, volunteers, staff and board members past and present, to celebrate our Convenor, David Stallard's 70th Birthday. I'm sure you will all join us in wishing him well in this new decade, and in thanking him for over 27 years of service and support to Befrienders Highland! Unfortunately, all group activities have had to be postponed indefinitely until after the Coronavirus outbreak is over, but we are committed to continuing once this has passed.



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Nairnshire Community Award for David

We are delighted to celebrate one of our volunteer's achievements in this edition!

We would like to celebrate our volunteer David who has been awarded a Nairnshire Community Award this year for the fantastic work he contributes to the community including with Befrienders Highland. David has volunteered as a befriender with us for over 20 years. What made this even more touching for him was that his special friend Andrew, who recognised the valuable support he has provided for him and others, nominated him for the award. David is a lovely man and a much-valued volunteer. He approaches anyone he encounters with warmth and humour. In addition, anyone who has ever spoken with him at any of our events can testify that he is officially: full of beans!



David accompanied by his friend Andrew after being presented with the award by Provost Laurie Fraser and Lord Lieutenant George Asher.

Mental Health Service Update

2020 is upon us and with that our clear vision of our service going forward. Whilst we have a temporary hold on face to face meetings for friendships in line with Coronavirus recommendations, we are offering telephone and email friendships in the interim, which will move on to face to face meetings as soon as the restrictions are lifted. This means we can continue to train volunteers, accept referrals and make friendship matches as usual, with short-term adaptations avoiding direct person to person contact.

We are continuing to promote our Face to Face service in the Skye and Lochalsh area and have received a few referrals so far – a few more volunteers would always be welcome too!! Face to Face befriending is also now being offered in Alness and Invergordon, with one successful match up and running (Malcolm is the lead for this project).

We continue to be busy with our ongoing caseload and currently support around 75 established friendships. We are also working our way through our waiting list of referrals and continually training our steady stream of committed and enthusiastic volunteers.

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We always welcome volunteer enquiries and applications as the more volunteers we have the quicker we can match them with people referred to us, thus reducing their anxiety at having a lengthy wait. We couldn't provide this worthwhile service without them, so if you know anyone who might like to start training as a befriending volunteer, please ask them to get in touch!

Looking forward to this year we hope to continue the fantastic work we do and look at additional areas to set up further Face to Face Befriending. We are eternally grateful for all the fundraising and financial support we receive from varying sources as without this we couldn't exist.

Thank you to everyone involved in keeping us going!

Mental Health Caithness - Catherine

A reminder that The Bags of Life TESCO tokens are still active so if you are in Wick Tesco remember to drop your token into the Befriending Caithness Slot, it appears to be in the lead to be the winning Charity but keep up the good work.

Memory & Carers

The Memory and Carer service have successfully secured funding from The Alliance to enable a Carer Peer Support Group and Carer Steering Group to be established. Carers initially met in December to discuss moving forward with both groups and the first official Carer Peer Support Group was held in Alness on Tuesday 25th February. Marion MacNeil from Versus Arthritis joined the group and led a discussion session using a Ketso Kit, a creative tool which helps to encourage and promote engagement with groups. It was a really enjoyable experience and supported our carers to agree and decide a number of things which will allow the Carer Peer Support Group to best support them and meet their needs moving forward.

The next meeting of the Carer Peer Support Group was planned for later in the spring, but has now been deferred because our participants are all in the high risk groups identified by the government. However, we hope to take forward some of the discussions from the first group meeting and to keep everyone involved by telephone or post whilst we are unable to meet in person. If you would like any further information on the Carer Groups, please contact Carol on 01463 712791 or email:carolsummers@befriendershighland.org.uk

Loch Ness Marathon & Festival of Running



Marathon Runners 2019. Photo by our member Ronald

Marathon

We are pleased to announce that we will be collaborating with the Loch Ness Marathon again in 2020. Runners who enter and fundraise in aid of Befrienders Highland will get a discount on their entry fee and we have 4 places available again this year. If you or any family members are thinking about taking up the challenge & running the marathon this year, and would like to raise funds in aid of Befrienders Highland, we will be delighted to hear from you! As members of our community, we wanted to give you the opportunity first.

Please get in touch and speak to Alan, who can tell you more, or please have a look at: <https://www.lochnessmarathon.com/run-for-charity/>. If you decide to go ahead, we can give you the necessary password to enter on the Loch Ness Marathon website.

5 K and 10 K Runs - New for 2020!



This year we are also excited to offer 10 keen runners free entry for the 5k or 10k races at the festival of running in October 2020. This offer is also for to those who agree to raise funds in aid of Befrienders Highland. 5k or 10k is a manageable and realistic goal for those new to fitness & running or those who are looking for a new challenge in 2020. This opportunity will operate on a first come first serve basis.

Please contact the office on 01463 712791 to register your interest and we can give you more information. See you at the start line! 😊

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Groups Update

(N.B. all group meetings are now temporarily suspended until guidance changes!)

Stepping Stone Fitness Group

We were delighted to have some new members join the fitness group recently. The session on Friday 6th March was fully booked up. The sessions are held on the first Friday of every month and are perfect for those looking to get back into regular exercise. Mental wellbeing is at the core of the group's ethos and all sessions are in a welcoming environment and are supported and supervised in a small group of up to six people. We aim for progress, not perfection.

Our 'Stepping Stone' fitness sessions focus on developing physical skills, and building confidence in an activity environment.

These 'Back to Basics' sessions aim to give you a solid foundation in functional fitness for daily life, sport, and play.

What exactly does this mean?

This means we take things back to the beginning and start from there. We focus on mobilisation, balance, coordination, gross motor skills, strength, and flexibility. You can also try a range of different recreational activities in a safe, fun, non-competitive environment. This practice helps to improve technique, and develop skill using a variety of equipment.

If you feel you could benefit from these sessions and may wish to give them a try in the future, then please contact the office on 01463 712 791 or email Malcolm at malcolmmacsween@befriendershighland.org.uk

There are a lot of home based activity sessions that you can join in with during social isolation, so if you would like some hints and tips on the sort of activity you can start with, contact Malcolm for some advice.

The first step is the most difficult, that is why we want to be there to give you support when you need it most. Our goal is to help you move towards your goal.

**You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great,
and it's never, ever too late 😊**

THE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFIT OF EXERCISE:	
	Reduce Anxiety
	Relieves Stress
	Improves Memory
	Improves Sleep
	Reduce Depression
	Improve Concentration
	Boosts Overall Mood

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Film Group

For March's film meet, group member Ben suggested we see the film 'Down the Rabbit Hole' at Eden Court by Inverness filmmakers Mike Webster and James Roddie. The film explores a cave diver and his relationship with adventure, photography and mental health.



Please get in touch if you would like to join the group. Perhaps you have a suggestion for a film for us all to see together? Membership is completely free and tickets are available on a 'pay what you can afford' basis. We usually see films at Eden Court and typically are a small group of around four to six friendly members.

During the Coronavirus outbreak we will explore how many people would like to watch the same film on TV or other streaming service, followed by an online or email chat about the film. Let us know if you would like to participate by calling Alan at the BHL Office?

Happy viewing!

Distance Groups

Alan has sent out a questionnaire to former members of our Write On group to get your views on how this group can develop and move on in the future. It is your opportunity to be creative and express yourself through writing, and to see your own work in print (either on paper, or possibly in the future through another means). Please send back your suggestions to Alan by email, and if you would like to join the group in the future, let him know by contacting alanduncan@befriendershighland.org.uk.

Until next time....Keep safe and stay well.

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