

Annual Report 2025-2026



Supporting organisations to deliver
quality befriending services



Befriending
Networks

Chair's Welcome

This year's impact report reflects the continuing value and importance of befriending across communities, and I am pleased to present it on behalf of the Board.

At the heart of Befriending Networks are our members. Organisations of different sizes, working in different places and alongside people at different stages of life. Their commitment to quality, kindness and meaningful connection is evident throughout this report. At a time when many charities continue to face significant financial and operational challenges, we recognise the resilience, care and professionalism shown by our members every day.

We are also grateful to our funders and partners. Their support has enabled us to maintain our core services, develop new areas of work and continue to strengthen and champion the befriending sector. Through their support and collaboration, the impact of our network reaches far beyond our own organisation.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank our staff team for their dedication, skill and all they have contributed over the past year. They have delivered a significant programme of work while remaining responsive to members and mindful of the pressures facing the wider sector. I would also like to thank my fellow trustees for their careful oversight, constructive challenge and support.

We look ahead with hope and a clear sense of purpose, while remaining realistic about the challenges we face. The need for meaningful connection remains clear, but so too does the importance of ensuring the long-term sustainability of our charity and the services our members provide. We will continue to listen, learn and work alongside others, guided by our shared belief that everyone should have access to quality befriending when they need it.

With my thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emily Kenward', with a stylized, cursive script.

Emily Kenward

Chairperson, Befriending Networks

Contents

Chair's Welcome	2
Objectives and activities.....	5
Charitable purpose, aims and beneficiaries	5
What is befriending?	6
Achievements, performance and impact.....	7
Charitable activities	7
Supporting a network of quality befriending services.....	8
Networking and Roadshows.....	8
Information Sessions.....	8
Conferences and Seminars	8
Learning and Development	8
Membership Case Study: Age UK Merton.....	10
Sustaining a valuable network.....	11
Membership Case Study: Rainbow Communities.....	13
Quality in Befriending	14
Membership Case Study: Volunteer Centre Greenwich.....	15
Developing a digitally connected network.....	16
Recognising an impactful sector.....	16
Championing the befriending sector	17
Projects and Programmes	19
Children, Young People and Families Befriending.....	19
Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness	19
Highland Conference in partnership with Befrienders Highland	19
Linking Lives UK – Social Connection in Wales.....	20
Campaign to End Loneliness (CTEL)	20
Active and Healthy Ageing in Rural Areas	20
Structure, governance and management	21
Governing document.....	21
Recruitment and appointment of new trustees.....	21

Key management remuneration	21
Related parties	22
Risk management	22
Financial Review	22
Reserves	23
Plans for Future Periods.....	24
Statement of Financial Activity for the Year Ended 31 March 2026.....	25
Statement of Financial Position 31 March 2026	26
Reference and administrative details.....	27

Objectives and activities

Charitable purpose, aims and beneficiaries

Befriending Networks is the network for befriending organisations. Established as a charity in 1994, we have more than thirty years of experience supporting and connecting befriending services throughout the UK and beyond.

The charity's purposes, as defined by the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 are:

- The advancement of citizenship or community development.
- The relief of those in need by reason of age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage.

Our members form the largest network of befriending services in the world. We provide access to sector-specific training, events, resources and awards which support quality in befriending. We work collaboratively and inclusively to connect and strengthen the befriending sector.

We support organisations (their volunteers, staff and trustees) to deliver quality befriending services that promote wellbeing and meaningful connections, ensuring that everyone feels valued. Our vision is of a society where quality befriending support is available to everyone who needs it and the importance of meaningful connection is recognised.

We achieve this by:

- Maintaining and expanding an effective and connected network of members.
- Providing information, resources, training, awards and consultancy for all aspects of befriending.
- Raising the profile and an understanding of befriending and its impact.
- Coordinating Befriending Week, our annual campaign taking place from 1 to 7 November.

Our work aims to create the conditions for increased social connection in healthier, more equal communities. Befriending organisations, their staff, volunteers and trustees directly benefit from activities that we facilitate. Our work increases skills, knowledge and connection, whilst also advancing good practice in befriending. Indirectly, our beneficiaries include individuals with a volunteer befriender, who are supported by our work to provide nurturing, enriching and trusted befriending relationships. Our primary beneficiaries are located in communities throughout Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Ireland.

