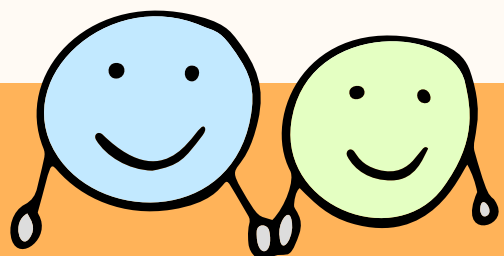


Ffrindia' Newydd Project Report

July 2025 - June 2026



Ffrindia'
Newydd



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1 Introduction

The project was funded by the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) from July 2025 to June 2026. The scheme was established to support individuals in the community experiencing loneliness, while helping to build their confidence, wellbeing and independence. Its primary objective was to recruit, train and support volunteers to provide befriending support to people aged 50 and over who would benefit from companionship, encouragement, or assistance to reconnect with their local community.

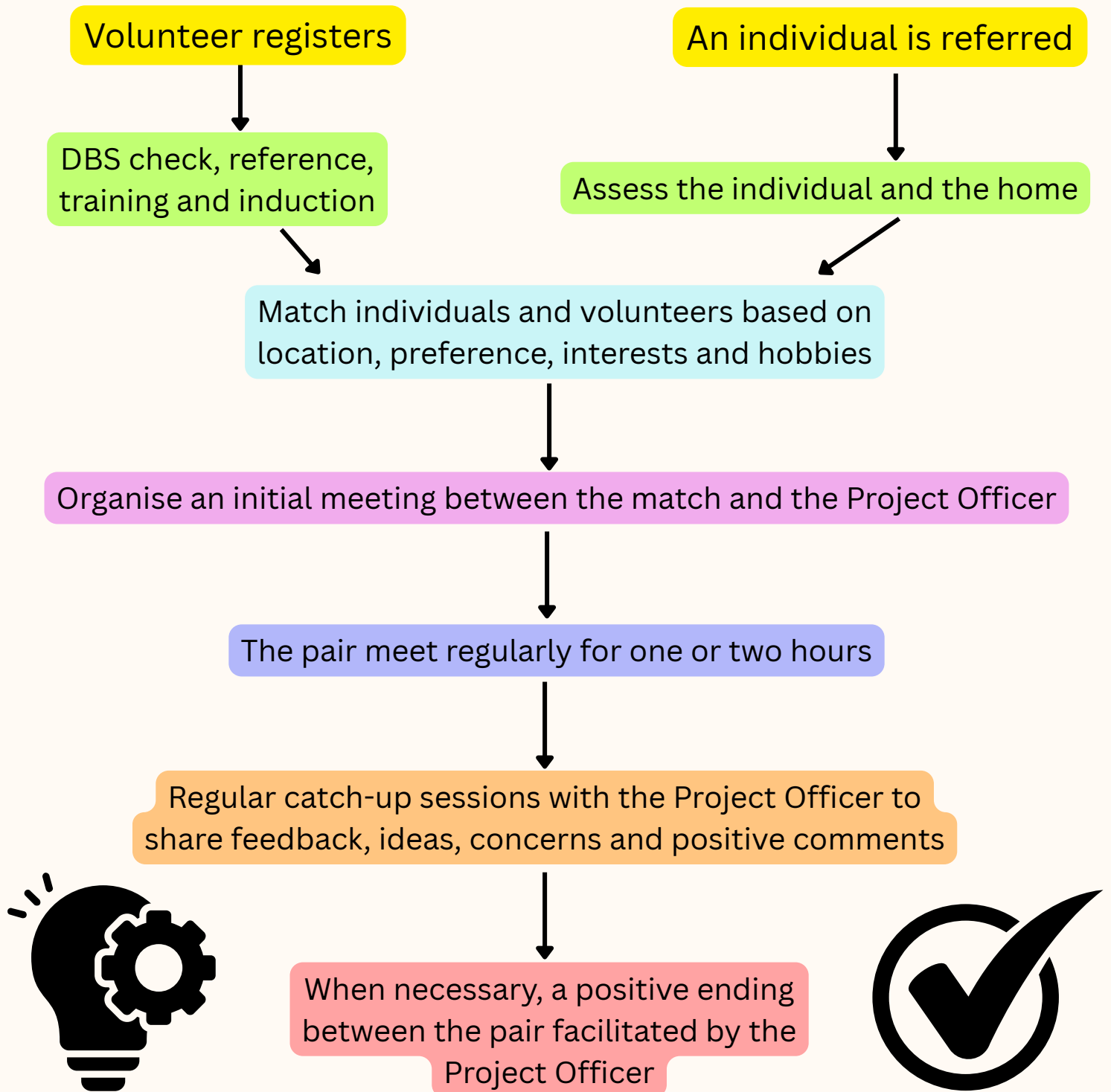
Befriending is about providing meaningful companionship, social connection and friendship to those who may feel isolated or in need of additional support. Through the Ffrindia' Newydd project, volunteers offered a range of support, including friendly conversations, encouragement to take part in walks and activities, and assistance to engage with local community opportunities.

