

# WERS' Befriending Scheme

## Annual Evaluation Report



This is the first annual report of WERS' Befriending Scheme, the first designated scheme for refugees and asylum seekers in Newcastle upon Tyne. Since 2000, volunteers have provided invaluable support and companionship to clients who are lonely and isolated. As the scheme has grown significantly, we thought it a good idea to bring together all the information relating to the scheme into one place.

The men, women and children who come to the UK seeking sanctuary have all experienced bereavement of some kind. Some have suffered bereavement in the traditional sense, having lost family members and friends. Some do not know what happened to their husband, wife or child – they were taken away by soldiers and never seen again. Some have been bereaved of their dignity, suffering sexual violence, other physical harm or mental torture. All have been bereaved of their country, homes and everything that was familiar and loved. These feelings of loss are then exacerbated by the isolation and loneliness that many face living as asylum seekers in Newcastle. Having someone whom you gradually get to know and trust, who visits you regularly, who is interested in you as a fellow human being, who listens to you and believes what you say – all this can make a real difference to your life.

*'Having XX as a befriender has shown me many things, and that there are good people in the world who help each other.'*

*'She was a great comfort to me when I was very down, I felt better after her visits.'*

The aims of the WERS Befriending Scheme are to help asylum seekers and refugees feel more welcome, supported and integrated into the local community and to enable asylum seekers and refugees who are marginalised and socially excluded by systems and regulations to regain some control over their lives.

As the name suggests, the role of the volunteer befriender is to be a friend to the family or individual with whom they are put into contact. This could take many different forms depending on individual circumstances and needs. Befrienders may meet the family or person they befriend at their home, at WERS or sometimes take them on outings. This year activities have included visiting the library, walking at the coast, going to the supermarket, salsa dancing, visiting art galleries, going for coffee and going to the theatre. The Befriending Scheme also offers clients the opportunity to meet other people and practise English language skills.

*'The one-to-one support at the WERS office helps me to concentrate and focus.'*

The annual report of the Befriending Scheme reflects upon the evaluation information collected during the year. This includes quantitative data about volunteers, clients, matches and referrals, and qualitative data from volunteer training evaluations, befriender and client evaluations, and referrers' evaluations. It uses feedback from clients, bendifenders and referrers to identify common trends and significant points which help to reflect upon what has worked well and what has not worked so well during the 12-month period. The information can also be used to identify areas for improvement and to enable the Project Director and Volunteer Co-ordinators to develop and implement an action plan for the next year.



## **Client and Befriender evaluation**

As well as regular chats on the phone and exchanging emails, clients and bendifenders are asked to complete formal evaluations at 3-monthly, 6-monthly, 9-monthly and then yearly intervals during the time they are matched. The questionnaire comprises a series of statements about the match with which the clients and volunteers are asked to agree or disagree. The questionnaire also asks for further comments and suggestions.

## **Client evaluations**

This year 18 evaluations were completed. 94% indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoy their time together and 94% strongly agreed or agreed that they feel a greater sense of well-being.

*'She is a great comfort to me and helps me when things are difficult.'*

*'Having a befriender helps to make me feel better.'*

## **Befriender evaluations**

25 evaluations were completed. 96% indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoy their time together and 88% strongly agreed or agreed that they felt they were well-matched.

*'Being involved in the befriending scheme gave the opportunity to have some time out from my normal routine, growing my confidence, a feeling of self-worth and a safe and trusting relationship.'*

*'I have found the experience rewarding and have learned a lot, about another culture and about the experiences of asylum seekers in the UK.'*



## Referrer evaluation

Clients may be referred to the Befriending Scheme in a number of ways. WERS has a leaflet about the Befriending Scheme available in 8 languages and clients are able to self-refer or be referred by a WERS support worker. WERS also receives external referrals, particularly from education support officers, health visitors and other health professionals. Referrers are asked to complete evaluations at 6-monthly intervals to give feedback about the service they have received as a referrer and feedback from clients.

