

# LOCAL FRIENDS

## Helping ordinary people care for one another

### Volunteering Framework

## Introduction

This statement of the *Local Friends* volunteering framework may look terribly formal and appear to be slightly intimidating, for which we apologise. The aim is simply to spell out some common sense aspects of the relationship. As always, we aim to operate as informally as possible, with a minimum of paperwork; but a healthy relationship is always based on shared expectations, and common sense is sometimes only common once it has been spelled out.

The central focus of *Local Friends* is to help people build and maintain healthy relationships within their local community. The purpose of this framework is to ensure, as far as possible, that we manage to do this: healthy relationships between the volunteer and the 'clients' (the people being visited), healthy relationships between the volunteers in a local scheme, and healthy relationships between the local scheme and the central support.

Again, as always, if you have any questions or can suggest any improvements to this document, please let us know.

For more details, please visit our temporary web page:

- <http://localfriends.pbworks.com/>

## Summary

A *Local Friends* volunteer is someone who:

- has freely offered to help people in their community through *Local Friends*;
- has been commended as suitable to *Local Friends* by a trusted individual;
- has received the *Local Friends* induction training;
- has been (and continues to be) accepted by *Local Friends* as a volunteer;
- works to help people and support *Local Friends*;
- works within the *Local Friends* policies and guidelines on an 'implement or inform' basis;
- attends the local feedback and briefing sessions when possible;
- records the key details of each point of contact with a *Local Friends* client on the activity log; and
- uses the support and backup available to them through *Local Friends*.

A *Local Friends* volunteer can step back from *Local Friends* activity for a while: personal circumstances can affect both availability and capacity. They are welcome to attend the feedback and briefing sessions during this time, and continue to make use of the support and backup available to them through *Local Friends*.

## Details

The volunteering role we are considering in this document is the ‘normal’ activity of a *Local Friends* volunteer: someone who visits a client who has been referred to Local Friends, gets to know them, builds a relationship, and then seeks to find ways to help them extend their network of relationships into the local community; they may also seek to help in other ways as appropriate.

Some people will volunteer to help *Local Friends* in other ways, such as administration, finance, online activity and so on. These offers are handled on an individual basis outside the framework described here, although some aspects described below will apply in both contexts.

## Starting

The starting point of volunteering for *Local Friends* is the offer and acceptance of volunteering support, described below.

The approach described here works on the basis that the volunteers are already involved (and trusted by responsible people to be involved) in visiting and pastoral support within their church, and they only need a small amount of training and orientation to transfer their current experience to the slightly different context of visiting people in the wider community.

As the local scheme grows, it is anticipated that new people will want to join as volunteers who do not have the same background and experience: at this point, it will become necessary to provide more detailed training and institute a formal application process (including an application form and the taking up of references). For the purposes of this document, it can be assumed that the application process is complete.

## Functioning

### Offered

*A Local Friends volunteer has freely offered to help people in their community through Local Friends.*

This requires that the potential volunteer understands what *Local Friends* does and how it operates, that they want to help and have the capacity to volunteer in some way.

Most volunteers contribute by building relationships with the clients: mainly through visiting them; but also through shared activities and other forms of contact, such as telephone conversations and email. As we have noted, some volunteers contribute by playing some part in the local administration, by helping to develop new local schemes or by strengthening the central activities.

Whatever form the volunteering may take, a basic understanding of Local Friends is essential. A good starting point is the *Introduction* document, available on the web site; other documents which are also available on the web site can be used to answer most of the initial questions which may arise; any further questions will be noted and a response to them will be included in the documentation at the earliest opportunity.

## **Commended**

*A Local Friends volunteer has been commended as suitable to Local Friends by a trusted individual.*

This is deliberately vague. Local Friends is all about healthy relationships and building trust; the basic way in which we establish new relationships is through connections with people we already trust, and we do not want to be overly prescriptive about how this works out in practice.

The sort of trust we are talking about can be initiated through an organisation, but it always operates person-to-person: we may trust someone to a certain extent because they have a position within an organisation we trust, but it generally takes very little personal contact before our own contact with them becomes far more significant.

Knowing that a person I meet is trusted by someone I trust is the best and quickest way to establish an effective level of trust with them, and once we are working together, personal trust can build.

Trust, however, is not a simple thing: it can depend on context (I may trust you completely, as long as you have not had a drink) and it can depend upon capability (I may trust you to handle my money responsibly, even if I know you gossip about me whenever you get the chance).