What is befriending?

Befriending is a relationship supported by an organisation to enable meaningful connection. It is diverse and can bring together people with shared or different life experiences, across all ages and stages of life. Befriending is a planned social interaction that can take place in one-to-one or small-group settings. Models include face-to-face befriending in the home or community, and distance befriending through telephone or video calls, letter-writing, and gaming. In all its forms, befriending can have a positive impact on loneliness by increasing beneficial connections that provide companionship and contribute to emotional wellbeing.



Achievements, performance and impact

Charitable activities

Our objectives and activities in this year were aligned to our Strategic Plan 2024-29.

Our objectives are:

1. Supporting a network of quality befriending services.
2. Sustaining a valuable membership network.
3. Facilitating an empowered network.
4. Developing a digitally connected network.
5. Recognising an impactful befriending sector.
6. Championing the befriending sector.
7. Succeeding as an organisation.

Providing opportunities for support, connection and collaboration through networking events, conferences, masterclasses and training are core activities of Befriending Networks.

In 2025/26 our network highlights included:

- Providing membership services and support to 360 befriending organisations.
- Facilitating 62 free networking opportunities for the befriending sector and our partners, reaching 888 people.
- Delivering 26 paid-for training events, reaching and benefiting 165 learners. Our training courses included short topical training, in-depth multi-session certificated courses developing vital skills for the befriending workforce, and good-practice courses on befriending, dementia and bereavement.
- Writing, designing and publishing six new e-learning courses, three for the workforce and three for volunteer befrienders.
- Hosting 8 member sessions for adopting and applying the Befriender Training Toolkit into members' organisational practice.
- Championing the befriending sector through forums, projects, programmes and Befriending Week.

Supporting a network of quality befriending services

We provided regular and meaningful opportunities for the befriending sector to come together, supporting a network of quality befriending services. Activities included:

Networking and Roadshows

- 5 Journey Across Befriending Roadshows, 3 of which took place in-person in Cardiff, Aberdeen and Tamworth.
- 10 Leaders and Managers Network events to support those in leadership positions within befriending projects.
- 15 thematic networking opportunities, covering themes including neurodiversity in the workplace, managing workload, wellbeing, distance befriending, group befriending and reducing waiting lists.

"I found the session very worthwhile but as a part-timer the challenge now is finding time in my diary to have a little 'refresher' and go through a few things to familiarise myself with everything. It was also interesting to meet other befriending coordinators working on such a diverse range of befriending models." (Guild Care)

Information Sessions

- 5 information sessions about our Quality in Befriending Award.
- 8 information sessions to introduce non-members to Befriending Networks.
- 8 information sessions for existing members to maximise the benefits of membership.

Conferences and Seminars

- 1 annual befriending sector conference.
- 1 conference in partnership with our member organisation, Befrienders Highland, to focus on social isolation and loneliness in the Scottish Highlands, taking place in Inverness.
- 2 webinars sharing contemporary sector research.
- 3 meetings of the Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness.
- 4 digital skills masterclasses.

Learning and Development

Across our annual programme of networking, conferences, training, learning and development opportunities, we had 1,053 direct beneficiaries. Of these, 165 completed training courses that enhanced specialist knowledge, skills and practice associated with befriending.

Table 1: Training Courses

Beneficiary Area	Number of Learners Completing Training Courses	Percentage by Area
England	98	59%
Scotland	52	32%
Wales	12	7%
Ireland	2	1%
Northern Ireland	1	~1%

"I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the courses and training you have offered at a time when I was newly appointed to the role. I benefitted greatly and was able to meet with other befriending organisations and learn good practice." (Keech Hospice)

"I did the Vital Skills: Risk Management Training recently because our funder would like us to be working with people with more complex needs. So going on that training has helped us to be able to put some things in place so that we can start taking on those referrals, which hopefully means that we will continue to be funded." (Member of Befriending Networks)



Membership Case Study: Age UK Merton

Age UK Merton deliver befriending services that reduce loneliness among older people by matching them with trained volunteers for regular companionship and support. They have been members of Befriending Networks since 2018, hold the Quality in Befriending Award and have particularly benefited from our Good Practice: Dementia and Befriending training and networking opportunities. They collaborate with Wimbledon Guild to deliver the Merton Befriending Project.

