

Clear Horizon

Final Report Evaluation

Prepared for Befriend

28 July 2017



Design. Evaluate. Evolve.

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Document review and authorisation

Version	Date distributed	Issued to	Comments
Final	28 July 2017	Nick Maisey	Addressed comments on draft report, includes and executive summary and was edited to improved readability.

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Last Saved	28/07/2017 9:48 AM

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1. Executive summary

Befriend Inc. is a Perth based not-for-profit social enterprise that aims to enrich lives through social connection. The organisation addresses social isolation in Perth by helping to break down the social barriers that hinder people from engaging in genuine, natural relationships and meaningful social networks. Befriend works intentionally to overcome barriers to inclusion and participation for people with a disability, people experiencing mental ill health, people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and older adults.

Between October 2016 and June 2017, Clear Horizon was contracted to evaluate the effectiveness of Befriend activities in helping to create a stronger, more connected and inclusive community. To achieve this, a multi-stage mixed methods approach was taken. During the first stage of the evaluation, 28 participants were interviewed from across the range of Befriend activities. The second stage involved the development and administration of two surveys based on the emergent themes from the interviews. The purpose was to assess the extent to which these themes could be generalised across the wider Befriend membership. One survey was designed to cover the Befriend Social Network activities and was distributed to all Befriend members. This survey was completed by 174 participants. The other survey was more narrowly focused on the view of people who were involved in the eFriends training and was completed by 11 participants. In addition, the evaluation included two focus groups, one with the Social Network Event hosts and the other with eFriends trainers.

The evaluation found that Befriend has been effective in positively influencing community attitudes and behaviours towards inclusivity. Since the program's inception in 2014, Befriend has supported over 500 Social Networking Events and over 50 Sweet Skills workshops. In addition, between 2015 and 2017 Befriend has delivered eFriends individual and group training to over 60 participants and delivered 10 individual Starter Kit training packages. Furthermore, over the past two years, Befriend has been supporting organisation inclusivity learning and has delivered professional development training to 16 not-for-profit organisations working in the social service sector. Befriend's broader reach in the community is extensive, with over 6,000 Befriend members receiving regular newsletters and event information and nearly 2,800 Facebook followers.

Overall, the majority of Befriend members said that they enjoyed the events and activities they attended, which is an important first step towards further engagement and learning. The average participation rate of 200 people per month is a testament to the attraction of the events and activities. Of those who participate, the majority said that their social connections have increased and many have made new friends. For a few members, those friendships have extended beyond a scheduled Befriend event. This was seen as particularly important for people with a disability or who have experienced mental ill-health, who value the opportunity to interact with a range of different people outside their usual support circle.

Members who have attended a Social Network Event said they have not only learnt a new hobby, social and/or life skill, they also feel more comfortable in approaching and interacting with others. Similarly, eFriends participants believed that they had an increased ability to interact with others using social media and technology. For a few participants, the increased self-confidence also provided them with a greater sense of independence.

Organisational participants who had attended a professional development activity facilitated by Befriend said that they had gained greater knowledge, skills and confidence to support their clients to build social connections and natural relationships. For some, this has resulted in them being supportive of initiatives

that facilitate more inclusive social connections outside their typical support offerings. In addition, as illustrated in the Most Significant Change Story “MSC 2” some participants working for the social service organisation have seen value in Befriend for themselves and have become active individual members.

Due to their involvement in Befriend, many members identified that they have more inclusive attitudes and behaviours. They reported being more active in engaging people during social interactions and feeling more comfortable interacting with people who were different from themselves. There is some evidence that participants now feel more socially included in their lives as a result. Participants spoke of how Befriend made them feel accepted for “who they were”. Many participants have an increased sense of belonging, stating that the Befriend community was “welcoming” and “non-judgemental”. A number of participants also described a ‘sense of family’ within the Befriend community. eFriends participants stated that they had an increased sense of belonging to the community as a result of the training and support they had received.

Although there was little direct evidence that Befriend members have an improved sense of well-being, the academic literature suggests a causal link between the quantity and quality of a persons’ social connections and improved well-being. Due to the increased social connections Befriend members have formed, it is conceivable that this has led to an improved sense of well-being overall.

Similarly, it was difficult to assess the extent to which Befriend members have internalised inclusivity as a personal value. Once again, the academic literature provides some evidence of a link between behaviours and attitudes, and people’s personal values. That Befriend members have clearly demonstrated inclusive attitudes and behaviours, is suggestive that inclusivity is has become an internalised value. Literature also proposes that people adopt the values of the groups they identify with. Therefore, it could be assumed that as inclusivity is an embedded core value of Befriend, it is likely this value is shared and internalised across the membership base, particularly those who regularly engage in the Befriend community.

Overall, the evaluation has found that Befriend has been successful in achieving their aims of reducing social isolation through assisting people to build more inclusive social connections and is thereby influencing community attitudes and behaviours towards inclusivity overall. The only tangible suggestions for improvement from members were to increase the geographic spread and to vary the scheduling of events. The following recommendations pick up these suggestions and offer some actions where improvements might be considered.

Recommendations

1. The most noted barriers to attending Befriend events were a lack of conveniently located and/or scheduled events. Befriend has recently developed a partnership model whereby they work with local councils to encourage them to support the extension of the Befriend Network across their local government area. This is a practical solution that could address this barrier. It is therefore recommended that Befriend continues with this strategy to expand the offering of Befriend events and activities.
2. To assist in expanding the number of Befriend events held each month, it is recommended that Befriend continues efforts to attract and retain event hosts.
3. Based on the evidence, the professional development training has the potential to positively influence the behaviours and attitudes of many people working in the social service sector. The reach is likely to be extensive and outcomes very positive. On the contrary, although there have been positive outcomes from the eFriends and Starter Kit training, the reach of individualised training is limited. In addition, the effectiveness of these activities in reducing social isolation is not

as compelling. Therefore, given resource constraints, it is recommended that Befriend further develop its professional development training program and reduce its focus on the provision of individualised social media and IT training support.

4. A small number of Befriend survey respondents indicated that they had a reduced sense of isolation, despite never having attended an event. While the reasons for this unknown, one theory is that receiving the monthly Befriend newsletter and other communications (e.g social media / online communications) was sufficient to reduce isolation. To ensure that these members continue to receive benefit from Befriend, it is recommended that Befriend investigates further what it is about their Befriend membership that these members most value.
5. This evaluation provides evidence of the effectiveness of Befriend at one point in time. However, it is important that as Befriend continues to grow and evolve that it embeds systems that support ongoing reflection and continuous learning. As such, it is recommended that Befriend develops a monitoring and evaluation plan which builds on the plan for this evaluation and the outcomes measurement framework.

2. Introduction

2.1. About Befriend

Befriend is a not-for-profit social enterprise with a vision of an inclusive, connected society. Befriend is operated by a group of passionate volunteers and a small team of paid staff. The organisation aims to address social isolation in Perth by helping to break down the social barriers that exclude people from engaging in genuine, natural relationships and meaningful social networks. Befriend works intentionally to overcome barriers to inclusion and participation for people with a disability, people experiencing mental ill health, people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and older adults.

While activities are designed to be welcoming and inclusive of individuals from socially marginalised groups, the overall ethos of Befriend is that inclusive communities are formed by connecting people from diverse backgrounds, and as such, Befriend activities are equally welcoming of all. Currently, over 6,000 people in Perth from diverse backgrounds are part of the Befriend community (as reported by Befriend in April 2017).

There are four main activity streams currently facilitated by Befriend. The first stream is the Befriend Social Network, which includes facilitating both small and large social gatherings (events) and offers opportunities for individuals to come together to learn new technical, life and hobby related skills (Sweet Skills workshops). It also includes personalised support to enable individuals to access these activities. The objectives of these activities are to:

- increase social connections and feelings of being socially included
- increase self-confidence and independence
- increase well-being, along with mental and physical health benefits
- build a stronger, more connected, inclusive community that embraces diversity

A second activity stream is eFriends. This is a person-centred, fun and creative training program aimed at closing the digital divide and empowering individuals to use technology in a way that strengthens human connections. Customised training is provided to individuals and groups across a range of information communication technologies.

The third activity stream is the Befriend Starter Kit which aims to support individuals who have difficulty meeting new people and navigating social situations to boost their social connection skills in preparation for participation in other Befriend events. The Starter Kit package may be purchased when individuals join the Befriend Network. It consists of a workbook that includes tips, tricks and exercises to improve their skills at connecting with others and up to eight one-to-one mentoring sessions with a Network Connector. Following these sessions, the Network Connector is also available to accompany the Starter Kit participant to their first Befriend event.

Finally, Befriend provides a range of professional development services for other community organisations. These opportunities aim to support community sector staff to develop their capabilities in enabling the social inclusion and connectedness of their service users.

2.2. Expected outcomes of Befriend

At the commencement of the contract Clear Horizon and the Befriend Management team worked together to create the program logic underpinning the Befriend concept. This is shown in Figure 1. It describes the cause and effect relationship between Befriend activities and the expected to be achieved outcomes. This model was used throughout the evaluation to provide a focus for the data collection, data analysis and provides a structure for this report.

2.3. About this evaluation

Clear Horizon, an independent evaluation consultancy, was contracted to work with Befriend to undertake the evaluation between September 2016 and June 2017. This report provides the overall findings of that evaluation.

To guide data collection and ensure there was a clear focus for the evaluation, Clear Horizon developed the following three key evaluation questions:

1. How effective has Befriend been in influencing community attitudes and behaviours towards inclusivity?
2. What are the unintended outcomes of Befriend?
3. How could Befriend be improved?

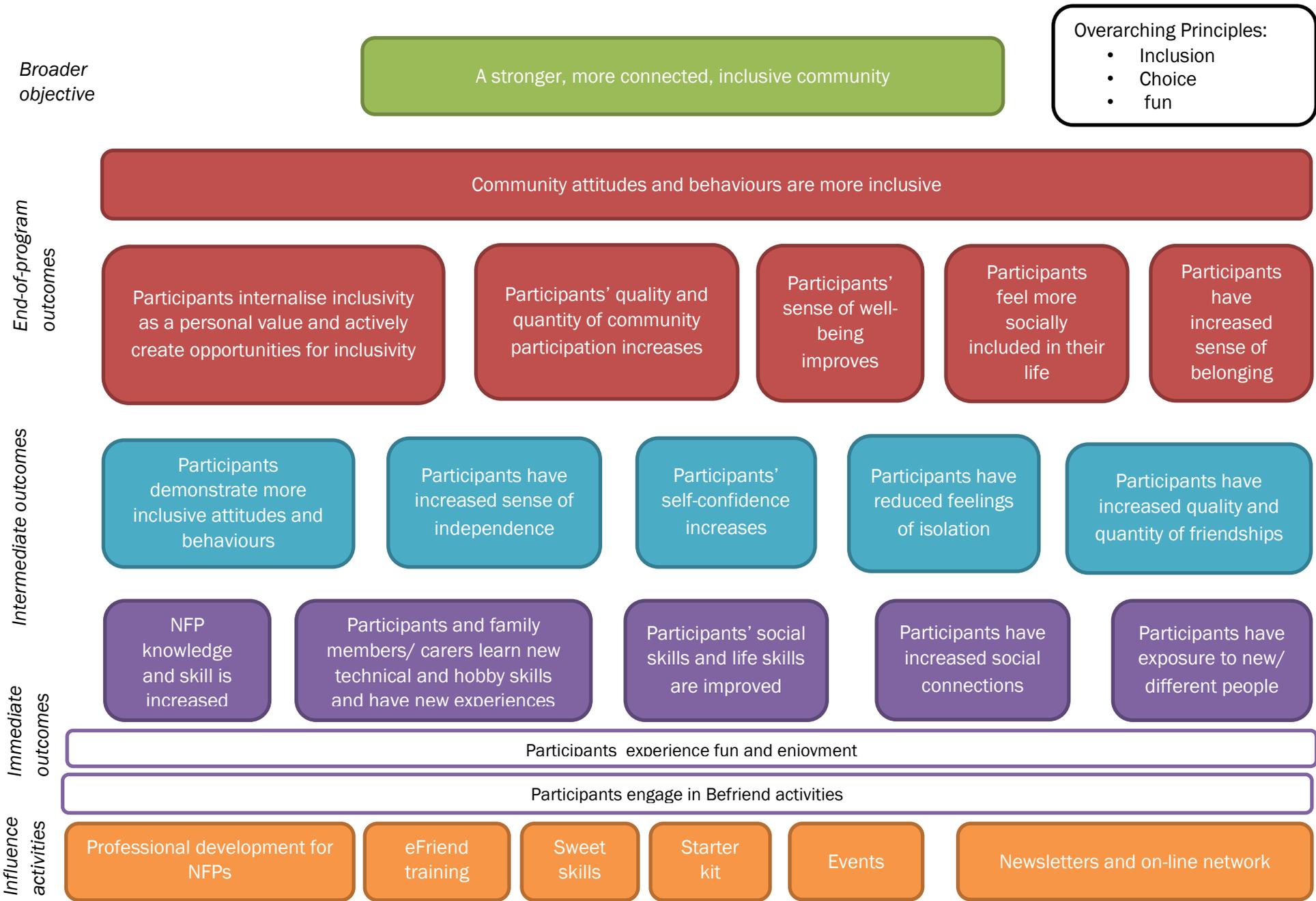


Figure 1: Program logic of the Befriend program

3. Methodology

3.1. Overall approach

The evaluation used a multi-stage mixed methods approach. The first stage involved qualitative data collection through a series of interviews with participants from across the four activity streams. As well as, two focus groups with Befriend event hosts and eFriends trainers. The second stage involved two surveys to quantify the extent to which the themes that emerged through the interviews could be generalised across the Befriend membership.