Individuals could be referred to the scheme by social services, third sector organisations, social prescribing teams, family members or friends. Self-referrals were also welcomed. The project operated exclusively within the Arfon area of Gwynedd.



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How does the project work?



2 The importance of befriending

Vivek Murthy, the surgeon general of the United States, warned in 2023 that "social disconnection" has a similar effect on mortality as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. The same study found that lonely people were 50% more likely to die prematurely than people with strong social relationships.

The statistics discussed here show that there is an epidemic of loneliness across the world.



The effects of loneliness can be particularly challenging in rural areas such as Gwynedd, where individuals face additional obstacles when trying to meet and socialise with others. These include factors such as limited public transport services, families moving away from the area, individuals moving to a new community without a social network or local connections, and language-related challenges. These examples consistently came up in conversations with individuals referred to the project, highlighting the real barriers that can contribute to feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

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Declining health or bereavement can contribute significantly to loneliness, especially among older people who face additional challenges such as losing the ability to drive, losing friends or family, a decline in hearing or sight, or limited mobility. As a result, it can be difficult to maintain existing social connections or create new ones. In addition, stigma can prevent some individuals from seeking the help available to them.

Befriending is a simple, accessible and unthreatening way to tackle loneliness. By providing a regular opportunity to meet, chat and build new relationships, it offers valuable social contact to people who may not see anyone else for days at a time. It also gives something positive to look forward to and contributes to better emotional and mental wellbeing.

The value of this approach is reflected by the hundreds of befriending projects operating across the UK, including over 200 listed by Befriending Networks. This shows the popularity of befriending and its effectiveness in supporting individuals experiencing loneliness.

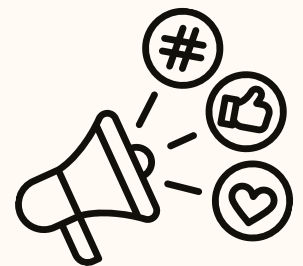
According to a study by the UK Government, between October 2024 and March 2025, 7% of adults said they often or always felt lonely.

3 Marketing methods

Raising awareness of the scheme was a key part of establishing the project during the first few months. There was a focus on promoting and developing a marketing plan, along with creating a new logo and branding to give the project a clear identity. Recruiting volunteers is becoming more challenging, so effective marketing was essential in order to reach potential volunteers and highlight the importance of befriending.

Between September 2025 and June 2026, a variety of methods were used to promote the project and spread the message:

- Posters and pamphlets distributed locally
- Various posts on social media platforms
- Promotional items such as bags, pens, stress balls and notepads
- Attend community events, including Marchnad Lleu, Dolgellau 'Good Health' event and Age Cymru Knitting Club
- Presentations about the project at meetings and events, including the AGM and an Age Friendly Partnership meeting
- Contacting local organisations directly to develop relationships
- Taking part in national and international campaigns, such as Befriending Week and Volunteers' Week
- Advertise in local papers and on the Bro360 website
- Interview on the Pryhawn Da programme on S4C
- Befriending Networks membership



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ganaf i'w gysylltu'n eiddo barod i ddiol heb dderbyniad. Mae'r ffrindiau'n gysylltu'n eiddo barod i ddiol heb dderbyniad. Mae'r ffrindiau'n gysylltu'n eiddo barod i ddiol heb dderbyniad.

thasol. Yma y cynhaliwyd Aelwyd o dan arweiniad O P Huws. Hwys Moseley a roedd Carys yn hysgu. Roeddwn yn ysgaflyddys d yn 10 mlynedd oed. Roedd yr n bwyais iawn i bobl ffrindiau yn eiddo yn cael cystadlu yn erbyn d eraill, cael chwarae badminton, eiddo'rfaeth cyfocs, cymysgu mynd i nofio i Bala Bangor ac versylla i'r Bala hefyd a chanu o dan. Mawr yw fy niolch i bawb a i'r Aelwyd.

