Waltham Forest Befriending Service Co-Design Workshops

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1. Introduction and Purpose

Waltham Forest Integrated Commissioning Team commissioned Befriending Networks and Deciding Matters to identify where befriending services can have the biggest impact for adults aged 18+ in Waltham Forest.

Befriending Networks engaged with a range of professional stakeholders in the form of a Voluntary Advisory Group, while Deciding Matters designed and delivered a community co-design process to help identify key recommendations for befriending services in Waltham Forest.

Insights gathered from the Voluntary Advisory Group and outputs from the community co-design workshops will be reviewed alongside a range of other information sources (including best practice guidance, user surveys and delivery reports) by the Waltham Forest Commissioning Team. The Commissioning Team will then design a provision tender which will be open to applications from existing and new befriending service providers.

2. Executive Summary

Ten participants from the Waltham Forest community engaged with a series of four co-design workshops, taking time to understand different models of befriending before identifying priority

community challenges and drafting a series of recommendations for the Waltham Forest Commissioning Team to take forward with future befriending service provision.

Recommendations

1	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should: • Make it possible/facilitate forming connections across generations and cultures • Be open to different groups of people: different ages, different genders; different cultures
2	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should help people build life skills e.g. IT, health and fitness, cooking, language, financial literacy) and meet their basic needs, understanding our problems and helping us find solutions.
3	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should involve local charities, faith institutions, and community groups so that they can make connections and share information and resources. Networks of organisations can gather and share information.
4	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should create opportunities for socialising and provide the facilities to do so.
5	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should be approachable and user-friendly, helping connect individuals with their local communities. It should treat each person as a unique person, because everyone is special.
6	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should organise courses with the befriendee and the befriender together as a team to build skills, including transferable skills, which benefit both.
7	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should help reduce the barriers to travelling and accessing activities, especially in the cost of living crisis.
8	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should make sure that the befrienders are well-informed and empathetic , and the befriendees have a say in the recruitment of the befriender (both in the criteria and the recruitment process). The service should also establish boundaries and manage expectations.

Additional Considerations

Alongside the recommendations above, participants prioritised safe and supported relationships, with clear boundaries and adequate training in place. Participants also highlighted the need for more partnership working between services in the borough, ensuring appropriate sign-posting and awareness raising of opportunities for learning and support, and to avoid duplication of work.

3. Approach and Methodology

3.1. Process Delivery

3.1.1. Inception and Planning

Deciding Matters worked closely with Befriending Networks and Waltham Forest Commissioning team to identify key lined of enquiry, a series of questions which would be brough to workshop participants to enable deliberative discussions around befriending services for the community. The following questions were identified:

- What does befriending mean to you?
- What are the priority needs of the community?
- How can a befriending service meet this community need?
- What recommendations do the group have for befriending services in Waltham Forest?

Members of the Deciding Matters team regularly attended Voluntary Advisory Group sessions and facilitated two extended sessions to gather insights and feedback which helped shape the design of the workshops and provide meaningful advice for the workshop participants while refining their recommendations.

3.1.2. Recruitment

Deciding Matters created a sign-up survey to be shared with the Advisory Group Team, Waltham Forest Council in order to target local people and members of organisations who had either used a befriending service or might be interested in using one in the future.

Recruitment challenges & mitigations

Recruiting public participants can sometimes present challenges. One of the difficulties is finding individuals who are willing and available to participate. People have busy lives and may not always have the time or inclination to get involved.

Another challenge is reaching a diverse range of participants that reflected the Waltham Forest area. It's important to ensure that the recruitment process is inclusive and reaches individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and demographics. Additionally, there may be concerns about privacy and data security, which can make some individuals hesitant to participate.

To mitigate some of these issues, working with partners such as Waltham Forest Council and the advisory team was crucial to better understand the local people we were aiming to engage. Conversations with existing trusting networks through already known parties I.e., the advisory group organisations they know can help in encourage sign-up to workshops.

In order to encourage interest, we also offered a £160 gift of thanks to participants who could attend all four workshops (£40 per workshop). We emailed and phoned all interested sign-ups to explain the process and check if they had any barriers to participating. For example, some participants might require materials in a different formats.

3.1.3. Accessibility and Inclusivity

To be inclusive, it is really important to be adaptive and flexible when working on any public participation project and take on advice from local partners who have the best understanding of the people they know and work with. Some crucial feedback we received in the advisory group sessions were the timings for the workshops which were inaccessible due to public transport I.e. 9am-12pm, not everyone could submit a form with their email address i.e., they might not have an email address and having outreach options would be really valuable as not everyone would be able to attend these workshop dates due to the location/day etc. Therefore, we amended the timings to 10am-1pm, amended the sign-up form and information where we had feedback and offered two additional days to do any outreach work to groups and individuals that might not be able to attend the co-design workshops. Here we asked similar questions in an informal manner and built their responses into the final recommendations.

Inclusivity and accessibility are crucial when planning and facilitating workshops to ensure that all participants can fully engage and benefit from the experience. This includes considering physical accessibility by choosing venues that are wheelchair accessible and providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Our venue was at Walthamstow Academy which was wheelchair accessible and had a side quiet room for anyone needing time-out from the workshop.

Moreover, it is important to consider the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of participants to ensure that the workshop content and activities are relevant and inclusive. Inclusive workshops also prioritize effective communication. This involves using clear and concise language, avoiding jargon, and providing multiple modes of communication, such as visual aids or sign language interpreters, to accommodate different learning styles and needs. When doing the onboarding, this is something we asked participants if they needed.

It is essential to create a safe and respectful space where all participants feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment or discrimination. To promote inclusivity, our highly experience workshop facilitators aimed to foster an environment where everyone's contributions are valued and actively encouraged. This can be achieved by incorporating group activities and discussions that allow participants to share their perspectives and learn from

each other. Our facilitators were also mindful of power dynamics and ensured that everyone had an equal opportunity to participate and contribute.

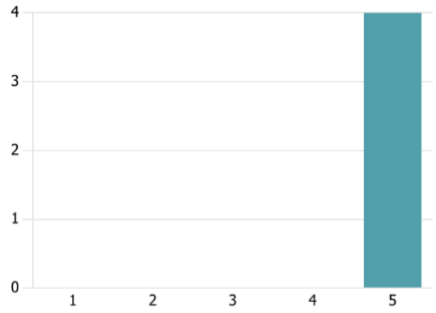
Feedback

To check our levels of accessibility and inclusivity we ask for anonymised feedback through a survey.

2. Please rate the workshop/s on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest):

More Details

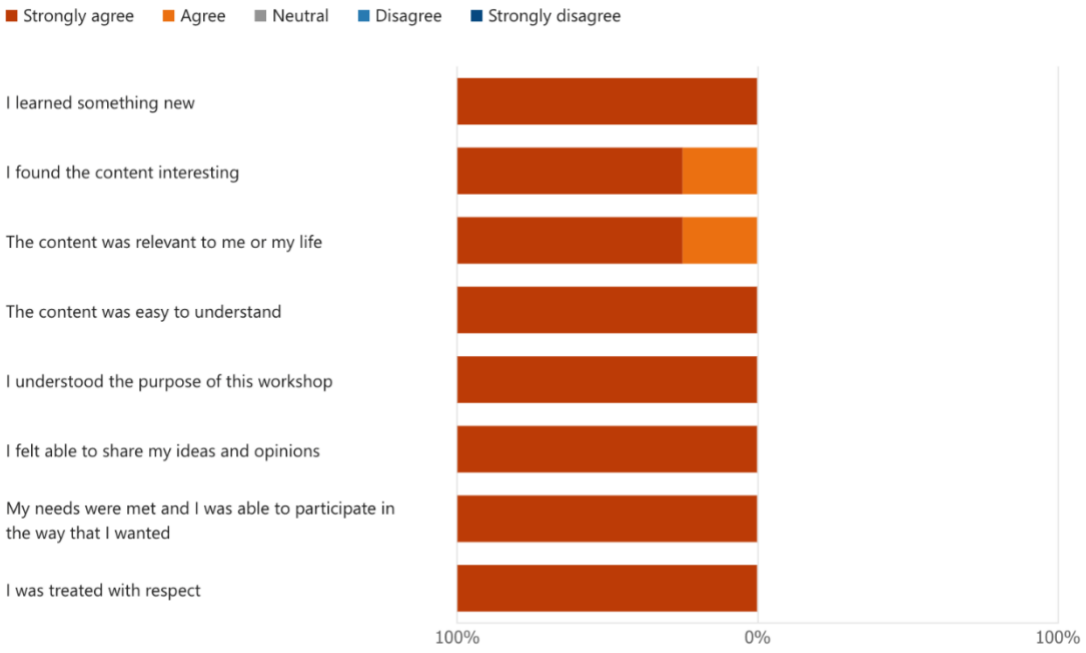
5.00
Average Rating



During these days, I have learned lots of things and felt part of the group, please keep me updated about the befriending service.