Tak has been Volunteer Coordinator since 2020.

He says: "Victoria [Befriending Networks' Learning and Development Manager] helped me shape dementia training for our volunteers and it was really useful to get her input. Our volunteers requested training on supporting people with dementia, so it's really useful to have our own resources and training we can deliver at our own pace. I'll also be consulting with Victoria to fine-tune our training for befrienders to help them spot the signs of scams and fraud that elderly people are vulnerable to."

"The Quality in Befriending Award has strengthened our reputation as a provider and gives clients confidence that we can be trusted in who we match them with and that we'll provide a quality service. The process of completing the award meant we improved our service. Other organisations have approached us to ask us about it, so there's potential collaboration there."

"I also completed the Management and Leadership Good Practice course. That was very interesting and was a good insight into management and the next steps we could take. I hope to join some of the Leaders and Managers networking sessions to pick up some more information and tips and further strengthen our service."

"Without Befriending Networks, it would be very difficult to meet and collaborate with other organisations. They act as a central hub to support, guide and connect befriending organisations so we can meet others and share ideas. I think it's good to speak to other people, get their advice, and trial new ideas. It's much easier to speak to like-minded staff working in the same sector."

Table 2: Networking, Conferences, and Information Sessions

Beneficiary Area	Number of Attendees	Percentage
England	433	49%
Scotland	391	44%
Wales	58	6%
Northern Ireland	4	~1%
Ireland	1	~1%
International	1	~1%

"Befriending Networks connect us to a wider network of organisations who are all experiencing similar challenges. At the recent roadshow we attended, there were certainly things that I took away from that that we're going to be able to use as part of our practice."
(Roadshow attendee)

Sustaining a valuable network

As a membership charity, all staff contribute to supporting and sustaining our membership. Throughout the year, we supported 360 member organisations. We welcomed 35 new organisations to our network for the first time, and 16 organisations returned to membership after a break of more than three months.

At 31 March 2026, our membership comprised of organisations from the following areas:

England 54%	Northern Ireland ~1%
Scotland 36%	Ireland ~1%
Wales 6%	British Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories ~1%

We said farewell to 84 organisations this year, with the overall network size reducing by 33 organisations. This year-on-year membership retention figure is comparable with previous years. The financial challenges facing our sector are evident in the reasons given for membership cancellation:

- 23 organisations had financial constraints or no funding.
- 14 organisations have stopped providing befriending of which two organisations were wound up.
- 10 organisations were reviewing the future direction of their services.
- 3 had no further need for support whilst only 1 found no benefit from their membership.
- The remaining organisations gave no reason for cancellation.

Our Membership Services Team undertook specific work to:

- Maintain an accurate, quality and informative listing on the public directory of befriending services.
- Provide an informed, timely and supportive response to membership support requests on all matters related to quality befriending practice.
- Encourage our membership to take co-leadership opportunities at our events.
- Identify and reach out to prospective members to sustain the scale, reach and diversity of our membership, welcoming both new and returning organisations to Befriending Networks.
- Engage proactively with all members at key points in their membership year, including inviting structured feedback and identification of need at the mid-point of their membership and encouraging renewal.
- Assist members to renew their membership and maximise the use of all membership benefits, in particular focusing on use of the membership-only features of our website.

"Can I take this opportunity to thank you all at Befriending Networks for the immense support you have given us over the last five years. I am not sure we could have achieved what we have for our residents without you being in the background." (Seafriends)



Membership Case Study: Rainbow Communities

Rainbow Communities provides community support for disadvantaged LGBT+ people across the UK. Their services include dementia support, support for domestic abuse survivors and their Rainbow Friends befriending service. Rainbow Friends provides one-to-one support and community activities including 'Rainbow Coffee & chat' and 'Rainbow Sunday Lunch Get Together'. They have been members since 2025 and have taken our Good Practice training on dementia and bereavement.

Paul is responsible for managing volunteers and leading the befriending service.

