



New Bridge Service Evaluation Report: 2023-24

'I think a befriender can give those of us on this side of the fence a broader and more positive perspective on the world, on relationships and on themselves. It's a great service, especially for those with little or no outside contact'

Foreword

Each year at New Bridge we send out a survey to the people we support, in order to better understand their experiences, and identify any areas for improvement. This helps us to continuously improve the quality of our work, and also brings the work to life for external audiences, through the voices of our respondents.

For this year's report we reviewed and redesigned the questionnaire itself, to ensure the language and format were both clear and accessible. We also added additional questions to tease out further information – for example regarding the impact on a service user when their volunteer retires from New Bridge and they start writing to somebody new – to help us ensure we are doing all we can to run a compassionate and impactful service in the most efficient way possible.

The response rate for this year's evaluation was 41%, slightly lower than last year, but broadly in line with the last 4 years (2022: 45%; 2021: 38%; 2020: 41%; 2019: 43%), though the number of respondents has risen over the past two years to 182 (2022: 164; 2021: 156; 2020: 206; 2019: 184).

The feedback in this year's report indicates a sustained (and in many places improved) level of impact on our service users, with personal development, optimism for the future and deep personal change depicted in abundance. It also reflects a huge and recurring feeling of gratitude to volunteers for the sense of care, encouragement and lack of judgement which their befriending provides, with many indicating how they are incapable of accessing this kind of support outside of New Bridge.

Last year we entered into a partnership with Arden University's School of Criminal Justice to redesign the evaluation process, and were pleased to see the results which gave a better understanding of the overall experience of being befriended, but more importantly the specific ways in which this has impacted service users. We were very pleased to partner with the Arden evaluation team for this year's report, which was again completed through the Volunteer Research Assistant scheme. The team at Arden steered the process from the initial application to the National Research Centre through the data collection, processing and analysis, and we are hugely indebted to them for the valuable insights which they have produced. We believe the partnership between New Bridge and the School of Criminal Justice at Arden University is a powerful way to promote positive change and support those in need.

We are grateful to all of our service users who took the time to complete our survey. We are also grateful to all of the prison Governors who gave us their approval to undertake the survey in their establishments.

I hope that you enjoy reading this report, and finding out more about the work that we do.

Dr Lucy Ball, CEO
September 2024

Executive Summary

This report seeks to gather data from service users across 3 key areas: their demographics, the impact the service has had on them, and their experience of the delivery of the service. Where possible, comparisons have been made to data gathered in the previous year's evaluation, in order to begin to draw out trends, or highlight any key shifts in perception.

Key findings around demographics:

- Service user population responding to the survey remains broadly similar to last year:
 - o Most common offence category for respondents was sexual (58%) followed by violence (13%)
 - o Almost half of respondents were serving sentences over 10 years (53% last year)
 - o 92% of respondents were men, 7% transgender and only 0.2% female
 - o 42% of respondents were aged over 50

Key findings around impact:

- **87%** report feeling better or much better about **getting through their sentence** as a result of being befriended (same as last year)
- **77%** report feeling better or much better about **the future** as a result of being befriended (a decrease from 79% last year)
- **83%** report feeling better or much better **connected to the outside world** as a result of being befriended (an increase from 79% last year)
- **83%** report feeling better or much better about **themselves** as a result of being befriended (an increase from 79% last year)
- Longevity of connection is a consistent driver of increased impact across all categories: the longer a person has been befriended by New Bridge (whether by a single volunteer or through change of volunteer over the years), the more likely they are to report positive change

Key findings around experience:

- 98% of respondents would recommend New Bridge to another person they met in custody (the same rate as last year), and indeed 34% report hearing about New Bridge from another prisoner
- Respondents report connecting with befrienders across a broad range of topics, and 94% say they never run out of things to discuss (an increase from 90% last year)
- Most respondents (87%) want their befriender to visit them, and appreciate when they do
- The key recommendations from respondents around improving the service were related to a request for increased engagement:
 - o More letters (or speeding up response time)
 - o More visits
 - o Implementing more tools for connection (e.g. video calls)

More detail on the demographics of our total service user population can be found in our 2023 Annual Report (www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/pages/category/annual-reports)

Background

The voluntary sector plays a longstanding and vital role in UK prisons by providing rehabilitative services and support that are crucial complements to government-run regimes within establishments (Tomczak, 2016). The mass benefits of voluntary organisations partnering with criminal justice agencies to offer programs that foster personal development, skill building, and community reintegration is heavily documented. Research studies have shown the positive impacts of voluntary sector initiatives like counselling, education, vocational training, and mentorship in improving prisoners' wellbeing, motivation, and readiness for release into the community. By addressing psychological, social, and practical needs, these programmes fill crucial gaps in preparing inmates for productive lives post-incarceration (Hucklesby and Corcoran, 2016).

