



Annual Report 2023

“Just a big thank you to New Bridge staff and befrienders who continue to be a light of friendship and support in a very dark place to so many prisoners across the prison estate and please keep up the good work.”

Foreword

2023 was a busy year at New Bridge. We saw increased demand for our service, **now reaching people in 70% of prisons in England and Wales**. We were able to manage the **53% rise in prisoner applications** thanks to our work preparing for increased scale, but were of course troubled by the evident increase in people feeling isolated and cut off from the outside world that this scaling up evidenced. Inevitably, increased delivery of our service means increased costs, so fundraising remains a vital priority for the charity to be able to continue to deliver where we are needed most.

“They make me feel I am worth something and not just a prison number.”



Professor David Wilson - July 2023

We were pleased to see a **54% increase in the number of prison visits our volunteers made**, since we know that this in-person contact is so meaningful for the people we support.

“We have food and drink and really good chats & laughs. She makes me feel human and accepted.”

“My befriender is awesome, she is kind and offers advice when I need it. I look forward to her visits when we can chat about anything. I feel a lot more hopeful and de-stressed since having a befriender and promote it to others. It helps normalise my behaviour and makes me certain I won't offend again.”

Our Volunteer Conference last summer saw our befriender community come together to hear from a range of inspiring speakers, including Professor David Wilson, our Vice President. David spoke about his belief that current prison conditions do not serve to rehabilitate people, with a lack of much-needed services around drug & alcohol treatment, mental health support and suitable post-release housing which in turn contributes to communities becoming more dangerous. However he asserted that **“The value of a non-judgemental and consistent contact in the outside world for those in prison cannot be underestimated,**



Conference group

both in terms of the impact on the prisoner and the impact on society. New Bridge volunteers do amazing work, and I am very proud to be their Vice President.”

The conference also gave us the opportunity to celebrate our wonderful volunteer community, and particularly to mark some very impressive milestones, with six long-service awards – four for 10 years and two for 20 years!

We were delighted to be joined by new volunteers from across the country, with our **community swelling by 32% over the course of the year**. This enabled us to make **309 new volunteer/prisoner matches** during the course of the year.

Internally we spent time overhauling our operations, modernising and digitising systems and processes in order to enable us to continue to grow to meet increased demand over the coming years.

Our new impact measure and revamped service evaluation (in partnership with Arden University) gave us valuable insight into how our befriending service is received – what people find most valuable and what we can do to improve. Perhaps unsurprisingly,



Volunteer award winners

the **key message from the evaluation was that the non-judgemental nature of volunteers was a breath of fresh air**, and provided people with the opportunity to see themselves from new perspectives, and to imagine new possibilities for their future. Being non-judgemental is our biggest core value as a charity, and every year we have its impact reflected back at us through the service evaluation: allowing people to explore their identity not tethered to their offence helps them to understand that they are capable of being rehabilitated and adopting a new lifestyle after their release.

2024 looks set to be another year of record numbers of applications from people in prison, and we are working hard to manage this so that every person who needs us can access the support that a befriender brings. We'd like to end with a huge thanks to all of our volunteers, and we include our Trustees and our special staff team who make such a difference to individual prisoners' lives.

Helen Boothman Chair
Lucy Ball CEO

Who We Are

The New Bridge Foundation is a charity which was founded in 1956 with the intention of using volunteers to support people in prison to resettlement back into the community after release, by prominent prison reformer Lord Longford. Over the years we have run a variety of additional projects to support people to this end, including Through The Gate programmes and family support programmes. However our core offering since our inception has been a befriending service delivered by volunteers, which we continue to run today. For nearly 70 years, our volunteers have offered a bridge to the outside world to people serving prison sentences across England and Wales by offering non-judgemental social contact to some of the most isolated and vulnerable in our society.

We are proud to have Michael Spurr, CB (former CEO, HMPPS) as our President, and Professor David Wilson (criminologist, author and former prison governor) and Reverend Jonathan Aitken as our Vice Presidents, as well as a royal patron in HRH Princess Alexandra.

“My New Bridge befriender is very encouraging and supportive, he is a good person and seems to accept that my crime does not define me. He has shown me that I am worth knowing and that I can achieve a better life.”

Our vision:

Every person in prison feels a meaningful connection to the outside world.

Our mission:

We match people in prisons with trained volunteers who offer long-term support through a combination of correspondence and visits. This provides people in prison with a bridge to the outside world, along with an increased sense of value and potential for their future.

Our values:



Non-judgemental

We believe every person has value.



Inclusive

We accept applications from any person in prison, and any volunteer who shares our values.



Independent

We are wholly separate from and not influenced by the criminal justice system.



Prisoner-led

Our volunteers shape their support, correspondence and visits around the needs of the person they support.



Constant

We provide a reliable connection between those inside and outside prison.

What we do

Every person we support is matched with a trained volunteer, with whom they communicate through letters or emails. Once they have been writing for at least 6 months, the volunteer can start visiting the person in prison, making 3-4 visits per year.

