



# **Battersea Befriending Network**

## **Annual Report for the Annual General Meeting December 6th 2024**

**Registered Charity Number 1194593**

## **Chair of Trustees' Report**

Overall 2024 has been another positive and successful year for BBN. Throughout the year we have consolidated and sustained our core work to a high standard. As ever, this is due to tremendous commitment from all involved. Tara Osman, our Professional Advisor, has enabled us to provide a stable and appropriate service to all our befriendees.

Our volunteer coordinators, Trish Daniel (till May) and then Lily O'Connor from August, have continued to be imaginative and wide ranging in their efforts to recruit new volunteers. Over the year we have run two of our quite intensive training courses, attended by 7 new volunteers at the first course in February and 4 at the second in November. From these, 10 people committed to become befrienders. We have recruited three new mentors, and we offer an induction session for them. We have continued our programme of support groups for the befrienders and mentors on a regular basis.

In addition, we have been holding very successful monthly social afternoons at Battersea Art Centre, open to those on the waiting list and current befriendees. We have had trips to Kew Gardens, a seaside outing and another lovely picnic in Battersea Park on a glorious summer day.

In March, Saint Peter's Church in Battersea hosted a national event for the Being Alongside movement. Several members of BBN gave a lively presentation about our work. It was very moving to hear more about the history of Being Alongside and to be able to describe what we do.

We had another strategic review day in June where we recognised the need to redistribute some of the key tasks in order to relieve Richard Trout, who founded BBN, of some of the many roles he has taken over 14 years.

We also agreed that although we had reached our maximum target of 45 relationships that we should be very cautious of overextending and mindful of funding challenges in the future. This has caused us to close our waiting list in order to ensure that we can maintain our commitment to our current befriendees and match them with a new person when the need arises.

One significant reflection over the year has been the increased complexity and challenges faced by some of our befriendees, and a very concerning sense that the existing NHS mental health services are struggling to cope with increasing demands.

I would like to finish by thanking in particular Trish Daniel for all her insight, commitment and care while she was carrying the role of Volunteer Coordinator. I know she will continue to be an important part of BBN.

Finally, although he's not leaving us, Richard Trout will be stepping away from some of the responsibilities he has carried so carefully and caringly. Richard and Helen Trout have truly been the parents of the family of BBN and they have set a wonderful example to us.

Thank you to all of you involved with BBN.

**Sarah Rackham**  
**Chair of Trustees**

## **Treasurers' Report**

We started our financial year on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 with cash reserves of £30,871. We had total receipts in the year of £15,681, and total expenditure of £25,093, ending the financial year with total cash funds of £21,459.

There are many things that are the bedrock of our work: professional advice from Tara Osman helps us have quality in the befriending and mentoring relationships; the training weekends for new befrienders; recruitment and support of volunteers from Trish Daniel for the first part of the year, and subsequently Lily O'Connor; the generous hosting from All Saints Church for our AGM, training and other events, and the church is also a donor to BBN.

Grant funders are the major underpinners of BBN finances. This year we received £15,000 from the Wimbledon Foundation. We treated this as restricted funding, and have spent this on employing our Professional Adviser. We started the year with two other restricted funds, £3450 from Wandsworth Borough Council, and £138 from Magic Little Lottery. We fully used each of these funds for their restricted purposes during the year. All of £21,459 we have at year end is shown as unrestricted.

However just because we are treasurers we do not only look at the pounds that flow through our bank accounts. Our funders recognise that we provide matched funding to their grants in the commitment and energy of our volunteers, as trustees, mentors and befrienders. The Trustees want to pay particular tribute to Richard and Helen Trout, who have done so much for BBN. We are very grateful to them.

In the year ahead we are grateful that there will be a second tranche of funding from the Wimbledon Foundation. We are also looking out for other sources of funding so that the network of relationships within BBN can continue to be maintained and supported in a resilient way.

BBN's financial details are filed with the Charity Commission (registered charity number 11945993). We would like to thank Chris Birchall who has conducted an independent examination of the BBN accounts during the financial year to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024, and who confirmed that there were no concerns.

We are looking forward to 2025.