He says: *"We're very reliant on volunteers which is why Befriending Networks is so important to us in terms of understanding how we can work with, recruit and train our volunteers."*

"Befriending Networks has spurred us on to make contact with other organisations and develop those relationships further so we can partner with them and achieve things together. And that helps to make the charity more robust and gives us more capability because we're not just relying on a few people."

"The key thing about Befriending Networks is that it is a support network and it brings people together. And without that you're more isolated and working in your own little sphere which can be quite a negative experience. Whereas when you see that other people are going through the same kind of issues and challenges, and you can problem-solve as a group, that can be really helpful."

"We're a small charity and can't help everyone, so we're reliant on signposting to other organisations – so meeting others that we could collaborate with, such as Age UK, has been really helpful. Similarly, we can bring our unique perspective to other organisations on how best to support and include LGBTQ+ people in their services. So interacting with the more mainstream charities like Mind, Age UK and Alzheimer's Society, is a big opportunity for us so that they're aware of our particular niche and we also can draw on their experience."

"The Dementia and Befriending training was amazing, as were all the resources, and it was great to meet other like-minded people in different parts of the country dealing with similar issues."

Quality in Befriending

The Quality in Befriending Award is the only award in the UK specifically tailored for befriending services. It is valued by referrers, befrienders, commissioners and funders. The Award is only available to members of Befriending Networks.

"The Quality in Befriending Award has very much helped us as a project to secure two years of funding to continue our services." (SeaScape Reconnect)

In 2025/26:

- 40 organisations were Award holders, 18 of which were at the Excellence level.
- 15 organisations were supported to retain their Award for a further 3 years through rigorous reaccreditation.
- 1 organisation achieved the Award for the first time.

Organisations working towards the Award demonstrate policy, practice and procedures against 60 indicators of quality befriending practice and a further 23 indicators to demonstrate excellence.



Membership Case Study: Volunteer Centre Greenwich

Volunteer Centre Greenwich has been a member since 2022 and holds the Quality in Befriending and Quality in Mentoring Awards. It runs the Befriending and Emotional Well-being Project which provides support to any adult living in Greenwich who is experiencing loneliness, isolation, poor mental health and wellbeing.

Abdi, Development Worker:

"Being members of Befriending Networks has really helped our service as they have lots of training as well as templates and resources we've used for our project. Having regular emails from the team is very helpful. And if we get stuck, it's so reassuring having someone we can send a quick e-mail asking: 'what can we do?'"

"We've also had training that was helpful in managing expectations for both the client and volunteer, setting boundaries and ensuring we keep a good relationship from the start."

Liz, Operations and Project Manager:

"Befriending Networks are very responsive. And knowing that there's an expert we can reach out to if needed is always helpful."

"Our biggest challenge is securing funding to keep our befriending project running. Having the Quality in Befriending Award has really helped with that. We get limited wording on funding bids and being able to say we've got a quality mark encapsulates what we can do without having us to have to go into lots of words."

"As we went through the Quality in Befriending Award process, any areas that we could improve were flagged and we were given templates. Some of those save us time because there's things like referral guidelines, which we can send to referral partners and reduce the amount of inappropriate referrals. We also created a flow-chart of the referral process that made things clearer and streamlined everything."

Developing a digitally connected network

We remain committed to making resources and information easy to access through our website, which sits at the centre of our digital services. This includes a directory of befriending services, event booking, training toolkits, e-learning, publications and resources, and the administrative elements of membership application and renewal through the My Account feature. During the year, 702 unique visitors accessed our member-only befriending resources.

"I'm very grateful to the supportive team at Befriending Networks for all their help and useful resources they have provided me since I started my new role as Volunteer Coordinator at MySight York! I have learnt so much in the short time that I have been a member. They are super responsive and really understand the complexities and challenges of being a befriending manager. They also have accessible online e-courses for volunteers which are really well thought-out and enjoyable to complete." (MySight York)

Each month, we send the Befriending Networks newsletter to 1600 subscribers, alongside a monthly members-only email to 1000 contacts, a bi-monthly Children and Young People's Newsletter to 220 subscribers and a quarterly Research Bulletin to 1600 subscribers.