Every volunteer is part of a Volunteer Support Group, which is Chaired by an experienced volunteer. Each group meets once per month and every group member attends to discuss their correspondence and visits and have the opportunity to raise any concerns about the relationship or the prisoner's welfare in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Support groups are spread across the country, and volunteers can choose to join one locally that meets in person, or one that meets via zoom with volunteers from across the country.



Information session at the University of Buckingham



Volunteering Fair at the University of Manchester



Volunteering Fair at Leeds Beckett University

“Prisons are hard places to be emotionally and being alone and having contact with someone brightens my day.”



Volunteers visit HMP Grendon

2023 in Numbers

12,958 

hours were spent
volunteering
(up from 6,561 in 2022)

We received
300
applications from
people in prison
(up from 196 in 2022)

★ We received
259 ★
applications
from volunteers
(up from 103 in 2022)



We trained
172
people
(up from 26 in 2022)



309
people in prison
were matched with
a volunteer
(up from 170 in 2022)



Volunteers made
267
prison visits
(up from 100 in 2022)



521
phone calls
were made
(up from 470 in 2022)



10,472
letters and emails
were exchanged between people
in prison and their volunteer
(up from 9,884 in 2022)

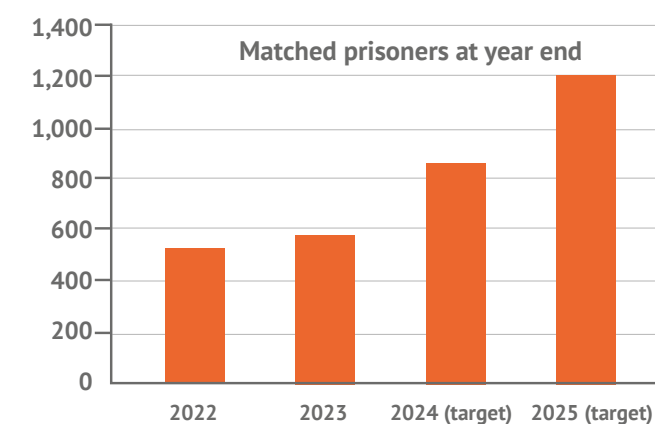
We ended
the year with
575 people
befriended across
86 prison
sites



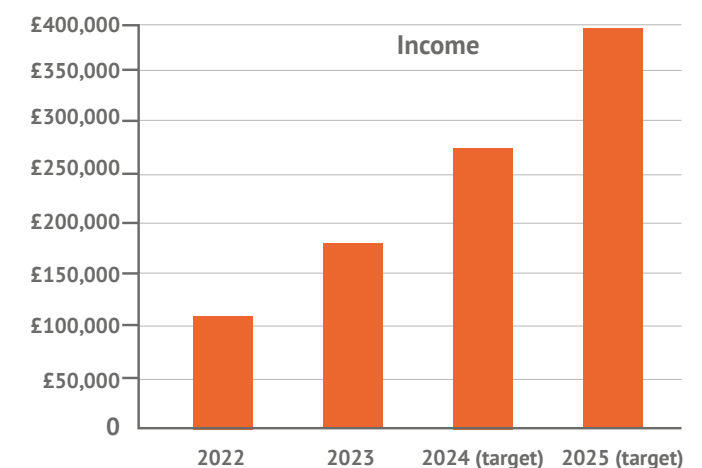
Strategy Progress

“ It’s made me think to myself
that I’m a better person and
I can turn my life around
thanks to my befriender. ”

In 2022 New Bridge staff, Trustees and volunteers came together to create a new strategy to take the charity through the next 3 years. We set ourselves the very ambitious target to more than double our number of service users by the end of 2025, supporting 1,200 people. We made good progress towards this goal last year, shoring up the foundations for growth by modernising systems and streamlining processes. We also focused on driving up the number of volunteers, so that we are ready to befriend more isolated people in prison. 259 people applied to join our volunteer community, a rise of 151% on 2022, in large part due to our successful outreach work building relationships across universities, including The University Of Buckingham, Coventry University and Royal Holloway University of London. This meant we were able to match more people in prison with a befriender, with the result that people spent much less time on the waiting list, down to an average of 36 days (from 3 months) – because we want to reduce the amount of time people endure isolation.



We also increased our income and started to diversify, with a healthy mix of donations from Grant Making Trusts, individuals and volunteers. We have stretching targets for the next two years as we seek to both scale up, and drive down the cost per service user.



How can you help us to support more isolated people in prison?

- **Donate:** help us meet our income targets so that we can manage the costs of growing newbridgefoundation.org.uk/donate
- **Fundraise:** organise an activity or event to raise funds and awareness of work newbridgefoundation.org.uk/fundraise
- **Volunteer:** sign up to become a befriender newbridgefoundation.org.uk/volunteer
- **Spread the word about our work**
 - Recommend volunteering to friends
 - Speak to your employer about entering into a volunteering partnership with your workplace
 - Nominate us for your workplace's Charity of the year

Service Users

Our service is person-centred rather than place-based, so we accept applications from any person in any prison in England and Wales. This also means that volunteers will continue to support the person wherever they may get transferred across the prison estate. We know this sense of continuity and belonging is important to the people we support, who can often lose access to good support (through prison staff or other charities) when they move prisons.