To assist in building internal evaluation capacity, Clear Horizon provided training and mentoring to Befriend staff and volunteers in conducting interviews and preparing most significant change stories. In total, seven Befriend members attended training and four assisted in data collection by conducting interviews for the evaluation.

3.2. Data collection – stage 1

Stage 1 of the data collection included conducting a number of semi-structured interviews with Befriend activity participants and two focus groups with Befriend staff and volunteers. The interviews and focus groups provided an opportunity to learn about participants' experiences, explore the extent to which the outcomes listed in the program logic model were achieved and identify any unexpected outcomes.

Details of the interviews and focus groups are provided below.

Interviews

Clear Horizon and Befriend conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 participants across the range of Befriend activities (as shown in Table 1). Nineteen of the interviews were conducted by Clear Horizon, and nine by Befriend. Purposive sampling was used to select interview participants.

Table 1: Participants interviewed

Stakeholder type	Number of interviews
Befriend event attendee	13
Sweet Skills attendee	4
Starter Kit participant	1
eFriends participant	5
eFriends trainer	1
Professional development attendee	4
Total	28

Most significant change stories

As part of the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked the question “Of all the changes that you have already described, or any others you can think of, which one do you think is the most important/significant?” Participants' answer to this question, as well as the follow up

question “Why did you say that this was the most important outcome/change” was transcribed verbatim to develop a short, one-page Most Significant Change Story story. The stories included what was most significant or important about the Befriend program for that participant and why. The stories are written in the first person to ensure the voice of the interviewee is captured in the story. The original author has been provided with their written story and asked to verify and give approval for its use in the report. Out of 28 interviews, 16 MSC stories were written, verified and approved.

A key part of the Most Significant Change (MSC) process is sharing the stories with stakeholders of the program to facilitate a discussion of what people value about the program. This process was done in a Summit Workshop held on 20 May 2017 (Section 3.4 below). Participants worked in small groups to read a number of stories out aloud, discuss the stories and identify the outcomes within each story. The individual groups then selected one story they considered the most significant outcome of the Befriend program. These stories capture the essence of change Befriend has delivered. All MSC stories are provided in Appendix 1.

Focus groups

In addition to the interviews, two focus groups were conducted with eight Befriend event hosts and five eFriends trainers. The purpose of the focus groups was to understand the role and experiences of the Befriend volunteers. It also provided the opportunity to capture the volunteers’ views regarding the benefits of Befriend to its members, as well as the larger community.

3.3. Data collection - Stage 2

Following completion of the semi-structured interviews, two surveys were developed in response to the identified themes. One survey focused on the Befriend events, and the other on the eFriends training. The purpose of the surveys was to capture the views of as many Befriend members as possible. Befriend distributed the surveys online via Survey Monkey™ to all Befriend members. Hard copy versions were also available for anyone who did not wish to complete the survey online, including the 2% of members who receive Befriend information regularly in the post.

Details of the survey are provided below.

Befriend member survey

In total, 174 Befriend surveys were completed (a 2.9% response rate from the 6,081 Befriend members). As can be seen in Table 2 the majority of survey respondents were female, and just over a quarter had experienced mental ill-health.

Table 2: Demographics of Befriend survey respondents

Demographic	Number
Female	120 (69%)
Male	49 (28%)
Gay / lesbian / bisexual / transgender / intersex / queer	17 (10%)
Has a physical disability	19 (11%)
Has an intellectual disability	24 (14%)
Has experienced mental ill-health	46 (26%)
Identify as Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	1 (1%)
I am from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background	11 (6%)

Survey respondents were spread across age ranges and the majority had been members for less than two years, as can be seen in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively.

Table 3: Age of Befriend survey respondents

Age	Number
18 – 25 years	24 (14%)
26 – 35 years	45 (26%)
36 – 45 years	32 (18%)
46 -60 years	50 (29%)
60 -74 years	21 (21%)
75+ years	1 (1%)

Table 4: Membership length of Befriend survey respondents

Membership length	Number
Less than 6 months	42 (24%)
6 – 12 months	39 (22%)
1 – 2 years	40 (24%)
3 – 4 years	13 (7%)
More than 4 years	18 (10%)

eFriends survey

Eleven eFriends surveys were completed (20% response rate from the 55 eFriends participants). Once again, the majority of survey respondents were female (refer to Table 5 for demographics).

Table 5: Demographics of eFriends survey respondents

Demographic	Number
Female	8 (73%)
Male	3 (27%)
Has a physical disability	4 (36%)
Has an intellectual disability	3 (27%)
Has experienced mental ill-health	2 (18%)

eFriends survey respondents ranged from 36 to 75 years or older and had received anywhere from one to ten or more eFriends training sessions, as can be seen in Table 6 and table 7 respectively.

Table 6: Age of eFriends survey respondents

Age	Number
36 - 45 years	2 (18%)
46 - 60 years	3 (27%)
60 -74 years	3 (27%)
75+ years	3 (27%)

Table 7: Number of training sessions eFriends survey respondents received

Number of eFriends sessions	Number
1 session	2 (18%)
2 sessions	2 (18%)
3 - 5 sessions	3 (27%)
6 - 10 sessions	1 (9%)
More than 10 sessions	3 (27%)

3.4. Primary data analysis

Qualitative data gathered through the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and qualitative survey responses were thematically analysed to identify key themes regarding the impact of the Befriend program. MSC stories were also developed from the semi-structured interview transcripts. Quantitative data gathered through the two online surveys were analysed to produce descriptive statistics.

All methods were analysed and the findings were triangulated to understand any similarities or differences between findings.

Secondary data analysis - Befriend program data

In addition to the data collected for this evaluation, Befriend had some existing data for Social Network event participation, Sweet Skills courses, eFriends training, Starter Kit and the professional development workshops. Listed below is the data provided by Befriend in excel spreadsheets.

Befriend events

- Monthly administration/output data, such as number of events held and number of attendees

eFriends

- Pre-training survey (n=17)
- Post-training survey (n=17)

Sweet Skills

- Post-course participants survey (n=196)

Starter Kit

- Pre-program participants survey (n=8)
- Post-program participants survey (n=8)

Professional development workshop

- Post- Relationship-building: Science & Strategies workshop survey – AVIVO (n=25)
- Post- Relationship-building: Science & Strategies workshop survey – City of Belmont (n=12)
- Post- Relationship-building: Science & Strategies workshop survey – Identity WA (n=40)
- Post- Relationship-building: Science & Strategies workshop survey – Southcare (n=9)
- Post-Befriend Community Connections Certification workshop survey – AVIVO (n=25)

The data from the four post-Relationship-building: Science & Strategies workshop surveys were collated to simplify analysis. The Befriend program data was then analysed in a method similar to that described above. The qualitative data was thematically analysed to identify key themes. The quantitative data was analysed to produce descriptive statistics.

3.5. Summit workshop

A Summit Workshop was held on 20 May 2017 and included the Befriend staff and volunteers. The process was used to allow participants to have in-depth conversations about the value of the Befriend program. Participants were provided with the opportunity to discuss and verify the preliminary findings of the evaluation.

The workshop participants were presented with the project findings in the form of a 'results chart' that outlined the data against the levels of the program logic. In groups, the participants discussed the findings and provided comments. Following the review of the 'results chart', a Most Significant Change story selection process was facilitated. This involved participants:

- reading stories of most significant change
- discussing and documenting the outcomes identified in the stories
- selecting one story they thought represented the most significant change
- discussing which stories were selected and why.

3.6. Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation was limited in the extent to which members who have communication difficulties due to an intellectual disability or because they experience a mental illness were able to engage in the evaluation. A number of strategies were adopted to increase the likelihood of their participation including interviewing a relative or close friend as a proxy and providing a number of options to aid them in completing the survey. However, it is possible that the evaluation has not adequately captured their voices and their views may not be presented well in the report.

Another limitation of the evaluation was the low response rates to the surveys. For the Befriend survey the response rate was 2.9 percent and for the eFriends survey response rate was 20 percent. This affected the extent to which the survey results can proclaim to represent the views of the whole population of Befriend members. However, when triangulated with the interview

data and the Befriend dataset, the findings are somewhat complementary. This gives greater confidence that the combined results present a reasonable explanation of the impact of the program.

A further limitation of the survey was the large percentage of respondents who selected “don’t know” as an answer to questions that explored the outcomes from their participation. For example:

Since joining Befriend have you felt more independent:

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

Due to the nature of online surveys, it is not possible to definitively know why someone has selected the ‘don’t know’ option. However, given the abstract nature of these outcome concepts (i.e. independence, sense of belonging and connection to community) it is possible that the high number of ‘don’t know’ responses is due to the cognitive capacity required to understand the question and reflect on the response. Therefore the results of the survey may not be a true reflection of the extent of the impacts of Befriend.

4. Findings

4.1. Effectiveness in influencing community attitudes and behaviours towards inclusion

The evaluation found that Befriend has been effective in positively influencing community attitudes and behaviours towards inclusivity through their activities and events that promote and facilitate social connectivity and inclusion. Befriend has supported many socially inclusive events and activities facilitated a number of individualised training activities and engaged with many social service organisations to increase their knowledge and awareness of the barriers to and impacts from social isolation.

Overall, there has been a high level of participation in events and activities and positive reactions from participants. There is evidence that participants' social connections have increased and many have formed new friendships. In addition, members who have attended a Social Network Event said they have not only learnt a new hobby, social and/or life skills, they also feel more comfortable in approaching and interacting with others. Similarly, eFriends participants believed that they had an increased ability to interact with others using social media and technology. Furthermore, after attending a professional development activity facilitated by Befriend, many organisational participants said that they had gained greater knowledge, skills and confidence to support their clients to build social connections and natural relationships.

Due to their involvement in Befriend, members identified that they have more inclusive attitudes and behaviours. There is some evidence that participants now feel more socially included and participants indicated that Befriend made them feel accepted for who they were. Because Befriend operates in a welcoming and non-judgemental way, many participants have an increased sense of belonging.

Although there was little direct evidence that Befriend members have an improved sense of well-being, the academic literature suggests there is a causal link between the quantity and quality of a persons' social connections and improved well-being. Due to the increased social connections Befriend members have formed, it is conceivable that this has led to an improved sense of well-being overall.

Similarly, it was difficult to assess the extent to which Befriend members have internalised inclusivity as a personal value. However, the academic literature provides some evidence of a link between behaviours and attitudes, and people's personal values. As Befriend members have clearly demonstrated inclusive attitudes and behaviours, this is suggestive that inclusivity is actually an internalised value. The literature also proposes that people adopt the values of the groups they identify with. Therefore, it could be assumed that as inclusivity is an embedded core value of Befriend, this value is shared and internalised across the membership base, particularly those who regularly engage with the Befriend community.

The section below provides the detailed findings of the effectiveness of the Befriend program against the program logic model levels (Figure 1); Influence activities, immediate outcomes, intermediate outcomes and end of program outcomes.