Throughout the year, we supported members of the public to identify befriending services they may be able to access. Enquiries came by phone, email, social media message and the contact form on our website. On average, 100 contacts were made each month using our public directory of befriending services to directly reach a member organisation. Of these enquiries, 75% were from people looking for a befriender, 15% were from people looking to become a volunteer, and 10% had another reason for contact.

Recognising an impactful sector

Our annual Befriending Week campaign remained a key opportunity to raise the profile and visibility of befriending. Through shared messaging, digital assets and campaign guidance, members were supported to showcase their work, amplify lived experience, and engage local stakeholders, funders and decision makers. This collective approach strengthened public understanding of befriending and positioned services as preventative, relational and outcomes focused.

Our campaign achievements included:

- The publication of the Befriending Sector Insight Report which became our top website content.
- Connecting the public with opportunities to find a befriender or volunteer as one: our most used service during the campaign was the public directory of befriending services, which had 10,786 views.

- Attracting 2000 people to visit the Befriending Week website throughout the campaign.
- Enabling an estimated 40% of members to actively participate in Befriending Week.
- Supporting 120 organisations as members, partners and supporters to create content about Befriending Week.
- Hosting two volunteer events “Being a Befriender” which reached 95 participants.
- Partnering with Transport for London and hosting the ‘chatty cabins’ initiative on the IFS Cloud Cable Car over the Thames for befriending projects throughout the week.
- Securing a motion within the Scottish Parliament recognising the befriending sector.
- Working with the Welsh Government to issue a statement of support to the befriending sector from the Minister for Wellbeing.

“Thank you very much indeed for so kindly organising the Cable Car event yesterday. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and it allowed those involved to connect with others from within our own service whom they had not previously met, as well as other organisations too. It has been a great start to Befriending Week! Furthermore, the trip constituted a ‘first’ for us, as it was the first outing we had ever undertaken as a service involving both volunteers and clients and it was a really exciting and rewarding experience to bring people together in this way and to feel part of something bigger.” (Jewish Care)

Championing the befriending sector

This year, we actively engaged in a range of opportunities to represent the experiences and needs of the befriending sector. Our work amplified the collective knowledge of our membership and supported our strategic commitment to policy and representation on loneliness, age and ageing, and volunteering. We also supported the sector by publishing a quarterly Research and Insight Bulletin, drawing together sector data, emerging themes and evidence of the outcomes achieved through befriending.

Our policy and strategy contributions this year include:

- Befriending Networks attended Scottish Parliament Cross Party Groups (CPG) on Health Inequalities, on Volunteering and on Age and Older People.
- Contributing as a guest panellist at SCVO The Gathering on prevention and health inequalities, providing an opportunity to talk about social connection, loneliness, and community building.
- Participation at the Scottish Parliament Disability Summit.

- Contributing to shaping of work around volunteering in Scotland through the Volunteering Action Plan, Recognition and Celebration Group, and Scottish Volunteering Forum.
- Developing the Manifesto for Social Connection as co-chairs of the Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness, which was published in December 2025.
- Membership of the Scottish Government Ministerial Advisory Group on Social Isolation and Loneliness, attending quarterly meetings to advise on the delivery of national approaches and strategy.

Together, this work strengthened the voice and visibility of befriending as a practical and relational response to loneliness and social isolation, helping to create the conditions in which more people and communities can experience meaningful connection.



Projects and Programmes

Children, Young People and Families Befriending

The Scottish Government Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund enabled us to deliver specific work focused on the needs of befriending services for children, young people and families. This year's activities included:

- Convening a regular forum for children and young people's services.
- Creating opportunity for trauma-informed endings to be profiled at our national conference by member project, Families First St. Andrews.
- Preparing and disseminating a dedicated newsletter on children and young people's issues.
- Maintaining an information hub related to safeguarding and the Protection of Vulnerable Groups.
- Continuing to support the infrastructure for delivering assessments for the Quality in Befriending Award.
- Participating in Together (Scottish Alliance on Children's Rights) Member Spotlight feature during Befriending Week and continuing membership of this alliance.
- Contributing to policy and influencing activities through an intergenerational lens.

Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness

The Scottish Government Equalities and Human Rights Directorate funding enables us to develop and deliver the Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness.