During 2023 we received new applications from 300 people in prison (a rise of 53%), and over the course of the year we made **309 new service user/volunteer matches**.

“Prison is incredibly isolating and many prisoners only talk about prison life. My befriender allows me to remain connected with an intelligent external perspective and a depth that is nearly impossible here.”

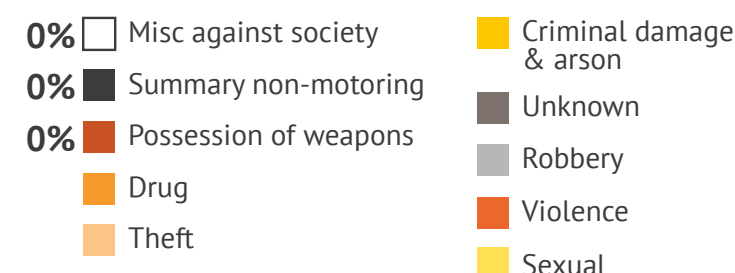
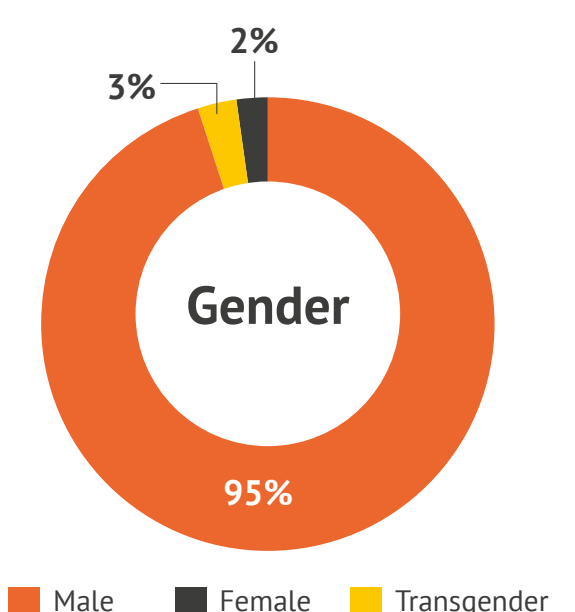
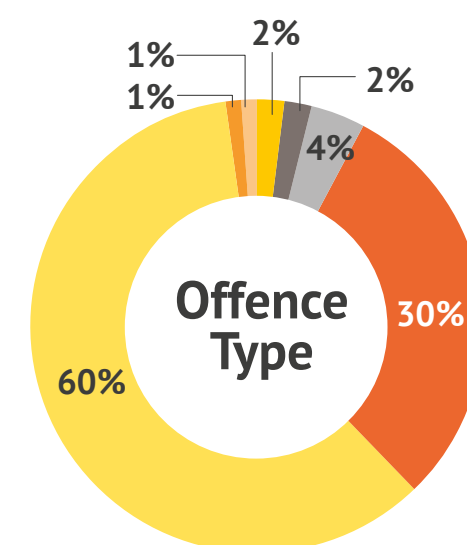
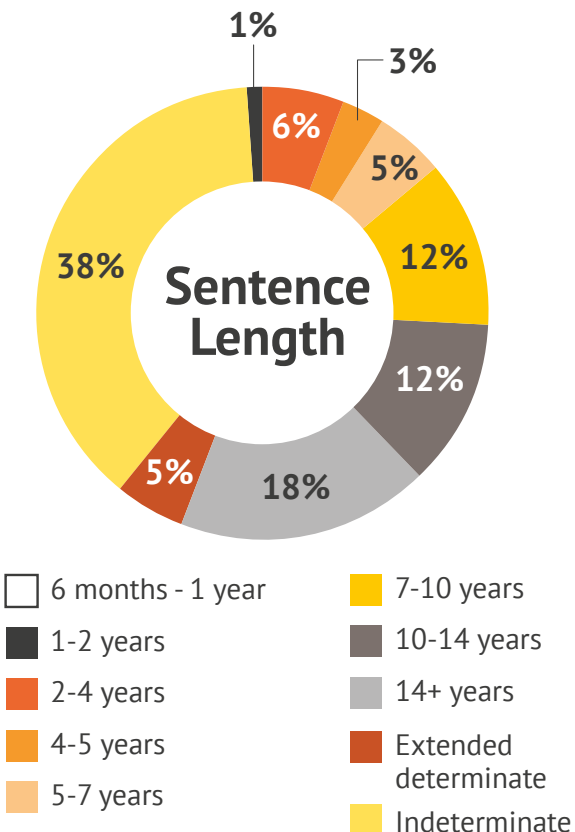
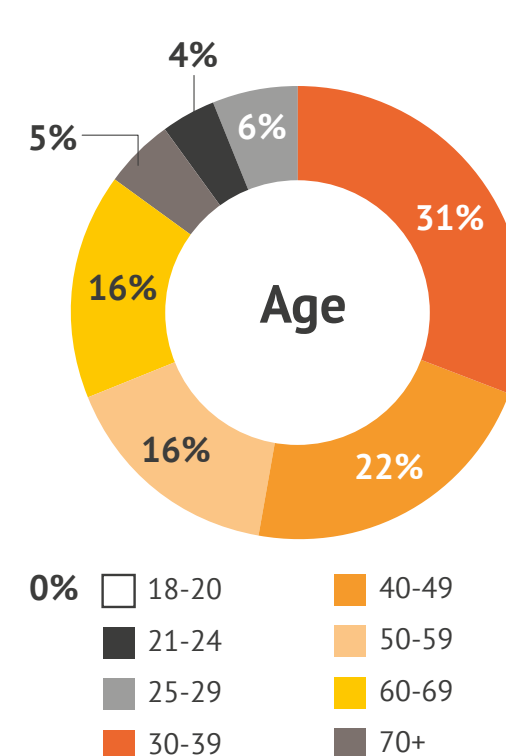
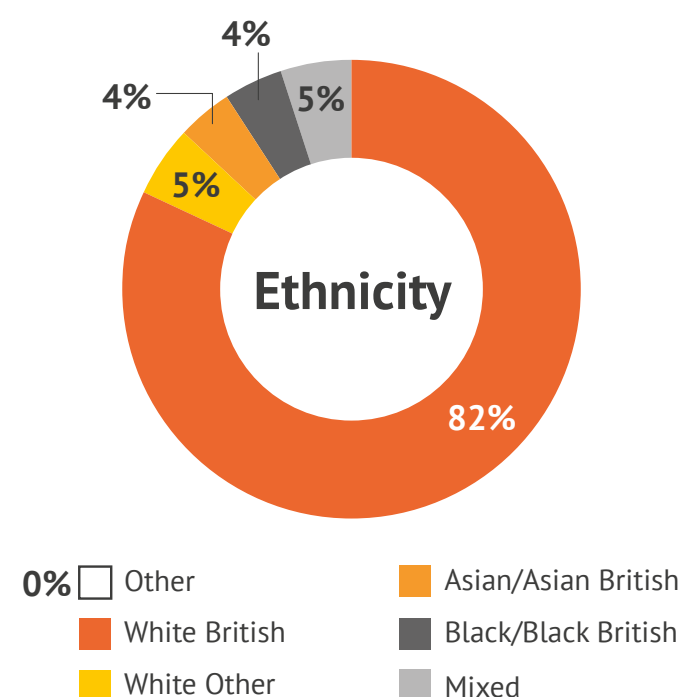
We know that our service users value having a befriender, and the connection that our volunteers provide. They are also happy to recommend us to others: **around 30% of the people we support heard about us through another service user:**