The trusted individual will be someone (whose judgement *we* trust) who can tell us that they trust this person to operate as a Local Friends volunteer. The potential volunteer may have all kinds of weaknesses and difficulties (as do we all), but in this area, someone who knows them says they can be trusted to behave as expected.

One standard requirement is that the volunteer will have some system of personal support already in place. Again, we do not want to spell out what this means in practice: different arrangements will work for different people, but the essential need is that the person offering pastoral care is also being cared for themselves.

No system of trusted relationships can guarantee that no mistakes will be made, and no system of references and background checks can guarantee this either. As and when problems arise, they will be considered carefully, examined by an independent source when appropriate, and the way we operate will be reviewed in the light of what has been learned.

The other key issue here is that someone who wants to offer pastoral care to others needs to be receiving pastoral care themselves. They must be in a relationship where their own needs are considered and responded to in an appropriate way. If someone wishes to avoid addressing their own needs and issues, then finding other people with ‘worse’ problems who need your help is an easy strategy: we do not wish *Local Friends* to be used in this way.

## **Trained**

*A Local Friends volunteer has received the Local Friends induction training.*

The details of the induction training depend upon the background and experience of the volunteers being trained – it would be a pointless and annoying experience to spell out the importance of listening to someone who has been providing effective

pastoral care to people for decades – but we do need to check that volunteers understand the basics. The essential training consists of the following topics.

- **Context.** Understanding the aims of Local Friends and the context within which we are operating.
- **Methods.** The means we use to achieve our aims, such as being present for people and listening to them, and providing support for the volunteers.
- **Boundaries.** How we make healthy judgements about what is or is not appropriate (such as not doing things for people which they need to do for themselves), and how we enforce those boundaries.
- **Confidentiality.** Understanding what information should be confidential and why this is important; also understanding what cannot be confidential, what must be shared and with whom.
- **Reporting.** Understanding what needs to be recorded and reported, what needs to be proactively communicated, and appropriate timescales for different reports and communications.
- **Support.** When and how to ask for help and support, the importance of debriefing after difficult conversations and regular feedback and training sessions.

We also ask volunteers to tell us about any questions, areas or issues which concern them, so we can set their minds at ease.

## **Accepted**

*A Local Friends volunteer has been (and continues to be) accepted by Local Friends as a volunteer.*

It should be obvious, but still needs to be said: just because someone offers, this does not mean they are suitable to be a *Local Friends* volunteer. There are many possible reasons why it may not be appropriate for someone to work as a volunteer. For example, some people are naturally good at connecting with strangers and putting them at their ease, but some people are not; some people struggle to respect the wishes of others regarding confidentiality; some people have not yet learned how to maintain healthy boundaries; some people connect easily with others, but use that connection to control rather than empower.

There are other good reasons why it may not be appropriate for someone to work as a *Local Friends* volunteer: they may already be fully committed doing other good work, or they may be being called to prepare for some other role. There are many good ways in which which people may be called to serve others, and this is only one of them.

It hardly needs to be said that turning down someone's offer to volunteer must be done in a careful and sensitive way, with the full involvement of the person currently providing them with pastoral care.

## **Works**

*A Local Friends volunteer works to help people and support Local Friends.*

The key point in all this is that the volunteer does something to make life better for the clients – primarily just by spending time and building a relationship with them.

We also expect a volunteer to be supportive of *Local Friends* as well. There are many ways in which this can happen.

- Talking with friends and family about *Local Friends*, explaining the idea that lonely people may be less lonely and have fewer problems if people spent time with them and got to know them.
- Contributing to the policies and guidelines, ensuring that they do the best possible job of helping us care for one another more effectively.
- Helping out in other practical ways, as different needs arise from time to time.
- Where appropriate, encouraging other people to support *Local Friends*, in prayer, in finance and in volunteering, so that more people can be supported and cared for.

We expect that the experience of working for Local Friends will enable the volunteers to be better able to love and care for the people around them; and maybe even be better citizens, using their knowledge and experience of the real life struggles and challenges people face to inform conversations, contribute to public policy questionnaires and influence voting choices at election time.

## **Guidelines**

*A Local Friends volunteer works within the Local Friends policies and guidelines on an 'implement or inform' basis.*

No written set of policies will be relevant and helpful in all situations, however carefully drafted they may be. Loving the individual must always be a higher priority than following the policies and guidelines, but following the policies and guidelines must be the default position, otherwise they are of no use.