I am happy to be part of this project.

Thank You very much for the invitation and opportunity for us to engage and share our thoughts with others



3.1.4. Workshop Delivery

Advisory Group Sessions were hosted online via Teams and utilised online platforms such as jamboard to engage with attendees. These sessions were hosted by Befriending Networks and facilitated by Deciding Matters.

Community co-design workshops were held in-person in a local secondary school with lots of transport links to neighbourhoods across the borough. Workshops were facilitated by Deciding Matters, bringing together trained and experienced professionals to support participants to engage fully with the process.

Advisory Group Session 1

Befriending Networks' Voluntary Advisory Group was asked to attend an extended session facilitated by Deciding Matters to help shape content for the first community workshops. In a previous session, attendees explored types of befriending service and best practices identified by Befriending Networks, as well as sharing their own delivery experiences. Deciding Matters built upon these discussions and asked the group to address the following questions:

- What are the biggest challenges residents in Waltham Forest face?
- How might a befriending service address these challenges?
- What models of befriending might this intervention require?

The facilitator captured discussions on a jamboard which attendees also had access to. Insights from this session were used as examples to share with participants at the community co-design sessions: supporting deliberation around the types of challenges faced by residents and the models of befriending services which might address these challenges.

Workshop 1

Workshop 1 was held on Saturday 4th November with the intention that by the end of the session participants should:

- Understand the purpose of this process and the intended outputs
- Be able to identify different types of befriending
- Identify the needs of the community that could be met by a befriending service
- Prioritise community needs/challenges which a befriending service should tackle

Participants took part in icebreaker activities to start getting to know one another before hearing from Susan Hunter, CEO of Befriending Networks, to understand what befriending is and what some models of befriending might look like. Participants were split into groups to share what befriending means to them, before starting to think about the challenges faced by the local

community that befriending services could address. The groups were asked to cluster the challenges into themes before voting on which priority themes they would like to work on at the following workshops.

Workshop 2

Workshop 2 was held on Sunday 5th November with the intention that by the end of the session participants should:

- Identify practical solutions to the prioritised challenges
- Highlight the key measures of a successful befriending service

Participants were reminded of their prioritised community challenges before taking part in a carousel activity: splitting into groups and looking at each community need in turn, discussing how a befriending service could address this need, the types of activities a befriender might undertake, and why this service is required.

Advisory Group Session 2

Outputs from Workshops 1 and 2 were shared with the Befriending Networks' Voluntary Advisory Group. Those in the group were invited to review draft recommendations from the community co-design workshops and provide expert input in the form of critical feedback, comments on the feasibility of any suggested actions, and identifying any need for further clarification from the community group.

The Voluntary Advisory Group used a jamboard to add comments and questions to each of the draft recommendations in turn. This feedback was then used to shape the design of Workshops 3 and 4.

Lunch Club Drop-In Session

Due to low sign-up and mixed feedback from the advisory group on their members being able to attend the co-design workshops in-person we attended one of our advisory members senior lunch club, to speak to people where they were already meeting to discuss what befriending services could mean and look like for them. At the lunch club we spoke to an additional 10 participants out-with the co-design workshops with mixed experiences, with some having used befriending services before and others who hadn't.

Workshop 3

Workshop 3 took place on Saturday 11th November with the intention that by the end of the session participants should:

- Review all feedback from Voluntary Advisory Group on the proposed solutions form workshop 2
- Start to adapt solutions and actions based on feedback
- Decide which actions are not feasible at this time and should be left as a recommendation

The session provided participants with the time to review feedback on their proposed recommendations from the Voluntary Advisory Group and consider any changes they might like to make, or gaps they would like to address.

Participants were asked to initially take part in an icebreaker exercise, sharing something positive that happened to them throughout the week. This activity was used to reintroduce the group to one another and give facilitators a list of positive experiences/activities to draw on in later discussions.

Workshop 4

Workshop 4 took place on Saturday 12th November with the intention that by the end of the session participants should:

- Draft recommendations for Waltham Forest befriending services including practical actions that can be taken, and why these are important

Participants spent the session structuring their draft solutions and ideas into refined recommendations to be shared with the Waltham Forest Commissioning Team. They were also asked to share their key words that summarised their vision for a befriending service in the borough.

3.2. Participants

Participants were asked to complete an initial Expression of Interest form which collected a range of information, including contact details, age and neighbourhood, Participants also had the option to provide additional demographic information including gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation.

3.2.1. Participant Demographics

Ten participants took part in the four in-person sessions. None of these participants currently engage with a befriending service but identified themselves as likely to engage with, or wanting to engage with, a befriending service in the future.

Diverse participants from across Waltham Forest joined the sessions. Participants came from all four of the local neighbourhoods: Walthamstow, Leyton, Chingford and Leytonstone. Participants of all ages took part, with the majority of the group being in the 30-39 age bracket. The majority (91.7%) of participants identified as straight or heterosexual and 50% identified as a woman, 41.7% as a man and 8.3% as non-binary.

Participants represented a range of ethnicities and each individual was able to describe their ethnicity using their preferred language rather than a drop-down menu.

For full demographic breakdown please see appendix 6.1.

3.2.2. Gift of Thanks

All participants who engaged in the sessions were offered a gift of thanks totalling £160 (£40 per workshop). This gift of thanks was to recognise the valuable contribution participants made to the process, giving up their time and sharing their insights and experiences to help design services for the whole community.

Participants could request this gift of thanks in the form of either a bank transfer or a voucher of their choosing. While most participants preferred a bank transfer, participants who receive benefits are encouraged to make use of the voucher option to ensure they benefits payments are not negatively affected by the payment.

4. Outputs

4.1. Advisory Group Session 1

Describing the Community

- Lots of shared needs – the want for company
- Those that volunteer are truly passionate about it
- potential for different needs - younger person might want different interaction than older person with early onset dementia
- the ability to have someone to talk to - but advice and pointing in directions of offers there may be slight differences
- keep it individual but understand difficult from a data point - keep it a individual as possible is important

Challenges and Supports

Challenge	How a befriending service might help

Language needs and wide mix and range of volunteers - the key languages of the community.	• Recruiting volunteers who can be matched with residents who need that language support ○ The representation of volunteers needs to be representative of the community • Can meet some needs but word of mouth works, ask volunteers if they have friends with specific language skills • Geographical issue - can be 6 month wait to get match people with the same languages in the same neighbourhood
Isolation and eligibility criteria e.g. not just for people living alone, carers, young people, carers	• Need for more resource: funding, scaling up and we could meet more than 'living alone' ○ Current delivery challenge • Carers can't access because person they are looking after disqualifies them/carers first inundated with requests • Calling carers to offer support and befriending but lack of volunteers to do so • Telephone befriending would be better than nothing for carers - look to other national phone befriending services cancer • Carers looking for respite care - to get hour off and also to connect with others • Face-to-face meetings with other carers and service users
Transport - models of befriending are groups - they love it but challenge to get them to venue	• Adult early-help support team - form filling etc. • Models of service - time-limited services e.g each person gets 6 month. This had been chosen for availability of volunteers to meet demand • Terrible de-motivator for volunteers - e.g 6 months is up, say goodbye to xyz, but volunteers kept visiting person. Loss of volunteers - don't end friendship. • Pilot project wellbeing at home - outcome focussed using volunteers with be-frienders life goals 3months limited and didn't work that well, iterations. Didn't work that well for volunteer
Housing challenges and home adaptations	• Housing advice service that individuals can access - what else exists? • Many individuals not aware of what they're eligible for e.g those who are being befriended • Those delivering well equipped and have resilience to deal with certain situations - people on the ground need to feel supportive, confident and have the answers • Goes beyond just a service if individual/s have a question/concern and then what happens next?
Communication, marketing, resources & signposting. I.e. not just	• Matching people/resources - provision of devices, using mobile phone, accessing health care, group model and offer online sessions once they have access to devices

older age group - acknowledgement of raising profile that befriending can be for young people too	• Paid workers and local rooted organisation that keeps up to date - directory goes out of date • Every coffee morning questions get asked - equip volunteers with where they take questions to get answers • Where do I go to fill forms in? They need to be able to sign-post - orgs put this in place for volunteers. • Empowering and strengthening volunteer role

For jamboards please see appendix 6.2).

4.2. Workshop 1

Hopes and Fears

Hopes	Fears
• Person is positive. Reliable. Cut-down isolation. Honesty. • Everyone finds someone. • Giving adequate time to the user to achieve a whole befriending group • To help young people develop themselves giving them funding to do own business or go to university. To help people develop confidence skills and do workshops for. • Be able to make a difference. Successfully participate in a service that may be able to make a substantial difference in someone's quality of mental health, health • Help for people who are lonely, on benefits or places to meet for free. • More help from council. Brighter future for everyone.	• Meeting a new person. Will I like them? Long commitment? Judgement. Talk about themselves and not listening. • That in the end all of this finish in a death end. • Die having not having not made a difference • Wearing a volunteer out. Feasibility with volunteer ends. • People of all ages, for foundation skills. Fears young people will lose confidence in themselves, to condition and train to be a better self. • We don't judge anyone. • Worried – to be badly judged and get boycott.

