



An Exploration of the Use and Impact of the Befriending Service Offered by Dan's Fund For Burns: A Peer Support Resource

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Research conducted as part of a PhD funded by the VTCT
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Background

The Dan's Fund for Burns Befriending Service is a resource for adults with a burn injury which includes aspects of online support whilst drawing on the benefits of one-to-one peer support. Dan's Fund For Burns describe the Befriending Service as a "*non-judgemental service, set up to help [you] during [your] recovery journey by offering the support of a specially selected and trained person called a befriender.*" The Befriending Service was launched in 2021 and was set up directly by the Dan's Fund For Burns charity in collaboration with Broomfield Hospital's Psychological Therapies Service.

In the Befriending Service, an individual who is ready to offer support, known as the befriender, is matched with someone who is currently in need of support, known as the befriendee. Some individuals find significant value in regular communication with someone who has undergone a similar experience (Simmons et al., 2023).

The Befriending Service was inspired by the American peer support model 'SOAR' (Survivors Offering Assistance in Recovery: a peer support intervention run by the U.S. burns organisation, The Phoenix Society, which is a nonprofit support organisation supporting people affected by burns, their families, and others involved in the burns community).

The aim of this evaluation, which was conducted as part of a wider PhD into online support for people affected by burn injuries, was to examine the experiences of individuals who participated in the Dan's Fund For Burns 'Befriending Service' to identify barriers to participation, determine what worked, and understand the motivations of befrienders and befriendees.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

- a) What are the experiences of burn-injured adults who utilised the Befriending Service?
- b) What are the motivations for people wanting to take part in the Befriending Service, either as a befriender or a befriender?
- c) How can the Befriending Service be taken forward in the future?

Methods and Ethical Approval

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over MS Teams and then thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Ethical approval was granted from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Health, Science, & Society at UWE (REC Ref: HAS.23.07.148).

Recruitment

Only those who had engaged with the Befriending Service, whether as a potential befriender or befriender, were eligible to participate. This ranged from those who had been successfully matched as a befriending pair, to individuals who had initially expressed interest but had withdrawn, as well as those still awaiting a match. An email template containing study information was created and shared with Dan's Fund For Burns, who then disseminated it to those who met the inclusion criteria.

Participants

Between November 2023 and February 2024 nine interviews were conducted. The nine participants consisted of two befriendees, five befrienders, and two members of staff from Dan's Fund For Burns (Table 1, above). All participants received a £20 voucher as a thank you for their time and participation.

Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Experience of Matching
Zara	Female	Befriender	Awaiting a Match
Wendy	Female	Befriender	Matched x2
Megan	Female	Befriender	Matched x1
Lisa	Female	Befriender	Awaiting a Match
Jamie	Male	Befriender	Matched x1
David	Male	Befriender	Matched with a Befriender
Isobelle	Female	Befriender	Matched with a Befriender
Sue	Female	Dan's Fund For Burns Staff Member	N/A
Amanda	Female	Befriender & Dan's Fund For Burns Staff Member	Awaiting a Match

Table 1: Participant details.

Findings

Themes Identified During Analysis

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
Theme 1: “Cyclical Nature of Recovery”	Sense of Duty	<i>“So, it was to help other people give the help that I never got, and I feel I knew what people would be looking for because I knew what I was looking for and that that wasn’t there.”</i>
	“I’m ready to take this step”	<i>“It was like a real instant thing for me because it was just that opportunity to have a one to one, you know, support one to one connection with somebody. It’s very rare that you get that opportunity.”</i>
	Supported to support	<i>“It became very informal and I think [a Dan’s Fund For Burns staff member] also realised that when we would chat and then I guess in some ways she’s giving me a bit of, you could say a little bit more free reign to manage it myself and just keep her updated.”</i>
Theme 2: The Dynamics of a Befriending Relationship	Boundaries	<i>“If immediately one finds that they don’t want it to continue, then you know, without having met in person, I think it would be easier to sort of stop it there, online.”</i>
	“A two-way process”	<i>“They both have different needs but I approached it the same way. You just go and sort go ‘Right, ok, what do you need?’. And listen to them and see what they actually needed.”</i>
	“Someone that understands”	<i>“It’s about telling somebody that there is hope. It can be really shit and it will be at times, but you’ll get through it because I have, so you’re no different to me. I’m no different to you.”</i>

Table 2: Table showing themes, subthemes, and example quotes.

