

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white ceramic mug. The mug features a blue and red heart design. The person is wearing a dark blue shirt. The background is blurred.

DEPAUL

Homelessness has no place

Community Befriending Impact Report 2020/21

ie.depaulcharity.org

A message from the Befriending Coordinator

In March of last year, the world most certainly changed. All of us were affected but not equally. Covid-19 really laid bare the stark inequalities that exist in our society. The Community Befriending team of volunteers responded quickly and continued to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community. I'm so proud of them and of the participants themselves who had the courage to reach out and ask for help when they needed it.

Through repeated lockdowns and ever changing public health measures Community Befriending kept innovating to meet the needs of those at risk of isolation. Participants needed additional reassurance, support and guidance and levels of engagement increased by an unprecedented 109%. One participant in particular who had become increasingly anxious was provided with additional support during the winter months. He soon rallied and said recently "...just knowing that people were looking out for me helped me to get back on my feet."

As a preventative service the key aim of Community Befriending is to support people to live independently. The wraparound supports and social outlets offered prevent recurring homelessness and support people to maintain their home and flourish in their community. It is a testament to the service that 100% of all tenancies were successfully sustained in 2020.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our generous funders who make all this possible. The impact of your kindness is best described through the stories of the people supported, like Liam who grew up in

care and now lives alone with no immediate family. Liam calls Community Befriending his 'alternative family' and he really benefited from telephone calls with his volunteer Mary during lockdown. He told me "I could parcel in my mind any worries and anxieties, knowing that I could look forward to having an attentive and supportive listener, when I answered Mary's scheduled call."

Thank you for your ongoing support and for being a friend to people who are homeless. Please read on to find out about the wonderful difference you have made in the lives of so many people.



Warmest regards,

Tim Hurling

Community Befriending Coordinator

The Impact of Your Generosity

40



participants engaged with the service,
a **14%** increase on the previous year.

The level of **engagement** between
participants and volunteers increased by



109%

Telephone Befriending increased by



29%

with **511 link-ins** on the phone.

In spite of lockdowns, one-to-one meetups
increased by

12%



With **385 in-person meetups**

There was a **95%** uptake of Covid-19 vaccines among participants



8

new volunteers were
recruited and inducted
into the Community
Befriending team

22

fabulous volunteers
have given their time
over the course of the
last year

Values-led Service Delivery

Seeing the potential in people

Community Befriending is an informal support service that gives participants the opportunity to achieve their potential. There are currently three distinct groups accessing the service. The primary group is made up of those living independently in the community who represent 62% of all participants. The second group are those at the point of moving into the community and the third are long-term residents for whom Back Lane is their permanent home. Each group have their own individual goals that the Community Befriending team support them to achieve.

Over the past year the team worked closely with participants living in the community and encouraged them to continue to link in which they did in earnest. It is a testament to the men that not one of them relapsed and 25 tenancies were successfully sustained.

Men who are at the point of moving into local authority housing or housing supported by the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme benefit greatly from Community Befriending. It's incredibly daunting moving from supported accommodation back into the community and particularly so when social interaction and movement is restricted. In spite of this 14 men moved from Back Lane into their own tenancies in 2020, a 28% increase on the previous year.

Long-term residents in Back Lane are prone to becoming withdrawn and their mental health can deteriorate very quickly. The Community Befriending team sees their potential to become active members of their community.

Throughout lockdown regular trips took place to the local park with the men where social distancing could be maintained, fresh air could be inhaled and cups of coffee could be savoured. Participation in these events was double what it was on previous years.

Putting our words into action

Since the onset of the pandemic the focus of Community Befriending, in line with the wider organisation, has been to adapt and innovate to improve the lives of the people we have the privilege to support. When all visits to services from external groups, visitors and volunteers stopped in line with social distancing guidelines and infection control measures, both the Befriending Coordinator and Befriending Assistant continued accessing Back Lane to bridge the gap between the community and the





residents. Stopping to have a chat, giving updates on what was happening outside and listening to small gripes and moans really helped people during a challenging time as well as supporting the hostel staff who were already adapting to and dealing with the new challenges posed by Covid-19.