“I would just like to say that I think the service that you offer is amazing and I try to promote your services wherever I go.”

“Recently I have realised how important the service is to my emotional wellbeing. Writing gives me focus, an outlet and structure, and something to do. I enjoy reading my befriender’s letters, and she likes, I hope, reading mine.”

Once a person has applied to join our service, we are committed to supporting them for the long-term. Whilst they are on the waiting list for a volunteer we will send them regular letters, along with birthday and Christmas cards. If a service user’s befriender decides at any point that they are no longer able to volunteer, then we will match them up with a new befriender as soon as possible.

“When I first came into prison I didn’t have much hope in my life. After having my befriender it gave me so much hope for my future. She has always listened and has always been caring. If I hadn’t joined this service I don’t think I would be where I am now.”



Service Evaluation

As part of our strategic goal to better understand and deepen our impact, we conducted our first Service Evaluation in partnership with the School of Criminal Justice at Arden University. This involved designing a questionnaire which would provide data on both users' experience of our service, but also their perceptions of how they had experienced any changes as a result of being supported by a volunteer.

We were delighted to see the following results:

Q. Have you noticed any changes in the way you feel about **getting through your sentence** as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?

87% felt better or much better

Q. Have you noticed any changes in the way you feel about **the future** as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?

79% felt better or much better

Q. Have you noticed any changes in **how connected you feel to the outside world** as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?

79% felt better or much better

Q. Have you noticed any changes in the way you feel **about yourself** as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?

79% felt better or much better

We know that the development of pro-social attitudes and the improvement of self-image are continually linked with successful rehabilitation and reduction in reoffending, so we are pleased to know that our service is having this impact. Many respondents reflected on how their volunteer had helped them to change, by considering their future and the kind of life they would like to live. They credit them with helping them to see beyond their convictions to the opportunities for change that are available to them.