Awareness of the Befriending Service

- **Imbalance in Befriender-Befriendee Ratio:** The charity faces an ongoing issue where more individuals are available to offer support than those ready to receive it, affecting the balance between befrienders and befriendees.
- **How Participants Became Involved:** Participants learned about the Befriending Service in various ways, with some already involved with the charity, while others found the service organically through online searches for support options.
- **Suggestions for Enhancing Recruitment:** Participants had suggestions for the recruitment process, including raising awareness among healthcare providers, such as burns units, about the full range of support offered by Dan's Fund For Burns.
- **Challenges in Advertising the Service:** Charity representatives acknowledged the need for better advertising of the Befriending Service but noted the financial and logistical challenges faced by a small charity.

Sense of Duty

- **Motivations to Take Part:** There is strong sense of duty to support others in the burns community, influenced by their own experiences with psychosocial support during recovery. Some befrienders felt compelled to give back to the burns community, viewing it as a homage to the psychosocial support they once received.
- **Uniquely Qualified:** Befrienders recognised that their experiences made them uniquely qualified to provide meaningful support.
- **Feeling Supported:** Befrienders reflected on the importance of feeling supported themselves as a foundation for their ability to continue offering help to others.

“I'm Ready to Take This Step”

- **Being Ready:** Participants described a feeling of 'readiness' as either accepting support for themselves or being ready to provide support to others as a befriender. The 'readiness' participants described was often linked to the timing of their recovery journey.
- **Feeling Judged:** Some participants explained how they had apprehensions about being judged when considering if they were ready to be part of the Befriending Service. This

apprehension was not exclusive but shared between both befrienders and befriendees.

Sometimes people felt that they were not burnt severely enough to warrant receiving or giving support.

Supported to Support

- **Support from Dan's Fund For Burns:** Overall, participants felt that as a charity, Dan's Fund For Burns were available to provide support throughout the befriending relationship. Befrienders found the support from Dan's Fund For Burns after their initial meeting with their new befriendee to be reassuring. They also discussed how they felt reassured in their role as a befriender knowing they were able to reach out to Dan's Fund For Burns representatives to discuss concerns.
- **Befriender-Specific Support:** Befrienders spoke about how it would be beneficial to have access to specific befriender peer support, such as in the form of a private Facebook group.
- **Structured Guidance:** Though both befrienders overall felt that support was accessible and available from the charity, there were instances when there was a desire for more structured guidance, such as through scheduled check-ins or supervision sessions. More structured check-ins could also be beneficial to ensure no befriendees 'fall through the net' during pauses in their involvement of the befriending service.
- **Refresher Training:** Introducing periodic 'refresher' training sessions to reinforce the befrienders' skills and knowledge was suggested.
- **Gauging Support Needs:** Implementing feedback mechanisms, such as distributing surveys to users about their experience so far, could be used to gauge whether additional support for either befrienders or befriendees is needed. However, additional time commitments from Dan's Fund For Burns may necessitate increased funding or reallocation of existing resources, something which could be difficult for a small charity.

Boundaries

- **Importance of Setting Boundaries:** Employing and maintaining boundaries helped befrienders to manage their own wellbeing whilst providing support to befriendees. Setting boundaries was a personal process and circumstantial. Some participants felt that more

guidance surrounding setting boundaries from Dan's Fund For Burns staff members would be beneficial, whereas others felt more confident in setting their own boundaries.

- **Friendships:** Friendships did sometimes develop as a result of the befriending relationship.
- **Online Advantage:** Some participants found it easier to set and enforce boundaries because the Befriending Service was hosted online.
- **Managing Transitions:** Some befrienders suggested it may be beneficial to include more information in the initial befriending training about relationship transitions and how to manage expectations about how the relationship may evolve, especially as it may naturally progress or conclude.

“A Two-Way Process”

- **Evolving Needs:** Understanding the individuality of each befriender and adapting to meet their evolving needs was an important aspect of being a befriender.
- **Flexibility:** Though the Befriending Service was initially created to be delivered virtually, it adopts a flexible approach which would permit in-person sessions if appropriate and feasible. This was a strength for some people who preferred face-to-face communication.
- **Video Calls:** As the Befriending Service was delivered online, it was important that both the befriender and the befriender felt comfortable showing their faces using the video-calling software. Specific guidance or introductory sessions to befrienders and befriendees that can work to address concerns around camera use could be beneficial.

Someone That Understands

- **Empowerment:** For a befriender, sharing personal experiences and learning from another person's experiences can feel empowering.
- **Part of a Wider Toolkit of Support:** While befriending is an important component of support, it is part of a broader array of interventions and not a standalone solution as it may not be suitable for all individuals.

Conclusion

The Dan's Fund For Burns Befriending Service can facilitate meaningful connections between people affected by burn injuries which can be an important part of the recovery journey, while potentially reducing and overcoming some traditional barriers associated with in-person support groups. The Befriending Service was positively received by both befrienders and befriendees, however, there were some areas identified that could benefit from future development.