Influence activities

The influence activities are:

- Professional development courses for not-for-profits
- eFriends training
- Sweet Skills courses
- Starter Kit training
- Befriend Social Network events
- Newsletters and the Befriend on-line network

Summary

Befriend has a large reach in the community with over 6,000 Befriend members who receive the monthly newsletter and nearly 2,800 Facebook followers. They have a large number of event offerings and since 2014, they have held 523 Social Networking Events. Since January 2016, the monthly average attendance at these events was 176 people. In addition, between January 2016 and December 2016, Befriend has run over 50 Sweet Skills workshops.

Befriend has helped to build organisational capacity through the delivery of training workshops to 16 different community organisations between April 2015 and April 2017. They have also built the IT capacity of members, having delivered eFriends training to 55 individuals, as well as a number of group training courses between June 2015 and April 2017. Finally, Befriend has delivered Starter Kit training to 10 individuals between September 2015 and April 2017.

As of April 2017, Befriend has a total number of 6,081 members. Befriend shares information with these members through a combination of a monthly newsletter, Facebook, and the Befriend Social Network Meetup group. The monthly Befriend newsletter is distributed by post to 143 subscribers, and by email to 1,713. The Befriend Facebook page has been liked by 2,856 people and is followed by 2,793. The Befriend Social Network Meetup group has 4,225 members.

The main offering of Befriend is the Social Network Events. Between June 2014 and April 2017, Befriend has held 523 events. These cover a range of different activities such as a monthly Sausage Sizzle in Subiaco, café meet ups, and pet walks. Between October 2015 and April 2017, the average number of attendees a month was 176. In addition to the Social Network Events, Befriend has run over 50 Sweet Skills courses between January 2016 and December 2016. Example courses include cooking, dancing and arts and crafts.

To assist Befriend members in improving their social skills and overcoming barriers to participation in Befriend events, Befriend delivers Starter Kit training. Beginning in September 2015, this training has been delivered to 16 individuals and as of April 2017, ten have completed the training.

Befriend currently offer four professional development courses to build organisational capacity within community service providers. The aim is to upskill providers to assist their own clients in building natural relationships and community connections. The four training courses focus on building relationships either face-to-face or through the use of technology. The four courses are:

- Relationship-building: Science & Strategies (formally, Sparking Connections Through Social Support)
- Befriend Community Connections Certification

- Digital Inclusion Fundamentals
- Technology for Connections and Life Skills (Has not been taken up, as of April 2017)

Eight Relationship-building: Science & Strategies workshops have run between October 2016 and April 2017. The courses were delivered to 86 participants from Avivo, City of Belmont (Community Services), IdentityWA and SouthCare. Three Befriend Community Connections Certification workshops were run in February 2017. These were attended by a total of 25 participants from Avivo. Five Digital Inclusion Fundamental workshops have been run from April 2015 to February 2016. These workshops were delivered to 31 participants from the following organisations:

- Majella Catholic Primary School
- Find & Connect
- The Meeting Place
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren WA
- UnitingCare West
- Juel Health Services
- Living Strength OT.

No Technology for Connections and Life Skills workshops have been delivered since the course's inception in April 2017.

Prior to the four courses stated above, Befriend has provided professional development courses to the following community organisations:

- Richmond Wellbeing
- Silverchain
- Juniper
- The Ability Centre
- CommunityWest

Befriend also provided one-on-one eFriends training to 55 individuals and delivered a number of group training courses between June 2015 and August 2016, with the aim to increase participants' ability to use technology to build and maintain social connections. The majority of individuals received six training sessions.

Immediate outcomes

The immediate outcomes are:

- Participants engage in Befriend activities
- Participants experience fun and enjoyment

Summary

The main reason given for participating in a Befriend event (a Social Networking Event or Sweet Skills course) is to meet people, for fun and enjoyment, and to socialise with others. The majority of members who have engaged in a Befriend event in the past 12 months have attended more than one event and said that the experience was fun and enjoyable.

The majority of Befriend interviewees stated that they joined Befriend to meet people, make new friends and to experience fun events. Befriend survey respondents identified similar reasons for joining, as seen in Figure 2 below.

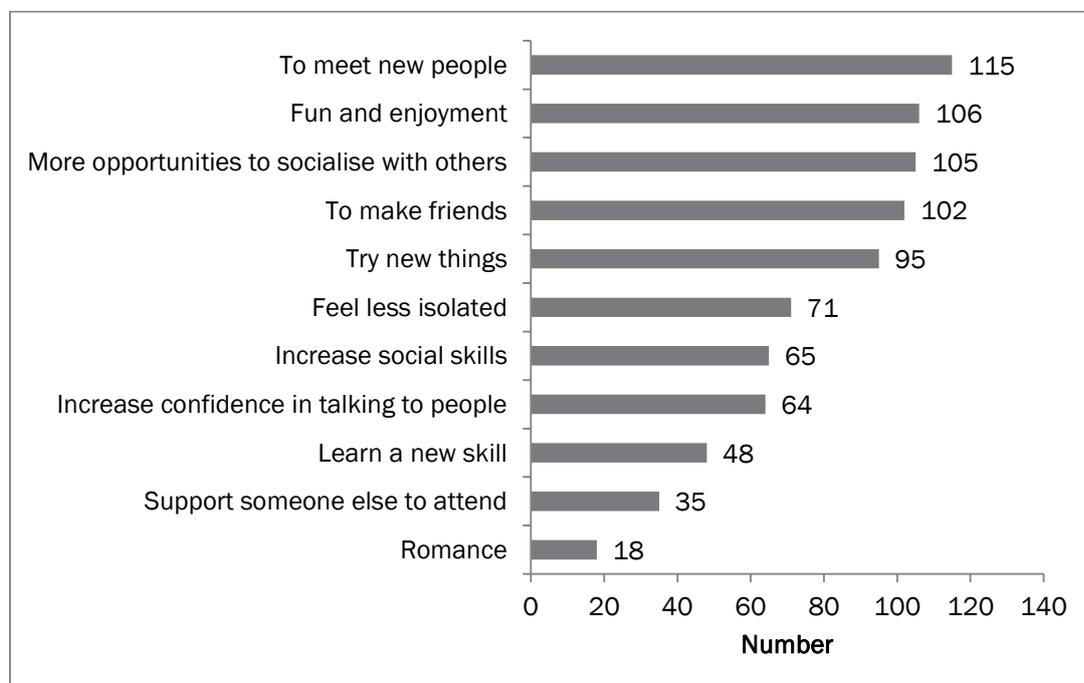


Figure 2: Reasons for joining Befriend (survey responses)

Fifty-three percent (53%) of Befriend survey respondents (n=93) stated that they had attended one or more Social Network Events in the last 12 months (refer to Figure 3).

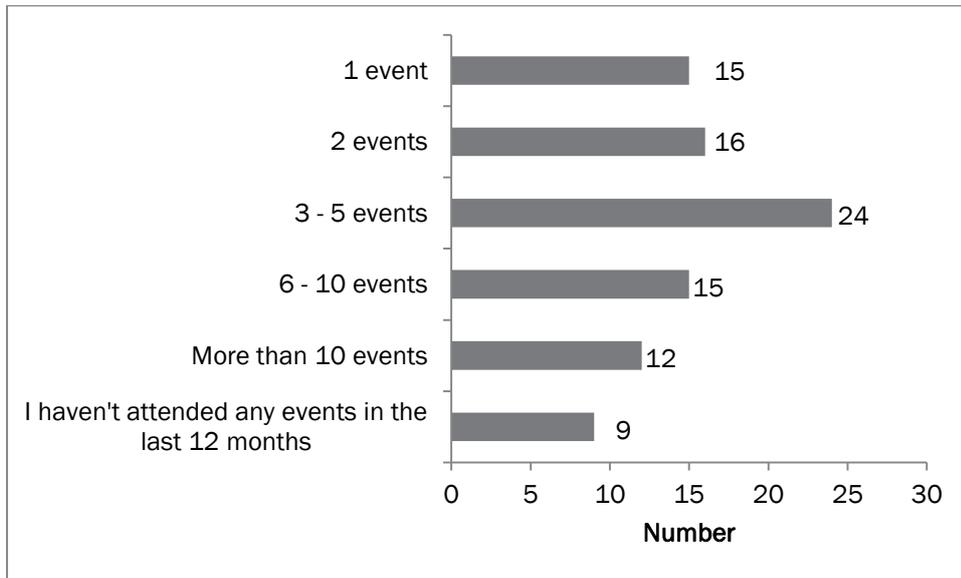


Figure 3: Befriend Social Network events respondents have attended in the last 12 months

Of the Befriend survey respondents who had never attended a Social Network Event or Sweet Skills course, 45% of them (n=35) had been a Befriend member for less than 6 months.

The Befriend interviewees and survey respondents who had attended a Social Network Event all described them as being fun and enjoyable activities. Interviewees emphasised the annual Befriend Ball as being fun, with one mentioning that it is the highlight of their daughter's year. Of the 93 survey respondents who had attended a Social Network Event, they rated their enjoyment at (on average) 7.8 out of 10.

While the majority of Befriend interviewees only spoke of positive interactions occurring at events, one shared a negative experience. They described an occasion where there was a conflict between two attendees at an event they were hosting. However, they stated that this was an isolated incident. Three members of the Befriend focus group also mentioned that they had experienced conflicts between attendees while hosting/co-hosting.

Only 14% of survey respondents (n=24) had attended a Sweet Skills course. Figure 4 below shows the number of courses survey respondents have attended in the last 12 months.

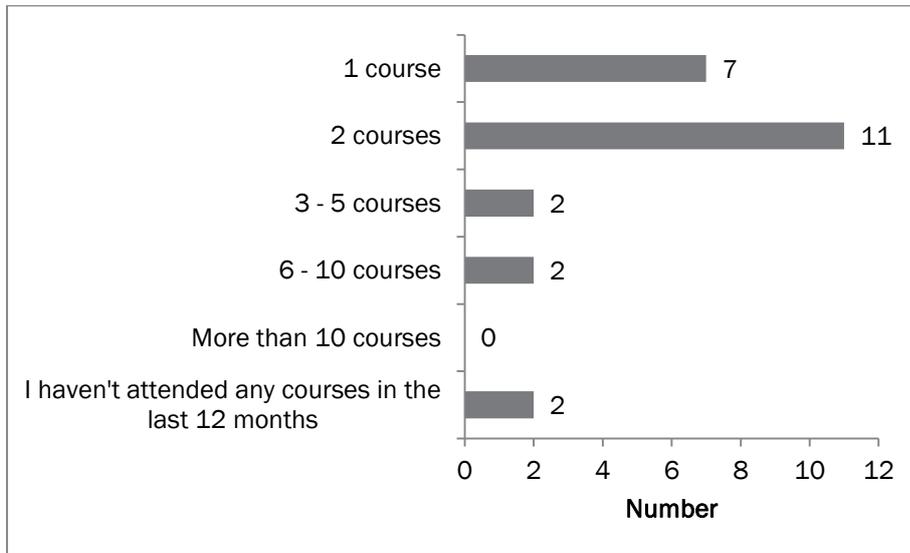


Figure 4: Sweet Skills courses respondents have attended in the last 12 months

As with the Befriend Social Networking events, all interviewees who had attended a Sweet Skills course found them to be fun and enjoyable. The average rating of the 24 survey respondents asked about their enjoyment of the course was 8 out of 10.

Of the seven Starter Kit participants who completed the pilot pre and post surveys, none had attended a Befriend event, prior to the training. Following the training, they attended between one and two events while accompanied by a Network connector. Two attended a third event unaccompanied. When asked to rate their enjoyment of the Starter Kit program on a scale of 1-5, the average was 4.3 out of 5.

Intermediate outcomes level 1

The intermediate outcomes level 1 are:

- Not-for-profit knowledge and skill is increased
- Participants and family members/carers learn new technical and hobby skills and have new experiences
- Participants' social and life skills are improved
- Participants have exposure to new/different people
- Participants have increased social connections

Summary

Staff working for community organisations providing services to people with a disability or with a mental illness, who had attended a professional development course reported that they had greater knowledge, skills and confidence to support their clients build more social connections and natural relationships. Staff reported that they are supporting their clients to identify opportunities to increase their social connections.