Many of the respondents reported having limited contact with family or friends:

“ *I lost all my friends and family when I came to prison, so they make a chance for people like me to rebuild their lives and have contact with someone.* **”**

“ *I get visits once every three months which makes me feel a bit normal while being in prison as I not got family coming to visit me or friends and partner.* **”**

However, even those with some family contact articulated the difference their volunteer made in enabling them to authentically express their feelings and emotions:

“ *I can talk to him/her about things that I don't want to talk to my family about because I don't want to upset my parents.* **”**

We were also interested to hear the range of topics that respondents reported discussing in their conversations with befrienders:

Topic	Frequency
Prison Life	118
My Future	116
TV	106
Music	97
Sport	64
Politics	57
Holidays/Travel	17
Work and Employment	13
Family	12
Religion/Faith	11
Hobbies	10
Life in General	10
Animals/Pets	9
Books	9
Food/Cookery	9

Topic	Frequency
Art & Craft	8
Befriender's Life	7
Gardening	7
Health & Wellbeing	7
Movies	5
University/Education	5
Walking	5
Nature	4
Business & Economy	3
Cost of Living	3
Poetry/Writing	3
Clothes	2
Reading	2
Gaming	1
Sexuality	1

You can read the full report on our website:

www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/pages/category/service-evaluation-reports

“ *I think the service is great and also see the joy it brings to other people when they get their befriender and become part of 'the club'. Just keep up the good work please!* **”**

“ *You really can't overstate the joy a letter brings – knowing that person has taken the time to write you a thoughtful message in their own time is truly special.* **”**



Support group locations

Volunteers

“In the last letter the person I write to told me “thank you for being my friend” and it was lovely to hear that the letters mean so much to him. He also said he has the birthday card and Christmas card from me stuck up on his wall.”

Our volunteers come from all walks of life, but have one thing in common: a belief in our mission.

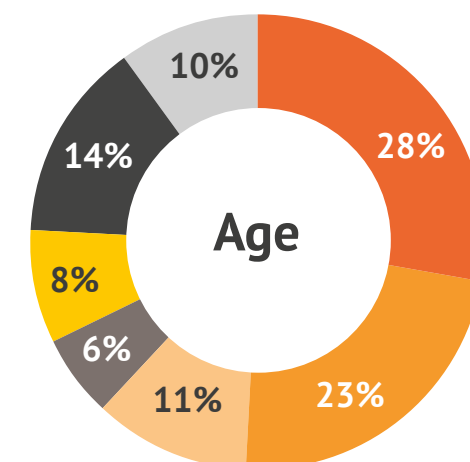
Our volunteers are on the frontline of our work, delivering constant, reliable support to our service users. They give their time and compassion through the highs and lows experienced by the people they support.

In turn, we ensure that our volunteers are supported: each person is a member of a volunteer support group which meets once per month and provides the opportunity to discuss their correspondence and visits and raise any concerns about the relationship or the person in prison's welfare in a friendly and encouraging environment. Support groups are spread across the country, with a mixture of virtual and in-person settings.

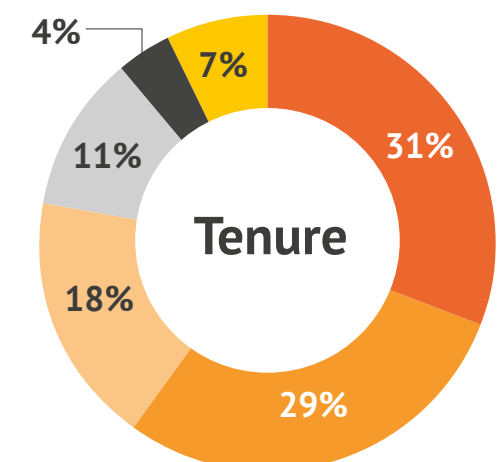
“I've now had two prisoners show so much gratitude and appreciation for having a befriender and have thanked me personally for my support with no judgement in a world where they are subject to a lot of judgement and have wanted to stay in touch after their release to let me know how they are getting on. One prisoner said that my support has helped them open up and acknowledge their feelings rather than keep them bottled up and seek help where and when needed. Its helped them gain a more positive outlook on life for their future.”

Our volunteering offer is very flexible, with letters and visits being organised around each volunteer's own schedule. This flexibility has helped people to continue in their role for long periods of time, fitting it in around their work, studies and personal lives. We gave out long service awards in 2023 to 4 volunteers celebrating 10 years with us, and 2 who had reached 20 years! This long service is testament not only to the flexibility of the role, but also to the enjoyment that volunteers draw from building long-standing social connections with the people they support.

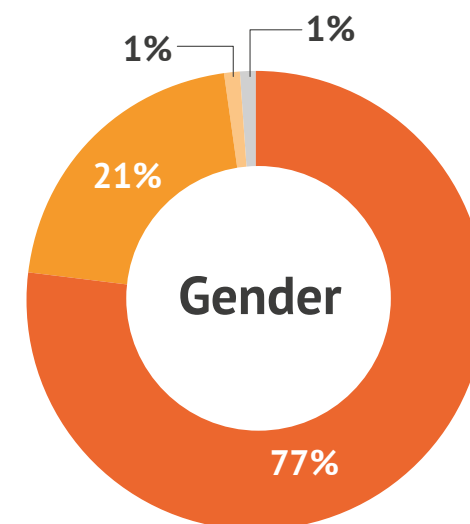
“I now can't imagine not volunteering with New Bridge, so I think you've got me for the foreseeable. Thanks for all you do.”