Ffrindia' Newydd

Ydych chi'n chwilio am gyfle gwirfoddoli ystyrlon?

Oes gennych chi awr neu ddwy i'w sbario bob wythnos i wneud gwr wahaniaeth yn eich cymuned?

Mae'r prosiect cyfeillio **Ffrindia' Newydd** eisiau gwirfoddolwyr brwdfrydig i gefnogi unigolion dros 50 oed sydd angen cwmnïaeth.

Am fwy o wybodaeth cysylltwch gyda bcca.gruffydd@mantellgwynedd.com 01286 672 626 | www.mantellgwynedd.com

Neu sganwch y cod QR i gofrestru



WE'RE SUPPORTING...

Befriending Week

1-7 November

Ffrindia' Newydd Befriending Networks



Ffrindia' Newydd

Gwnewch Wahaniaeth yn eich Cymuned

Gwirfoddolwch gyda ni!

Ydych chi'n nodi rhywun sy'n hysgu'n unig neu'n ystyrlon?

Proffws yn eiddo neu'n ddiol heb dderbyniad a wneud gwr wahaniaeth yn eich cymuned.

Mae'r prosiect cyfeillio **Ffrindia' Newydd** eisiau gwirfoddolwyr brwdfrydig i gefnogi unigolion dros 50 oed sydd angen cwmnïaeth.

Am fwy o wybodaeth cysylltwch gyda bcca.gruffydd@mantellgwynedd.com 01286 672 626 | www.mantellgwynedd.com

Neu sganwch y cod QR i gofrestru

mantellgwynedd

Gwirfoddolwch gyda ni! Volunteer with us!

Beth? What? Cyfeillio gydag unigolyn dros 50 sy'n teimlo'n unig Befriend an individual over 50 who feels lonely

Ffrindia' Newydd



mantellgwynedd

Gwirfoddolwch gyda ni! Volunteer with us!

Beth? What? Cyfeillio gydag unigolyn dros 50 sy'n teimlo'n unig Befriend an individual over 50 who feels lonely

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4 Volunteers

29

Number of people that showed an interest in volunteering with the project by filling in a registration form

Number of volunteers that went through the process of induction, training and a DBS check

14

4

Number of volunteers that were matched with an individual and now meet regularly

Reasons to volunteer:

24

“To feel useful”

“Gain new experiences”