What does befriending mean to you?

Participants described befriending as being about forming strong bonds and being there for someone. It provides an opportunity to develop friendships in a safe space, where you can rely on each other. It means companionship, sharing ideas and interests, and learning new things together.

Befriending involves a mixture of mediums, where common interests serve as the basis for forming a bond, even overcoming language barriers. Safe spaces with boundaries, like meeting over coffee and cake, create neutral ground for these relationships.

In a world where much is done online, befriending offers an analogue and in-person space. It's about meeting someone who you enjoy spending time with and mutually benefiting from the relationship. Befriending also serves a human purpose by bringing out the best in others and offering support. It's about reaching out to those in need and knowing that a helping hand will be extended to you when you need it. Befriending involves sharing ideas for a better life, reaching out to cheer up others, and finding comfort and joy in friendship. It's about finding friends who can support you through challenges and help you grow.

Participants also described befriending as all about bonding, togetherness, and helping others. It's about sharing what is available in the community and learning from others. It sustains culture without barriers and reaches into other communities, promoting integration of culture and tradition. Befriending is a kind gesture, where people are there for each other, providing advice and support. It involves engaging in activities together to build confidence, sharing skills, and integrating into the community while sustaining cultural norms and traditions.

What is the Community Need

Below we have outlined the prioritised community needs in order of votes (dots)

Connection (different groups coming together intergenerational and culture sharing) (9 dots)	• Need different groups and people coming together to learn about each others culture and traditions. • Intergenerational connections – learning from each other. • Tackling loneliness • Support raising children/families
Involving charities/churches/mosques	• Investing in grassroots organisations • Resources for schools, community centres etc. Sure start. • To be funded or resourced

and existing resources – investing in grassroots (8 dots)	• Help for elderly and youngsters. • More community centres for us.
Mental health/physical health and unconditional non-judgemental and emotional support (7 dots)	• Needs more free togetherness groups and councils must look after peoples mental health and their needs • Health/ability/disability • Address tiredness – widespread fatigue, unconditional emotional support
Mentorship - connecting with interests to develop confidence (5 dots)	• Mentorship – nurturing potential and confidence • Youth teaching elders, elders teaching youth. • Having reminders for reformed individuals – e.g., troublesome teens, having a reformed individual laying out a path for them. • Awareness e.g., people's reluctance to go out, commercial individualisation e.g., amazon at home. • Knowing information, guidance, support – nurturing • Someone who sees and nurtures your potential. • Befriending service should support each other and build confidence.
Building life skills and practical skills (5 dots)	• Basic skills for living – like skills • Basic needs • Resources- finances, space, leadership skills and connections. Community partnerships, confidence to get started.
Role of befriender, signposting guidance, triage of needs, befrienders should be able to refer or recommend services (4 dots)	• Role of befriender, signposting, guidance, advice and awareness raising on how to get help or services, social needs etc • Match pairing meet and greet based on age (optional) i.e., people looking for friends to party with, people looking for study group etc. • A way to raise awareness of problems or needs in communities and their root causes. • Basic skills and advice on how to get basic skills. • Housing advice • Befriending need – sharing experience e.g., each others culture, tradition and experience. • Help each other to break the loneliness.

Building social skills for in-person socialising (3 dots)	• Advice to young and older people e.g., technology, experience, knowledge • Sharing from older generations, games in person, fun, introducing social skills, less time on screens • Share ideas and help each other about tips. Sharing about our passions • Social needs – help for filling form and IT. • Guidance – how to behave – behaviour, keeping busy with full activities to become better citizens. • Teaching them to be support to each other. • Encourage youngsters to be more socialised. To mingle with others. Avoid depression, suicide, obesity and diabetes. • Play as learning. • Learning more words and English vocabulary • Help with cooking skills for all walks of life, Connecting with nature activities, sports, to nurture interests.
Transitions to new places (3 dots)	• Transitioning to new places – buddy/transport/extra help to get out the house. • Mitigating risks of meeting new people • Transitioning to new places, services, spaces – buddy would make this easier, comfortable. • Extra help to get out the house. • Transportation needs
Overarching question: **What are the parameters of the relationship between befrienders**? (2 dots)	• Safety/acceptance/fairness/consistency? • Support/ social consistency and awareness
Extra overarching question: **Who should be eligible for befriending support?** E.g., carers, most isolated, young people, those not currently receiving service etc.	• N/A

4.3. Workshop 2

Carousel (developed prioritised needs)

We asked participants to develop their prioritised needs by asking the following questions:

- *How could a befriending service address this need?*
- *What activities might a volunteer befriender do with someone with this need?*
- *Why is this important?*

Connection (different groups coming together intergenerational and culture sharing)

How?	• Online/social media • In-person through making public places available to use. • WhatsApp • Befriender as an anchor, monthly meeting or activity.
What?	• Activities -guessing games, get to know you games, share languages, give language classes, language exchange • Cooking sharing recipes, sharing cultural food, music films • Sports activities e.g., badminton • Share childhood games from different cultures. • Practical skills – cleaning, de-cluttering, chores, domestic household • Challenge close-mindedness, learning about each others' culture is good for an open mind
Why?	• Everyone is struggling right now, life is hard, we need to connect and learn from each other on how to make life easier, look out for each other and change things. • A consistency in Befriendee's life • Coming together brings hope – see reality. • Inter-faith groups respect each others religion without judging. • Different generations have different skills to share e.g., IT.

Building life skills/basic needs

How?	• Go together to life skills workshops in the community. • Teach 1-to-1, learn together. • Computer skills across generations • Break down language barrier. • By sharing experience, teaching our skills
What?	• Cooking together • Go to online banking workshop. • Life skills workshops • Practice languages 1-to-1 • Fixing things, playing board games • Gardening/growing. • First aid/CPR training • Studying, educating your mind, growing your (something)
Why?	• Need to eat and you save money.

	• It's healthier. • We can take in that knowledge. • Help people remember and learn by doing together. • Maintain your health including mental health. • So that we learn from each other.

Involving charities/churches/mosques and existing resources – investing in grassroots

How?	• Can get funding for good causes at mosques help find befriendings. • If places of workshop run activities • Use spaces. • There could be challenges of attending places of workshop together but benefits of connection and sharing across cultures. • Recognising that people might want a befriender with a particular faith, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity. Giving people a choice, trying to build tolerance. No barriers. • By being linked into the grassroots communities • Befriending without judging or criticizing.
What?	• Car-boot sales at churches, also have cake & tea. • Attend the activities. • Charity work, volunteer together, raffle draw for charity – prizes are exciting. • Making things and designing things. • Hair treatments, massages, threading, nail varnish • Inviting people in from grassroots – holding events "fair jobs" and events to enable people to see what is out there and talk with organisers.
Why?	• These groups help build a sense of community, build on from a befriender to feel part of a community. • Combat loneliness and give a sense of purpose. • Feeling included and part of a larger community; going as a befriender gives a sense of security. • Charity activities go something good for someone is good for your own wellbeing/happiness. • There's fun and excitement e.g., charity raffle etc. • No-one must be alone for hiss or her festivities.

Building social skills and space for in-person socialising

How?	• At the heart of befriending, sitting with and getting to know each other. • There's a way through the 1:1 befriending to transition to a larger group socialising. • Sharing our passions and hobbies and skills
What?	• Playing games, video games, chess, board games, sports games

	• Painting, art, pottery, fixings, ceramics • Movies, theatre • Get to know each other. • Day trips • Sharing dishes, social games, sharing experiences and knowledge • Walking, free/low-cost activities
Why?	• Relationships at the core of happiness • Humans are social creatures; important to connect to one another. • People spend a lot of time alone in the house, can help get out. • Make connections with people who can help you; network. • To tie the befriending bond.

Role of befriender, signposting, guidance, advice and awareness raising on how to get help or services, social needs etc

How?	• By telling people where to get help they need, access services, or join social prescribing activities. • Access to a befriending should be by self-referral. • Mix of referral processes; self and professional & consent.
What?	• Posters (at shops), flyers, emails • In person advice as often un-well people will ignore posters • Not just online, it's intimidating. User friendly communication together with physical activities. • Leaflet through the door for people who aren't leaving the house; council could organise. • Spokesperson from befriending service to go to events, schools, talk and let people know.
Why?	• It will give hope that something is out there. • Hopeful not hopeless • Social skills can be hard to build or rebuild – building confidence. • Feeling like you're not a statistic and not valueless.