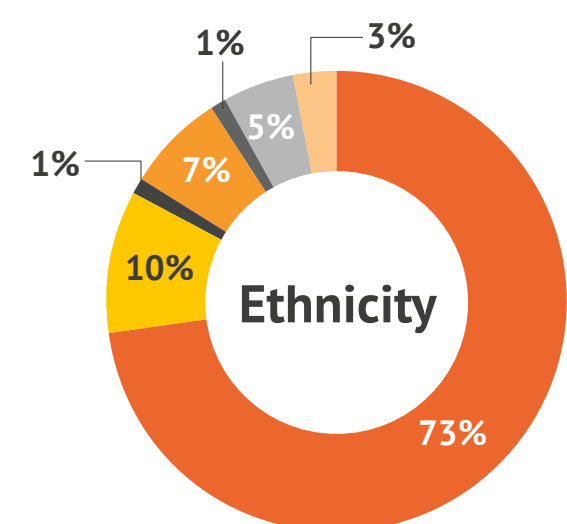
18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65-74 75+



Less than 1 year 1-2 years 3-5 years 6-9 years 10-15 years 16+ years



Female Male Other (Please specify) Prefer not to say Transgender



Other White British White Other Asian/Asian British Black/Black British Mixed Prefer not to say

We recruit and train volunteers all year round. If you are interested in volunteering with us (or know someone who might be) then you can find more information and our online application form: newbridgefoundation.org.uk/volunteer

Volunteer Survey

We surveyed our volunteers at the end of the year to gather their feedback on their experience with New Bridge.

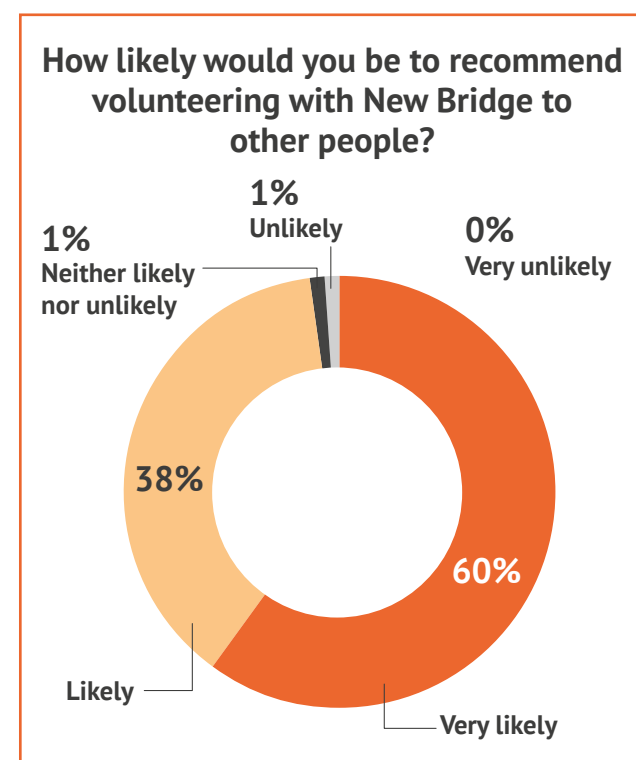
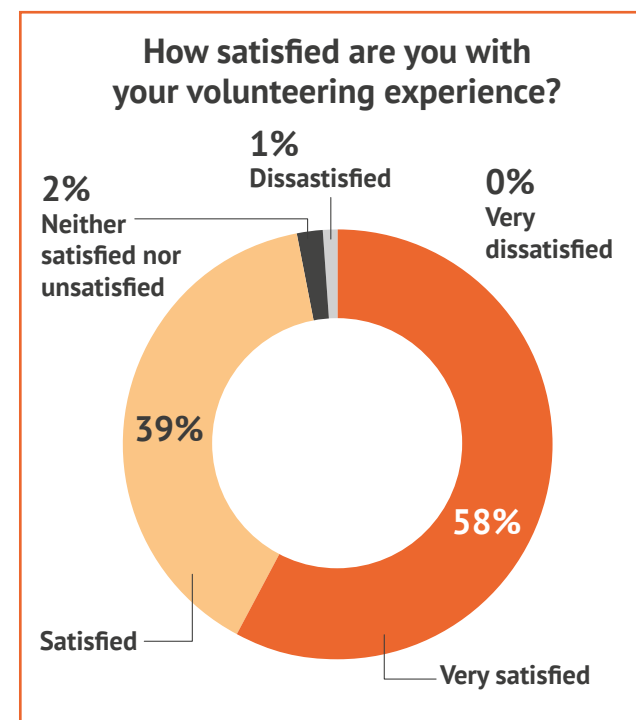
We were delighted that **97% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience**, and **98% would recommend volunteering with us** to other people.

We asked respondents what their favourite thing about volunteering with New Bridge was.

