



COMMUNITY BEFRIENDING IMPACT REPORT

2024

DEPAUL

Homelessness has no place

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A WORD FROM THE BEFRIENDING COORDINATOR



2024 was a very positive year for Befriending. We welcomed new faces and welcomed back existing community group members, many of whom are still very involved and invested in the Programme after many years.

We are grateful to our committed and invaluable team of Befriending volunteers. They encourage participants to re-engage with their local communities. Our participants often experience loneliness, depression and social isolation.

Having these regular link-ins over a cup of coffee gets them out of the house and the volunteers flag any problems with us which we can follow up on.

Our young and enthusiastic European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteers have contributed massively, supporting us with the weekly meet-ups, outings and running the Tuesday Clubs in Back Lane and Peter's Place.

The Youth Programme, which was started in the last quarter of 2023, has been going strong in 2024. Through our Tuesday Club, we have gotten to know so many of the residents. We have seen growth in their self-esteem through outings, like climbing, and by letting them lead activities, like cooking their favourite dish for us.

It's not just about befriending. It's much more than that. It's about community impact, linking people in with services, showing people what's out there, and what's possible: events, courses, things like that.

And most importantly, it's service user led. Befriending Participants are empowered to decide on activities and encouraged to give feedback on how the service best benefits them.

On behalf of our participants, volunteers and befrienders, I would like to express our deepest thanks for your unwavering belief in the Programme and our service users, who have the opportunity to change their lives for the better.

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BEFRIENDING IN NUMBERS

Together with your help in 2024 we:



**SUPPORTED
95 SERVICE USERS
TO DEVELOP A
STAKE IN THEIR
COMMUNITY**

**DELIVERED
436 IN-PERSON
ONE-TO-ONE
MEETINGS**

**ORGANISED 146
EVENTS AND
SOCIAL CLUB
MEETINGS**

**SUPPORTED
438
VOLUNTEER
AND
PARTICIPANT
LINK-INS**

**DELIVERED
275 PHONE
SUPPORT
LINK-INS**

**SUPPORTED
25 VOLUNTEERS,
ALLOWING THEM
TO TAKE THE
LEAD**



THE IMPACT OF YOUR SUPPORT

The Depaul Community Befriending Programme empowers both participants and volunteers, creating a supportive environment that fosters growth and positive change. By offering a variety of activities and interventions, the programme not only helps participants reach their potential but also strengthens the community by encouraging collaboration between participants and volunteers.

EMPOWERING PERSONAL GROWTH

The programme provides a platform for participants to set and achieve personal goals, building their confidence and renewing their sense of purpose. The programme also supports community participants with personal admin and paperwork. Through this support and by facilitating service user-led activities, participants take ownership of their progress, breaking barriers and gaining self-esteem. Volunteers play a crucial role in this journey, learning how to support and uplift participants while developing their own leadership and empathy skills.

FACILITATING SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

For individuals transitioning into independent living, the programme offers personalised support, helping them navigate new environments and build meaningful connections. Volunteers are empowered to become advocates and companions during this process, enriching their own understanding of resilience and adaptability. Together, they foster a community that promotes mental well-being, inclusivity, and mutual empowerment.

Through these shared experiences, both participants and volunteers grow, contributing to a more resilient, inclusive community where everyone feels valued and supported.



COMMUNITY BEFRIENDING HIGHLIGHTS

In January, we met for our quarterly Social Committee Meeting. This is a participant-led meeting where we discuss ideas and suggestions for events and outings. It gives the community participants ownership and lets them take initiative.

During the summer months, we had a great day out in the Wicklow Mountains visiting the stunning Russborough House. The 18th century mansion has been beautifully restored and we admired all the woodwork and paintings. After a nice lunch, we went for a stroll in the beautifully laid out walled garden.

Always a popular outing, we spent a lovely autumn day at Dublin Zoo. We were lucky with the weather that day and could admire many animals, favourites of which were the monkeys, the red pandas and the giraffes. We also treated ourselves to some nice take away lunch which we enjoyed at one of the outside seated areas in the Zoo.

For many the highlight of the year, the Community Group Christmas lunch takes place every year in a hotel in the heart of Dublin. It is a joyous event where participants, volunteers and staff gather to enjoy a festive meal, pop Christmas crackers and do the Secret Santa, so everyone has a bit of fun and brings home a small gift.

Many of our community participants are paired up with a volunteer to meet for coffees on a regular basis. The main aims of these social interactions are to combat isolation and encourage the participants to re-engage with local communities.



BACK LANE HIGHLIGHTS

A highlight of the month of March was a Shamrock Rovers game at Tallaght stadium. With a full Depaul Van, we drove to Tallaght where there was a great ambience as the home team secured a win.

