

## Bilingual Telephone Befriending Monitoring Report 2021-22

Social Isolation is an intrinsic part of the migrant experience which, depending on the reason for migration, also comes along with other associated and multiple challenges.

BTB work with the scheme members giving moral support, encouragement and motivation which boosts their wellbeing and enables them to tackle other practical and social issues.

### Matches

on-going matches at the beginning of 2021-22	20
new matches in 2021-22	26
<b>Total matches</b>	<b>46</b>
Closed or finished in 2021-22	23
<b>Total active matches</b>	<b>23</b>
Waiting list	9

BTB matches are on the basis of a weekly phone call but the frequency and duration are not monitored.

Matches have an average duration of 9 months  
27% of matches have lasted for longer than 12 months  
The longest match is 24 months (since the start of the scheme)

The need for telephone befriending may have eased a little as the vaccine programme has been rolled out and service users are able to stop social distancing. There are also more face to face venues and groups restarting. Careful consideration will be given to developing bilingual face-to-face befriending along side bilingual telephone befriending.

### Ethnic profile of scheme members

Arabic	13	28%
White European	18	39%
Middle Eastern	9	20%
Chinese	5	11%
South Asian	1	2%

The diversity of service user languages is reassuring and indicates good reach. The percentage uptake correlates well against interpreting uptake across languages. We might expect to see a bigger uptake from South Asia (particularly Bengali) if compared to interpreting (9%). This will be investigated in 2022-23.

## Referral Source for 2021-22 scheme members

Partners	14	30%
SIS	11	24%
NHS	10	22%
CVS	7	15%
BHCC	2	4%
Self-referral	2	4%

It is unusual for a SIS service to have low self-referrals. This may be reflective of the nature of and stigma attached to social isolation and loneliness.

SIS has added translated information about telephone befriending to 18 SIS service user web pages including information about how to self-refer by phone, email or web form.

We have been cautious of promoting of the service externally (to CVS partners or Service Users) for fear of compromising capacity. We will re-promote the service to CVS partners who work with our service user demographic to encourage referrals.

## Case Studies

### ***Polish Speaker N – matched in April 2021***

N was referred by SIS social prescribing caseworker following support for health, benefit applications, utility bills and disability support. The case was coming to a close but the caseworker felt she could benefit from a befriending match

*“N is quite short on confidence and can come across as being quite nervous – this is in part due to her anxiety over her health amongst other reasons. She can struggle with being proactive and could benefit from a friend outside her family”*

N was matched with a Bilingual Telephone Befriender in April 2021 who expressed concern after the first conversation

*“It was a very short call this time, I had an impression that she was quite nervous and wasn't sure what to expect from our calls. I explained how things work and tried to make her feel at ease. ... she wanted to think about it and I didn't want her to feel under pressure and/or withdraw from the program before she gives it a try.”*

Thanks to the gentle reassurance of the befriender they were able to establish regular weekly calls which have enabled them to build a strong rapport. When the befriender was away over the summer, N *“firmly insisting on having a break but is happy to resume our calls once I'm back”*.

The befriender has also reported that N's confidence seems to be increasing too; she has been dealing with some health related issues, and is now capable of handling her on-going issues and taking care of herself fairly well.

### **Romanian Speaker S – matched in July 2020**

S was referred by MIND Advice and Information Officer

S had a complicated situation with housing, employment and physical and mental health issues. A SIS social prescribing caseworker was helping with these practical issues.

S had to shield during covid and was unable to leave the house,

*“I feels on the edge, powerless and very fragile emotionally and physically because of my situation. I feels lost and confused and so lonely”.*

S was matched with a Bilingual Telephone Befriender in July 2020 and at times this was very challenging for the befriender

*“I feel helpless listening to all her difficult situations, she describes her desperation and fragility. I have a very hectic time myself [with work] and although I care very much and I would like to keep in touch with her, I feel sometimes that I might not always be able to be there when she needs me nor that I am able to help her.”*

Despite these issues, the befriender continued the relationship with S and was able to report a few months later

*“I am pleased to say that when I speak to S, every time she seems better and more comfortable with her situation, the support she is receiving is definitely helping her and making a big difference. I am happy to continue being part of this project.”*

This match is still continuing.

### **Hungarian Speaker A – matched in August 2020**

This match was a result of an internal referral for a SIS social prescribing caseworker who'd helped with a wide variety of issues; travel help, arranged food parcels, ESOL , career advice, school application, council tax reduction, and health appointments.

It took a little while to establish a regular call pattern. Initially they talked for an hour or more on a Friday afternoon but switched to a dedicated slot during working hours which was a better fit. The BTB found that having a dedicated time helped to maintain boundaries particularly regards the duration of the call. The BTB always sent a message shortly before the call to check if it would go ahead.

The BTB reported that the conversation flows incrementally and naturally e.g. she mentioned they are planning to buy a cat, so next week I could ask how did that go etc. They often talked about Hungary and reminisced. Sometimes they would have a moan about life but the BTB tried to keep the conversations light without going too much into those things that are upsetting, annoying.

The scheme member lived with her family but was at home on her own most of the time which meant the BTB call was something she really valued, looked forward to and benefitted from. She was signed up to English classes and gained confidence from the BTB calls to increase her attendance. This and other things meant she had more things to do and the calls naturally became less frequent.

