

Bilingual Telephone Befriending Monitoring Report **2023-24**

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. Bilingual Telephone Befrienders 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.

Please use the links below to navigate this report

[Scheme Member](#)

[Language Profile of Scheme Members](#)

[Referral Source](#)

[Case Study 1](#)

[Case Study 2](#)

[Impact](#)

[Volunteers](#)

[Support for Volunteers](#)

[Collaborations](#)

[Equalities Monitoring](#)

Scheme Members

Individuals engaged with SIS **45**

Current matches **10**

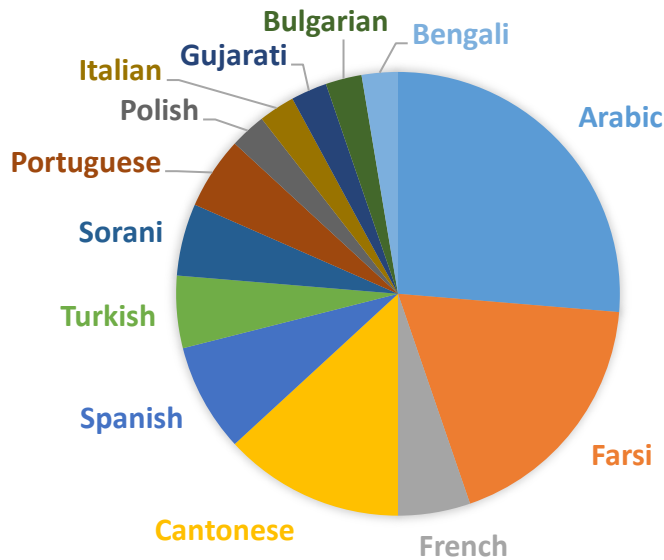
- on-going matches from 2022-23 4
- new matches 2023-24 6
- finished matches 12
- waiting list 4

- inappropriate referrals* 8
- withdrew before matched 6
- unable to contact Service User 5

** lived out of area, wanted F2F, mental health concerns, English speaker*

Language profile

LANGUAGES



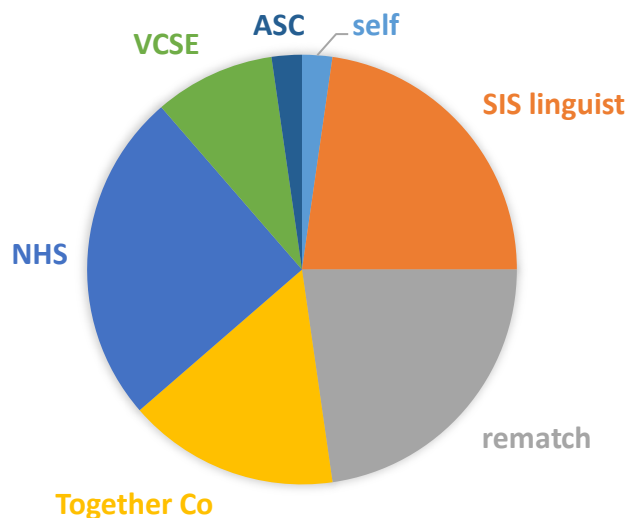
Finding and enrolling volunteers in the languages required continues to be a challenge. We frequently need to look further afield than Sussex, making contact with national community groups, to try and find a suitable match.

It has been particularly challenging to find Farsi speaking volunteers particularly men, and gender matching is a specific cultural consideration for this language community. We explored the possibility of “peer matching” between two Farsi speaking men and two Sorani speaking men.

Bilingual Telephone Befriending doesn’t necessitate the matches living locally to each other but does restrict opportunities to take their relationship forward and meet face-to-face.

Referral Source

REFERRAL



We received our first direct self-referral this year. This is in contrast to indirect self-referrals; when a linguist, who is helping with a self-referral for social prescribing support, has identified a social isolation issue and then made an internal referral.

A significant number of matches came to an end this year. Many of these Service Users initially said they would like a rematch but subsequently decided that they didn't need to have a new befriender having found the process confidence building and empowering, helping them to take other steps to engaging with their communities.

Case Study 1

The scheme member was referred to SIS by Together Co back in April 2021. The Service User particularly wanted to be matched with someone who shared her language and culture. This match has been ongoing since then and helps to relieve the scheme member's feelings of loneliness and isolation.

It so good this project, I'm so grateful, I couldn't talk to anyone before. It is hard for me to talk to anyone. I found it easy to talk to her from the start. I don't know how you matched me with her, but it really worked well.