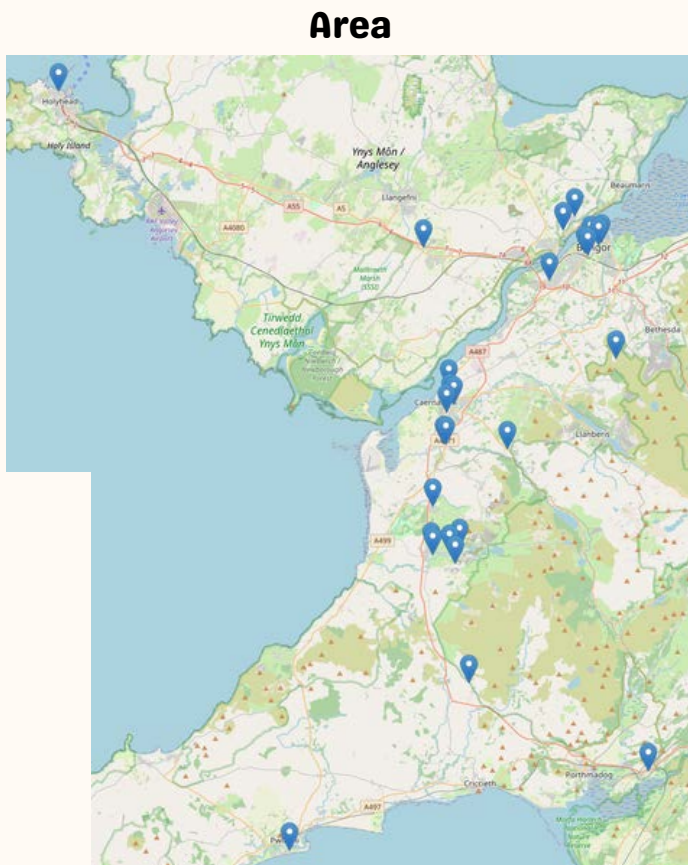
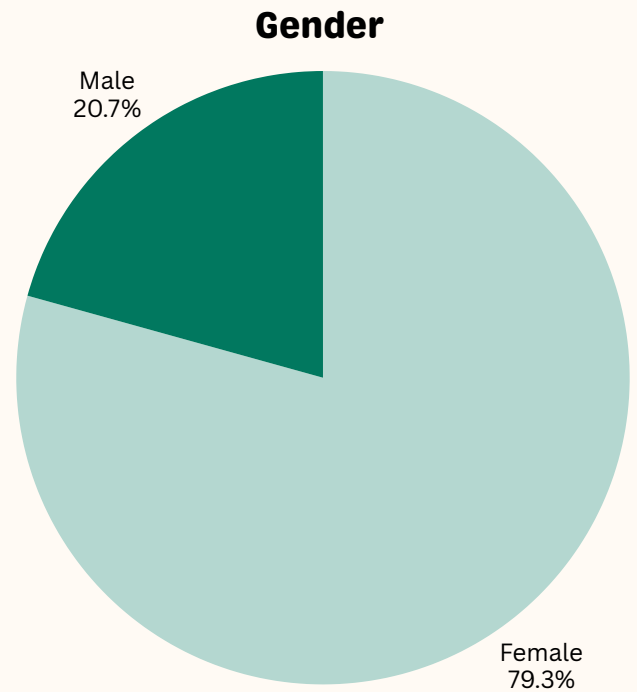
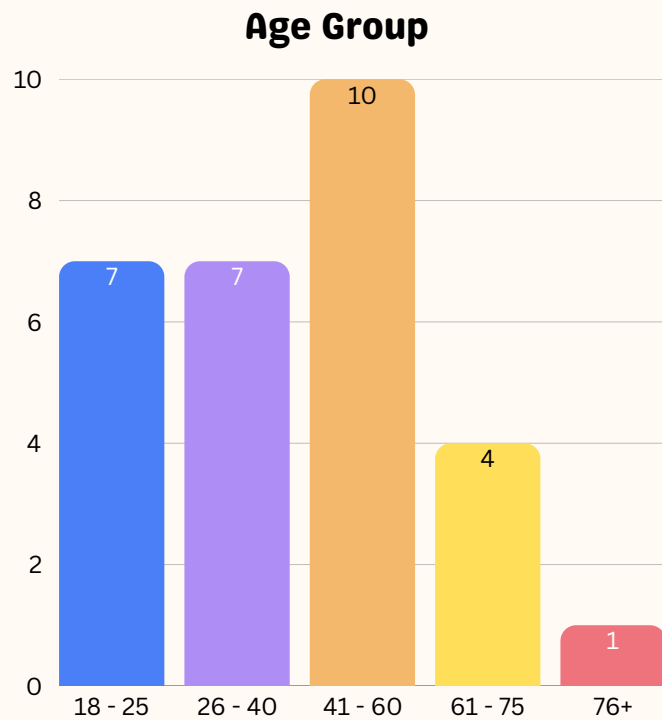
19

18

“Personal satisfaction”

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Breakdown of the numbers:



The most popular areas:

- Bangor
- Caernarfon
- Penygroes

5 Individuals

The individuals who were referred to the project varied considerably in terms of their personal circumstances. However, most of them had some common experiences, whether that was living alone following a bereavement or feeling increasingly isolated after having to stop driving due to a decline in their physical health. Above all, the most common factor was they recognised that they experienced loneliness, had fewer opportunities to socialise with others, or felt disconnected from their community.

