

# Outline

In many communities you can find:

- a significant number of lonely, disconnected people whose isolation causes them to feel unhappy and makes them far more likely to suffer from a wide range of problems;
- a GP surgery which sees many of these people and recognises that many patients come to them primarily because they are lonely or suffer from other non-medical problems; and
- a local church which has a reasonably effective system of pastoral care for its members and their friends and a desire to serve their local community.

*Local Friends* seeks to help all three groups through partnership working. We aim to build the capacity of people in the local community to care for one another by using the skills and experience of people in local churches to provide human contact and develop a network of relationships, resulting in improved quality of life, a strengthened connection with the local community (both for the participant and the church), and a reduced workload for the GP.

*Local Friends* extends the concept of Social Prescribing: it creates a parallel strand of personal contact which can be offered alongside the current activity based options. It also outsources some of the activity associated with Social Prescribing to a small Pastoral Care Team based in a local church or supported by a group of local churches, and supplements it with personal support.

The *Local Friends* activity will be undertaken by local volunteers, so the running costs will be low. One of the support options explored will be to find ways in which the participant can offer support to others: people gain and grow through helping other people, and one way to do this is through volunteering with *Local Friends*. Some training and infrastructure support will be required to make the scheme work, monitor performance, and provide supervision and backup to the volunteers when required; this activity will need to be funded.

- We are offering simple human contact, not solving problems;
- seeking to build a friendship which can then be shared and extended to others, aiming to draw people into the wider community;
- responding to what the person being visited wants to talk about, not aiming to talk about matters of faith, but not avoiding the subject either;
- not offering a commitment to weekly visits for the rest of your life, but open to the possibility of establishing a lifelong friendship.

For more details, please visit our web site:

- <https://localfriends.org.uk>