Befriend members who attended a Social Networking Event or Sweet Skills course said that they have learnt new technical and/or hobby skills, improved their social connections and had greater exposure to new and/or different people. This was particularly relevant for people with a disability or who have experienced mental ill-health. There is also evidence that Befriend members and Starter Kit participants have increased their social and life skills.

Some eFriends participants also said that they had made new friends through the group interactions, as well as by being better equipped to engage with others outside of Befriend, through increased skills, knowledge and confidence to use social media and technology.

Social inclusion knowledge and skills

Befriend has run 16 professional development courses, reaching 142 participants from 11 community organisations. These courses helped to increase participants' level of knowledge of social inclusion and increase their skills in how to facilitate connections. Some interviewees felt this helped them to support their clients to build social connections. They also discussed how the training allowed them to reflect on their practices. As one said:

"I was just kind of toeing the line and just doing the same things over and over again without direction and not what I was supposed to be doing."

Participants' level of knowledge, skills and confidence to facilitate connections in the community for the people they support, increased as a result of completing the Relationship Building: Science & Strategies workshop (refer to Table 8). Eighty-six (86) participants who completed the workshop were asked to rate their knowledge, skills and confidence before and after, and the average scores across all three qualities increased.

Table 8: Participants knowledge, skills and confidence to facilitate connections

	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop
Knowledge	6.3 out of 10	8.1 out of 10
Skills	6.5 out of 10	8.2 out of 10
Confidence	6.6 out of 10	8.4 out of 10

Participants also rated their overall satisfaction with the workshop and usefulness of the content highly with an average rating of 90 percent and 89 percent respectively.

Those who completed the Befriend Community Connections Certification workshop (n=25) also felt that their skills and confidence to facilitate connections had improved (refer to Table 9). They believed they had greater access to effective tools to facilitate connections for the people they support, as well as and a more structured approach to supporting these people. These participants also rated their overall satisfaction with the workshop and usefulness of the content highly with an average rating of 94 percent and 95 percent, respectively.

Table 9: Participants social connections skills, confidence, approach and use of tools

	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop
Skills	5.7 out of 10	8.6 out of 10
Confidence	6.2 out of 10	8.4 out of 10
Structured approach	5.8 out of 10	8.7 out of 10
Effective tools	6.8 out of 10	8.7 out of 10

Interviews with workshop participants showed that they have an increased awareness of the importance of social inclusion, particularly for their clients. Interviewees commented that they were now more aware of participants’ wants, needs and the importance for them to have appropriate and valued social connections. They are now asking their clients what activities they would like to engage with and facilitating that more targeted engagement. For example:

“For one client, she loved cats. Every Saturday, she has a four-hour community support. They used to just do whatever. Now they have been volunteering at the cat haven.”

For some community organisational interviewees, the training provided the opportunity to come together as a team and collaborate on client service planning.

“For me, that has been the biggest thing- getting everyone in a room together to talk about one person that we all know well, and want to help... Befriend is the one who did this, they got us together.”

Learning new skills and having new experiences

The evidence shows that Befriend event and Sweet Skills course participants have learnt new technical and hobby skills, and have had new experiences.

Interviewees mentioned that they had engaged in activities that they would not have had the opportunity to otherwise, such as attending a Ball or improv classes. Other’s discussed how the Sweet Skills courses allowed them to try activities that they had wanted to in the past but didn’t have the opportunity to try. The Befriend survey supported these findings, with nearly half saying they had attended an event where they had tried new things.

Interviewees who had attended a Sweet Skills course also spoke of learning new skills. This was supported by end of course survey data, which showed the majority (98 percent) had learnt new skills because of the course (n=196). Similar results were found in the survey.

Lastly, a number of Social Network Event host interviewees said that they had learnt new skills in regards to event planning and hosting.

“Being an event host [has] given me the chance to find out what goes into the planning...You have to know how to plan it and how to tell people what to look out for and everything.”

Social and life skills

The evidence suggests the social and life skills of participants at Befriend activities have improved. Ten Befriend event interviewees discussed an improvement in either their social skills or their client’s social skills. Most felt they or their clients were better able to interact and speak with people. As one stated:

“I feel more comfortable interacting with people, I feel less nervous...”

Two interviewees felt that due to Befriend they were improving their ability to make eye contact during conversation.

“One thing that’s a work in progress, which is sort of like the negative of my disability... is eye contact...I really find it difficult looking people in the eye. But I think through Befriend that’s kind of helped a little bit.”

The Befriend member survey supported these findings, with 27 of the 96 survey respondents who had attended an event feeling that their social skills had improved.

All Starter Kit participants (n=8) who completed the pre and post-training surveys also felt that they had increased their social skills in one aspect or another. One participant felt that their ability to make conversation with a person they had just met had decreased, two rated their ability to talk with people from different backgrounds to themselves as decreased.

Table 10: Changes in participants social skills following the Starter Kit training

	Increased	No change	Decreased
Making conversation with a person you just met	5	2	1
Being a good listener	5	3	0
Reading other people’s body language	5	3	0
Talking with people with different backgrounds to yourself	6	0	2
Turning someone you recently met into a friend	4	4	0

Across a range of social skills most participants indicated an increase in their ability in each skill (refer to Table 10).

Data also suggests that eFriends participants have increased their knowledge in the basic use of computers. Four interviewees felt that they were now more capable of using technology due to the training. As one stated:

“I literally didn’t know how to turn my computer on. I know people say that but I actually couldn’t. I am now able to go to my computer and get information, and email and work around the computer now.”

This was backed up by the eFriends survey. Five of the eleven survey respondents indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that they had developed the skills that they had wanted to.

While interviewees stated they were more capable of using technology, they believed they still had more to learn. Similar results were found for the 17 eFriends participants who completed the pre and post-training surveys. Prior to the training, participants' rated their satisfaction with their overall technology skills and experience as 3.4 out of 10. After the training, participants' average satisfaction rating increased to 5 out of 10. Although there was an increase, the final rating remains low.

In terms of confidence to use technology, the majority of eFriends interviewees said that the training had a positive impact. As one stated, they were "no longer as afraid of technology". Similar themes were raised during the eFriends focus group, with members noting that they saw changes in participants' confidence in using technology.

The eFriends trainer also spoke of seeing participants' confidence with technology increase. The pre and post-training eFriends surveys supported these findings. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with a number of statements relating to confidence in using technology. As seen in Table 11 below, on average participants rated their confidence as higher after the course.

Table 11: eFriends participants' rated confidence using technology pre and post course

	Pre	Post
I feel confident about using my device/s	4.1 out of 10	5.7 out of 10
I feel confident about using the internet	4 out of 10	5.5 out of 10
I feel confident about finding information using the internet	4 out of 10	5.4 out of 10
I feel confident about protecting my personal information online	2.5 out of 10	5 out of 10
I feel safe online	2.9 out of 10	4.9 out of 10
I feel confident about communicating with family and friends online	4.1 out of 10	6 out of 10

While the majority rated that their confidence had increased, a small number believed that it had decreased. During the summit workshop, it was suggested that this was due to participants having an inflated sense of confidence in their abilities because sometimes people "don't know what they don't know". It is possible that after completion of the training, participants had a greater self-awareness of their lack of knowledge and rated their confidence as having decreased. This suggestion is supported by the academic literature regarding the Dunning-Kruger effect, which refers to the mental bias where a person with low ability inaccurately rates their ability as greater than it is. This is due to them lacking the mental awareness to realise their own lack of ability (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

Exposure to new/different people

As a result of their involvement in Befriend, people have been exposed to new and/or different people. All 18 Interviewees who had attended a Befriend event stated they had met someone

new. Similarly, 69 of the 96 survey respondents who had attended an event also indicated that they had met a new person since joining.

Interviewees mentioned that they were given the opportunity to meet people that were outside of their usual social networks. This opportunity was something highly valued by some interviewees. It was particularly important for attendees with disabilities or who have experienced mental ill-health, as Befriend provided them with an inclusive opportunity to socialise with others in the community.

“She [daughter] has a mild intellectual disability... So it was a way of her socialising with different people other than just small groups of people that have an intellectual disability.”

Social connections

The majority of Befriend event interviewees believe that they have or are starting to make new social connections. They mentioned that after having attended multiple events, they are starting to be recognised by other attendees. One interviewee talked about the value of this recognition.

“One of the things that I like about Befriend... that’s really valuable as well, is the loose network of lots of people that you know the names of...Having that loose network of being able to go to an event...and being able to know someone there, that is so comforting.”

For some, these new friendships revolve primarily around Befriend, as the only interaction they have with their new friends is at Befriend events.

A few interviewees talked about how, as event hosts or network facilitators, they have also built social connections with Befriend staff. Evidence of Befriend members building social connections was also provided through the Befriend survey. Of the 96 survey respondents who had attended an event, 33 believed that they had made new friends.

To a lesser extent, evidence suggests that some Starter Kit participants have increased social connections. Seven participants were asked to rate how happy they were with the number of friends they had, as well as the closeness of those friendships, pre and post training. Two rated that they were happier with their number of friends. In regards to their happiness with the closeness of those friendships, three rated it as having increased.

Finally, the Starter Kit participants were also asked to rate how confident they were in meeting new people and being able to connect with them. Three rated that their confidence had increased and five rated that it had remained the same.

Some eFriends training participants also have increased social connections. Two interviewees discussed that due to their increased knowledge they were now better able to maintain social connections through the use of technology. Not all embraced the connectivity of “virtual communication” with one respondent saying that while they were able to use technology, they did not enjoy the process and still preferred to keep in touch with family and friends through phone calls.

Similar numbers of eFriends survey respondents felt more confident in their ability to make new connections, both online and face-to-face. Five of the eleven respondents strongly agreed or agreed that after attending the training they were now more confident in their ability to use technology to initiate and maintain online connections with others. Four neither agreed nor disagreed and one disagreed. Three respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they now felt

confident in using technology to initiate or maintain face-to-face connections. Four neither agreed nor disagreed, and one disagreed.

During the eFriends trainer focus group, members discussed their experience with participants maintaining and increasing social connections through the use of technology. A few discussed how participants have learnt how to use email and Skype and were now better at maintaining contact with their family. One also noted that the group training provided participants with the opportunity to make new social connections amongst the other participants. They provided the example where after learning how to send emails, participants were swapping emails in order to “keep in touch”.

A small number (less than 50%) of eFriends pre and post-training survey respondents also felt that they had made new friends. Three of the eight agreed that they had made new friends, two neither agreed nor disagreed and three disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Intermediate outcomes level 2

The intermediate outcomes level 2 are:

- Participants demonstrate more inclusive attitudes and behaviours
- Participants have increased quality and quantity of friendships
- Participants have reduced feels of isolation
- Participants' self-confidence increases
- Participants have an increased sense of independence

Summary

Befriend members have an increased sense of independence, self-confidence, and quality of friendships since joining Befriend. They have also had reduced feelings of isolation and demonstrated more inclusive attitudes and behaviours.

Befriend members have demonstrated more inclusive attitudes and behaviours, such as being thoughtful of the ways to more inclusively engage with people at events. As well as being aware of the need to actively welcome new members. Some also said that they are now more comfortable interacting with people who are different from themselves. There is a general sense of 'not being judged' when attending an event and this is recognised as an important value of Befriend.

The evidence suggests that participants have made new friends and a few have extended this to meeting people outside of scheduled Befriend events. As a result, members discussed having a reduced sense of isolation. eFriends participants also mentioned a reduced sense of isolation due to their increased ability to engage with others through social media and the use of technology.

Many of the participants commented that they have gained greater self-confidence. They were more confident to approach and talk to new people. A few also mentioned having a greater sense of independence. One reason provided was that Befriend had increased their confidence in themselves to do things on their own. eFriends participants also mentioned having a greater sense of independence by having improved IT skills.

Inclusive attitudes and behaviours

Evidence suggests that people who participate in Befriend events or activities have developed more inclusive attitudes and behaviours. This was clearly demonstrated during the interviews with 18 people who had attended a Befriend event. Of these, 13 discussed ways in which they have adopted inclusive attitudes or behaviours. Interviewees mentioned that they encourage people to attend Befriend events. Two also talked about how they try to be welcoming to new members. As one interviewee mentioned, they now try to include people more in conversations.

"If there's one person who I can see is not contributing much to the conversation but I feel like they have something to say, I will make a point to ask them a question or divert the conversation in a way that includes them."