- Co-chairing (in conjunction with Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland) and convening the Forum three times, engaging over 146 individuals from 108 organisations, and balancing research evidence with lived experience.
- Sharing the outputs with Scottish Government Ministers and informing the agenda of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Social Isolation and Loneliness.
- Collating the experiences of forum members, alongside international research to write and publish the Manifesto for Social Connection in Scotland.
- Framed the emerging issues highlighted by Forum members including: inequalities of loneliness, building ambition around research, intervention, and increasing the profile of the issue.

Highland Conference in partnership with Befrienders Highland

- At the invitation of our member, Befrienders Highland we co-delivered a one-day conference on Social Isolation and Loneliness to a combined audience of NHS primary and secondary care and third sector and befriending volunteer representatives.

- Focused and brought attention to the issues of loneliness and social isolation in the Highland region and demonstrated the importance of befriending as a meaningful intervention.
- Published a conference report, which was distributed publicly and shared with the Scottish Government and NHS Highland.

Linking Lives UK – Social Connection in Wales

- Collaborated in partnership with Linking Lives UK to lead the development of befriending services in Wales and the provision of ‘good conversation’ training to volunteers and community groups.
- Developed a joint membership support package awarded to five organisations to join the networks of both Befriending Networks and Linking Lives UK for 2026-2028.

Campaign to End Loneliness (CTEL)

- Attended Advisory Group meetings with stakeholders throughout the UK and ensured progression of relationships with key personnel at the CTCL.
- Engaged with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) at Westminster through their marketplace event, and roundtable meetings.
- Hosted the first CTCL Roadshow in Edinburgh in March 2026 with 25 attendees and made new connections within academia. This also enabled cross sector collaboration with housing and homelessness organisations. We then presented findings from the roadshow to the APPG Inquiry on the theme of Housing, Place and Community.
- Made meaningful contributions to the online community, the Tackling Loneliness Hub.

Active and Healthy Ageing in Rural Areas

- This year we contributed best practice in befriending with partners in Spain, Iceland, and Norway as partners in the Fundacion Diagrama project Active and Healthy Ageing in Rural Areas.
- We shared an international survey with our membership and submitted a written case study featuring three befriending projects in rural Scotland. We have valued the opportunity to reflect and compare practice with other countries.
- We attended a partnership programme workshop in Madrid, alongside our member Food Train to explore intergenerational volunteering and support for healthy ageing.
- The report and findings of the work were published by Fundacion Diagrama in early 2026.

Structure, governance and management

Governing document

Befriending Networks is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, registered in Scotland. The charity is controlled by its governing document, the Memorandum and Articles of Association. Befriending Networks constitutes a company limited by guarantee, as defined by the Companies Act 2006.

A membership resolution at the Annual General Meeting in November 2025 approved the replacement of the Articles of Association. The new Articles of Association became effective from 20 November 2025. This included a change to the organisation's charitable purposes and objectives.

Recruitment and appointment of new trustees

As a member-led charity, six of the trustees, who are also company directors, can be members of Befriending Networks, known as 'Member Trustees'. Four of the trustees can be non-members, known as 'Appointed Trustees'. These individuals are appointed to the board to bring specific skills, knowledge and experience. At each Annual General Meeting, Appointed Trustees retire, as do the longest-standing 50% of Member Trustees, although they may stand for re-election if they wish. No trustee will serve a term of longer than six years.

The selection, appointment and election of trustees is a robust process, with necessary background checks undertaken to ensure suitability and legal compliance. All trustees receive induction to the charity, which includes background documents, meetings with senior staff, and access to mentoring from existing trustees. Trustees engage in annual appraisals with the Chairperson.

The business of the charity is conducted through five board meetings per year, whilst strategy meetings, task and finish project meetings and training events are also convened when required. All major decisions are taken at board meetings, while operational management decisions are taken by the Chief Executive Officer, who also acts as Company Secretary.

Key management remuneration

The directors, who are the charity's trustees, and the Chief Executive Officer comprise the key management personnel of the charity in charge of directing, controlling, running and operating the charity on a day-to-day basis. All directors give their time freely and no director receives remuneration for their time. The pay of the senior staff is reviewed annually.