Mentorship – nurturing potential and confidence

How?	• By creating structure and agreeing goals (goal focused befriending) • Giving a second point of view, have your point of view confirmed or challenges; have to be strong to take on critique.
What?	• Physical activities • Building skills e.g., budgeting, sewing, including social skills e.g., games, meals, building confidence. • Sharing our own skills with others

	• Sharing resources, exchanges of goods – barter system • Bring befriendee to events/activities that the befriender is already going to/ a part of
Why?	• To live your life as normal as possible. • To develop our social life skills and build confidence. • The fruits and the benefits of the work came later; long term impact.

Transitioning to new places – buddy/transport/extra help to get out the house

How?	• Treat us with respect, listen to what we want and say. • A friend that has had the same experience as you that can understand you. A normal person not too privileged to empathise – but a variety of people and skills too. • Awareness of the power dynamics – empowering the befriendee to understand their value in the relationship.
What?	• Help to do activities e.g., film, book club, group activities • A friend that enjoys activities e, g., sports, cooking and will do them with you.
Why?	• On your own you might not have the energy, social skills to be able to do things and overcome barriers, e.g., language, confidence. • Joy of giving and receiving – coming together for each other – mutual.

Mental health/physical health and unconditional non-judgemental emotional support

How?	• Support to build structure into your day so you have somewhere to be and something to do • A friend to boost you up or help you see and recognise the problem • Someone, a friend that sees you as a normal person and feels what you feel – empathetic – listening. • Stays away from “health” and “medical” language e.g., patient. Doing this together.
What?	• Phone-call to check-in and encourage you, to arrange a place to meet, go for a walk • Support to access further help from family or professionals • Communicating in a way that the person prefers • Celebrating special occasions e.g., Christmas or birthday cards, Eid • A smile – someone friendly • Home visit check-ins as well (bring a treat as well) • Improve awareness on mental health & emotional wellbeing e.g., course, mental health, first aid course, supervision.
Why?	• Make that person feel that someone cares that you exist

	• Our friends are sometimes already struggling or overwhelmed so you may need another helping hand • To help with loneliness and isolation • Stops the person feeling like a burden.

What are the parameters of befriending relationships? How to make it safe? Acceptance, fairness, consistent etc?

- How can befriending be made safe and fair? Setting boundaries and managing expectations for all parties at the start and throughout
    - Respect and trust – not telling others when we have opened up to one person
    - Consistency from us both
- Befriending with a particular timeframe, with measuring throughout to assess progress e.g., how independent you can be when going to the gym. Preparing for befriending. to end - path of expectations.
- Safeguarding. Referring for care – confidential but duty of care. Connects with boundaries e.g., panic attack in case of emergency.
- Befrienders need to be able to act as family or contact family members as some people are completely alone for different reasons (elderly, bad family, gay with no children)
- Equality of access to befriending, including. across different communities.

Who should be eligible for befriending support? E.g., carers, most isolated, young people, those not currently receiving service etc.

- Young people are lonely too, but they might not use a befriending service.
- There's work to do de-stigmatizing the service.
- People with mental health difficulties
- LGBTQ+ people
- Lonely people
- Someone going through a big life change.
- Part of the recovery process
- Mental health is a big issue. Hard to find inner peace in heart and mind. Everyone is suffering.

What would success look like?

How much of this (above) could be done within one service?	**this was too difficult question to answer without the expertise from Waltham Forest Council but participants felt one service could still make a huge difference.*
What would success look like?	• Money raised for deserving organisations and people who need it. • Percentage decrease in loneliness in population • People get more knowledge and support in helping each other. • Permanent friendships. • Being the catalysts to someone to begin an activity they might not have had the initiative to begin alone • Success is helping someone to gain a valuable skill they otherwise wouldn't have. • Long lasting sustainable model that can be adopted and multiplied in other areas. • Success is giving someone a friend before crisis to prevent and to help them when they need it. • Success will be being able to look after money, controlling own finances.
How can we measure that success?	• By seeing how the liaison went through questionnaires. • Meet targets, ongoing service, empowered person giving back. • Review process. Feedback from both befriender and befriendees. • When people meet free charity places then they share ideas. • How the befriender can see how the befriendee is doing i.e., new found confidence etc.

For notes from Workshops 1 and 2 please see appendix 6.3.

4.4. Advisory Group Session 2

Attendees were asked the review the outputs from the carousel activity above and leave comments regarding the feasibility of solutions, where existing service provision was already in place, and where solutions needed more clarity.

Feedback included the need to be cautious when engaging with specific faith-groups as some faiths held onto stigma in relation to some of the needs of service users (e.g. a lack of praying causing mental health issues).
While attendees agreed that befriending services could support those who feel isolated and want to socialise more, they highlighted that due to capacity (funding, number of volunteers, staff time) many organisations could only support service users most in need, and would not be able to provide a befriending service for someone who was not seen as "vulnerable" other than wanting to socialise more.

Attendees also noted some gaps that they wanted community participants to consider in the final workshops:

- Need to understand the role of befriending and the structure/training programmes in place
    - What befriending can't be
    - Volunteers being 100% clear on their role and their contribution
    - Build in the needs of volunteers (training, support, etc.)
- Building a model of safe relationships
- Understanding what else exists in the community - need to meet needs that are not currently being met and not duplicate
- Consider range of delivery and that it's not a one-size-fits all model (an 18y/o and a 80y/o will have different needs)
- Clear referral criteria
    - Think about safe referrals! Befrienders are volunteers who need to be looked after and not all referrals are appropriate for befriending services
    - Need to be comfortable that not every service is for everybody
    - Prioritise who should be getting and receiving a befriending service - need to recognise that there is not funding for everyone in the borough to have befrienders
        - How do we identify the people who are most in need of a befriender?
- Early intervention is challenging to monitor and evaluate
- Consider people whose voices are not being heard in this process
    - Missing the voices of older people who are unable to attend this session in person

For jamboards please see appendix 6.4.

4.5. Lunchtime Drop-In Session

Deciding Matters offered two additional drop-in days where we could come into any existing group or service in Waltham Forest to gather input. This was because we were conscious of the barriers to

some people attending Walthamstow Academy workshops and we wanted to get as much input from diverse perspectives as possible within the community.

Participants

Participants at the lunch club were made up of senior adults, half of whom were interested in the befriending concept and half who felt they didn't need it. Those who had used such services before had mixed experiences too, some of them had struggled to commit and others had made long lasting friends that they were still in touch with.

Those who had never used this service and didn't feel the need to use it either already felt quite connected to others, or had some concerns, such as not being able to access the service because of their disability or not being able to uplift someone else as they had their own mental health issues. A few of the ones that had never used it expressed their interest to alleviate isolation and loneliness.

Overall participants suggested some recommendations and activities below that should be considered as part of a befriending service.

What recommendations and activities could be done as part of a befriending service?

Suggested activities	Other recommendations
• Shopping, sitting, chatting. • Would prefer to have some help, not just sitting and chatting. • Go out for refreshments. • Help with computer skills. • Take them out. • Going on trips or to the cinema. • Phone calls. Someone to get you out. • Doing some activities. • Help you get on the bus.	• It could be short term or long-term depending on people's needs, same with intensity. Some would need once a week, others daily chat. • It needs to be free. • Someone in your age group. • Thinking about transport, moving from A to B. • Weekly/once a week.

Hopes & Positives	Fears & Concerns
• Some people have family, some don't and others have family but don't get along, so important to meet others. Would be good for my husband as well because he's an introvert and now he's older and he is too much within himself, would need someone to talk to him. • Someone to ring up when it's not easy with disabled sons. Before, had a	• Struggling with a disability and not sure how that might impact ability to join the service. • What if I can't go out of the house. • Worry that would not be suitable with my time/appointments at the hospital. • Don't like the phone ones because after you hang us you are still on your own. • Not very good on the phone.

mothers group but no longer have a peer group. • Company is the main thing. Someone to have a chat with. • Someone on the phone if I need. Good previous experiences • Have two friends from befriending: good, we share, talk and laugh. Meet weekly, when don't see each other, call each other on the phone. • Done it before with Age UK and it was very nice, still in touch.	Reasons for low interest • Already have friends • Prefer a group setting than 1-1 • Have done it before. • Had one prescribed by a doctor but cancelled because it was on the phone. • Already busy but maybe when I can't go out and about anymore. • Already have neighbours from independent living accommodation.

4.6. Workshop 3 and Workshop 4

Participants spent Workshop 3 reviewing the feedback from the Voluntary Advisory Group and started to draft recommendations which they refined in Workshop 4.