Participating in Befriend activities has made two interviewees more aware of the importance of inclusion. They spoke of their realisation that there are people who need support in socialising with others. Other informants shared their belief that Befriend provided a way for people to improve their social connections and for people who may value inclusivity to act upon that value.

As one interviewee stated, they felt that hosting Befriend events was one of the best ways to have a positive impact on someone's life.

Some interviewees are now more accepting and comfortable interacting with people who are different to themselves. Befriend focus group members also agreed that they were more accepting and less judgemental of others. A few stated that the Befriend community was accepting of difference and encouraged people to be themselves.

A key theme from the interviewees and focus groups was the change in how members interact with others. They felt more accepting, less judgemental and more comfortable interacting with people who were different from themselves. The survey results concur, as Figure 5 shows.

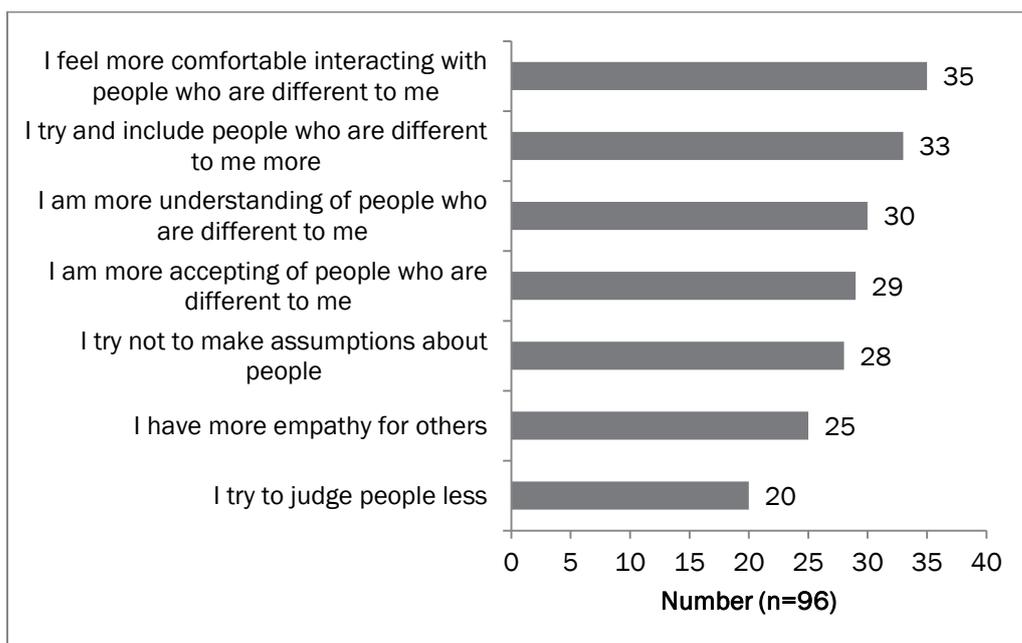


Figure 5: Number of respondents who felt that their attitudes towards others had changed

While the majority of respondents felt that their attitudes had changed, 24 felt that theirs had not. The most noted reason was that they were already inclusive and accepting of others.

Quality and quantity of friendships

While numerous Befriend event interviewees spoke of making new friends, only a few spoke of making friends that they now see in other settings. For these interviewees, the friendships provided them with people that they could occasionally meet up with, for example, meeting for coffee. One talked about an experience they had where they felt their friendship with other members deepened.

“The first time that I had hung out with these two people outside of Befriend.... [they] invited us into [their] home and we were just there together just chilling I felt like I became a lot closer to them in that moment”

While most interviewees did not say that they have increased their quality or quantity of friendships, one mentioned that they felt Befriend was the first platform since school that they could develop quality friendships. A Sweet Skills interviewee was hopeful that they had made a

quality friendship due to Befriend, stating that they felt there was a connection, but that “only time [would] tell.”

In addition, Befriend survey respondents felt they had increased friendships. Of the 96 who had attended a Befriend event, 17 noted that they had made friends that they see outside of Befriend.

Reduced feelings of isolation

Befriend has had a positive impact on reducing participants’ sense of isolation. Over half of the Befriend event interviewees (n=11) discussed how Befriend had contributed to them feeling less isolated. The high number of events and the social connections people formed meant that attendees often had somewhere to go to be around “friendly faces”, providing them with a sense that they never have to be alone. This was supported by the Befriend survey, with 32 of the 96 survey respondents who had attended an event indicating that they had reduced feelings of isolation. Interestingly, three respondents who had not attended a Befriend event also felt this way. One possible explanation for this is that for some, just receiving communications from Befriend, such as the monthly newsletter, was enough to reduce isolation.

A small number of eFriends interviewees also felt less isolated due to their involvement in eFriends. For two, this was due to their new ability to use technology to stay connected with family and friends. As one described:

“I’m more or less marooned in the house and I can’t get about much. I don’t drive anymore and so on. [Using an iPad] was a way of keeping in touch with family.”

A similar story was shared during the eFriends focus group, where a participant was able to reconnect with family overseas due to being taught how to use Skype. In addition, 4 of the 11 eFriends survey respondents agreed that they were more connected to friends and family as a result of what they had learnt.

Self-confidence

Fifteen interviewees stated that they were now more self-confident. For most, they were more confident in their ability to initially approach someone and start a conversation.

“I was just not up to meeting new people. But now I can just walk up to someone that I don’t know and introduce myself and just talk”

A member of the Befriend focus group also believed that regular attendees gained more confidence. Two Befriend interviewees spoke of how they now felt more comfortable and confident in larger crowds. About a third of survey respondents who had attended a Befriend event indicated that they were now more confident in talking to people.

One Befriend member talked about a significant change that came about because of a shift in their self-confidence.

“My brother has been quite emotionally and physically and verbally abusive all my life. It’s taken 27 years but I finally broke away from that because of Befriend. I finally got the confidence in myself that I don’t deserve that.”

Sense of independence

Two Befriend event interviewees spoke of how they were now more independent. One had improved their use of public transport because it was necessary to attend events. The other felt that, if it not for Befriend, they would still rely on their parents for social interactions.

eFriends interviewees also spoke of how the training had increased their independence. Three stated that they were better able to use technology. This in turn made their life easier, for example, the ability to do their banking online. This was especially useful for one interviewee with a disability who was unable to leave their house for a number of months. For another, who after a serious health episode was unable to perform their physical job, the increased knowledge regarding technology meant that they could consider a transition from physical work to office based work.

An improved sense of independence was supported by the Befriend survey. Twenty-nine survey respondents indicated they had an improved sense of independence due to; an increased confidence and ability to talk to people and attend events; Befriend allowing them to get out more often, and an increased ability to use public transport. Thirty-four said they weren't. No further information was given to explain these responses.

Similar findings were found in the pre and post-Starter Kit surveys. Eight participants were asked to rate how comfortable they felt attending a social event for the first time by themselves. Five rated that they felt more comfortable and three rated they did not.

The eFriends survey supported these findings, with four of the eleven survey respondents feeling more independent as a result of what they had learnt. Five however, did not.

End of program outcomes

The end of program outcomes are:

- Participants feel more socially included in their life
- Participants have increased sense of belonging
- Participants' quality and quantity of community participant increases
- Participants internalise inclusivity as a personal value and actively create opportunities for inclusivity
- Participants' sense of well-being improves

Summary

There is some evidence to suggest that Befriend has been successful in increasing members' sense of belonging and social inclusion. There is also evidence within the academic literature to suggest that Befriend members have a greater sense of well-being and place greater value on inclusivity.

Befriend was described as a welcoming and non-judgemental community. As a result, members have a greater sense of satisfaction in their social lives, and a greater sense of belonging. eFriends participants also said that they had an increased sense of belonging to the community.

Little evidence was found to suggest that Befriend members have an improved sense of well-being. The academic literature regarding subjective well-being however provides evidence for a causal link between the number and quality of social connections one has and improved well-being. Due to the increased social connections Befriend members have formed, it is probable that this has led to an improved sense of well-being.

Similarly, little evidence was found to suggest that Befriend members have internalised inclusivity as a personal value. However the academic literature provides some evidence of a link between one's behaviours and attitudes, and one's personal values. As Befriend members have been shown to demonstrate inclusive attitudes and behaviours, this is suggestive that inclusivity is actually an internalised value. Evidence also suggests that people adopt the values of the groups they identify with. Therefore it could be assumed that as inclusivity is an embedded core value of Befriend, it is likely this value is shared and internalised across the membership base.

The aim of Befriend is to promote social inclusion and reduce barriers to connections between people. This evaluation has found Befriend is achieving this aim with its members. The evidence suggests that Befriend members feel more socially included in their life. respondents' spoke of how inclusive and welcoming the Befriend community was. It allowed them to be themselves and to feel accepted.

Evaluation informants generally rated their satisfaction with their social life as higher since joining Befriend or participating in Befriend activities.

There is also clear evidence that Befriend members have an increased sense of belonging. Two interviewees described how they felt like they belonged within the Befriend community. With one referring to the community as a sort of family.

"If I moved out of the country and I went away for a while and then I came back to Perth, a lot of the Befriend community would... still be there... So just knowing that I've got this almost like a family,... it's like extended family."

One Befriend focus group member also stated that Befriend feels like a family and that this is the reasons regular members continue to attend. Similarly, 39 survey respondents who had attended an event also felt they had a greater sense of belonging because of the following reasons:

- The friendly and welcoming Befriend community made them feel as if they belonged (n=10)
- Participating in the Befriend activities provided a sense of belonging (n=5)
- Being a part of the Befriend team (n=3)
- Engaging with people who had similar values (n=3)
- Feeling less isolated and no longer invisible (n=3)

Not only did they feel connected to the Befriend community, survey respondents also felt a stronger connection to the wider community because of; the diversity of Befriend participants they came into contact with and because attending the Befriend events and being physically present in their community made them feel more connected. A small number of eFriends survey respondents also felt more connected to their community.

No direct evidence was found to suggest that Befriend participants have internalised inclusivity as a personal value due to their involvement in Befriend. However, the academic literature indicates that there is a link between a person's values and their attitudes and behaviours (Bardi, Calogero & Mullen, 2008; Boer & Fischer, 2013). From the Befriend interviews and survey, participants demonstrate increased inclusive attitudes and behaviours. This could imply that Befriend members are engaging in inclusive behaviours because they value inclusivity. While this may be evidence that members value inclusivity, it does not necessarily mean that this is due to their involvement in Befriend. It is possible that these members already valued inclusivity prior to joining Befriend.

However, there is evidence within the literature to suggest that Befriend may be providing an environment that fosters the internalisation of inclusivity. Mael and Ashforth (1992) found when a person identifies with a new group, their values may change to better align with that group. Schwartz and Bardi (1997) also proposed that people adapt their values based on their ability to act in accordance with them. More specifically, they state that people place greater importance on values that are reinforced within their social environment. As previously stated, numerous Befriend interviewees spoke of how inclusive the Befriend community was, and of how inclusiveness was promoted. It is possible then that due to the social environment provided that actively promotes inclusion, members also place greater value on inclusivity.

In a similar vein, while little evidence was found to indicate that Befriend members' have an improved sense of well-being, based on the literature it is probable the sense of well-being for some has improved. Interviewees discussed how the quality and quantity of their social connections had improved thanks to Befriend. Numerous studies have shown a casual link between close social connections and subjective well-being (e.g Helliwell, 2011). Due to this causal link, it is likely that some members' increased social connections have led to improved well-being. Helliwell also argues that having a greater sense of belonging to community, as some Befriend members have stated, leads to improved satisfaction and thus overall well-being (Helliwell, 2011).

4.2. Instances of significant change and unexpected outcomes

Stories offer a method for simulating complex events, outcomes and/or problems and allow for the exploration of people's perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes. As they represent a person's own values and what outcomes they value, they may elicit unexpected outcomes.

The following stories were chosen by the participants of the summit workshop as representing the most significant changes occurring because of a person's participation in Befriend. These stories were chosen out of three sets of vignettes (16 in total).

These stories were extracted directly from the interview transcripts, which were captured with digital audio recording. While edits were kept to a minimum, some text was removed where the removal does not materially affect the content or context, this is indicated by three dots between sentences.

Three groups of between five to seven workshop participants were involved in the story selection process. Each group read between five and six unique stories from a range of stakeholders. Each group then selected one story as representing the most significant change of Befriend and described why. The stories selected are described below (and included in full in Appendix 1)

MSC 2 - I'm better at making sure that everyone feels heard.