Talking to her has really helped me with many things, how I'm thinking about things. You said it was luck that we were matched, but I think SIS knows how to choose people, they know what to say and think... SIS knows how to choose people who know what they are doing, they are professional.

In general, I just feel comfortable that if I have a problem, I can talk to her, even things I can't talk to my family about, she makes me feel better and that is important. I hope this project can continue; it is really valuable."

The Befriending Volunteer also reflected on their calls:

"I get a sense of satisfaction in helping someone and we enjoy speaking to each other. I feel I have a friend in her."

The scheme member also attended the SIS AGM in November 2023 and was thrilled to meet the Befriending Service Coordinator who they'd spoken to frequently on the phone. They reiterated their joy at being part of the scheme.

Case Study 2

The SIS Telephone Befriending project received a referral in November 2021 from the person's GP via Together Co. She was matched with a SIS Telephone Befriending Volunteer that same month.

The Scheme Member is in her early 70s. She lives with her husband and has family living nearby. An interview with the Scheme Member was conducted through a SIS Community Interpreter.

"Because I was feeling lonely, my daughter wanted me to find someone to befriend me. Even with having four of my children and two grandchildren living nearby I can't help but feel low and lonely especially because of lack of communication with friends after the pandemic. My lack of knowledge of the English language both for speaking and reading can make it more difficult. I don't want to put pressure on my oldest daughter because she has her own family to worry about.

My befriender was really good, very nice. We were talking about daily things, my befriender asked me about my children.

I felt like I was in a dream, it was nice talking to someone about my life. I am much better now. This is the best thing that you have done for people like myself, I don't think you can do any better. I really admire what you are doing. I am really happy and grateful that you think about people like us.

When my daughter found me an English class, my befriender told me she could help me practice English. I was away for 3 months so we stopped the calls but I would like to start them again."

The Befriending Volunteer also reflected on their calls:

"Even though she feels lonely, this lady sounds very good humoured. She spoke about her life and her family very openly. She was so happy to be contacted by me as a friend speaking her own language."

Impact

The feedback from Bilingual Telephone Befriending Volunteers attests to mutual benefits and satisfaction of the scheme.

*"I feel good to be one of the volunteer befriender in this program and able to help others scheme member feel better with what they are facing or dealing with. My scheme member feels a sense of not being left out from the community and knows someone cares about what and how they feel." **Cantonese speaking BTB Vol***

It is clear that scheme members value having someone impartial to talk to

*"Volunteering gives me a sense of community. It gives my Scheme Member a chance to vent, feel listened to, be less isolated" **Spanish speaking BTB Vol***

*"I have feelings of satisfaction, helping somebody who needs help and is not familiar with the culture and rules here. They are really happy. They can offload their feelings, the ones they cannot share with friends." **Farsi speaking BTB Vol***

The BTB volunteers have usually been resident in the UK for much longer than scheme members and this can help with cultural brokerage.

*"This project has helped a lot for people not familiar with the culture here and how to find help when they need one. It also helps with loneliness. They know that someone is always there to turn to if needed." **Farsi speaking BTB Vol***

*"I enjoy talking to her and she enjoys talking to me and knows that our conversation is confidential and non-judgemental." **Portuguese speaking BTB Vol***

Some matches have moved to meeting up Face to Face as well as chatting on the phone.

*We normally contact each other through WhatsApp messages and meet up for coffee/lunch. We both have a friend through this project, and I can help signpost her to services." **Farsi speaking BTB Vol***

“I was able to meet up with my Scheme Member. It went well, we met at the library and I helped her with some IT issues she was having.” **Farsi speaking BTB Vol**

“We are planning to meet at a café. I enjoy talking to her and she enjoys talking to me and knows that our conversation is confidential and non-judgemental.” **Portuguese speaking BTB Vol**

Bilingual Befriending Volunteers are also open about some of the challenges with the scheme.

“For me, challenge is when the scheme member not really want to talk much about anything.” **Cantonese speaking BTB Vol**

“As our community is very small, we found out we have a lot of common friends. This might be a hesitation for her to share more about herself.” **Cantonese speaking BTB Vol**

“It was difficult to agree a time that we would both be available, so we speak when we're both free. She has been travelling to Portugal quite often.” **Portuguese speaking BTB Vol**

The Befriending Project is one of many additional joined up services that SIS offers.