Interestingly, some of the reasons that led individuals to be referred to the project were similar to the reasons that attracted volunteers to take part. Both parties appreciated the opportunity to meet new people, build relationships and socialise with others in the community. Consequently, it is important to emphasise that the effect of the befriending scheme extends to the individual and the volunteer alike, with both parties benefiting positively from the relationship.



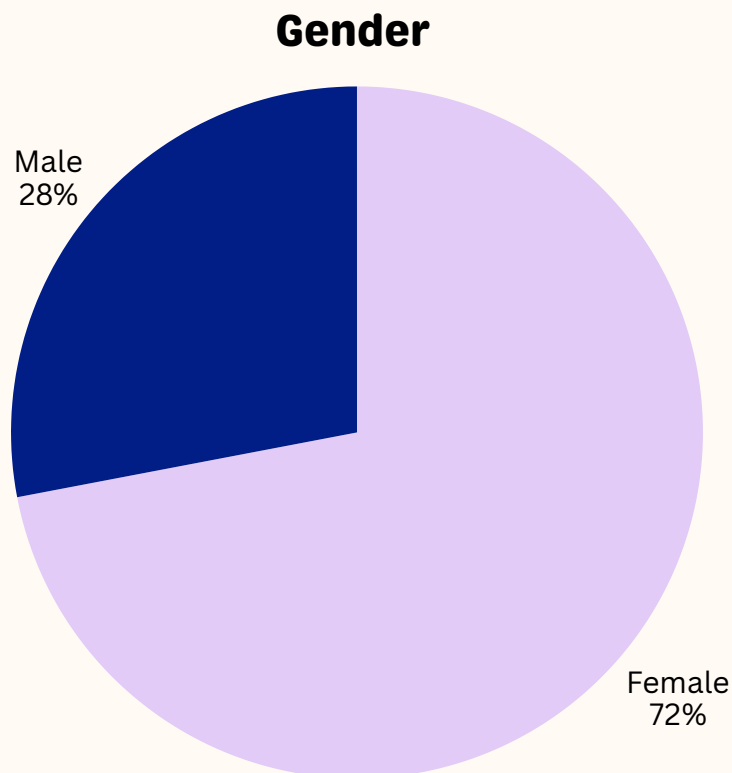
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Due to the demographics of the individuals referred to the project, it was more likely that circumstances would change suddenly. During the project period, there were deaths, illnesses and changes in personal needs which meant that some individuals were unable to continue to participate, either temporarily or permanently.

25

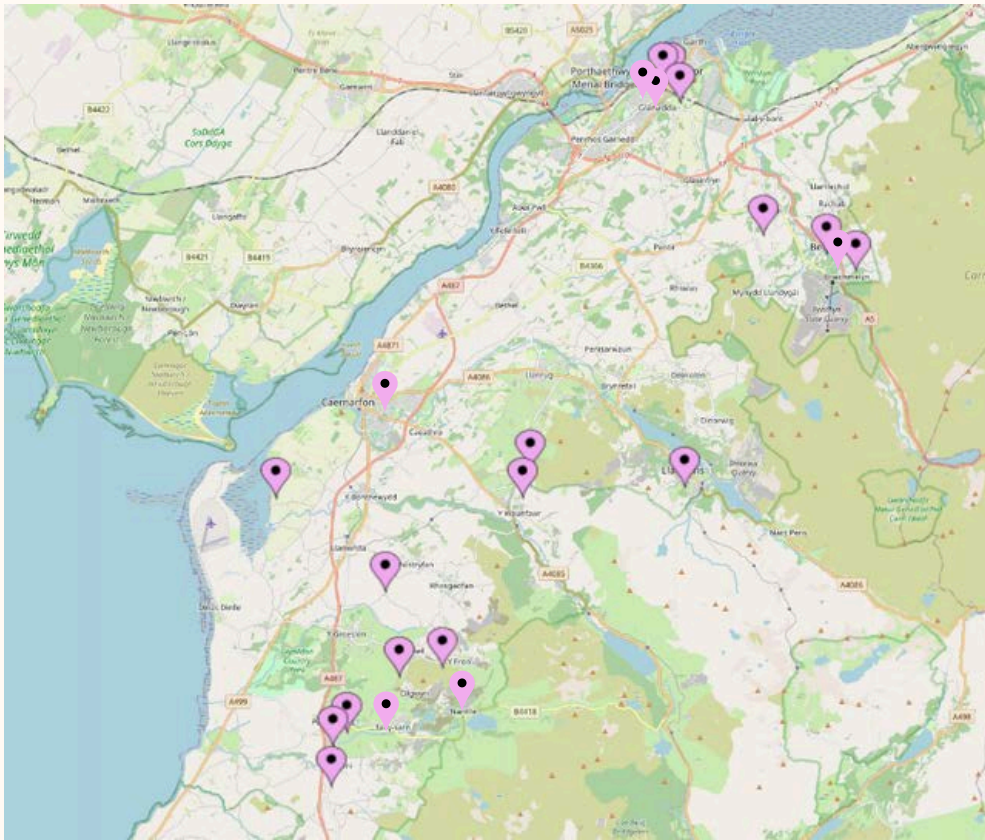
**Number of individuals
referred to the project**