This story was selected because it was believed to be the 'poster child' of Befriend and represented the whole Befriend member journey. The author's first experience with Befriend was taking a client to events for work. When they unexpectedly started to enjoy the events themselves, they became a Befriend member and eventually an event host. The group also believed that the story provided evidence for every level of the program logic. In particular, the story highlighted the increased skills that the author has gained from Befriend that they could now use in their personal and work life.

MSC 6 - Feeling accepted and more tolerant of others.

This story was selected because it represented a journey of change and provided a clear picture of Befriend. The author spoke of how her daughter feels more valued and accepted because of Befriend. In turn, she is now more accepting and less judgemental of others. The group felt that these experiences of real social inclusion were a direct fit with Befriend's mission of people feeling more connected and having a more inclusive society.

MSC 14 - Helping clients to do what they want.

This story was selected because it represented how an individual change brought about by Befriend could lead to a positive impact for multiple people. The story was of a support worker who attended a professional development training session run by Befriend. Following the training, there was a positive change within the individual's organisation regarding how they engaged with their clients, which led to positive outcomes for the clients.

The themes identified across all stories read by Summit Workshop participants are outlined in Table 12 below, along with the corresponding number of MSC story where the theme was identified.

Table 12: MSC story themes identified in the Summit Workshop

Theme	Story Number
Self-empowerment and personal growth	Story 1, 2, 7, 8, 12 and 13
Increased confidence	Story 1, 6, 7, 9, 12 and 13
Increased social connections	Story 3, 4, 5, 11 and 15
Sense of social inclusion	Story 2, 6, 14 and 15
Reduced feelings of isolation	Story 4, 5, 8 and 16
Improved quality of friendships	Story 4, 9 and 16
Sense of belonging	Story 6, 9 and 14
High number of options regarding events	Story 3, 10 and 14
A safe space to be one's self	Story 8 and 10
Improved mental health	Story 7 and 12
Journey through Befriend from bystander to volunteer	Story 2 and 16
Befriend as the first step of personal growth	Story 6 and 8
Meeting people you wouldn't otherwise	Story 5 and 13
Having fun and quality experiences	Story 8 and 16
Improved knowledge and skills for not for profits	Story 11 and 14
Increased self-esteem and self-worth	Story 9 and 12
Increased sense of independence	Story 1 and 7
Developed new social skills	Story 7
Increased community participation	Story 14

4.3. Improvements to the Befriend program

Befriend survey respondents were asked how they thought the Befriend Social Network Events could be improved. They were presented a list and were allowed to select multiple improvements. Figure 6 below displays how survey respondents believe the Befriend Social Network events could be improved.

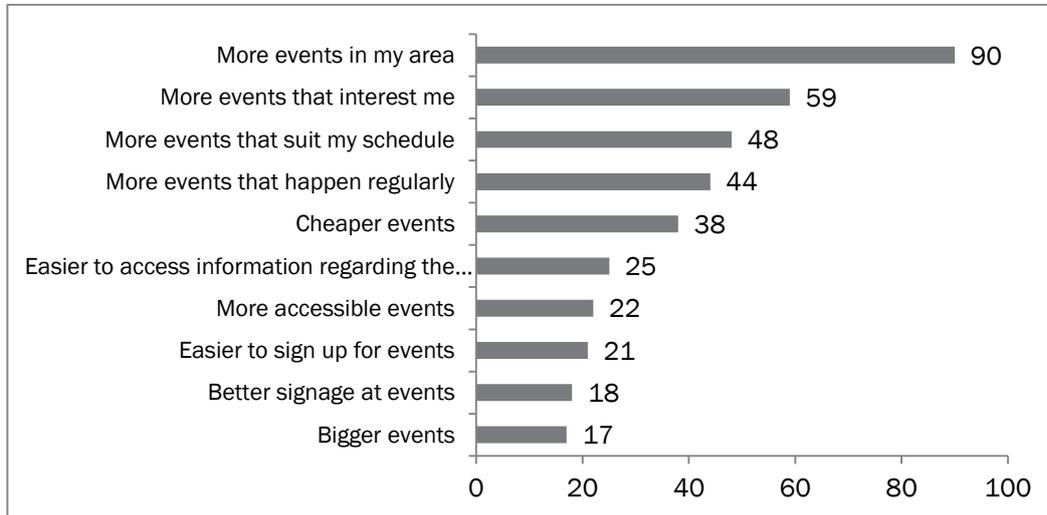


Figure 6: Improvements to Befriend Social Network Events

The most noted improvement were more events in my area, more events that interest me and more events that suit my schedule. Similar themes were found during the Befriend interviews, with interviewees most noting a lack of suitably scheduled and located events as the biggest barrier to attendance.

Befriend survey respondents were also asked how they thought the Sweet Skills courses could be improved. They were presented a list and were allowed to select multiple improvements. Figure 7 below displays how survey respondents believe the Sweet Skill courses could be improved. The most noted improvements were more courses in my area, cheaper courses, more courses that interest me and more courses that suit my schedule.

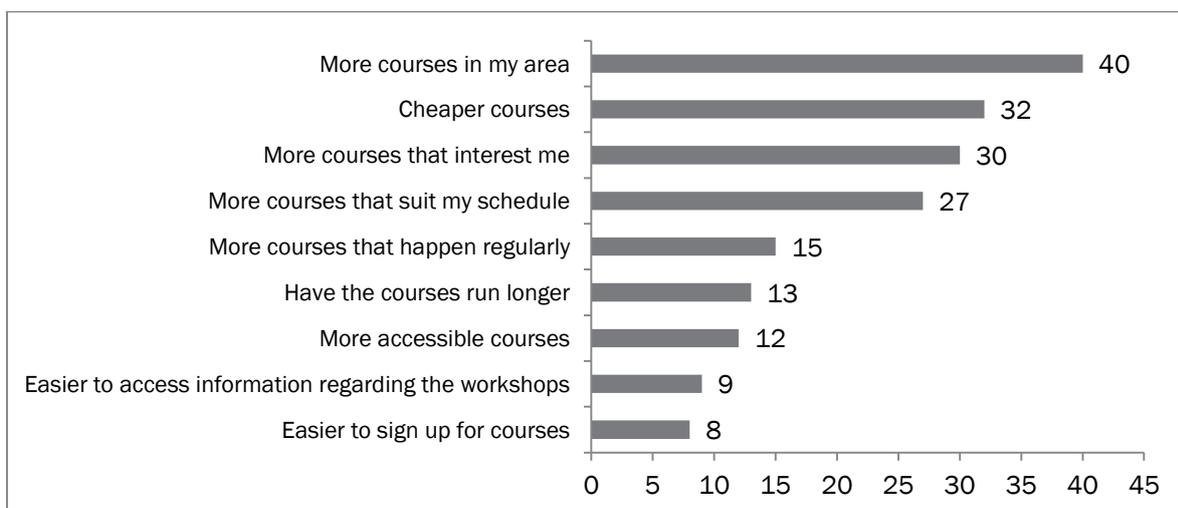


Figure 7: Improvements to Sweet Skills Courses

5. Conclusion

Overall, the Befriend program has been successful in achieving its intended outcomes. Since the program's inception in 2010, Befriend has grown to over 6,000 members and a large number of individuals have engaged with the program's many activities. There was overwhelming consensus among Befriend members that the events are fun and enjoyable, although the location of some events made it difficult for some to attend. Participants who had attended either the professional development training or eFriends training were satisfied with the training they had received.

There is evidence that the professional development training is achieving its intended outcomes of increasing community organisations' knowledge and skills. Participants spoke of how the training has helped them reevaluate and improve the way they work and this has started to benefit their clients.

The Befriend events have been shown to be an effective way for members to meet new people in a fun and safe environment. From the events, members have fostered new social connections, with some extending their friendships outside of Befriend.

A number of evaluation informants mentioned having improved social skills, specifically their ability to approach and talk to others. They also mentioned having gained new hobby skills.

There is also evidence that the increased social skills and connections Befriend members have formed, has led to reduced feelings of isolation, greater self-confidence, increased sense of independence and more inclusive attitudes and behaviours.

Early evidence suggests that the inclusive environment Befriend creates which allows members to feel comfortable in being themselves and has contributed to participants feeling more socially included, as well as having a greater sense of belonging.

One of the overarching aims of Befriend is for participants to internalise inclusivity as a personal value. The evaluation has shown that many Befriend members are connecting with others in an inclusive way. Moreover, they are aware that they are doing so. If, as the academic literature suggests, there is a link between behaviour and values, then it might be argued that Befriend is achieving this aim.

No questions directly asked about well-being. However, a link has been established between social connectivity and well-being. That being the case, Befriend has improved the social connections of, and between its members which suggest that, their well-being has improved at the same time.

6. Recommendations

1. The most noted barriers to attending Befriend events were a lack of conveniently located and/or scheduled events. Befriend has recently developed a partnership model whereby they work with local councils to encourage them to support the extension of the Befriend Network across their local government area. This is a practical solution that could address this barrier. It is therefore recommended that Befriend continues with this strategy to expand the offering of Befriend events and activities.
2. To assist in expanding the number of Befriend events held each month, it is recommended that Befriend continues efforts to attract and retain event hosts.
3. Based on the evidence, the professional development training has the potential to positively influence the behaviours and attitudes of many people working in the social service sector. The reach is likely to be extensive and outcomes very positive. On the contrary, although there have been positive outcomes from the eFriends and Starter Kit training, the reach of individualised training is limited. In addition, the effectiveness of these activities in reducing social isolation is not as compelling. Therefore, given resource constraints, it is recommended that Befriend further develop its professional development training program and reduce its focus on the provision of individualised social media and IT training support.
4. A small number of Befriend survey respondents indicated that they had a reduced sense of isolation, despite never having attended an event. While the reasons for this unknown, one theory is that receiving the monthly Befriend newsletter and other communications (e.g social media / online communications) was sufficient to reduce isolation. To ensure that these members continue to receive benefit from Befriend, it is recommended that Befriend investigates further what it is about their Befriend membership that these members most value.
5. This evaluation provides evidence of the effectiveness of Befriend at one point in time. However, it is important that as Befriend continues to grow and evolve that it embeds systems that support ongoing reflection and continuous learning. As such, it is recommended that Befriend develops a monitoring and evaluation plan which builds on the plan for this evaluation and the outcomes measurement framework.

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8. Appendix 1: MSC stories

1. I used to be really hard to be approached

I'm also an Event Host, which means I organise my own events. I think about what I need to do to make an event happen. I do lunches, and I recently done picnics in the park because now that the weather is warmer people don't want to be cooped up inside. I try to do some outdoor things that are fairly local to where I am.

I always had trouble having to explain my hearing, because I've got a hearing impairment. I wasn't shy, but I was just not up to meeting new people. Because I would meet one person, I would introduce myself, I would explain about my hearing and everything, and then I would move on to another person and I would have to repeat myself over and over again But now I can just walk up to someone that I don't know and introduce myself and just talk. I find it easy to explain about my hearing, and if I hold an event of my own I get everyone together at first so I don't have to keep saying the same thing over and over again.

Now I'm a lot more confident. If I'm on my own at a Befriend event, I can just approach people and talk to them if I want to. I've made friends, and I've kept in touch and we catch up. It means that I go out more often and I'm not sitting at home on my own, and it just means that I have more fun, I'm not bored.

[The most significant change was] the confidence, because like I said before, I used to be really hard to be approached because I couldn't hear properly, but now, it's a lot easier for me. [I'm] more independent on my own. I've become more people friendly and I'm easy to get on with.

2. I'm better at making sure that everyone feels heard

I [was] working at [service provider], which is where I still work now....One of the people that I worked with was a young person in their... early 20s who had an intellectual disability and they wanted to make some more friends because they lived at home with their family. So my coordinator suggested that I take them to Befriend, so that is what I did and that was my first involvement with Befriend.

I was just going there for work, I didn't really expect to enjoy it but then I did. Then I was like oh wow, apart from whatever the benefits of this organisation are to my client, I really like this organisation. I get a lot out of it. So then I started to gradually go to a few more Befriend events outside of work. Then from there I started to volunteer to host Befriend events as well. Because it was such a friendly community and there were so many great people there, you just get addicted, you keep going to it.

