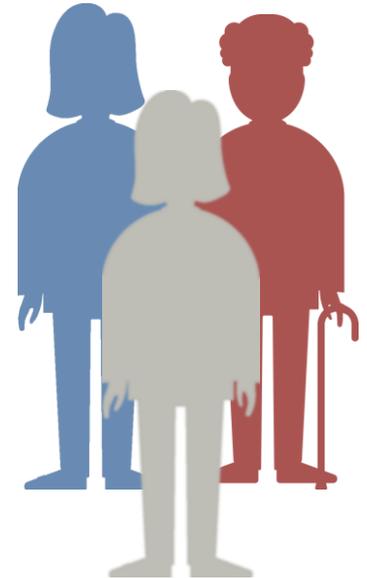


Yorkshire West Riding's telephone befriending service

About the service

Yorkshire West Riding's telephone befriending scheme is uniquely for members of the Masonic Community. Established in June 2017, it is currently supporting a growing number of clients who receive a regular telephone call from one of West Riding Masonic Charities' Care and Support Team. In many cases this may be the only regular contact the person receives and it offers a vital respite from loneliness and social isolation, particularly for clients who are less able to attend activities and events where they can meet new friends in person.



Why it was created

Age UK's figures show 3.6 million older people in the UK live alone and 1.9m older people often feel invisible or ignored. For a growing number of people in later life, loneliness is a defining feature.

Lodge Almoners work hard to provide support to Brethren and their families but it can be challenging and they cannot resolve loneliness alone. The Province identified that there were Brethren, widows and dependants who were potentially suffering from social isolation and they wanted to do something practical to respond.

There is a real demand for befriending services with hundreds of people receiving support from the services run by Age UK and Silverline. The Province wanted something which would offer the same benefits but specifically for members of their local Masonic family. Asking for help can be difficult and the Province felt that the Masonic nature of the service would create an obvious initial connection which may encourage contact from people who would not be comfortable approaching other organisations.

How it works

- The Telephone Support Team currently consists of two Care and Support Officers.
- They volunteer for flexible part time hours depending on workload.

- The Telephone Befriending Team is part of West Riding Masonic Charities Care and Support Team. They were selected from the last round of recruitment for visiting Care and Support Officers.
- Calls are made at a time agreed with the client and many receive a call every week.
- The service uses an internet-based telephone system to make the outgoing calls, allowing access from different locations which means the Team doesn't need an office or physical base.
- The length of each call is client led, with conversations lasting anything from a couple of minutes to half an hour, even more if necessary. The Care and Support Officer and client will speak about all sorts of things – favourite recipes, television programmes, books, family – anything which they both find interesting.
- Clients are assigned to a specific Care and Support Officer allowing the relationship to grow and flourish over time.
- Training is important and all the Team have completed the Samaritans 'Listening Skills' course and a separate 'Dementia Awareness' course to give them the skills they need to confidently and confidentially handle the calls. Details of publicly available courses run by the Samaritans are available at <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/workplace/workplace-staff-training/open-courses/>
- The cost of the service is funded by West Riding Masonic Charities Limited.
- Clients sign up for the service either through the Lodge Almoners network or via the Province's own 24 hour confidential telephone helpline.

The difference it makes

The most rewarding thing about the service may be the feedback received from the clients who report that they see the support calls as a valued service and they look forward to receiving them.

For some clients, these calls may be the only conversation they have that day, or even that week.

Tips for Provinces considering a similar service:

- **Who is it for?** Think about who you want to target with the service. Will you restrict it to certain groups (e.g. widows) or open it up to the wider Masonic Community? The answer to this question may depend on how many people you feel able to support.
- **Publicity:** Be prepared to keep promoting the service. It may take a little while for people to hear about the service on offer and get the courage to approach you.
- **Safeguarding:** Make sure you have a process in place for dealing with concerns identified during the course of a call. Confidentiality is central but it's essential that

safeguarding concerns are identified and dealt with properly.

The NCVO publishes a range of useful information for organisations working with vulnerable groups at <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/safeguarding>

You should also visit The Disclosure and Barring Service for essential advice on helping to prevent unsuitable people working with vulnerable groups, including guidance on obtaining a DBS check for a volunteer. Visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

- **Record keeping:** Have a system for keeping notes about conversations – areas of interest, special events etc. This helps the volunteers to familiarise themselves with the client ahead of the call and helps build rapport and a sense of friendship.

Find out more

Interested in knowing more about befriending services? The following list is a small selection of those which operate around the country. *The MCF does not endorse or recommend any of the organisations listed.*

- **Age UK: Call in Time**
Free weekly friendship calls for the over 60s.
www.ageuk.org.uk/services/befriending-services/
- **Contact the Elderly**
Monthly tea parties for socially isolated people aged 75 or over.
0800 716543
<https://www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk/>
- **Independent Age: Friendship Services**
Free phone calls and home visits for older people.
0800 319 6789
<https://www.independentage.org/get-support/receive-regular-phone-calls-or-visits>
- **Royal Voluntary Service**
Practical help, companionship, advice and support.
0845 608 0122
<https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/get-help>

- **Silverline**
A free, confidential service providing information, advice and friendship calls for older people.
0800 470 80 90
<https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/>
- **UK Men's sheds Association**
Men's Sheds are befriending groups across the UK which help to reduce isolation and loneliness, benefiting men's health and wellbeing.
<https://menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed/>

General information on loneliness

- **Campaign to end loneliness**
<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/>

Other information

You may also be interested in the following Masonic Charitable Foundation resources.

- **Alternative Sources of Support Factsheet**
Contact details for a selection of national charities and organisations providing support and assistance to individuals and families.
mcf.org.uk/almoner/
- **Advice, Counselling and Support leaflet**
A leaflet explaining the practical support and assistance the Masonic Charitable Foundation can provide to Freemasons and their families.
mcf.org.uk/resources/
- **Loneliness Factsheet**
A short guide explaining the impacts of loneliness and outlining potential sources of assistance.
mcf.org.uk/almoner/

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