Community Vision for Befriending Services in Waltham Forest

Participants were asked to share their key words to summarise their vision for a befriending service:

- Empathy
- Respect
- Safety
- Encourage
- Empowering
- Expression
- Stability
- Kindness
- Joy
- Honestly
- Non-judgemental
- Non-biased
- Integrity
- Happiness
- Satisfaction
- Metropolis
- Fun
- Friendship
- Connection
- Confidence
- Confidential
- Communication

Recommendations

1	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should: • Make it possible/facilitate forming connections across generations and cultures • Be open to different groups of people: different ages, different genders; different cultures To do this a service might:

	• Have both 1:1 and group activities to share culture, knowledge and skills, e.g. community kitchens, gardens, providing community space to meet • Have multi-lingual communication in a variety of formats This is important because: • We need to connect with one another to have hope, build skills, be inspired, to make life easier, look out for each other, and change things • We need to challenge close mindedness • Different generations and different cultures have different skills to share
2	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should help people build life skills e.g. IT, health and fitness, cooking, language, financial literacy) and meet their basic needs, understanding our problems and helping us find solutions. To do this a service might: • Provide clear information and links to existing opportunities and activities in the borough that befrienders can attend together • Provide alternatives for very vulnerable people with health problems, the elderly, and/or disabled people • Provide the equipment and spaces needed to build life skills e.g. computer accessories, cooking utensils, sports equipment • Provide links to existing services i.e. signposting This is important because it improves our daily life. For example, developing independence by taking care of ourselves in areas of healthy lifestyle, paying bills and debts, developing healthy friendships, resilience towards life's ups and downs.
3	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should involve local charities, faith institutions, and community groups so that they can make connections and share information and resources. Networks of organisations can gather and share information. To do this a service might: • Access the spaces and activities that these organisations have and run • Consider people's interests, language preferences, gender identity and culture to match befrienders and befriendees This is important because we want to break down the barriers of racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, homophobia, and sexism, to promote a more diverse society. We want to feel a sense of community that brings joy and fun.
4	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should create opportunities for socialising and provide the facilities to do so.

	To do this a service might give training and resources to volunteers so that they have the tools to help the befriendees build up their confidence and social skills. This is important because there are groups of people in the borough (e.g. vulnerable people, people with language barriers, etc.) who cannot develop social skills in other spaces. This would give us the skills we need to articulate our problems and advocate for ourselves. Humans are social creatures and it is important to connect with one another.
5	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should be approachable and user-friendly, helping connect individuals with their local communities. It should treat each person as a unique person, because everyone is special. To do this a service might: • Consider the needs of the individuals to ensure that they are met and that the individual's voice is heard • Update on what's on and online activities, and communicate this to befrienders. For example, through a read-only WhatsApp or Facebook group, or newsletter (online or physical). This might include cultural events in the borough. This is important because it reduces isolation and it makes people feel part of the community, people can make informed decisions and it gives the befriendees choice. It empowers us.
6	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should organise courses with the befriendee and the befriender together as a team to build skills, including transferable skills, which benefit both. To do this a service might: • Hire teachers to host workshops that the befriender and befriendee can attend together, such as cooking, budgeting and IT skills • Have a survey, wellness wheel, or other tools, to understand the needs and interests of the befriendee and help them set some goals e.g. take a shower, make the bed, do the cooking, cleaning This is important because everyone needs a trusted person with whom they can check-in and make sure they are on the right track. Prevention is better than cure and everyone can benefit from befriending. Checking in with befriendees about how they feel at the beginning, middle and end helps measure progress.
7	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should help reduce the barriers to travelling and accessing activities, especially in the cost of living crisis. To do this a service might provide Oyster cards, reimburse travel expenses, book Dial0a-Ride or other modes of transport, connect with the freedom pass application process.

	Relationships between befriendee and befriender should be facilitated so they can do activities together. This is important because of the cost of living crisis and it's an incentive to get out of the house and be comfortable to go to places. It's a mutual benefit for both befriendee and befriender. It increases independence and confidence in the long term.
8	We think a befriending service in Waltham Forest should make sure that the befrienders are well-informed and empathetic , and the befriendees have a say in the recruitment of the befriender (both in the criteria and the recruitment process). The service should also establish boundaries and manage expectations. To do this a service might: • Provide training for volunteers including mental health awareness, mental health first aid, safeguarding training and DBS checks, listening skills, grief and bereavement training, communication skills for inter-cultural communication • Encourage volunteers to be empathetic with the befriendee's choices • Work with medical professionals in a way that is confidential, multi-agency and holistic • Have a contact person for the befriendee and involve the befriender with the what the befriendee is going through This is important because it can empower he befriendee and de-stigmatise people with mental health needs.

For notes from Workshops 3 and 4 please see appendix 6.5.

5. Learning

5.1. Timescales

The time between launch of the project, beginning with the setting up of the Voluntary Advisory Group, and the delivery of community workshops was initially intended to be one month. This was not enough time to build relationships with the Advisory Group and secure buy-in for the process. Workshops were postponed as a result to allow additional time to develop an appropriate recruitment process with the Advisory Group. Once recruitment went live, however, the Advisory Group were still hesitant to share the opportunity with their service users. This was for a number of reasons: in-person sessions were not accessible for some elderly individuals who were mostly house-bound, they were unhappy that the council was setting up a new tender without more input from current service providers, they worried the co-design workshops would not be representative

of the community most in need of befriending services (those with mobility challenges, long-term health conditions, mental illness, etc.).

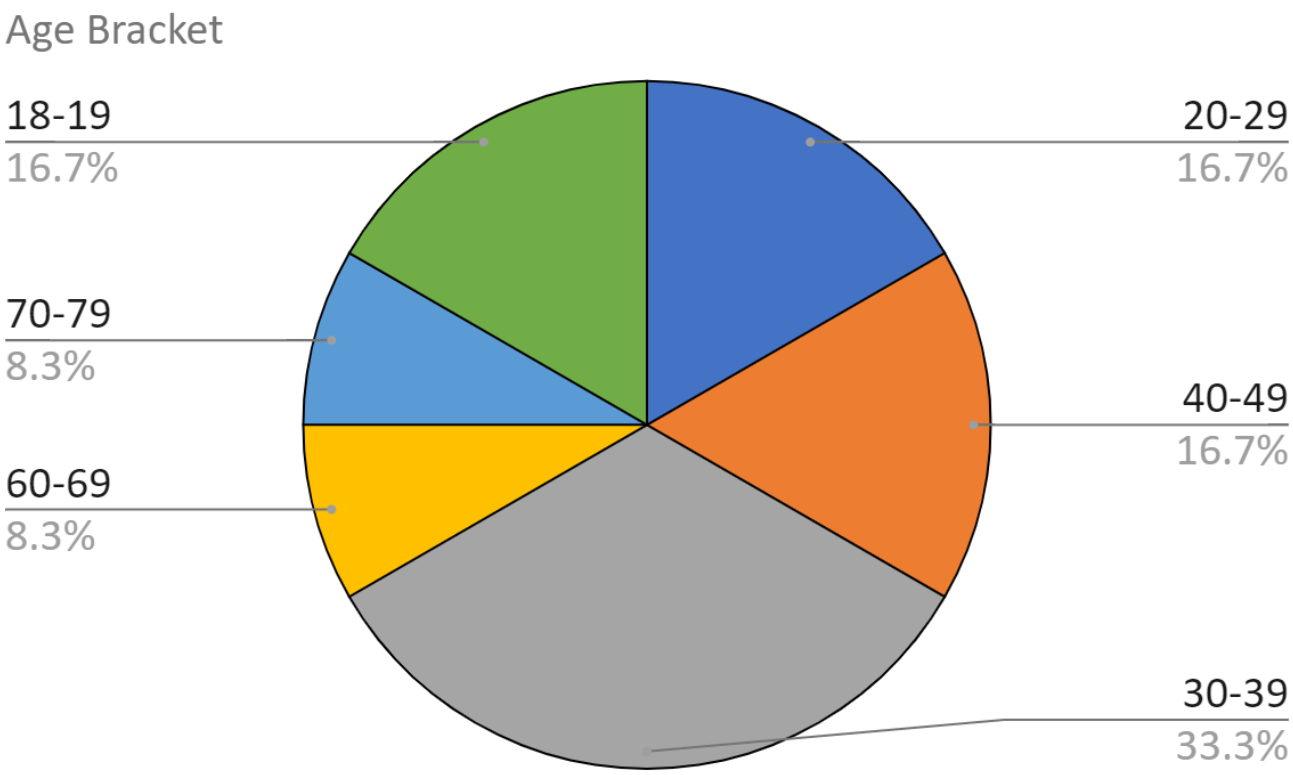
Deciding Matters recommends that future processes in involve current service providers at a much earlier stage to help shape the design of community engagement. It is also recommended to extend timescales to allow for multiple forms of community engagement to take place to ensure as many members of the community are able to engage as possible (e.g. online sessions, in-person sessions, phone interviews, drop-ins).