Breakdown of the numbers:



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Area



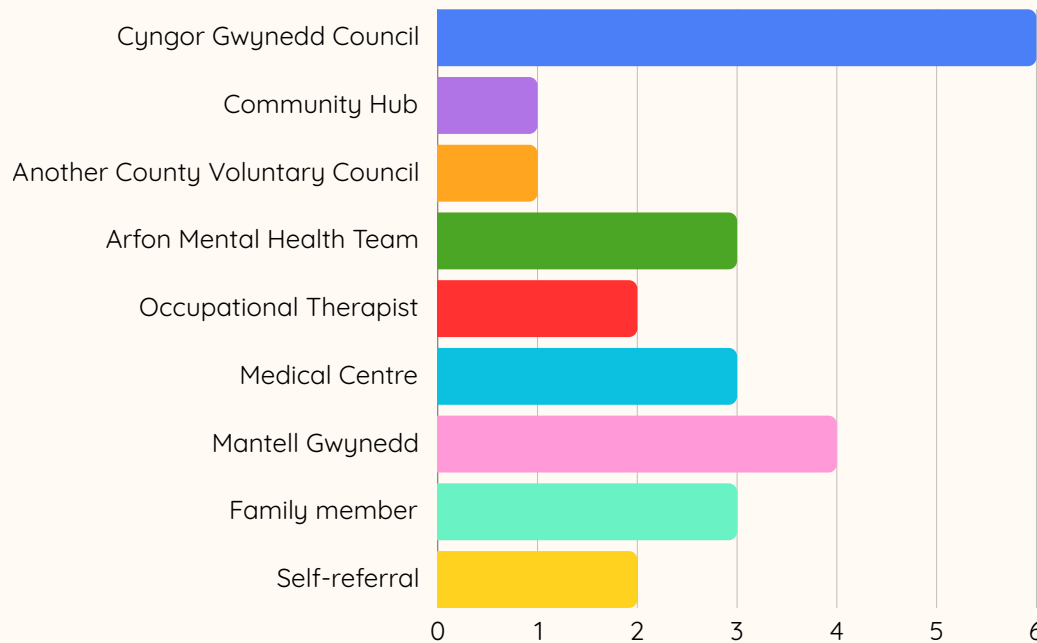
The most popular areas:

- Dyffryn Nantlle
- Bangor
- Dyffryn Ogwen

Areas not on the map, outside the operating area:

- Tywyn (twice)
- Betws y Coed

Where did the referrals come from?



6 Case Study a) Connection that Counts

Peter Marshall is a volunteer befriender with the Ffrindia' Newydd befriending project. Since November 2025, he has been visiting Mr R regularly, and by now the two have developed a warm and valuable relationship over a period of approximately five months. Peter described his experience of volunteering as "thought-provoking and rewarding."



In 2023, Peter lost his partner, which had a major impact on his life and mental well-being. Following the bereavement, he was confined to the house for around 18 months and felt more isolated than ever. After a holiday at the beginning of 2025 that changed his perspective, he decided to look for a volunteering opportunity to help him reconnect with his life and community.

He was referred to the Gwynedd Volunteer Centre by Age Cymru, and his first volunteering role was arranged at a food bank in Blaenau Ffestiniog. Having seen the positive impact that volunteering had on his life, Peter was supported to take on an additional role with the Ffrindia' Newydd project.