When in-person visits with people in the community were not permitted telephone link-ins increased. Community participants who would normally only check-in occasionally needed extra support. To meet this demand 8 new volunteers were recruited, many of whom were off work themselves due to the pandemic. The Befriending team made the initial introductions between participants and volunteers and many new matches were made. 511 significant telephone calls took place ensuring that people were listened to, reassured and made to feel that they were not alone.

Taking a wider role in civil society

Depaul believes in partnership and the success of Community Befriending is built on the many relationships that the team have forged externally. To support people with budgeting and general household management, MABS the money advice and budgeting service and Citizens Information Centres are engaged with on a broad range of matters. The team liaise regularly with landlords, local authorities and the Residential Tenancies Board to ensure that people continue to thrive in their homes. As health and housing are intrinsically linked, the team have built up relationships with primary healthcare providers including GPs, pharmacies, dentists, chiropodists and counselling and recovery programmes. The team is also a member of Befriending Network Ireland, a network for befriending services across Ireland who provide training and resources so that staff and volunteers can make a real impact and keep meeting the needs of the most vulnerable.

Tom & Bella

Like many participants, Tom's story is complicated. With a history of alcohol dependency, he spent many years in and out of homeless services, couch surfing and moving around. Then finally through engagement with Depaul, Tom was supported to move into his own home. He then joined Community Befriending and has availed of the service for 10 years.

As well as supporting Tom to maintain his home Community Befriending has brought so much stability and consistency to his life. During lockdown however, Tom sadly lost his beloved terrier Bella. The loss hit him hard and he reached out to the team for additional support saying "... when I'm at



home it's just me, there's no one to talk to. It's very hard in the evenings. I miss Bella."

Immediately, Tom was given extra support and was matched with a new volunteer, Paula. They had regular phone link-ins and when restrictions allowed they began to meet up in the local park for coffee. As well as being a listening ear, Paula provides Tom with practical support and helped him to register for his vaccine.

Tom is the gentlest of souls, having someone to meet in the park once a week means a lot to him and he recently said "... it means the world just to sit down with someone and have a chat."



A Volunteer's Voice

Community Befriending would not be possible without our amazing volunteers! Eddie came on board with us two year ago. He had just retired and was worried about being stuck in the house. He'd heard about Community Befriending and said he'd give it a go.

His first match was with Anthony, a young man who was at the point of leaving Back Lane to live independently. Eddie said "...at first he was quiet, very dependent on others. But now he's much more outgoing. Much happier."

The two started to meet up regularly in a local cafe. Anthony would talk about his family, his life - maybe the football - and Eddie soon realised they weren't that different. Just two men walking different paths. After initial nervousness on the phone Anthony got more comfortable and they developed a routine. Eddie calls at the same time every week and Anthony tells him what his week has been like. Eddie increasingly engaged with Anthony during lockdown, when it was more important than ever to be supportive.

With restrictions easing, and both vaccinated, Eddie and Anthony are looking forward to getting out to the next Community Befriending event. Eddie recently said “I’ve gotten so much out of it. It makes me so happy, and doesn’t cost me anything.”

Thank You!

The past year has truly brought to the fore the importance of Community Befriending. When people were required to stay at home, staff and volunteers responded with innovation to ensure not only that our service users were cared for, but that the pandemic did not halt their journey away from homelessness and that they could continue to build bright futures. All of this was only possible with your kind support.



**In memory of Dan McLaughlin, a long-term
friend of Community Befriending**

Dublin

18 Nicholas Street,
Dublin 8,
D08 VCP7

Charity Registration Number: 20048938

CHY Number: CHY14753

Belfast

449 Antrim Road,
Belfast,
BT15 3BJ

Charity Registration Number: 102995

CHY Number: XR87991

01 453 7111

depaul@depaulcharity.net

ie.depaulcharity.org