This year 3 referrer evaluations were completed. All were very satisfied with the referral procedure and felt that the scheme was very beneficial to the individual or family.

*'Every referral made has been dealt with appropriately and parents have felt supported, gained confidence, feel aware of local area, engaged with other services.'*

## Training

WERS' volunteer training programme has a number of key elements which are delivered every four months as part of a rolling programme. Volunteer befrienders are required to attend two induction training sessions which are to be completed before befriending begins: 'Being a Befriender' and 'Lone Working and Personal Safety'.

Volunteers are required to attend the two remaining training sessions within 12 months: 'Seeking Asylum in the UK' and 'Working with Survivors of Torture'.

In addition, an optional Befriender Support Group is held every 4 months at WERS and an opt- in befriender email newsletter is rolled out monthly.

Being a Befriender: 15 evaluations completed

Lone Working and Personal Safety: 8 evaluations completed

Seeking Asylum in the UK: 20 evaluations completed

Working with Survivors of Torture (session led by Tony Wright, Medical Foundation North East): 12 evaluations completed

Relevance/usefulness of content:

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Being a Befriender	86%	7%	7%		
Lone Working and Personal Safety	75%	25%			
Seeking Asylum in the UK	95%	5%			
Working with Survivors of Torture	100%				

Style and method of delivery:

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Being a Befriender	74%	13%	13%		
Lone Working and Personal Safety	50%	50%			
Seeking Asylum in the UK	85%	15%			
Working with Survivors of Torture	92%	8%			

*'A great balance across factual circumstances/practical issues, emotional/psychological aspects, and use of case studies.'* (Working with Survivors of Torture session)

*'Clear handout on the UK asylum process and discussion relevant to this; case study to demonstrate points; opportunity to have discussion/Q&A on topics raised.'* (Seeking asylum in the UK)

### **Befriender support group**

In addition to the training sessions, the Befriending Scheme holds quarterly support group meetings to enable befrienders to make contact with other befrienders and to provide an opportunity to discuss a variety of issues. The meetings are structured in a way that enables the befrienders to lead the discussion. The first meeting was held in September 2010 and the second was held in January 2011.

There were 11 evaluations returned for the Befriender Support Group meetings. When asked to evaluate the relevance or usefulness, the materials and handouts used and the

style and method of delivery of the session, 73% rated it as excellent and 18% rated it as good, 6% rated it as satisfactory and 3% rated it as poor.

Befrienders' comments have revealed that some volunteers prefer a very free format for the meetings whilst others have expressed a preference for a much more structured approach. WERS' challenge will be to find a way of accommodating these differing preferences!

An optional monthly befriender newsletter is sent out to befrienders which lists events and opportunities for the coming month, as well as listing possible training opportunities for clients and befrienders. In addition to this befrienders are regularly contacted by telephone, email and in person.

## Statistics

There have been 15 clients referred to the scheme this year, 11 of whom were referred by external agencies and 4 by WERS support workers. Of the clients referred, 9 were women with families, 2 were men with families, 2 were single women and 2 were single men.

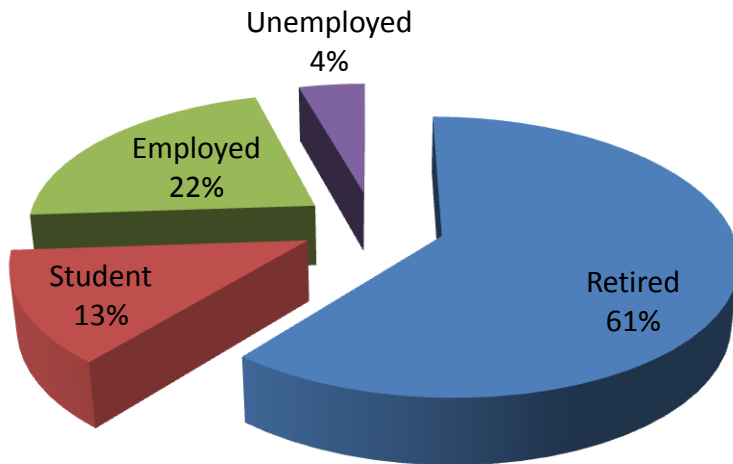


At present there are 7 clients waiting to be matched with a befriender. This year the average waiting time for a client from referral to match was just over 3 months.