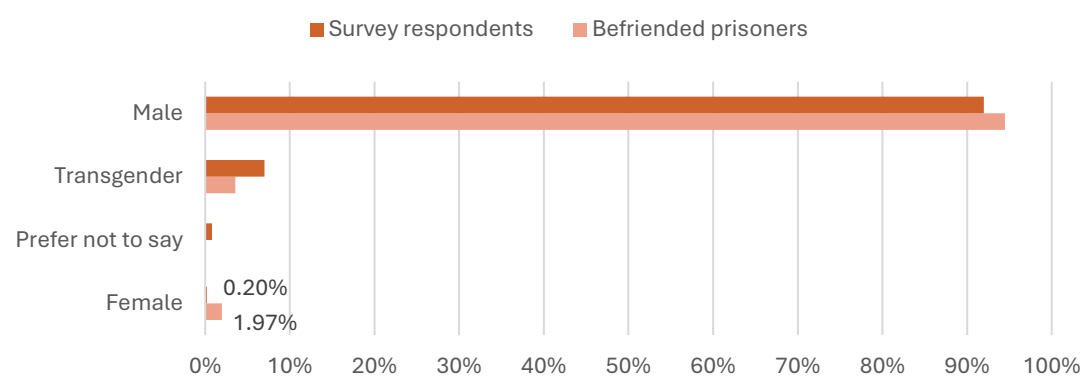
The voluntary sector also facilitates community engagement with marginalised populations like prisoners, promoting restorative justice and rehabilitation over retribution (Clinks, 2016). This is linked to lower recidivism rates and safer communities according to evidence from the UK and worldwide (Prison Reform Trust, 2017).

Within this landscape, organisations like New Bridge operate as key participants in the prison voluntary sector. New Bridge coordinates volunteer befriender schemes across multiple UK prison establishments. Feedback outlined below from inmates indicates these initiatives provide vital social connections, self-confidence, and hope during incarceration. New Bridge's work aligns with the broader mission of empowering prisoners to transform their lives.

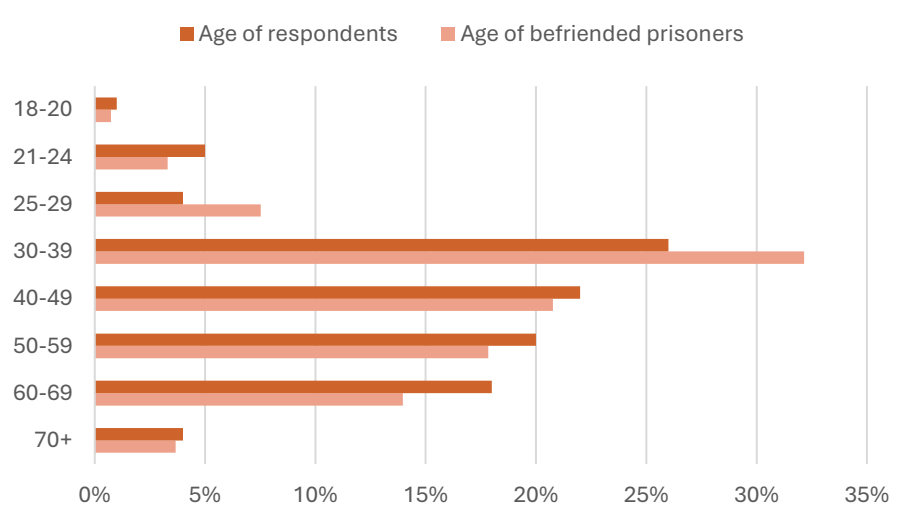
Demographics

Who are the 182 people who completed our survey?