**Peter Wolstenholme and Harry O'Riordan**  
**Treasurers**

## **Professional Advisor's Report**

There has been significant fluctuation this year in the number of befriending relationships supported by BBN; at one stage we were very close to our maximum number of 45, having been able to match 7 people completely new to BBN, but there has been a subsequent decrease and the current number is 33. This is largely due to volunteers moving on, with the people they befriended now awaiting matching with a new befriender. Our focus for the coming year will be to stay within our capacity and work only with those already on our books. For these people we will continue to offer both individual befriending and a number of opportunities to socialise with others involved in BBN including our monthly social at Battersea Arts Centre and other events throughout the year. "On our books" also includes people on our waiting list who are invited to attend social events once they have met with us for an initial discussion about befriending. Including people on the waiting list we are providing a level of support to up to 55 people at any one time.

It seems that this year has been challenging for many and I have spent more of my working hours than in previous years on providing individual support to both befriendees and befrienders and on dealing with safeguarding issues, some of which become apparent at the first meeting with someone who has been referred and some of which have been picked up later by a befriender, or self-reported. As an organisation dealing with isolated people we are particularly likely to be the ones to encounter or hear of these situations.

I continue to be impressed and inspired by the commitment of our volunteers who give so many hours of their time to BBN, which simply could not exist without them. This includes not only our befrienders but also mentors of whom we now have a consistent and experienced group of 15, and our trustees. There is a significant amount of movement and crossover of people between these different groups, for example befriendees becoming befrienders, befrienders becoming mentors, and several people who do several of these things. I notice that a significant percentage of people who come to BBN to volunteer describe themselves as having some lived experience of mental ill health and this contributes enormously to the value and ethos of what we do.

This year we ran volunteer support groups both online and in person every quarter, all of which included a training element. I would like to say a huge thank you to all of those who have offered their skills and experience to run one of these training sessions which have been a particular highlight of the year for me. As a further initiative to learn from the experience of volunteers we have instigated an exit interview process for volunteers leaving BBN.

With more time needed for individual support there has been less time for other things for example getting our advisory group up and running or starting a second social afternoon in a different part of the borough. With the focus on consolidation for the coming year I am keeping an open mind about whether or not we will be able to expand our focus in this way and much will depend on the prevailing climate!

**Tara Osman**  
**Professional Advisor**

## **Befriending Co-ordinator's Report**

As I reported last year, with Tara now taking responsibility for the matching of befrienders, and our Volunteer Co-ordinator being the main point of contact for all new volunteers, the chief remaining role as Befriending Co-ordinator has been as contact point for new referrals for befrienders.

The number of these new referrals has reduced over the year. This is partly because it has become known by those making referrals that our slow-moving waiting list means we are unable to match people with a befriender for, in some cases, at least a year. But partly also because we have tightened up our criteria for those we accept for befriending, leading us to turn down this year five referrals which we considered for various reasons unsuitable – in most cases signposting them to other agencies such as Age UK. To avoid raising expectations, we have now closed our waiting list for the time being.

To enable me to take more of a back seat from the new year, there are plans to relieve me both of this role and of most of the administrative tasks which have been my responsibility for the past 14 years. For this I am immensely grateful to our Chair and Secretary, in addition, as always to Tara Osman, and now to Lily O'Connor, However, I will continue to be a Trustee, befriender and mentor, and an enthusiastic supporter of all that BBN does and stands for.

**Richard Trout**

**Befriending Co-ordinator**

## **Volunteer Co-ordinator's Report**

I began as Volunteer Co-ordinator in August and my main focus was to recruit applicants for the BBN Befriender training course, which was held in November.

I picked up volunteer recruitment building on some key contacts and suggestions kindly handed over by Trish Daniel, who had been the Volunteer Co-ordinator. Using a combination of emails to community partners, posters in local libraries in shops, and networking at events, BBN's volunteer recruitment was advertised in the following ways: Emailing 60 local community groups, networks, and organisations, asking them to share our opportunities for volunteering.

Posting on 12 digital platforms/noticeboards

Displaying posters on 14 physical noticeboards across the borough

This resulted in 21 expressions of interest and by 28/11, 7 application forms for the befriender training had been returned.

At the training course in November, 4 people attended the training, and 3 have been confirmed as becoming befrienders, and 1 to be confirmed.

An additional 3 people returned application forms, hoping to join the training in Spring 2025.

From speaking with other organisations, it seems that volunteer recruitment and retention is an increasing challenge since the Covid pandemic and cost of living crisis. I am hoping to strengthen partnerships with other organisations, offering a befriender opportunity as a positive way for people to step into volunteering and community building.

**Lily O'Connor**

**Volunteer Co-ordinator**