The volunteer agrees to work within the policies and guidelines when they are relevant and helpful, and to inform Local Friends when they are not. This will enable Local Friends to consider whether the written policies and guidelines need to be updated.

## **Feedback**

*A Local Friends volunteer attends the local feedback and briefing sessions when possible.*

The feedback and briefing sessions provide a number of important functions. We do not aim to cover all these on each occasion.

- **Team building.** The volunteers work as part of a team, and for this to work well, they must know and trust the other members of the team.
- **Feedback.** Verbal feedback on the support being offered not only helps the team leader to understand what the volunteers are doing, but it also helps other volunteers to be sensitive to the developing issues and concerns being faced by people in their area, and thus to what they need to be careful about listening out for in their own visits.

- **Updates.** The sessions allow for any new policies and guidelines to be discussed and understood, and for possible improvements to be suggested.
- **Training.** As volunteers gain more experience in talking with people and seeking to respond helpfully to the various situations and questions they are faced with, they will become more aware of areas where further training would be helpful. Where possible, ongoing training will be provided as part of these sessions, rather than as standalone events.
- **Support.** The sessions are one of the ways in which the volunteers are supported and encouraged, and are opportunities to affirm them as people and confirm the value of the work they do.
- **Information.** The sessions may also be used to inform the volunteers of news and developments with Local Friends before the information is generally circulated. While this is not essential, it does help to build a sense of identity and belonging.

## Records

*A Local Friends volunteer records the key details of each point of contact with a Local Friends client on the activity log.*

The level of detail needs to be carefully judged, but at the very minimum each point of contact must be recorded. The medical professional who made the referral can look at the record to see what is happening to support their patient, and if the volunteer is unable to continue visiting for any reason, then whoever picks up the contact needs to understand the areas and issues which are important to this individual, and which of these are significant in some practical way.

The issues flagged up in the support records may also be used – on an anonymised basis – to identify where other resources may most helpfully be deployed.

We also need to be aware that the person being visited may request a copy of their records: while this is very unlikely, we do need to be careful to ensure that the records are clear and factually accurate: recording what the client said or did, not any opinion or judgement about what they said or did, and what the volunteer said or did, possibly including plans such as, ‘Next time, I intend to ask about how they coped after the divorce.’”

It is important to record any recommendations the volunteer makes, in case there is any confusion about this at a later stage. In particular, any recommendations that the client seeks other help should always be recorded.

## Support

*A Local Friends volunteer uses the support and backup available to them through Local Friends.*

*Local Friends* is all about helping people build connections with one another – and one of the key ways in which we build connections is through asking for help. We aim to be proactive in offering help and support to one another, but do not pretend to be mind-readers, and while it may be possible to see that someone is struggling, it is the volunteer’s responsibility to say what sort of support they are in need of, and how urgently it is required.

We all need help and support from others; at some times, this is more obvious than at others. We need to love and care for one another, and the support offered to the clients is an expression and outworking of the love and support we receive and offer to one another. Support is given where it is needed; we love and support people as people, not just to enable them to undertake some work or play some role in the community.

Of course, much of our support will come from people who are not involved with *Local Friends*, through normal human contact and through planned activity, through conversation and through prayer. There is no intention that support should be delivered through *Local Friends*, only that, if it is needed, and that need is not being met in other ways, then *Local Friends* should ensure that the need is met.

Volunteers support one another, and the team leader has a particular responsibility to ensure that the volunteers are being supported. The *Local Friends* central team are also available to help where needed, either to provide access to a wider range of knowledge, skills and experience, or simply to provide an external and more objective perspective on a situation.

## **Pausing**

A *Local Friends* volunteer can step back from *Local Friends* activity for a while: personal circumstances can affect both availability and capacity. They are welcome to attend the feedback and briefing sessions during this time, and continue to make use of the support and backup available to them through *Local Friends*.

## **Ending**

Over time, people's circumstances and priorities change. There is no expectation that someone who volunteers for *Local Friends* will continue to volunteer until the day they die. We are grateful to people when they offer to volunteer; and when they are no longer able to volunteer, or simply choose to stop, we are grateful for all they have done.

One danger of any caring role is that you can end up feeling trapped by it. It is easy to believe, "People need me; I don't want to let them down." One of the key aspects of the caring and support which must be provided for volunteers is to ask whether the volunteer needs to stop, or perhaps take a break.

## **Further details**

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