Gender identity

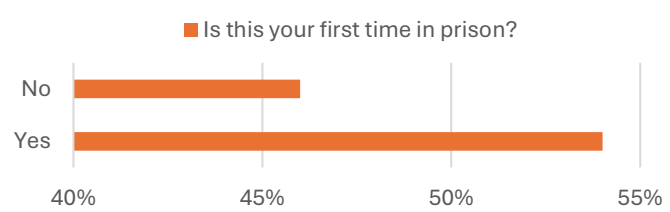


Age

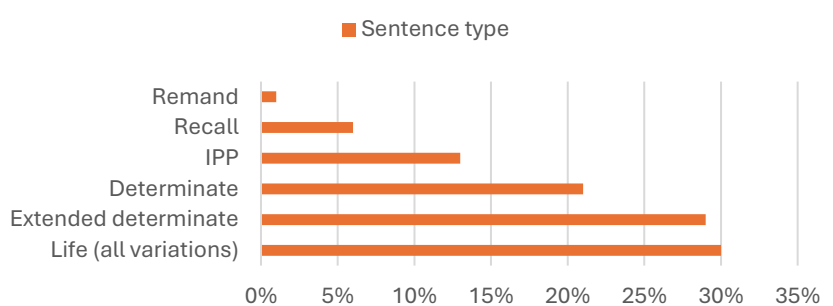


The 30-39 age group was the most dominant (as was the case last year) at 26% (47). This falls in line with current prison statistics, which indicate that a third of all prisoners fall within this age range (Sturge, 2024). Notably there were 8 respondents aged over 70 (4%). Only one respondent was in the 18-20 age bracket (1%). This perhaps reflects the broader ageing prison population (Sturge, 2024).

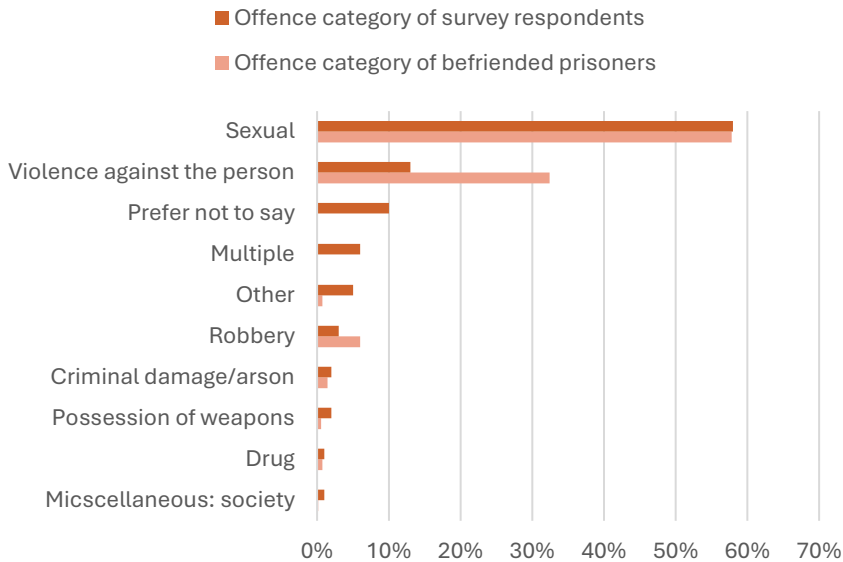
First time in prison



Sentence type

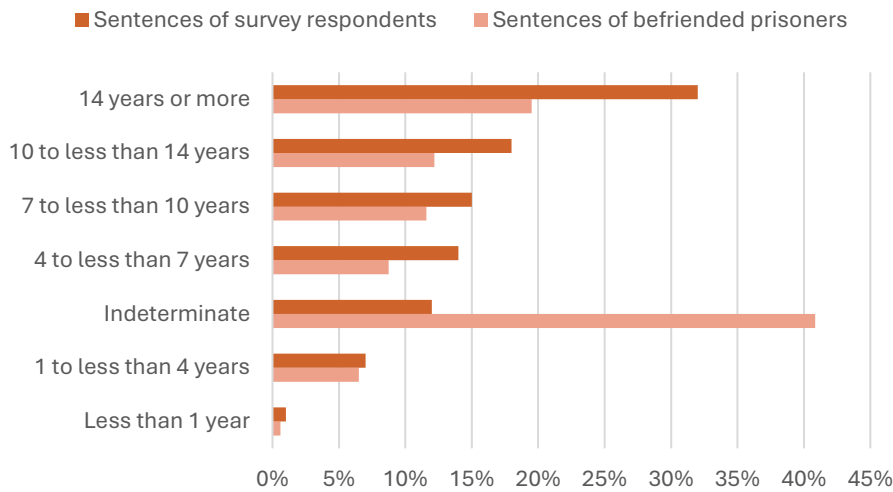


Offence type



The highest proportion of respondents reported having been convicted of a sexual offence, at 58%; this was also the highest proportion of respondents last year. 13% reported a conviction for violence against the person. Interestingly, the latest prison statistics for March 2024 show that approximately 55% of the prison population are in custody for violence against the person as opposed to 20% for sexual offences (Sturge, 2024). There were 18 respondents who did not want to disclose their offence (10%).