Related parties

There are no related parties.

Risk management

Trustees have a duty to identify, review and manage the risks to which the charity is exposed and to ensure appropriate risk management controls are in place to provide reasonable assurance against fraud, error or harm. A detailed risk register is maintained and monitored by trustees as a standing item at all board meetings. Lead trustees for specific risk areas are in place, with intensive review of risk identification and assessment undertaken at regular intervals. Risks are mitigated through appropriate and proportionate measures, controls and actions. The operational management and escalation of risk is the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer.

Financial uncertainty is the greatest single risk to the organisation. Short-term grant agreements with recurring annual funders, alongside the ending of multi-year funding, make it difficult to plan with certainty. Recurring government grants have remained at the same value as in previous years, while delivery costs have increased. To mitigate this, the trustees have worked with the staff team to develop income-generation opportunities, and a fundraising plan is in place alongside a part-time fundraising officer post. Mechanisms for direct giving and donations have also been made easier. The external funding landscape for trusts and foundations is exceptionally competitive. Income from the delivery of our charitable services remains comparable with the previous year. The board prepares and reviews regular financial reports, including cash-flow statements, to ensure liquidity and confirm that all liabilities can be met. Associated financial risks include the impact on staff wellbeing, staff retention and the resources required to deliver the level of service expected by our beneficiaries.

New risks added this year relate to cyber security and the subsequent adoption of additional measures with our managed IT partner for continuous system monitoring to seek to minimise threat and impact. We have also identified changing risks with changes in data protection legislation and trustees have engaged with a professional advisor to make recommendations to support compliance and minimise risk.

Through active oversight, regular review and proportionate controls, trustees seek to ensure that risk is managed in a way that protects the sustainability of the charity and supports the continued delivery of its charitable objectives.

Financial Review

The charity's main income was grant income from the Scottish Government and the National Lottery Community Fund (England), alongside income from charitable services. This included a contract for services with partner organisation Linking Lives UK, as well as income from

membership fees, training, events and awards. Total income was £257,939 and total expenditure was £311,966. The charity reported a deficit of £54,027.

This financial year produced a planned deficit and included the use of designated funds assigned by trustees to complete the digital transformation project, sustain the size and structure of the organisation, and mitigate reduced grant income. Collaborative work with another organisation supported the charity to retain project staff during the year. When this project concluded, one redundancy was made.

At the financial year end, the charity held total funds of £175,165, of which £2,090 were restricted funds and £173,075 were unrestricted funds. The designation of unrestricted funds into reserves, and to sustain the charity in 2026/27, includes:

A designated reserve of £150,000, of which £30,000 is designated for liabilities and the costs of charity closure. Free reserves are £23,305. The charity's reserves policy is reviewed annually by trustees.

Reserves

A risk-based approach is used to calculate the optimal level of reserves, taking account of the reliability of income, the costs of reorganising activities and specific liabilities. Amounts are included for known risks, as well as contingencies to allow the organisation to cope with unexpected costs or loss of income.

We principally hold reserves to:

- Protect the continuity of our work against uncertain future income streams.
- Provide the capital needed to finance investment in operations.
- Provide funds to replace assets.
- Allow us to respond to unexpected opportunities that can further our mission.
- Provide cover for specific liabilities, contractual obligations, redundancies and identifiable risks, including the cost of closure of the charity.

The trustees have set optimal reserves at £150,000, which equates to approximately six months of unrestricted expenditure. The cost of winding up and charity closure is estimated at £30,000 and is maintained as a designated fund within reserves.

The key financial priority is to continue to seek alternative income sources to mitigate any further reduction in grant funding. The charity will continue to review its structure and governance to ensure it meets the needs of the befriending sector, while remaining cognisant of the challenging funding landscape for charities and infrastructure organisations.

Plans for Future Periods

Key priorities for 2026/27 are to secure income from new funding sources for core services and new or time-limited project work.

Project funding for the design of specialist training throughout Scotland on Dementia and Social Connection will be delivered between 1 April 2026 and 31 March 2027. We will update and republish our headline good practice publication: Running a Befriending Service.