Through the project, Peter is now a befriender to Mr R, who had been confined to his home for five months when they were matched and was experiencing social isolation. Peter visits him once a week without fail, usually for about an hour and a half.

Case Study a) Connection that Counts

It soon became clear that they shared similar interests, including woodworking and Sudoku. Although football is one of Mr Roberts' main interests and Peter is not usually a big fan of the game, Peter set out to learn more about the world of football in order to help build a meaningful relationship with him. The weekly visits have now become an important and valued part of Peter and Mr R's weeks.

Although Mr R lives with his wife, the opportunity to spend time with someone outside his home, especially male company, is very important to him. As he rarely leaves the house, these visits have become a weekly highlight and provide regular social contact which helps reduce loneliness.

From a personal perspective, Peter said volunteering played a key role in rebuilding his confidence, as well as giving a sense of purpose and structure to his week. By volunteering regularly, he has moved from a period of isolation to once again playing an active role in the life of the community.

“My befriending experience demonstrates the value of flexible, relationship-based volunteering models in addressing social isolation.”



Case Study b)

The Power of Companionship

Mr R* has been receiving support through the Ffrindia' Newydd befriending project since November 2025. He was referred to the project by a Social Worker, as he is housebound due to various health conditions and experiences social isolation as a result. Following an initial visit by the project coordinator to explain the project, Mr R decided that the opportunity to have a volunteer befriender was something he was keen to try, as a way of meeting new people without having to leave his home.

Shortly afterwards, Mr R was paired with a volunteer befriender called Peter, and since then the two have been meeting weekly at Mr R's home. During these sessions, they spend time chatting leisurely about a variety of topics, and the time tends to pass very quickly.

Although the relationship took a little time to develop at first, it now feels completely natural and comfortable. Mr R feels that he can talk freely about anything, and the meetings do not feel forced or formal.

"The ability to connect with someone outside my usual circle with completely different experiences has been a terrific experience."

Mr R*



Case Study b)

The Power of Companionship

The relationship has had a positive impact on Mr R's wellbeing, giving him something to look forward to each week and providing regular social contact. The visits have become one of the highlights of his week, helping to reduce feelings of loneliness and bringing more positivity to his everyday life.

The impact of the project has also extended to his wife, Mrs R. As she does not feel comfortable leaving Mr R alone due to concerns about his safety, Peter's presence during his weekly visits gives her peace of mind. This enables her to go out and attend a social group, knowing that Mr R is in safe hands and has company. As a result, the arrangement provides her with a valuable break as a carer.

Both of them praised the pairing with Peter, noting how important it is to have the right match in such a relationship. They feel that the two have "clicked", and believe that this has been key to the success of the relationship. For Mr R, this friendship has become an important part of his life, improving his well-being and adding an element of meaningful social connection to his week.



*Names have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals.

Case Study c) A Cuppa and Connection

Llinos was keen to be part of a project that responds directly to the challenges of loneliness and isolation in the community. As she has worked in the field of mental health and community work for a number of years, she said that tackling loneliness and supporting others has always been very important to her. Llinos decided to join the Ffrindia' Newydd Project after seeing an advertisement shared on social media.

Llinos was paired with Ruth*, who lives in a remote and isolated area in Gwynedd, to support her by offering conversation and companionship. Llinos described the visits as relaxed and meaningful. Usually, the two meet at Ruth's home for a chat and a cuppa. When the weather's nice, they spend time sitting in the garden listening to the birds and sharing stories and memories of life. Llinos and Ruth, through their conversations, have discovered many common interests even though there is a 37 year age difference between them.

Llinos described the experience as one that has been beneficial not only for the individual receiving support, but for her as well. With two jobs and other volunteering commitments, Llinos finds it easy to forget the importance of slowing down and taking time to connect with others. She said that these weekly visits, the conversations, the laughter and the gathering of stories have been a "tonic" to her own well-being.

She also shared the effect that the befriending relationship has had on Ruth. Ruth now looks forward to the visits every week, especially as she doesn't leave her home often, except for hospital appointments. In Llinos' words, their conversations "have helped to reduce her worries and calm her mind at times when life can be challenging and frustrating."

