

New befriending Service

A new befriending service has been launched during Loneliness Awareness Week to combat isolation and loneliness in Norfolk.

In partnership with Norfolk County Council, Voluntary Norfolk has recruited befrienders from the 3,500 strong army of volunteers who came forward during the coronavirus pandemic. They will help people, who, for a variety of reasons, would benefit from social contact.

People can ask for support with loneliness and isolation by contacting Norfolk County Council directly on: **0344 800 8020**.

By centralising calls for the befriending service, the County Council's customer service team can rapidly connect the customer to a volunteer co-ordinator, who will then match an appropriate befriender from the network of volunteers across the county. As well as befriending phone calls, the service hopes to provide socially distanced visits too.

Should the customer require longer term support, then a volunteer can refer (with consent from the customer) to the **Better Together helpline**: 0300 3033920. This may include opportunities for the customer to get involved in their community or to be given extra help with their wellbeing.

The **Better Together helpline** will offer a triage service to check eligibility and ensure that this is the right intervention at the right time. Where people require additional or different support, the volunteer will stay in touch with the customer to check that the intervention has been successful.

So far, volunteers across the county have made regular calls to over **260** people.

Ceri Sumner, a spokesperson for the Norfolk Resilience Forum, said:

'We already know the devastating effects that loneliness and social isolation can have on people's mental and physical health, so we are urging people to reach out and not to feel stigmatised – essentially, it's okay not to feel okay – we are here to help. We must remember that, for a number of vulnerable people in the county, they still need to take more precautionary measures. The befriending service should go some way to reaching those people who don't have friends and family to make regular calls or visits.'

Please check on anyone who would benefit from befriending, and share the contact number: 0344 800 8020.'