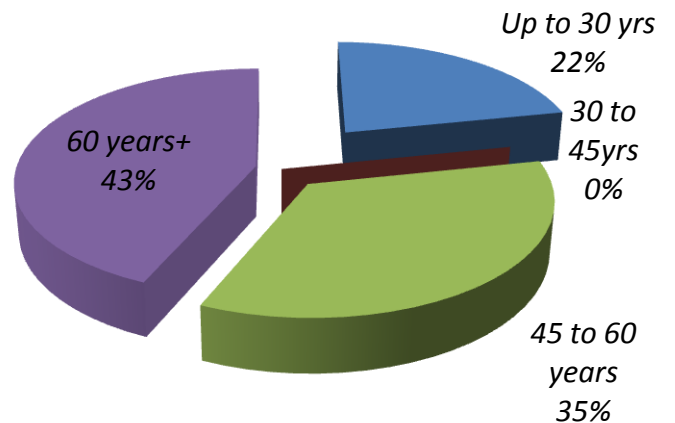
## About our Befrienders

There are currently 23 befrienders: 15 women and 8 men. The largest age group is those over 60 years old (43%) and 45 to 60 years old (35%).

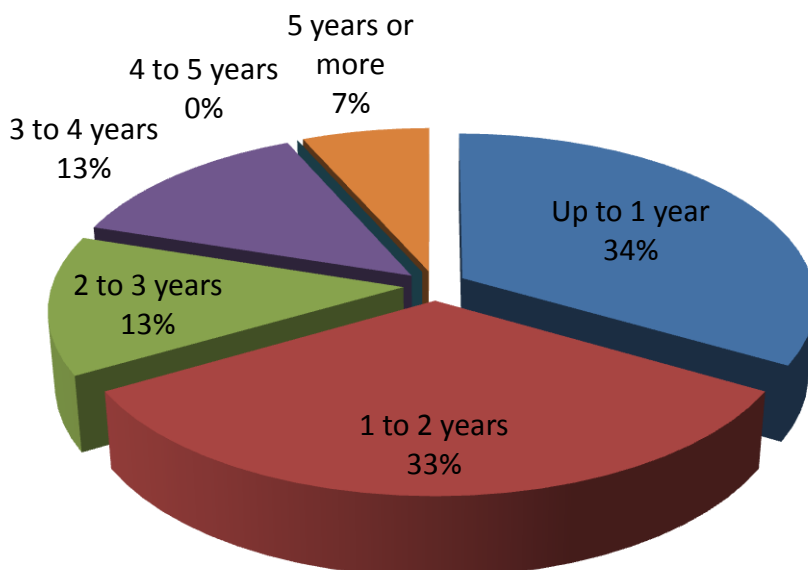
### Current situations of befrienders



### Age ranges of befrienders



### Length of time befrienders have been in their current match



## Action plan

From the information gathered, four areas have been identified for improvement and development in the next 12-month period.

- Update the Lone Working and Personal Safety training session so that there are more opportunities to discuss potential safety issues through case studies and risk assessment information.
- Look into ways to structure the Befriender Support group meetings to suit differing tastes.
- Gain re-accreditation of the Befriending Scheme through the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation.
- Implement 6-monthly befriender supervisions to increase contact and support with current befrienders.

WERS would like to pay tribute to the work of its volunteer befrienders. They all do a great job! A big thank-you, too to Carol and Jo, our volunteer co-ordinators, who work so hard to ensure that the scheme runs smoothly and that both clients and volunteers enjoy being part of WERS Befriending Scheme. WERS currently has 23 Befrienders of an optimum number of 30 and would warmly welcome new volunteers to join the team undertaking this worthwhile work.

September 2011