Core services of membership support, learning and development and quality award will continue to be delivered within the staffing capacity we have available. We will adapt our service delivery to reflect the challenges and pressures experienced by our members, being mindful of their financial resources and capacity to engage in opportunities.

We will continue to pursue approaches which are digitally led, which offer convenience, accessibility and choice, this includes expansion of our e-learning and online live training and networking events.

The trustees will review the strategic direction, priorities and sector needs to position Befriending Networks for the future. The charity will focus on organisational sustainability while financial resources remain uncertain. Trustees are committed to actively managing the financial resilience of the organisation and are engaged in scenario planning and forecasting to account for different potential future income positions, and the skills, staffing and infrastructure the charity will require to advance its charitable objectives.

Together, these priorities will support Befriending Networks to remain responsive, resilient, and focused on strengthening quality befriending services that increase meaningful connection for people and communities.

*Extract from Independently Examined Accounts for the Year to 31 March 2026,
which are available at Companies House.*

Statement of Financial Activity for the Year Ended 31 March 2026

	Unrestricted Fund	Restricted Fund	31.3.2026 Total Funds	31.3.2025 Total Funds
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM				
Donations and Legacies		£144,629	£144,629	£189,240
Charitable Activities				
Training/Network	£67,999	£38,361	£106,360	£65,445
Investment Income	£6,875	-	£6,875	£17,646
Other Income	£75	-	£75	£150
TOTAL	£74,959	£182,990	£257,939	£272,481
EXPENDITURE ON				
Raising Funds	£5,166	£4,143	£9,309	£10,720
Charitable Activities				
Training/Network	£125,900	£176,757	£302,657	£312,604
TOTAL	£131,066	£180,900	£311,966	£323,324
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)	(£56,117)	£2,090	(£54,027)	(£50,843)
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Total Funds Brought Forward	£229,192	-	£229,192	£280,035
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	£173,075	£2,090	£175,165	£229,192

Statement of Financial Position 31 March 2026

	Unrestricted Fund	Restricted Fund	31.3.2026 Total Funds	31.3.2025 Total Funds
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors	£3,879	-	£3,879	£1,153
Cash at Bank	£199,369	£2,090	£201,459	£236,105
	£203,248	£2,090	£205,388	£237,258
CREDITORS				
Amounts falling due within one year	(£30,173)	-	(£30,173)	(£8,066)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	£173,075	£2,090	£175,165	£229,192
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	£173,075	£2,090	£175,165	£229,192
NET ASSETS	£173,075	£2,090	£175,165	£229,192
FUNDS				
Unrestricted Funds:				
General Fund			£23,075	£79,192
Unrestricted Fund			£150,000	£150,000
			£173,075	£229,192
Restricted Funds			£2,090	-
TOTAL FUNDS			£175,165	£229,192

Funders in 2025/26

Scottish Government Equalities Unit. Scottish Government Children Young People and Families Early Intervention and Prevention Fund. National Lottery Community Fund England. National Lottery Community Fund Cymru.

Reference and administrative details

Registered Company number: SC195896 (Scotland) [Find us on Companies House](#)

Registered Charity number: SC023610 [Find us on OSCR](#)

Registered office: 5-7 Montgomery Street Lane, Edinburgh, EH7 5JT

Trustees	E Kenward J K E Burnett N Pattinson B Bowhay M Niles S Gray J Weir C Prothero (appointed 11 December 2025) A Tudor (appointed 11 December 2025) C Roberts (appointed 20 August 2026) R Chadha (resigned 28 January 2026)
Board Advisor	S Patterson (effective from 11 December 2025)
Company Secretary	S E Hunter
Senior Staff	S E Hunter, Chief Executive Officer
Independent Examiner	Julian Cordery FCCA FCA CA Gibson McKerrell Brown LLP Chartered Accountants 14 Rutland Square Edinburgh EH1 2BD
Bankers	CAF Bank Ltd 25 Kings Hill Avenue Kings Hill West Malling Kent ME19 4JQ



Befriending Networks Ltd is a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in Scotland No. SC195896, Charity No. SC023610

5-7 Montgomery Street Lane, Edinburgh, EH7 5JT



@befriending.co.uk



Befriending Networks LTD



@BefriendingNetworks

www.befriending.co.uk