“There are challenges about not being able to help them with many kind of problems, but I refer this to SIS Projects team to provide support.” **Farsi speaking BTB Vol**

“I am so glad that X came to the SIS Service User Day. Apart from finding friends there, she now has telephone befriending too. Sometimes we don't know how desperate people get with the situations in front of them and how much our help is valuable for them.” **SIS Linguist**

Volunteer Profile for all current befriending volunteers

- Matched with 1 scheme member 6
- Matched with 2 or more scheme members 2
- Currently unmatched 7
- **Total enrolled volunteers** **17**

- Waiting list 33 (in languages we currently don't need)
1 (in the enrolment process)

Referral Source for all current volunteers

- SIS Linguists 8
- Direct application 3
- Volunteer Centre 4
- Recommendation 1

Support for Volunteers

SIS volunteers are providing a remote service and delivering their Befriending very autonomously, it is therefore really important that we give regular opportunities for feedback, support and supervision.

When a match is established, the Befriender is contacted by the Project Co-ordinator at regular intervals; immediately after their first contact, then a month later, then two months later and thereafter every six months. We have an open door for Befrienders to reach out to SIS at any point in their volunteering journey.

“I am always happy to help as a volunteer. If there are any challenges I ask SIS Projects Coordinators. The Befriending project is working very well, helping a lot of Service Users.” Farsi speaking Befriender

Every six months we circulate a feedback survey to Befrienders to gather outcome and impact information and check in about any support issues. The most recent feedback told us;

All respondents were **very satisfied** with the support they received as a Volunteer Befriender
The most popular topics for calls are:

- Problems/worries
- Health
- Family
- Daily life

Volunteers commented on the value their role brought to their own lives as well as to scheme members;



“I can learn about other people’s experiences and values”

“Being a Befriending Volunteer is rewarding and a good thing”

“I get to practice my language and connect with someone from my heritage”

“I get a sense of community as a Befriender”

“We have talked a lot about difficult practical issues like education, and have found out about help for them which has increased my knowledge too”

“The project has been a really positive experience”

Befrienders also mentioned the challenges attached to the role;

- not being able to solve practical problems

- finding adequate time for volunteering when working or studying full time as well
- the pressure of being someone's "only friend"

This has enabled us to put additional support in place and remind Befrienders of SIS's other complimentary services [Bilingual Social Prescribing](#) and [Bilingual Advocacy](#)

We send regular monthly updates about our work, other community projects and training/employment opportunities.

Volunteers are invited to join SIS quarterly, face to face, at;

- [Linguists winter seasonal gathering](#)
- [Volunteer Week Tea Party](#)
- [Summer Picnic](#)
- [AGM](#)

Collaborations

October 2023, A SIS Volunteer Bilingual Telephone Befriender wrote a beautiful presentation for a volunteering event hosted by B&H Volunteer Centre which can be read in full [here](#)

"I agreed with SIS's sentiment "Everybody should have someone to talk to" and thought it was a great opportunity, which seemed like such a good fit, to give something back to my current community.

The first impression I received of SIS set the tone for my entire experience. I was welcomed warmly and the team explained how my roles fit into the bigger picture of the organisation. That friendly and informative welcome made me feel valued and excited to join the team.

It has given me the opportunity to promote my own wellbeing with tons of physical and mental rewards like building new strengths, making new friends and reducing stress. Invitation to events and celebrations, such as picnics, tea parties, Service User Days and the AGM, make volunteers proud and motivated to continue their work. SIS know this is an important part of making the volunteers feel that they belong to a community of like-minded people who share their passion and values.

I believe volunteers are inspired by cause so, by involving them with exchanging information you can make them feel respected and empowered as part of the organisation."

December 2023, Together Co organised a festive get together for some of their Befriending project Volunteers and participants. SIS was invited to join in, and we took a small group of Farsi speaking BTB scheme members along with a SIS Farsi interpreter and SIS Projects Coordinator. The event at the Brighthelm Centre included live music, food, a raffle, and plenty of chances to chat and interact with others, everyone really enjoyed the experience.

March 2024, SIS Project Coordinator Laura Gilbert attended Together Co volunteer training. She found it very useful to share their knowledge; understand how Together Co manage their scheme, learning more about their processes and how they have overcome challenges with managing befriending volunteers.

Equalities Monitoring for 2021-22 scheme members

ETHNICITY		
White	Other white (please state)	7 European
Asian or Asian British	Bangladeshi	1
	Indian	1
	Chinese	5
Black African / Caribbean		1
Other	Arab	10
	Any other ethnic group (please state)	7 Persian/Iranian 2 Turkish 2 Kurdish 3 Latin Am

AGE	16 – 24	25 – 35 1	36 – 49 17
	50 – 59 7	60 or over 8	? 6
GENDER	Female 26	Male 12	