The key recurring themes were:

- Making a difference to someone, especially those who may feel forgotten by society
- Getting to know new people – both prisoners and volunteers
- Flexibility
- Receiving letters
- Sense of community
- Meeting like-minded people
- How easy and straightforward everything is

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for my visit, telephone calls I have had, your letters, and not forgetting your e-mails, postcards and pictures. I feel really thankful that I have had a person like you with such humility to help me through my prison journey. It has and does make a difference.



Respondents shared some of the positive experiences they have had whilst volunteering:

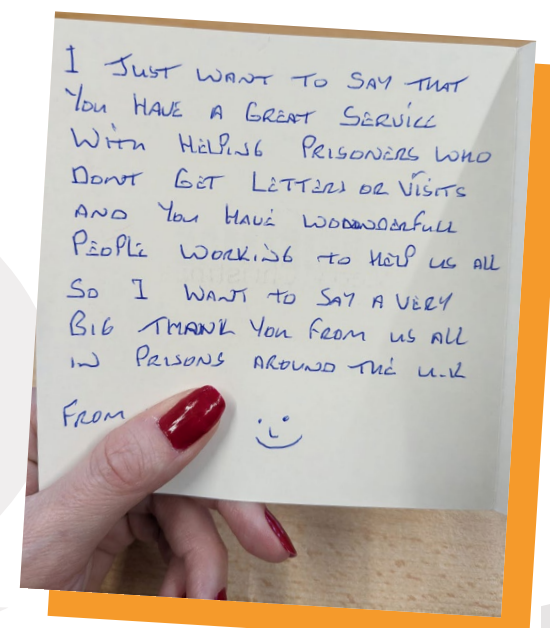
I find the open way prisoners share their experiences and feelings a privilege and find that they are interested in my life too.

I have befriended Tony for 14 years of his 40 year term in prison. I was his only visitor as his Mother died and his Father was elderly and lived at a distance. He was finally released and is now living independently in a flat for the elderly. He has become confident and can manage most aspects of his life. He continues to email me to ask questions and celebrate his achievements. I am very proud of Tony's achievements.

One of my three got into Parkrun whilst inside which, at the time, I was doing off and on. We had an agreement that when he got released we would do a Parkrun together and we both kept our side of the bargain. The ex-prisoner was my pacemaker and got me round in a faster time than otherwise I would have done by myself! We celebrated with coffee and cake.

I received a tea-bag in a letter at Christmas time with the message 'have a drink on me'!

One of my prisoners has opened my eyes to the beauty of poetry. Another has amused me to the point of laughing out loud with tales of his life behind bars and how he and his friends make the time bearable. The third has filled me with joy by overcoming a blip in his progression. His dedication to working through the therapy is not easy for him - he has made me proud of him.



Volunteer Profile

Having worked for many years in the field of mental health I didn't expect any surprises when I signed up to be a befriender with New Bridge. How wrong could I be. Yes, there are mental health issues a plenty for the people in prison but those I've had contact with seem to have little or no expectation of getting any help with their problems.

Some people in prison will volunteer to be trained by Samaritans as "listeners" and along with the prison officers will help when their fellow detainees are having psychotic episodes, self-harming or full-on suicide attempts to name but a few of the issues they seem to face regularly.

These situations would be extremely challenging for any highly qualified professional: for the officers and prison listeners, it's asking a lot. They are not trained or experienced enough so it's human kindness that will

help them through. It's a miracle that they manage as well as they do. Human kindness goes a long way in prison.

The prison system from every angle is creaking. The really appalling circumstances that many prisoners experience reflects this.

The lockdowns of the Covid era will continue in some prisons due to staff shortages: the only way everyone could be kept safe, officers and inmates alike, was to restrict movement. This of course adds to the isolation so having a New Bridge befriender is all the more important.

So that's some of the downsides to prison life – there are many others of course. Stories are regularly in the news about the over-crowding and that basic human rights are not being met. Although the IPP sentences were abolished in 2012 there are still many people incarcerated for years after they have completed their initial tariff.

But enough of the negatives, this is not a political rant: I just mention these things to highlight some of the problems and the need for charities like New Bridge to step up and help where they can.

New Bridge befrienders all seem to say what a rewarding and positive experience volunteering is: how strong and long-lasting relationships are formed. Some for many years and a few will continue after release.

I joined New Bridge in 2020 and I'm still in touch with one of the people that I started writing to then. We discuss music, poetry, religion as well as the day-to-day stuff. Others I have had contact with have been

released, some have found other activities in prison to keep them busy. Currently I have established befriending relationships with four people. All they have in common is the fact that they are in prison. Other than that, they are their unique selves, and each relationship is different. My letters will reflect this. Some of the content of the letters will be similar, if for instance if I'm talking about something very general but on the whole, each letter is tailored to the person I'm writing to. I've now met them all so find it easy to put a face to a name when I write.

One is very keen for me to visit as often as possible, however, he's been moved many miles away and understands that I can no longer visit quite as regularly. We have added monthly phone calls to keep the much-valued contact in place. Another one finds visits stressful and although keen to meet wants about a six-month gap before the next one is booked. Another, ironically, doesn't much like writing and sends minimal information by post but really values the visits.