*“It’s been nice to get to know more and more her and her family and I have also enjoy having a connection which helps me to take a break from work, going for walk and chatting. At the moment, I am still happy to call her and I am proud of both of us that we kept this connection for so long which has allowed her to share more personal things from her side. I am preparing for an occasion that it has to come to an end at some point, and how to do that.” BTB*

## **Volunteers**

volunteers active at the beginning of 2021-22	22
volunteers enrolled and matched with beneficiaries	15
volunteers withdrawals following a match	11
<b>active volunteers at the beginning of 2022-23</b>	<b>26</b>
volunteers on our waiting list	19

Capacity for Bilingual Telephone Befriending is driven by the availability of suitable bilingual volunteers. Enrolment and retention of volunteers has been challenging. A high number of people (68) expressed an interest and were invited for a discussion interview. 38 of these were interviewed but only 15 completed the process and were successfully matched with a beneficiary. This can be very labour intensive for the project coordinator who works 6 hours per week on this project.

Once matched volunteers have been committed to the process with few withdrawing prior to their match coming to a natural end.

## **Referral Source for all current volunteer**

Volunteer Centre	47%
SIS professional linguist	28%
Community outreach	17%
Amex	7%

The referral source of volunteers shows the value of our promotional activities within ethnically diverse communities, through our existing linguists and through collaboration outside the partnership

## **Testamonial of Bilingual Telephone Befriender**

Having worked in the diplomatic field for 25 years, I have always been interested in working with people on an international level. I moved from London to East Sussex five years ago. I expressed my interest in volunteering with SIS and fortunately received the opportunity to join the Bilingual Telephone Befriending in May 2020. As we know, it was during the pandemic and soon I received 6 matches from different social backgrounds and language needs. The one major point they all had in common was the feeling of being particularly isolated and having few people they can connect with mainly because of the language barrier.

Without doubt the Bilingual Telephone Befriending Service was like a breath of fresh air to them. A fantastic arrangement in order to make a real difference to their personal life and to create a positive outlook.

Looking back to 18 months ago, I feel so content to see each one of my 6 matches (I still have contact with some of them) is a lot more confident, having a better understanding of their personal life and problems. This is not because of me, but it is mostly because Befriending and SIS recognised how valuable a phone call can be in relieving isolation and other social stresses. I most certainly witnessed with my eyes how effective this service has been and how important it is for the service to be continued. It has an important role in helping people to regain a sense of purpose and direction, boosting their confidence by connecting them with the community, as it has done with all my matches.

I am so proud that through the Befriending Service I could achieve a special and unique relationship with those who I have been in contact with. For many it simply means that there is still someone there to talk to and who cares. I sincerely thank you [SIS] for giving me this opportunity and very much hope this service continues to provide the best it can to the scheme members.

### **Feedback from BTB**

Last night I chatted with my match for one and half hours. The conversation went extremely well and I could sense that L was cheered up and fully engaged with conversation.

#### ***Chinese Speaking BTB***

I managed to speak with E for an introductory session. We both talked about ourselves and our families and circumstances and Polish roots.....E has been discharged from the hospital and feeling better but still a bit fragile. She is a lovely, young disabled lady who did indeed confirm that feels a bit lonely and isolated.

#### ***Polish Speaking BTB***

M is a very nice guy, he is also smart with a lot of stories and adventures to tell.

#### ***Arabic Speaking BTB***

I talked with M. He was very happy that I called and he had someone to talk with. He wants to continue speak on telephone regularly. He feels better than at the start of the conversation and hopes this service will help him to be better and better. He is feeling so low and sorry for some period of his life but now he is more optimistic.

#### ***Turkish Speaking BTB***

A is really in need of the service and I am happy to be his befriender. I feel that he is really needing help because he is totally alone and doesn't know anything in this country. He said to me that he was so happy with my phone call ; to find someone who speaks Arabic. He told me he does not know even how to use the bus and struggles with so many things.

#### ***Arabic Speaking BTB***

Every week D sounds better; enthusiastic, happy to talk and share her daily life. She sounds like a happy mom and optimistic about the future....Her social life is improving, she goes to the Church and has some friends she meets every week. I think befriending was a good experience for her to boost her confidence. I also enjoyed calling her.

#### ***French Speaking BTB***

We've had a few very good conversation in August, talking about life in general but she was mainly passive. Perhaps she'll need some face to face social interaction. Is there any chance that we would offer a few of the sessions?

***Chinese BTB***

Thank you so much for making this match. I have just finished my first chat. It went absolutely great. She was funny and an interesting conversationalist. I enjoyed her different experiences and expertises. We agreed to talk once every two weeks as she has just moved to her permanent flat and needs time to settle in. Thank you again for referring her to me.

***Arabic BTB***

I had a first call last week, and it went well. He told me about his struggle to learn English, so I suggested that we do some of chat in English, and he liked the idea. It turns out that I should change my volunteering role from a befriender to an English teacher (: . The good thing is that I used to teach English back home, so I think I have some experience.

***Arabic BTB***

Even with having four of her seven children and two grandchildren near her, she can't help but feel low and lonely especially because of lack of communication with friends after the pandemic and lack of her knowledge of the English language both for speaking and reading.

She was so happy to be contacted by me as a friend speaking her own language but also very keen to be contacted in person as she likes to see the person talking to. She is not very knowledgeable using the internet but is hoping we speak next on the whatsapp video call for the time being.

***Farsi BTB***

It may be difficult at first to establish a trust and meaningful relation with someone we've never met before so it requires a lot of patience and open, friendly approach but it eventually pays off and we start to feel that after the initial stage things become more natural and lead to a positive outcome.

***Polish BTB***