I am a naturally shy and introverted person. In social situations my default setting is to not talk. I find it hard to say hi...how are you? What's your name? Or just to talk with people that I [don't] know very well. While I was out and about on the street going to the shops or whatever I would make a point not to really talk to the people who were serving me food or putting my groceries in a bag or whatever.

After coming and being involved with Befriend I feel more comfortable in social situations. I am better at interacting with people. I feel less nervous interacting with people, I am better able to interact with people in a way that makes them feel included and happy and welcome. Those skills and that awareness came about as a result of attending Befriend events. Just to be clear...I still find it difficult but I find it much easier now than I did before.

I'm better at listening to people when they talk and also not just being a better listener but say if there were four people sitting around, I'm better at making sure that everyone feels heard. If there's one person who I can see is not contributing much to the conversation but I feel like they have something to say I will make a point to ask them a question or divert the conversation in a way that includes them. As a result of Befriend I am more aware of how my actions affect other people and I can do small things to make people feel more included or make their day a bit better.

I think the most significant change is that I am noticeably better at interacting with, talking to and including other people. [That is the most significant change for me because] no matter what you do in life, one of the constant things is that you're going to have to interact with people. Being a part of an organisation that makes me feel more comfortable interacting with people it makes me ... feel better at doing that. That is something that is going to improve my whole life for the rest of my life, every day. I'm going to make more friends who I would have never met, even outside of the Befriend context just because I feel more comfortable talking to people and that is something that I have already started to do.

3. I think its working.

[Befriend] came by our office ... a few times. I thought I should give them a try because I thought it would be fun to do some events I've been going to a few of their events for a few months now.... I felt like my social conversational skills could probably use some improvement, because I am mainly in my own disability community with a lot of blind people. I thought it would be a good place to work on that. [I've been] going to dinners, attending some of their classes. They have an event down in Fremantle that's a sing-along that I go to each month. It just really depends what looks interesting in the month, I'll sign up and do it if I'm interested

I'm starting to meet some people. Some people recognise me at different events.... I'm glad that's started to happen and I'm talking to people, people know who I am and I know who they are, so it's good.... I've been recognised quite a bit at the musical event where we do the singing and people seem to know me and say how's it going, how's your month been and all that, which is nice.

[I'm] doing activities that interest me, with other people. It's very nice that they are just very friendly. The host is usually happy to meet at venues .. or helps out if I need to get somewhere.... I got my husband to come along to a couple of the Befriend events, which he enjoyed. He doesn't get out of the house too much.

Befriend offers the informal disability support needed to [network]. So you know that you can go to their events and that the host will be happy to read the menu for you, or help you get up to the counter or checkout and all that.

[The most significant change for me is] ... being able to more easily talk to new people that I meet. [This was significant because] If I can talk to people more easily, then I guess I can expand my network and meet more people and possibly become friends with the people that are interesting... I think it's working, I think I'm able to now have better conversations than I could before ... when I go to real networking events I can actually have conversations.

4. That's the key to life really, is to have social connection

I joined Befriend in July of 2013. I volunteered as a project development officer.... I volunteered up until about June 2014. I stopped volunteering for Befriend because I then got involved in TEDxPerth. That was taking up more of my time so I didn't sustain volunteering for both organisations.

I [had] a lack of social connection because...the problem that I had with my life was that I didn't diversify my life beyond my work and academic studies. My social connections were definitely not as strong... because once you're in the workforce it's pretty hard to develop other circles. I needed to find platforms and ways of meeting new people and developing connections. My problem was that I was still battling mental health in those early years and looking for different ways to making social connections. In December 2010 I survived a suicide attempt, but it was through involvement of groups like Befriend that gave me meaning in my life that I didn't have prior to this attempt on my life.

Now....I've got myself in so many social circles - Befriend being one of them, TEDxPerth - I could probably name like 30 different circles in my life now because I've joined up to various things. I've made friendships and connections. I can always bump into them at a certain time and see what they're up to. I feel like I'm never alone. If I'm ever struggling someone will come out and chat to you. So it's good to know that you've got that support, even though you might not see them on a day-to-day basis. I feel like Befriend was that first platform where I could develop relationships with people on a quality type basis that wasn't my high school and uni circle.

I think social connection would definitely be the [most significant change because] it's the one [thing] that makes you, ultimately, the happiest. I mean money comes and goes, but connection with people, that doesn't go. So I think the key to life really, is to have social connection, that's ultimately what makes you happy and makes you healthier.

5. Knowing that you're never alone

I moved back to Perth in March this year which was about, what, six months ago... My parents and my brothers and my nephew are here. I know some people because I went to school here. But a lot of them have sort of moved on and I wouldn't really class them as really close friends.

So I joined some dance classes, I did some other activities ... Trying to make friends as an adult is really challenging because a lot of the time people have their friend sets, especially in Perth. People over the east are much more open to having friends, like new friends - whereas Perth, trying to make new friends as an adult is really hard. So ... that's...why I did the Befriend thing.

I found out about Befriend ... and then just decided to go along. There was a barn dance. I like dancing. ...That was my first introduction. Because I like dancing and it seemed like a fairly social, but not intimidating event to attend. From that I met a couple of people, formed a couple of good friendships... and since then have gone through and attended a few other events. Not as many as I'd like, only because of work schedules and because of where I'm living.

I'm fairly confident. I don't have many troubles walking up to people and having a conversation. If I were to go out dancing to say, the Mustang Bar I would just start to talk to people, but it's a little bit different. If you want to say, 'let's catch up for a coffee another time', they might not be open to that whereas Befriend you kind of know that people are going to be friendly and you'll have someone to talk to. That was kind of the reason I went... just to meet some new people and try something different.

I kind of feel a bit more confident knowing that if I'm at a loss for something to do and I feel a bit lonely... there's probably an event on...Sometimes [A Befriend member] might invite me to something and she'll bring some of her other friends ... or I'll invite her out and ...bring some of my friends along or there's a couple of other people from Befriend who have turned up as well and that's nice. So yeah, it's just knowing that you're never alone.

[The most significant change is] I have new friends. [I'm] meeting people who are open to having new friends... because it's not something to be sniffed at when you've only got a handful. I don't have large groups of friends, but I do value the individual relationships that I have. What do I value about having new friends? Different perspectives... You always learn something different from each person I guess.

6. Feeling accepted and more tolerant of others

[I got involved with Befriend] for my daughter's benefit. She has a mild intellectual disability - doesn't quite fit comfortably into one box or the other in society. So it was a way of her socialising with different people other than just small groups of people that have an intellectual disability.

[We go to] mostly to their outdoor [events]. Their sausage sizzles in the park, type of thing, concerts in the park, a couple of quiz nights. [My daughter] is passionate about the Befriend Ball. That's the highlight of her year. I like to go to ones where I can mix and mingle rather than sit down dinners.

I think the idea is ... to grow people and that's what I liked about it in the beginning. That it wasn't like you've got a disability and we're going to make sure you get there okay and.. ..you get home okay. It was allowing people to step out of their comfort zone a little. The other side of it, she's actually probably learnt to accept other people a little bit better too. She has been quite judgmental in the past - so I think she's learnt to be a little bit more tolerant of others.

I think where it has helped [my daughter] is feeling accepted. As I said, particularly at the Befriend Ball, she had never been to a ball before and for her to get dressed up and go somewhere, even if she only goes to that event and that's the only event in the year, it just makes her feel really special. What I like most about attending Befriend events, is the variety of people there. It makes me feel like maybe I haven't got one foot in the grave. That I've still got something to contribute and just because I might be two generations away or whatever, [I've still] got some value in the community.

[The most significant change] for [my daughter] I think it certainly has stretched her confidence in attending things that aren't supervised, like going to Disability Services funded events where you're picked up in a bus and off you go and everything is organised and you don't have a choice where you go or what you do. I think it's made her more confident.... I've noticed a change in her which I think translates to the fact she probably feels more part of the community.

For me I guess it just has stretched me out of my comfort zone a little bit... but made me more satisfied being out of my comfort zone... [This is significant because] it's given me a new interest I guess. I had recently retired. You sort of feel a bit redundant and facing retirement, what have you got to do, what does life hold? So by being involved... it just gave me a new interest. It encouraged me to do different things in the community, be involved, not just... wait for things to happen, if that makes sense.

7. A place where you can go and be yourself

My involvement in Befriend came about when my friends introduced me to Befriend... The first one I went to was a barbeque... I like to go to social events like Cafe Cafe on a Saturday. That's always nice. I like to go ten-pin bowling and I like the Befriend ball that they hold each year. That's really good.

Before [Befriend], I didn't have much of a social life. ... I was very shy. I didn't really want to hang with a lot of people, so I [didn't] have a lot of friends. I [didn't] know how to be independent. I'd still rely on my parents. ..Usually I [would] feel when I go to a place, like someone's judging me or I can't be who I am or they don't understand or accept me.

But since I've been going to Befriend, I also notice I've been less shy and just felt like going out, chatting, having a good time....I have learned a lot of new skills whilst being with Befriend, like making friends, how to introduce myself with confidence and being a better person to my family and everything like that. Befriend has helped me to be independent and go out ... be comfortable making new friends.

I think the confidence and being around lots of other people is the [most significant change] that Befriend's helped me with. [This is significant because] because I know I usually don't have the greatest of confidence. If I don't have confidence, then I just feel like I shut down and I don't want to be around people So having confidence means that I can go to an event and have a great time and get to know others and not be this person who doesn't want to go.

8. Something a bit more to look forward to

I've only been to a few [Befriend] activities. It started off with someone suggesting I join them as a way of getting me out of the house and meeting new people and just doing something out of my usual routine. It's difficult for me to meet new people. I know I am stuck in a rut.

The first ones I went to I was accompanied by someone. I think she's already a member of the Befriend group so the first couple...I met up with her and then we went to the thing. The fact of not going into them cold with someone that knew a bit about the organisation....was good, because... it was someone there that I already knew.

I've been to one of the coffee things and met some people there. I went to... a craft thing and learnt to make a dreamcatcher. That was fun. I had been wanting for ages to learn how to make them and I thought oh they're going to be hard to do, but they weren't.

I suppose I've got to learn to do things on my own. I mean I'm in my 60's now so it's about time I started doing stuff on my own. But, yeah, it's just a little bit nerve-racking but I'm determined to do it. I was thinking of going to one [in a few weeks]...I think that'll be my first one by myself, so that'll be a test. It's like a little kid when they're learning to walk sort of thing, the first steps. They're not sure what's going to happen; whether they're going to do the step or fall down.

[The most significant change is] when I get the timetable thing..... I try and plan out stuff and [it gives me] something a bit more to look forward to than just the usual daily or weekly stuff. [That is important to me because] if you don't get out of the house much you don't learn about all these sort of things that are out there for people to do. I know myself getting out decreases the boredom... I mean getting out and about and interacting with other people ... stops your brain stagnating.

9. Conquering challenges with growing confidence

I suffer from anxiety and it's something that has plagued me for a number of years. So just sort of being able to be out and in public view and not be anxious was a really big thing for me. I've been wanting to meet new people outside of my usual circles and it sounded like a really good way to do that. I was in a sort of bit of a slump in terms of feeling not so great and just wanting to do something different.

I was always very reserved. It took quite a long time before I'd sort of join in on a conversation with people I didn't know. Because - you always worry that everyone's going to be there with their friends and whether or not you'd be included. That sort of thing was hampering in my ability to function which is sort of a problem when you're in sales. I was sort of just hanging in there because it was a job.

[Now] I'm a lot more confident in talking to people that I've never met before. I've made some new friends. I guess I'm a bit more open to being myself from the outset. I'm quite happy to go to the workshops now by myself now. I feel a lot more at ease. I know what the deal is, how it works and that people are friendly. I've actually made a couple of friends through the courses as well. One particular person, we now go to the courses together. I'm better able to do that now... I'm feeling a bit more inspired about what I want to do with my life. I changed jobs.

I go through stages where I'll be fine and everything will be dandy. Then something will happen I'll just be a miserable mess for a while. [It's a] supportive environment, even though most of the people are complete and utter strangers.

Probably the confidence to actually go out and meet new people [is the most significant change]. I think my confidence has increased significantly. It's a whole lot less isolating. [This was significant because] you don't feel as alone and broken. You sort of feel like you're fitting in again.

It was a really good way to connect with people that I wouldn't normally encounter through my daily life. I guess you could say it restored my faith in humanity.

