

## **Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland: Report to Community Scrutiny Committee (North West Leicestershire District Council).**

Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland is a local charity and voluntary organisation.

We are also an Age UK Brand Partner and as such, we share a recognisable national name.

Our organisation's aim is to provide local older people with the services, support, and advice that they need in order to remain safe and well in their community.

Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland has adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic so that it can continue to support older people, their families, and informal carers.

North West Leicestershire District Council fund Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland to provide a befriending service through a Service Level Agreement. This service recruits and matches volunteers to support socially isolated and lonely older people. This type of support can prevent potentially vulnerable older people from crisis situations. In recent years, there has also been a growing body of research that indicates a strong link between loneliness and health.

Prior to the first lockdown in 2020, the befriending service was providing home visits to the majority of clients. The service adapted quickly to continue providing support remotely. The majority of befriending support is currently provided via telephone, but the service also offers support using text and email if preferred.

The service employs a part-time co-ordinator who currently oversees 36 active volunteers. In March 2021, the service supported 50 older people.

In accordance with government guidance, the befriending service provided socially distanced visits to clients in gardens, where and when it was possible. This took place in August and September 2020. All visits were carried out only after a detailed risk assessment had been completed. As infection rates increased significantly, all face to face visits were suspended and the service reverted to telephone befriending.

We are currently planning to resume face to face befriending activity in mid-May. This will be dependent upon the continued easing of restrictions and will also be subject to risk assessments. Each befriending risk assessment will also be reviewed before visits are resumed.

Our Befriending Co-ordinator continues to provide volunteers with regular updates on sources of support that are relevant to both volunteers and their befriendees. This includes emotional support, support with maintaining physical wellbeing, access to food, including support with the home delivery of meals, support with accessing food banks etc, helplines and community hubs.

The Befriending Co-ordinator has supported the volunteers throughout the lockdowns to ensure that they are well and continuing to enjoy and benefit from

volunteering. More recently, the Befriending Co-ordinator has engaged with a wellbeing project that is being delivered by the District Council to offer mental wellbeing support through physical activity.

The Befriending Co-ordinator has also maintained direct contact with the most vulnerable clients during lockdown. It is clear that this additional support has been needed at a time when isolated older people have been disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of lockdown and shielding.

The Befriending Co-ordinator has been maintaining links with Adult Social Care, Local Area Co-ordinators, GP Surgeries other agencies, both statutory and voluntary. In particular, connections with local Social Prescribing Link Workers have been of great value and a number of new referrals for telephone befriending have been received, feedback from clients has been very positive, see below.

Recent feedback from a Social Prescriber (anonymised):

***“There has been a marked improvement in her mood since I last spoke to her, and when I asked why she felt this was, she said it is because she has a telephone befriender. \*\*\* says she now realises the importance of having someone outside the family that she can speak to about her feelings of bereavement after losing her husband. She felt she could not share these with the few remaining family members she has, as they are experiencing similar emotions. I asked her consent to share such positive feedback, and she was more than happy for me to do so. It’s so encouraging to see that such a positive impact can be made so quickly, and also highlights the importance of isolated people having someone to speak to.”***

***\*\*\* was delighted and said “They couldn’t have given me anyone better”. She went on to explain that she and \*\*\*\* (Volunteer) have a lot of common interests and she feels that it is very easy to make conversation with her.***

The scheme has continued to receive enquiries about volunteering and a number of volunteers have recently joined as telephone befrienders. Going forward, these volunteers will be encouraged to consider home visiting and a number have already expressed interest. Articles printed in local magazines aimed at recruiting new volunteers and also service users have been successful and continue to be an effective method for recruiting volunteers and clients and raising the profile of the service in local communities.

### **Other Services:**

Alongside our befriending service, Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland has continued to provide a range of other services in North West Leicestershire:

**Information and Advice:** We continue to provide free information and advice to local people through our Telephone Advice Line. Our local office will be re-opening in Coalville Library in May (funded directly by Age Leicester Shire & Rutland).

**Domiciliary Care:** Our CQC registered domiciliary care service has continued to operate during lockdown. During 2020, we provided 2000 hours of care in North West Leicestershire.

**Independent Care Act Advocacy Service:** We provide free, person centred and confidential Independent Care Act Advocacy Support to empower individuals living in Rutland, Leicestershire and the City of Leicester, who have substantial difficulty in engaging with care and support processes and who have no appropriate person to support them (contract with City and County Councils).

**Last Orders Project:** This project has been running since the beginning of January 2017. During 2020 and 2021, the project has continued to provide people over 50 with support and advice regarding substance misuse. Post Covid-19, the project will resume an extensive programme of talks and presentations, that will focus on raising awareness of the problems associated with alcohol misuse and other forms of substance misuse. A variety of training tools are used to demonstrate the value to awareness regarding the consumption of alcohol e.g., pouring correct unit measures, possible contraindications with medicines and the effect of alcohol on driving. The project is currently delivered as a sub-contracting arrangement with Turning Point.

**Joining Forces Project:** The Joining Forces Project provides support to veterans over the age of 65. The project is funded by the Ministry of Defence Aged Veterans Fund, which was established by the Chancellor of the Exchequer using LIBOR funds.

**Think Digital:** The project has supported older people to get the most out of digital technology through one to one remote support provided by Digital Champion volunteers. The project has been supplemented by a tablet loan scheme that has offered older people access to a free 12-week loan of an internet enabled tablet. (funded via an agreement with national Age UK).

**Warm Homes Project:** The project works in partnership with Eon and Leicestershire County Council to provide people with energy advice and other support that can enable them to heat their home more affordably (funded through the Warm Homes Fund in Partnership with Leicestershire County Council and Eon).

**Troy Young- Assistant Director, Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland**

**16.4.2021.**