5.2. Joined Up Working

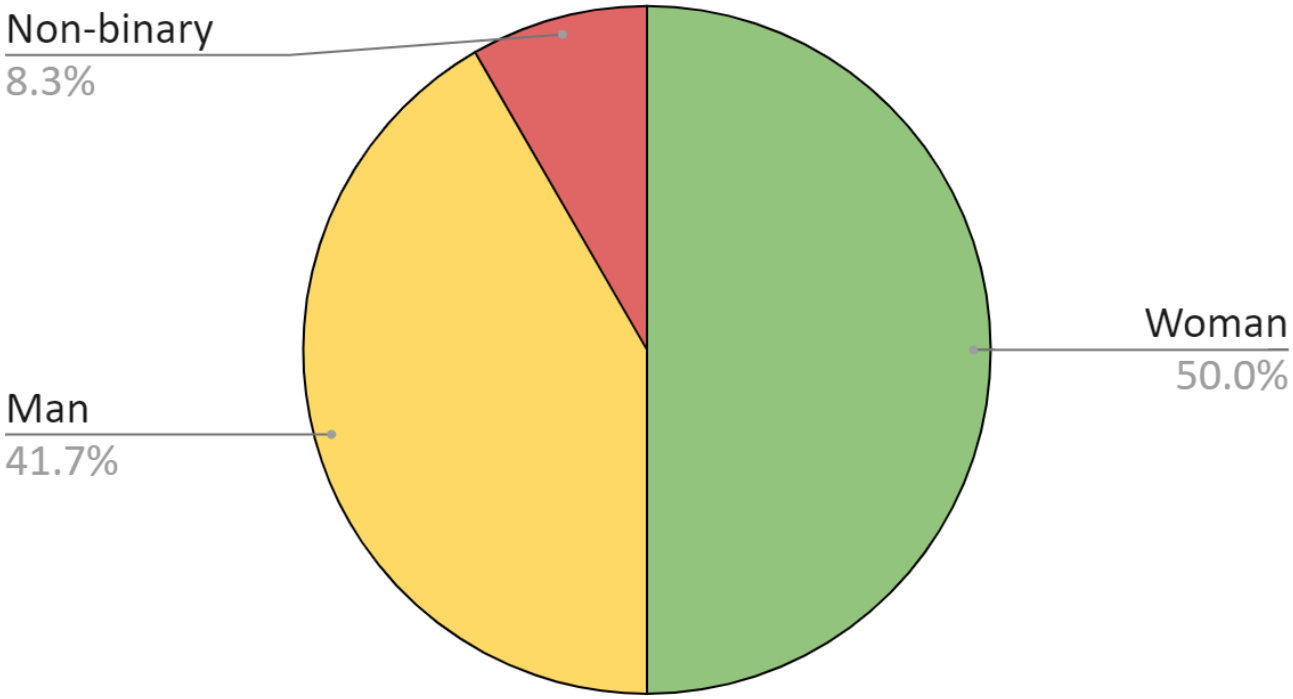
Some of the draft recommendations proposed by participants were then highlighted by the Advisory Group as already being delivered in the borough by statutory services (e.g. goal orientated mentoring). Existing service providers were unsure how many services were currently already addressing the needs identified by community participants, and were keen to avoid duplication. A clear list of service providers and remit of services in the borough would help with both sign-posting and avoid duplication of service provision in the future.