10. I can speak with confidence now

I do stuff that I know that I'm going to like. Like the sweet courses... Candle making, was one of the classes. Dream catching making... and the cooking classes. So yeah, I sign up for stuff that I know that I'm going to enjoy.

[Before] I didn't really like to attend to a lot of the things because my confidence skills weren't very high. The last few years, my confidence levels have changed. [Now] when I get put into a situation that I don't know the people, I'm quite comfortable in my own way.... I'm really quite chatty with people that I don't know. When I went to that woman's expo, I just started chatting to one of the [women]... I turned to this lady and just started chatting to her, and I didn't know who she was at all.

[The most significant change for me is] my confidence. [This is significant because] I wouldn't have been able to walk up to someone and say, hi, my name's [Brenda]. I can do that now.... I wouldn't have been able to do that... Before I used to speak really fast because trying to get it all out. Now that I can just talk normally I don't seem to have a speech problem. That's to do with confidence. Confidence that I know that I can speak normally.

11. Before I didn't even think to ask

I'm a support worker with [Organisation]. [My] first interaction with Befriend was through group training. I did two training [sessions]. Then I've been to a couple of events I can remember. The monthly meet-up in Subiaco, then I went to another one - the ball.

[The first training session] I think [was] talking about independence, talking about the four pillars. Then the second training was all about communication and assistance to people ... and tailoring your support to what they really need.

[Before Befriend] I was just running through the motions really. So I [would] meet the person ... I'm going to be working with and they usually run through what they do normally.... I guess they're comfortable with the routine... I'm not sure how much they enjoy it sometimes, but I didn't even think of asking them....

[Before] I felt like I was just kind of toeing the line and just doing the same things over and over again without direction... There was on the job training for my role but not much more than that. This is the change. [After the training] I started thinking [of asking] this person would they actually like this?

[The most significant change] I guess is that... I'm working with my guys. So I've asked point blank - is there anything I can do to help you feel more social? Do you want to go out more? Do you feel like you have enough friends in your life? Do you feel like you belong? I guess I wasn't even thinking of that before.

Yeah, so thinking of different situations that pop up like I'll take someone to a café... The owner is very welcoming and remembers his name, so that you know it's a really good place to take someone to. I guess before they're concerned mostly about prices. But I'm like 'oh we could go to that café. That lady is really nice.'

I guess that is the most important [because] that's why I'm there - to support this person and if ... I'm not giving the full benefit ... you know it's a bit empty.

12. Finding myself again

I was looking to get back out there socialising with people and I googled and Befriend popped up. I started to feel like I just didn't belong anywhere anymore and I wanted to belong again and expanding my friend circle ... having fun and making new friends.

I was in domestic violence. My brother has been quite emotionally and physically and verbally abusive all my life. I was in a really dark place with depression.... The domestic violence and especially after losing a child and then cancer, I kind of felt like a broken model. I still feel like a broken model in some ways but I'm fixing myself. I started believing the negative things I was getting told. I only left the house to go to medical appointments.

It's taken 27 years but I finally broke away from that because of Befriend....I've been put down so much that I thought I deserved the cancer, I thought I deserved to have no one. I thought I deserved to sit in an empty house by myself because I wasn't worth anything.

Now I feel like I am, I'm worth the world.... I've made some great friends through Befriend, event hosts and also just other members of Befriend's community. I make friends nearly every day. I am mostly doing co-hosting, just supporting anyone I can. Then hopefully this year I will start taking on the host role more and more. It's given me the confidence that I didn't think it was going to.

Now even if I don't have a medical appointment I get out of the house every day. It doesn't matter if I'm just going for a walk down to the park. I get out of the house every day. It's given me my life back. ... I've finally realised that I am enough. People do want to listen to what I have to say. So it wasn't just everyone else excluding me, it was me excluding myself. I've learnt that I shouldn't exclude myself because there's always someone out there that's willing to talk.

[The most significant change as a result of Befriend was] breaking away from domestic violence. Feeling that I am needed and wanted in life because I was in a really dark place ... It's got to a point now, six months down the track, and I'm not on anti-depressants anymore because just the way ...all the members and the event hosts and coordinators ... have made me feel like I'm just one person but I'm important.

[That is significant to me] because I felt like I lost myself through cancer and I'm finally getting to know ... the new person and it's really exciting and fun. I love the fact that I now have the confidence to go up and speak to anyone. I don't lock myself away anymore. I am not afraid to go sit at a café and have lunch by myself because by the end of lunch I'm normally talking to someone.... I'm finally finding myself again because of that confidence and that's the main thing to me.

13. Trying new things and meeting new people

My friend told me that she heard about [Befriend] through another friend, and that there was going to be a barbeque on Sunday. Then we went to Befriend and I had a really good time... It was more or less to meet new people, have new experiences.

I did have a bit of a social life [before] but it wasn't as good as it's been since Befriend. I'm glad that I've actually tried new things. I was keen to actually experience more things. I think I've been this month about two, three times. There certainly are times that I've actually gone to almost every event. They've had a fair few dog walks along the beach...I did that. It wasn't horrible but wouldn't necessarily be in a rush to do it again. I like the active ones. I have done things like tennis, I might have even done soccer once.

Sometimes I'll go with some of my friends. [It's] always really, really cool when I can actually go with someone I know... But I'm happy to do it by myself as well. Generally, I'm a participant but I'm really, really determined to actually host an event again.... You learn a different way to interact with people. Because when you're organising you need to get everyone together, so you need to be able to talk a bit more. With hosting [there are] many things they need to do. It's just freaking amazing.

I would say generally, most of the time, it's been pretty good. I think most of [the events], for me personally, have run quite smoothly. It generally depends how receptive [people] are. If they're pretty receptive it makes it so much easier to actually talk to them.

[The most significant change for me was] learning how to host an event. Having an understanding of what hosts go through before they can actually host an event. I guess it gives me even more respect for hosts. Being a host it was a bit more difficult than I thought, but I'm glad I did it that's for sure. [After being a host] I guess I feel more confident now that I can approach people a lot easier. Rather than before, I was a little hesitant. Still am sometimes, but not as much. It makes me feel good. Getting out of the house and going to new places and meeting new people; all that's really, really good for me. I would recommend it because it gets you out there meeting new people.

14. Helping clients to do what they want

I did all the training. We have had 4 or 5 seminars now. I've come in a few times and sat with [a Befriend staff member] and we have gone through individual [...clients, and she has suggested Befriend events.

I have been to some Befriends events with clients. We went to the BBQ and [are going on the] dog walking in a couple of weeks...The biggest barrier we face is getting people's confidence to go to events. It takes a while to get the ball rolling and to get them going to new events.

[The clients] love it. Everyone there has faced the same barriers that they have. [Befriend] are really welcoming. It's all been very positive. I went to the ball in an [organisational] capacity. We took 5 clients with us. We were their date for the night. Made sure they were OK. Made sure they weren't drinking too much.

In the [training] seminars, we focused on two customers from [the organisation]. One customer has totally changed everything. All the support workers sat down and had a big brainstorm of what we could do. Their ... timetable hours have changed. She is now going to lessons twice a week. She was going to a specialised disability class and we now have her at Beatty park in an everyone-can-go, run-of-the-mill normal aquatics class. That was a big change, she loves that now. She hates the fact that she goes to things with disability. Also with that, we actually applied for extra funding and got five extra hours, so that was pretty cool. That was just from that brainstorming, of working out what she needs.

Another client [name removed], also went to the ball, very hesitant to try new things. But now she has agreed to go to the Befriend BBQ on Sunday. That's a big step for her. She goes to ...a dancing class, only for disability clients. She doesn't like the fact that they can't choose who she hangs out with, who she dances with.

Before Befriend, it was very much you go in there, you do your job, and you get out. Support workers go and get a support plan.... Let's go to the zoo, let's go to Scitech, you do your job... Lots of supports are used for family respite rather than actually doing something that the client wants. So the family are pleased - take care of him for five hours. They have things they need to do. They have lives.

So now, we think 'what can we do in those five hours'. We find an interest that that person has, whether that's gardening or cooking, or for example cats. For one client, she loved cats....They used to just do whatever. Now they have been volunteering at the cat haven. Now she has purpose, she has a role, she is volunteering. She is hanging out with people who have similar interests. She is being an active participant in the community and volunteering in an organisation in which she loves. That just came from that one simple idea that 'she loves cats'.

For me, that has been the biggest thing is getting everyone in a room together to talk about one person that we all know well, and want to help, then coming up with a list of things we can do. It's fantastic. Befriend is the one who did this. They got us together. They ran us through the framework. They said 'What are the interests, what activities could you do for that interest'.... It wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for [Befriend]. [They have] a great framework – it's so simple, and so good.

15. It has an impact on the organisation's social mission

I have a perspective from a partner organisation. But I am also a befriended member. I have been to a lot of events. I went to the choir, the quiz, the barn dance... I've been to a few quizzes, they were cool.

[Our organisation] is a support provider, so we support people with a disability, with serious mental health, who are older... and with the best of intentions we arguably support some of the most socially isolated people in our community.

My first contact with befriended was at our AGM, where Nick came and did a talk about what Befriended did. And I suppose at that point ..the relationship was purely financial. [The organisation] had some reserves... for a social investment fund.

[Since then] Befriended has come and done some training with our staff. I think Befriended has taken a slightly different track this time, saying that actually if we invest in the staff, help them to connect people, teach them skills. Overwhelmingly people have said it was the best training they have ever been on. It's brilliant. They learnt lots of stuff about how to connect people. People have loved it.

[There are also] two projects that we have done [with Befriended]. They were not easy projects. There were some people who were part of that, who are really tricky, who are in and out of Graylands every other week, whose behaviour is pretty interesting at the best of times. But Befriended almost unequivocally were going to make it work. They were never going to say "it's not for that person". So that whole approach has an impact upon our staff. Inclusion means everybody, not just the easy people.

I suspect the training will have had a big impact. I think probably the whole experience really talks to an issue that if you don't keep highlighting it, you can just gloss over it. Our staff go and support people who live in their own homes. So you might go and support, say my Nanna, who doesn't see a soul other than you, and you see them once a week, and you do their shopping. I suppose you can quite quickly get used to it – that I'm here to support you to do your shopping once a week – but that's not good enough. It's not good enough that woman is sitting there week-in-week-out waiting for one of our staff to get there. Without the projects around Befriended, it can easily just go away – even though we all know it is what kills people, it's the stuff that life is about. Yeah, it's important that Nanna gets her shopping, but surely it's more important that someone gives a s**t that she is alone.

I think [the most significant change is] probably the people things. For individuals, but I also think for our staff. The issue I was talking about before, that we don't always get paid to think about social's people connections, but we know it has such a big impact on people's health, their wellbeing, their quality of life, that we to keep finding ways to support people with it. And the government are not always brilliant at funding that. As long as people have food and shelter.

.. I think it has an impact on [the organisations] social mission; around we don't just exist to get people out of bed. What is the point of getting out of bed if you nothing to do or nothing to look forward to? So I think it's another strategy of how we focus on that stuff, albeit that often it is not paid.

16. Making new friends

I found Befriend through my employment agency who I was registered with quite a few years ago. From there I contacted Befriend; spoke directly with the wonderful Nick Maisey. Nick signed me up and from there I started going to Befriend events; the small events and the big events. Absolutely fantastic. One hundred per cent what I expected and met some new people, made some friends.

I enjoy ... them very much, both the small events and the big events. I've been to some of the Café Café events. I've also been to the Befriend ball each year. I've been to some of the San Churro events because I love going to San Churro a lot. Just eating food, drinking and chatting to people who I meet through going to Befriend, which I think is a great thing for me to be doing because that way I'm hoping to make more new friends.

I'm going to start hosting events very soon. More food events like more dining events where we go to cafes, restaurants. I'm really passionate about food. I just went to the most recent Befriend orientation session for event hosts and event co-hosts. That went really well, so I'm going to start hosting in February hopefully.

[The most significant change for me is] making new friends in Perth... building on my social connections. When I first moved to Perth back in 2010 I didn't have very many friends. When I'm not with friends or family I can feel a bit lonely and depressed... but after I started going to Befriend events I feel quite positive... I think they're very nice people. I've become friends with quite a few of them. Making new friends, meeting the people who I've met, having fun, keeping myself occupied, not being so lonely. When I've got company as long as I'm with them I'm always feeling happy.