"A valuable opportunity to create a connection, listen and share mutually beneficial moments."

~ Llinos

*Name has been changed to protect the identity of the individual.



7 Looking back, moving forward

What went well?

Although this was a pilot project, the first year provided an opportunity to establish a strong foundation for the scheme. A clear identity was developed for the project by creating a logo and branding, making the work of producing marketing and promotional materials much easier and more consistent. At the same time, clear policies, processes and operating systems were established to ensure that the scheme ran safely and effectively. The policy for lone-working, for example, was praised by external organisations as an example of good practice. Forms, induction processes and other documents were also reviewed and modified following feedback from volunteers and stakeholders, ensuring that the service developed continuously.

The relationship between the individuals and the volunteers who were matched is one of the project's greatest strengths. Feedback from the volunteers and individuals was consistently positive, with many noting the difference the friendship made to their everyday life. In addition, positive feedback was received from referrers and members of the families individuals, with some partners and carers stating that they also benefit by having a small break as the individual spends time with their befriender.

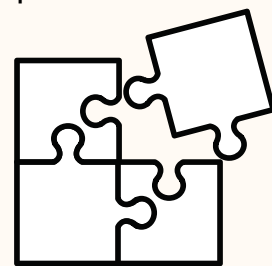


Challenges and lessons learned

One of the main challenges encountered during the pilot was the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checking process. While this is an essential part of safe recruitment and safeguarding procedures, the process was often lengthy and time-consuming, which could delay volunteer onboarding. As the process is predominantly completed online, it presented additional barriers for some volunteers, particularly those who were less confident using digital services or who experienced difficulties accessing the required supporting documentation, such as paper bank statements. Nevertheless, securing a full-time officer enabled us to provide a face-to-face and hands-on service.

The rural nature of Gwynedd also posed a significant challenge. The great distances between some volunteers and individuals, together with the lack of reliable public transport in some areas, meant that it was not possible to match some individuals, although they would likely have been very suitable for each other. One of the solutions to this was to pair volunteers with individuals in their local area and work with community transport schemes wherever possible.

Although there was considerable initial interest in the scheme, recruiting and retaining volunteers was an ongoing challenge. A good number of people signed up, but many withdrew before starting to volunteer due to personal circumstances such as illness, caring responsibilities, work commitments or changes in their personal situation. This highlighted the importance of maintaining regular contact with potential volunteers throughout the recruitment process.



What's next?

The project has clearly shown that there is a need for a befriending service to tackle loneliness in our communities. The work of promoting the scheme, together with the constant flow of references, provided evidence of the demand for opportunities to foster friendship as a way of reducing loneliness and improving well-being.

As pilot funding was only available for a one-year period, the primary aim of the project during its first year was to demonstrate the need for a service of this type and gather evidence of its impact. The evidence gathered clearly shows that the demand exists and therefore the focus is now on securing further funding for the next two or three years. Ideally, two officers would work on the project in order to provide the capacity required. Recruiting and the induction of volunteers, organising references and DBS checks, marketing the scheme, building relationships with referrers and arranging visits with individuals are all time-consuming processes. From a safety perspective, the lone-working procedure required two members of staff to be present on home visits when the referrer is unable to be there.



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Looking ahead, it will be important to further strengthen relationships with local agencies, community hubs and partner organisations to ensure the project remains visible and accessible within the community. Continued engagement with these networks will help increase awareness of the service, encourage appropriate referrals and support the recruitment of new volunteers. There are also opportunities to enhance the ongoing support provided to volunteers once they begin their role. For example, using WhatsApp or other communication platforms could help maintain more effective contact, share information quickly, and foster a sense of community among the volunteers. This approach would provide an additional layer of support, encourage peer engagement and contribute to volunteer satisfaction, confidence and long-term retention.

In addition, the project will seek to embed the principles of the New Vision for Volunteering in Wales across all areas of its work. These principles will be reflected in the project's day-to-day practices, volunteer recruitment and support processes, and the ongoing development and delivery of activities. By aligning with this new approach, the project will aim to create a positive, inclusive and sustainable volunteering experience, while ensuring that volunteers are valued, supported and empowered to make a meaningful contribution within their communities.