For me another valuable aspect of befriending is that, unlike my working life, I have no official responsibilities. I don't have to decide on guilt or innocence, there is no pressure to rehabilitate or to decide on fitness for parole. I'm not their probation officer, lawyer, social worker or counsellor. I'm free of all these professional restrictions and demands which is really liberating and helps no end in forming the relationship. I'm free to offer advice if I feel it is helpful (always with the caveat that they can ignore me) but mainly I aim to be supportive. I've had one person say to me how much they appreciate my encouraging words as there is little time for such niceties in prison. Another says that he finds being

able to off load has helped him settle into prison life without kicking off. A common theme from them all is the importance of contact with the outside (real) world. Prison can be an insular and isolating place.

I've mentioned the aspect of befriending that is very freeing compared to having professional involvement and with this in mind it's important to mention here that New Bridge take their responsibilities to their volunteers and the people they write to very seriously.

We have regular support groups that meet monthly, and share updates on each person. We don't disclose any identifying personal detail. There is also access to the New Bridge staff team for advice or administrative queries. We submit a monthly update on each person we are in touch with so that any issues can be monitored and acted on as needed. There's also an annual volunteer conference with speakers on related topics to stimulate and provide an opportunity to socialise.

My fellow befrienders are a constant source of support and inspiration, many having expertise in other aspects of the justice system. I learn so much from them. It's a bonus to meet so many dedicated and interesting people with a wide range of life experience. We come together with the shared goal of making prison life just a little bit better.

Libby



Prisoner Profile

Paul has recently been released from prison, and contributed this article to share his reflections on his experiences of being supported by a befriender.

Having New Bridge in my life for the past 6 years of my prison sentence was the best move I ever made. They became a friend that will tell it to you straight, they are there for both highs and lows in life. I have enjoyed their company and I'm hoping they have learnt a little about me (as both a person and offender).

For those considering becoming a befriender... do it, you are half way there by even giving it a thought – so why not enrich someone else's life by what experiences you may have, who knows you too may learn and when others around you say "why do you do it?" you can say "they have fallen through bad choices, I make good choices, to help them make good choices too".

Many befrienders and the public do not know what prison is like – it's not a soap/documentary – it's real.

Many times I've watched a soap where a character has been in the justice system and think 'why don't they employ a team of prisoners (or ex prisoners) to say what it's like?'. Many of the items (the public calls luxuries) have to be earned by good behaviour and that in itself is like a task in itself. The visit to a shop to buy a ¼ lb of sweets doesn't happen – you fill in a form, you wait a week for it to be delivered, if they have it in stock. Meals are fine, but it depends on which prison you are in – it's not 5 stars, but 5 bars: cooked by prisoners for prisoners.

Those who do not have visits/family/friends turn to New Bridge for support as a Prison Chaplain belongs to the prison, yet a befriender with New Bridge is independent. You the befriender could be the only person in that prisoner's life.

I love to write – I think it's therapeutic to throw words onto paper and make people 'aware'. Since having my befriender(s) I have become more confident in myself, more outgoing and vocal.

New Bridge is the prisoner's choice and the only befriender service of its kind in the UK (maybe the world). You're not a counsellor or intimately related but everyone needs a good friend. Can you be that to a prisoner?

Paul



Our Supporters

“I feel much less isolated and also feel valued as a human being. I also find great joy in receiving letters from someone who isn't connected to the prison system.”

We couldn't exist to impact lives in the way that we do without the generous financial donations of our supporters.

Last year we were grateful to receive donations of over £1,000 from the following:

- 1772 Charity
- 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
- Albert Hunt Trust
- Alchemy Foundation
- Chesterhill Charitable Trust Ltd
- Christopher Rowbotham Charitable Trust
- Constance Travis Charitable Fund
- Cumber Family Charitable Trust
- Dowager Countess Eleanor Peel Trust
- HBJ Trust
- HDH Wills 1965 Charitable Trust
- HLJ Brunner Trust
- Jessie Spencer Trust
- Leigh Trust
- Lord Faringdon Charitable Trust
- Michael & Shirley Hunt Charitable Trust
- Noel Buxton Trust
- Oakdale Trust
- Postcode Lottery Trust
- Rhododendron Trust
- Robert Gavron Charitable Trust
- Sir James Reckitt Charity
- Sir James Roll Charitable Trust
- Vandervell Foundation
- Wyndham Charitable Trust
- Zochonis Charitable Trust

We've developed a Fundraising Guide for other volunteers or supporters who are interested in organising fundraising activities. You can find this on our website: www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/fundraise

We were delighted to see volunteer Anna successfully complete the London marathon, raising a huge £2,740. Anna said: *“So chuffed I ran what I was aiming for, finishing in 5hr06, especially as I was ill over Easter. The crowds were great, it was super well organised and a truly memorable day. Although I'm in no rush to do it again!”*





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New Bridge Foundation