At the beginning of July, we went to Howth for a delicious lunch at Burdock's and a Boat Trip around Ireland's Eye. The guide was brilliant explaining us all about the wildlife and culture in the area while putting a few Irish songs on the speaker.

We had a great day out in the Dublin Mountains. At Hazel House, we did a woodwork workshop and created lovely pieces to take home. Niall, the owner, also showed us how to work the woodfire pizza oven and we had a gorgeous lunch eating our home-made pizzas.



YOUTH PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS



We had a great day in the Wicklow Mountains visiting Powerscourt Waterfall. The residents enjoyed being outside and discovering a place in Ireland that was unknown to them.

The climbing wall was a great activity to help with the residents' confidence. Each wall climbed was a more difficult challenge but the residents kept going. They were very proud of their efforts.

In autumn, we organised a trip to the bowling alley in Coolock as requested by the residents. We all enjoyed the game and went for a meal afterwards.

TUESDAY CLUBS AT BACK LANE AND PETER'S PLACE

Every Tuesday, an activities club takes place between 6–7pm in the Back Lane and Peter's Place hostels. This initiative provides consistency and gives residents the opportunity to socialise and engage with the Befriending staff, volunteers and each other.

The younger group at Peter's Place showed great interest in cooking and baking and many of the residents taught us how to cook their favourite dishes from all over the world. We also came up with suggestions for healthy snacks and cooked simple meals that the residents could do themselves in the kitchen corners in their rooms.

The Back Lane residents enjoyed doing the arts and crafts activities and bingo was a big hit in 2024. Many residents come in for the banter and to have a chat with us and one another.

Volunteers play a vital role in the clubs, helping out and organising their own activities. It's great for the residents to have persons of all ages and walks of life to exchange with.



A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

"I always wanted to volunteer but travelling a lot with work and being away for some months during the year made it impossible. I assumed that most charities would train you and then needed you to commit to be there more regularly.

But then Covid happened and the Befriending team was looking for new volunteers. I wasn't comfortable talking with someone I didn't know on the phone. I felt it suited me more to meet face to face and get to know the person. Because I lived in the area I was able to walk to the Back Lane Hostel and there I met one of the younger residents. We went for short walks, had a take-away tea and then walked back. This helped us both, because I was out of work for some time myself.

For the last year I have been meeting up with Steve*, even if I can't always meet on a weekly basis because of work. But we try as often as possible. We both are flexible with the weekdays and he is patient with me. I think we both appreciate our chats.

We meet in a local café and talk about a lot of different things: work, family, cooking, sport etc.

If possible I also join the outings each month. I am glad I found Depaul to volunteer, even if it's just a small part from my side."

JENNIFER*, BEFRIENDING VOLUNTEER



*Names have been changed for privacy.

VOICE OF A PARTICIPANT

"I grew up in State care and went through abusive situations there. Later in life, I used alcohol to vent my anger and my whole world fell apart. Work, finances – everything went. I became homeless and ended up as a resident in Back Lane.

Coming to Back Lane was a bit like coming home. I had five friends – four walls and a roof. I was safe. I had food to eat. The care, the kindness, the support I was shown at Back Lane struck a huge chord with me. I was there for two years. Back Lane is there to help you get on, not to just sit around, so I did move on to transitional housing where I started to make my own way again.

Leaving Back Lane was hard. I had a huge feeling of security there, just having a roof over my head. Then I got a call from Depaul Befriending. It was entirely optional but I could put my name down and meet people and get advice when I needed it. I joined in 2008, so eighteen years ago now. I'm the longest member there. I'm on the social committee and we organise outings – we're going to the Zoo next.

The one-to-one meetings are an important aspect of the Befriending service. The opportunity to meet in confidence and the support for those who may be going through issues, like anxiety, is of enormous benefit. Also, it's great to have support with day-to-day matters, like when the Coordinator kindly met with me to assist in the selection of my new glasses.

Befriending can offer that bit of social interaction that can save somebody when they're vulnerable. It's regular contact and it brings people together. Even if they don't feel up to it on the day, people know they're being thought of. The option is there. It can be so important when you're struggling.

We all need friendship at times."

LUKE*,
BEFRIENDING PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

*Names have been changed for privacy.

A THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

None of the work the Befriending Programme does, or the incredible outcomes it achieves, would be possible without the unwavering support of those who continue to fund and assist the programme. The continued generosity of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is what enables the Befriending Programme to have a transformative impact on its participants. We are also grateful to have received funding from the Coca-Cola Thank You Fund to expand Befriending to support and empower our younger service users.

By helping our participants engage with each other and their community, we are easing the transition out of supported accommodation and showing our participants that they have a place in society and a community to join.

We are eternally grateful for the support our funders provide so that we can enhance the Programme and adapt to our participant's needs. We hope you know that your support means a great deal to everyone in Depaul, especially our service users and programme participants, who are grateful for your ongoing belief in their future potential.





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