6. Appendices

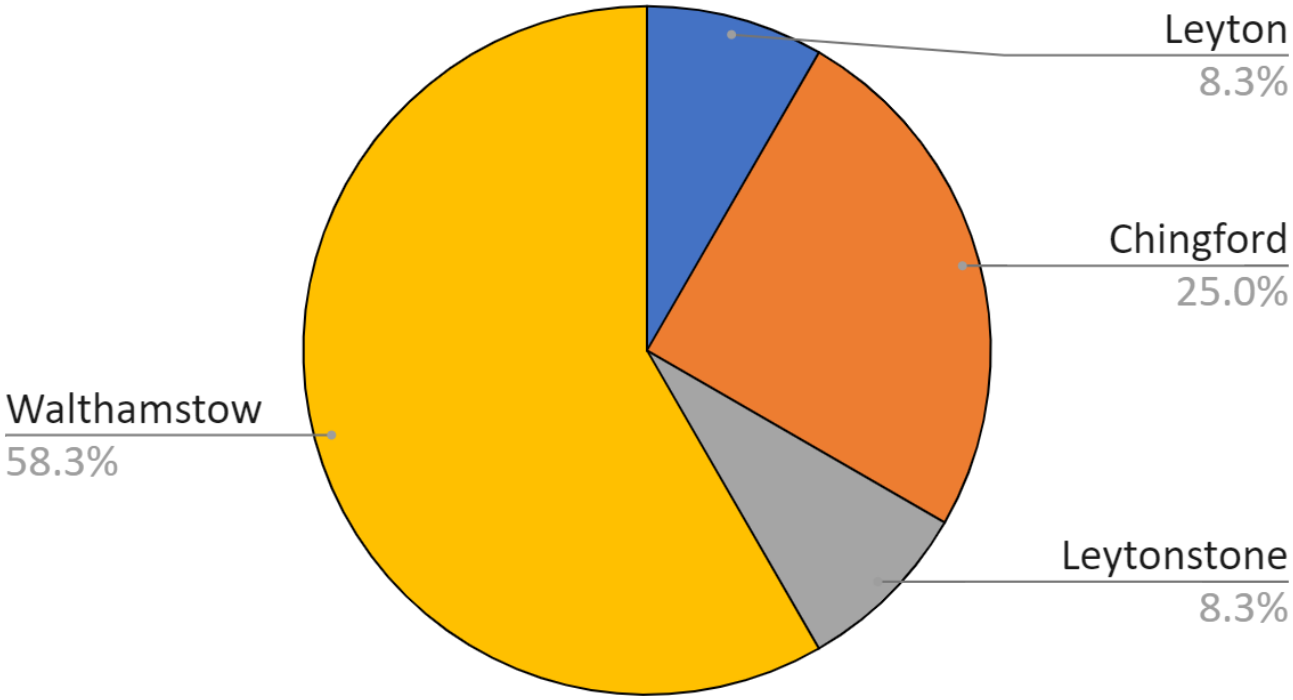
6.1 Participant Demographics



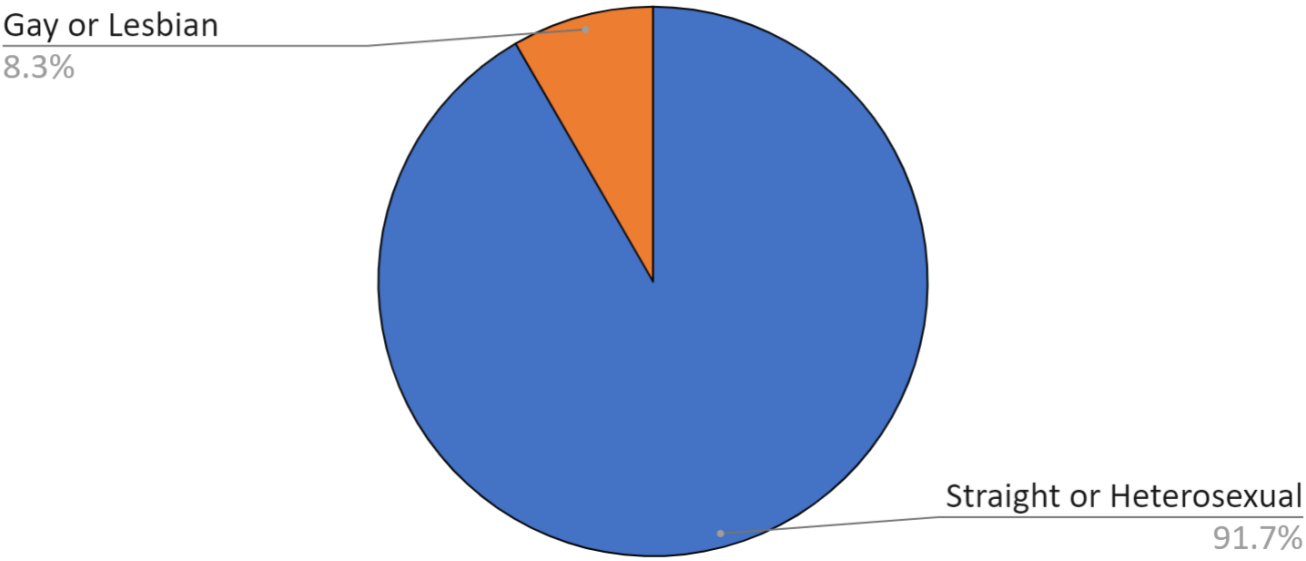
Gender



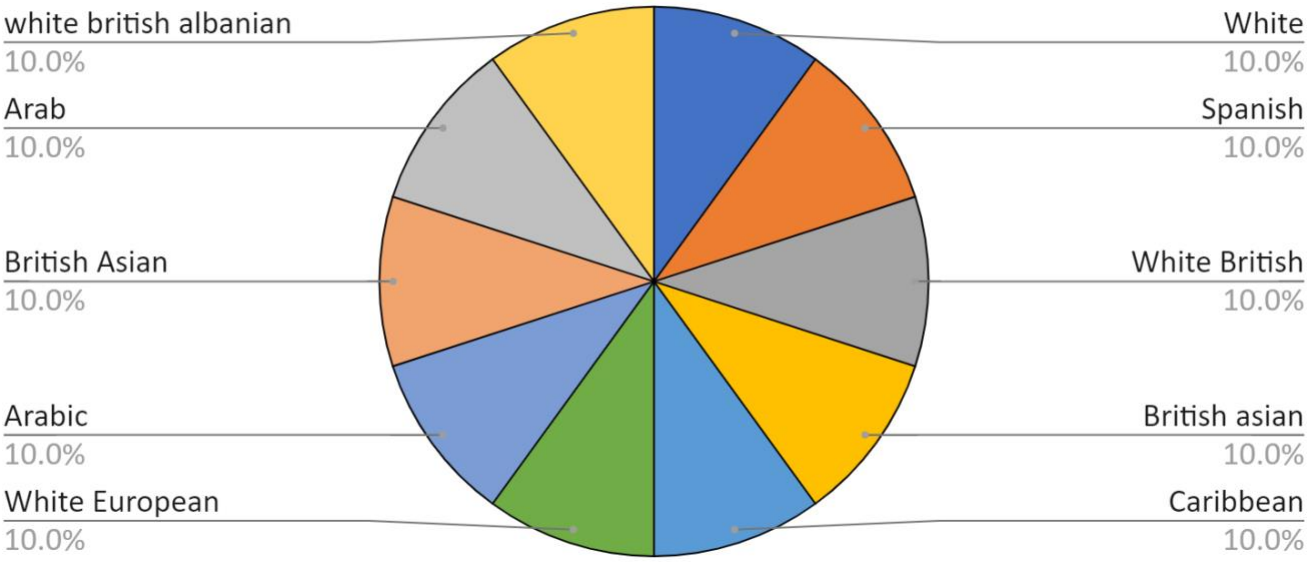
Neighbourhood



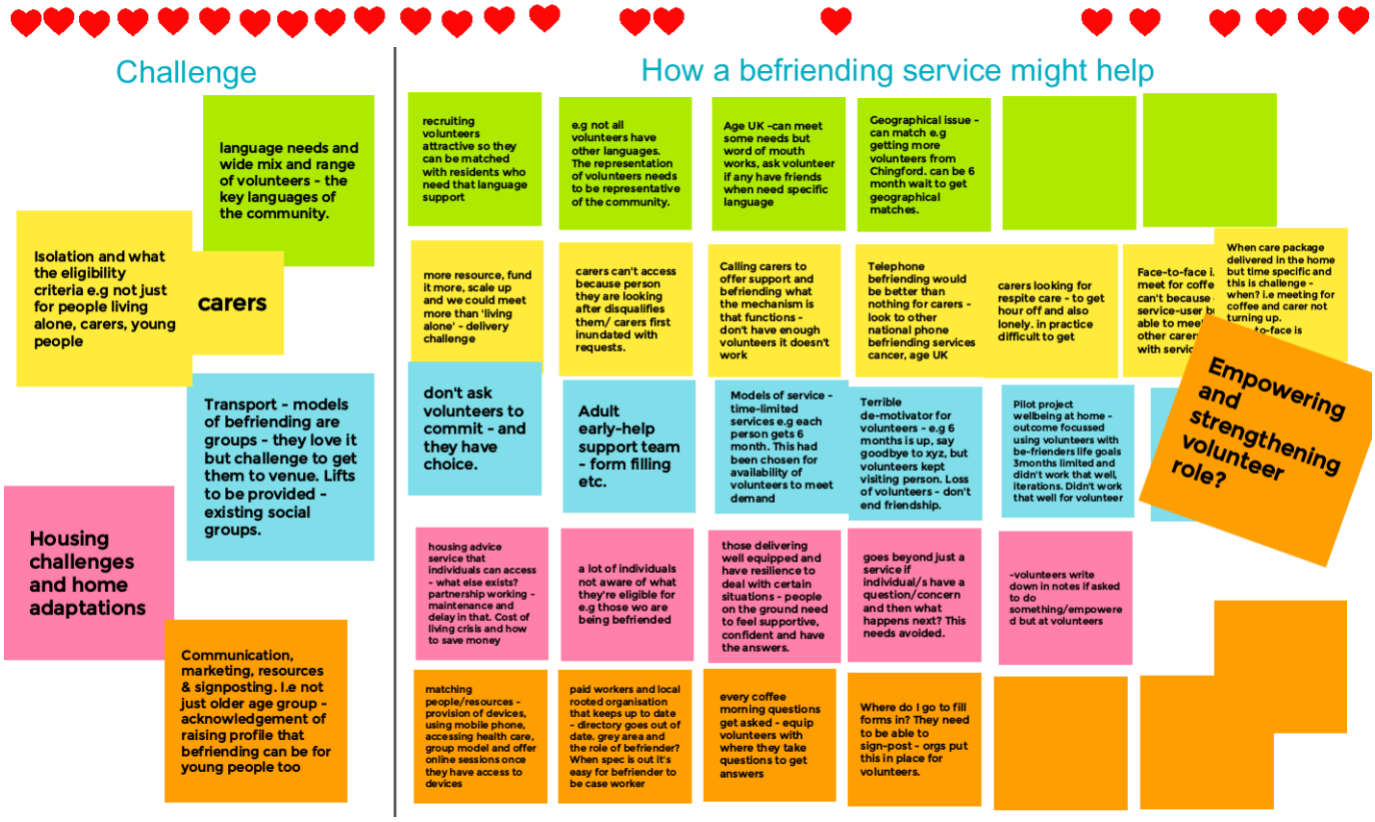
Sexual Orientation



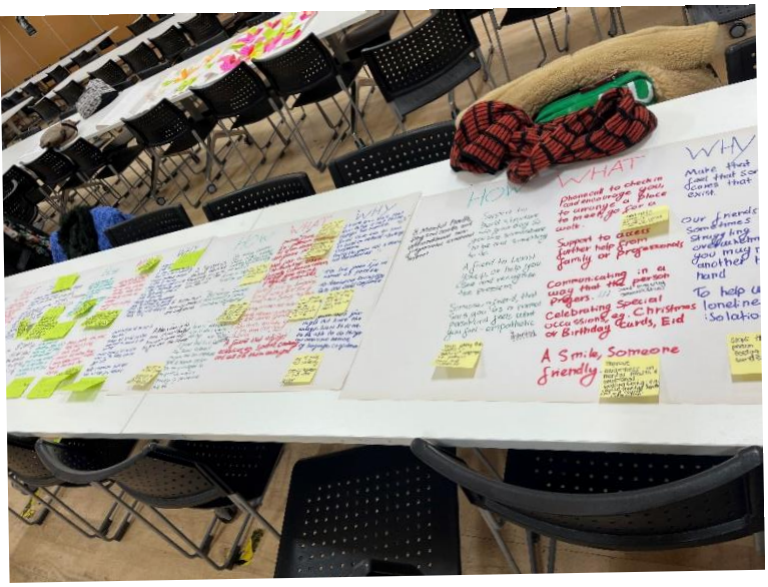
Ethnicity

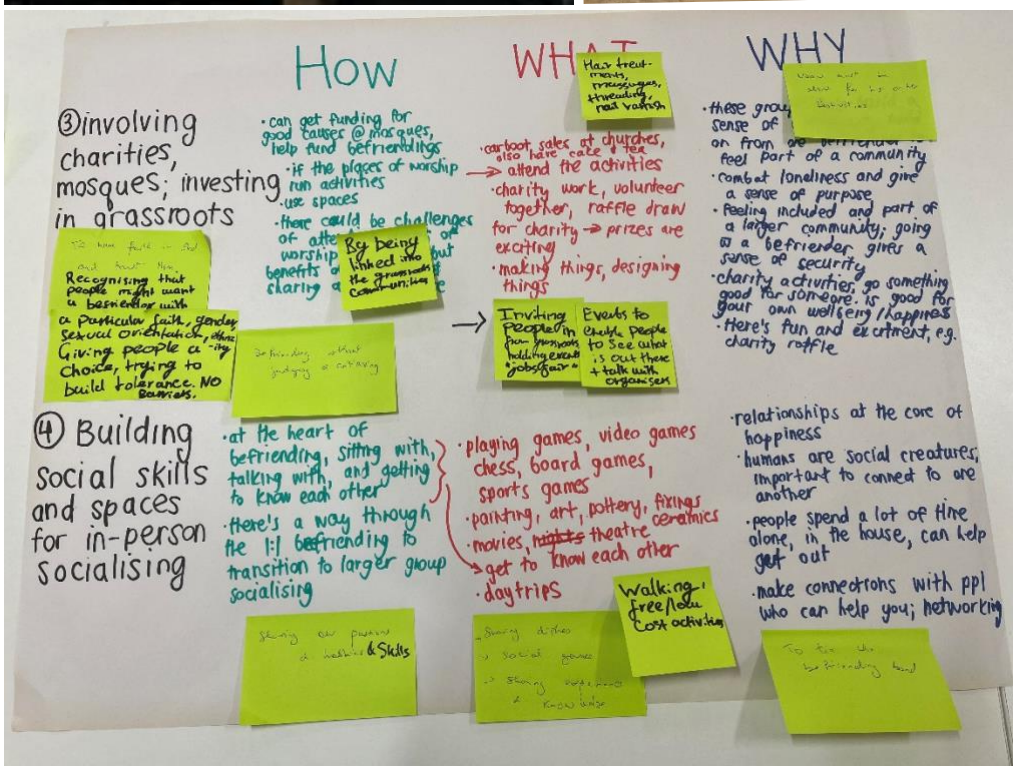


6.2. Advisory Group Session 1 Jamboards



6.3. Notes from Workshops 1 and 2





6.4. Advisory Group Session 2 Jamboards

Community need: Mentorship – nurturing potential and confidence

How a befriending service might address this need:

- By creating structure and agreeing goals (goal focussed befriending)
- Giving a second point of view, have your point of view confirmed or challenges; have to be strong to take on critique

What activities might a befriender do?

- Physical activities
- Building skills e.g., budgeting, sewing, including social skills e.g., games, meals, building confidence.
- Sharing our own skills with others
- Sharing resources, exchanges of goods – barter system
- Bring befriendee to events/activities that the befriender is already going to/ a part of

Early Help Division, LBWF, headed up by Tess Glendale. Carries out one-to-one work with goal focused outcomes

need to ensure befriending is not duplicating statutory services (resource already exists)

Why is this important?

- To live your life as normal as possible.
- To develop our social life skills and build confidence
- The fruits and the benefits of the work came later; long

some people don't have a set goal they want to work towards - not one-size-fits-all

goals need to be realistic (e.g. someone who is bedbound being expected to reintegrate with the community within a short timeframe)

goals set by befriendees, not by funders, as everyone will have very different needs

What frequency and mode of contact do you think is most appropriate, should this be determined by the Befriender and Befriendee

how can a service show they've met goals with regards to wellbeing indicators (e.g. a person is happier, hasn't been readmitted to hospital)

Are there any gaps?

need to understand the role of befriending and the structure/training programmes in place

building a model of safe relationships

understanding what else exists in the community - need to meet needs that are not currently being met and not duplicate

missing the voices of older people who are unable to attend this session in person

consider range of delivery and that it's not a one-size-fits all model (an 18y/o and a 80y/o will have different needs)

volunteers being 100% clear on their role and their contribution

prioritise who should be getting and receiving a befriending service - need to recognise that there is not funding for everyone in the borough to have befrienders

what befriending can't be

build in the needs of volunteers (training, support, etc.)

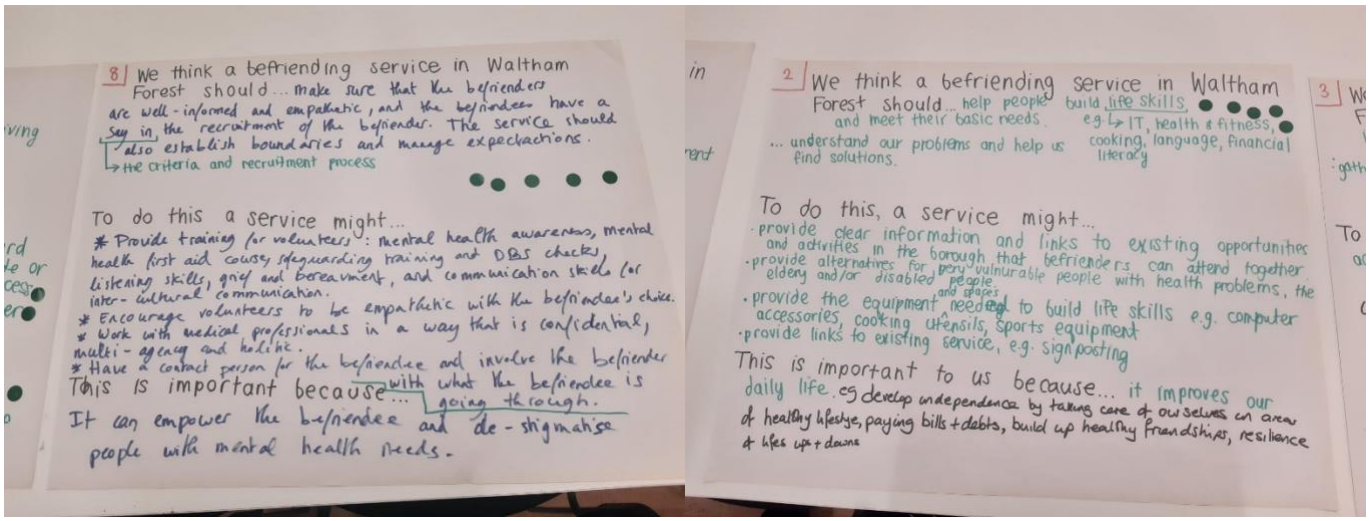
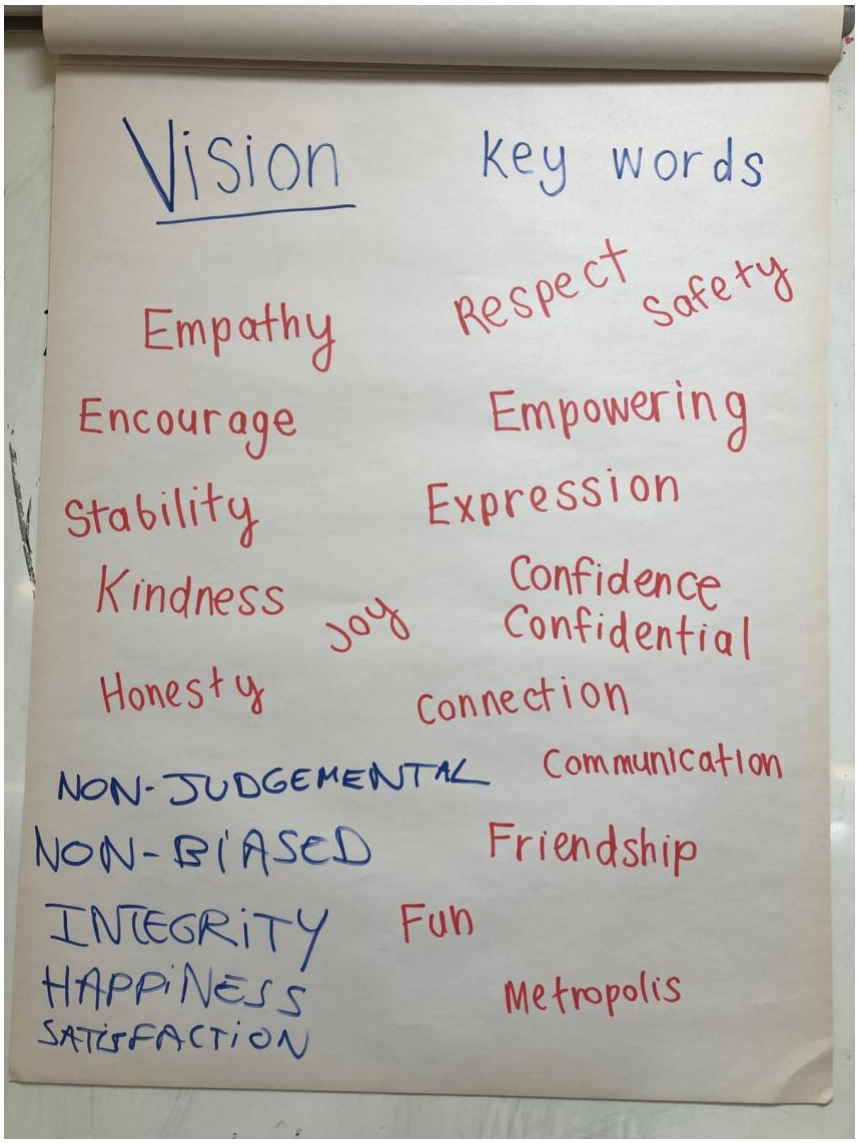
think about safe referrals! Befrienders are volunteers who need to be looked after and not all referrals are appropriate for befriending services

clear referral criteria

need to be comfortable that not every service is for everybody

how do we identify the people who are most in need of a befriender

early intervention is challenging to monitor and evaluate

consider people whose voices are not being heard in this process

6.5. Notes from Workshops 3 and 4