Length of sentence



79% of respondents reported serving sentences in excess of four years; 7% serving 1-4 years, and 1% serving less than a year. The latest prison statistics indicate that around 57% of the sentenced population were serving 4 years or more, with 25% serving sentences from 1-4 years. 12% of respondents reported serving an indeterminate sentence (a sentence without a set release date, but with a minimum time you must serve in prison which will be set by the court).

Impact

Impact Questions:	Much Worse (%)	Worse (%)	No Change (%)	Better (%)	Much Better (%)	Positive Resp Rate	Change from previous year (%)
<u>Have you noticed any changes in -</u>							
- the way you feel about getting through your sentence as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	22 (13%)	68 (39%)	82 (47%)	87%	0%
- the way you feel about the future as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	38 (23%)	61 (36%)	68 (40%)	77%	-2%
- how connected you feel to the outside world as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	27 (16%)	76 (44%)	65 (38%)	83%	+4%
- the way you feel about yourself as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	24 (14%)	76 (46%)	62 (37%)	83%	+4%

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

Rating	Frequency	Percentage	Change from last year
Much better	82	47%	+4%
Better	68	39%	+5%
No change	22	13%	+2%
Worse	1	1%	0%
Much worse	0	0%	-1%

I feared actually getting a befriender but after the 1st letter all the worries was gone and the whole service has really helped with my prison journey lately, I have a love spring in my step and that is due to the work of NB so thank you for that and keep up the good work, I really understand the benefits of the service you provide, thank you again

87% of service users gave positive responses to this question. The positive response rate for IPP prisoners was particularly high, with 100% of respondents noting the value of support. This is particularly important given the uncertainty around their sentence length, and is reflected in one person noting: “By having a befriender makes this sentence easier because of having no end date”, and another “Before I got my New Bridge befriender my sentence dragged along. But since I had my New Bridge befriender my sentence now moves along at a steady pace, and things now looks brighter and not bleak.” This reflects the specific value of support for IPP prisoners, alongside broader themes of support that emerged from responses as a whole.

Compared to last year’s report, the positive response rate was the same, with key themes remaining similar: they feel less lonely, more hopeful, better understood, better supported, happier, and like they have something to look forward to. One service user stated “I do not feel lonely anymore. I feel understood and supported” and another stated that their befriender is “very encouraging and supportive” and a “good

person” who “seems to accept that my crime does not define me, and he has shown me that I am worth knowing and that I can achieve a better life”. Another explained, “My befriender has helped by allowing me to vent, to reminisce, to communicate my feelings without any judgement or criticism or punishment. It has allowed me to explore and open on my choices and accept this new life”. Another service user stated “Having a befriender gives you a reason to look forward in life when there is no one else”. This indicates that the New Bridge befriending service is effective in helping the respondents progress through their sentences as the befrienders foster feelings of being understood and offer non-judgmental support to the service users. Furthermore, this has a consistent impact over time, helping them feel valued, supported, and more capable of moving forward in their lives despite their past offences.

13% of respondents stated no change and 1% gave negative responses: some respondents find having a befriender to have minimal impact on getting through their sentence due to their lack of connection; participants who feel unaffected often describe relying on other coping mechanisms or adapting well independently. Further analysis of those reporting no change or negative change indicate:

- Older respondents are more likely to report no change in this area¹
- People who are in prison for the first time are least likely to report any change in this area²
- The longer a person has been befriended, the more likely they are to report positive impact³
- People who are satisfied with the number of letters they receive from their befriender are more likely to report positive impact⁴: As some participants noted, ‘I feel as due to the lack of letters I haven't been able to build any trust or happiness; if the frequency of letters improved so would my trust and I'd feel happier that someone wants to talk to me.’, ‘I don't get many visits, letters, emails to reply back to’ with another stating ‘I am very adaptable and I can handle most situations so I just get on with it’
- People who are satisfied with the number of visits they receive are more likely to report a positive impact⁵
- People who have no other contact (outside their befriender) are more likely to report positive impact⁶

¹ 18% of ‘no change’ respondents were aged 30-39 despite comprising 26% of total participants; 27% of those aged 60-69 stated no change despite comprising 18% of total participants

² 64% that stated no change were people serving their first sentence, despite comprising 54% of total participants

³ 55% of ‘no change’ respondents have had a befriender less than one year, despite comprising 32% of total participants; 60% of ‘no change’ respondents have had a befriender less than two years, despite comprising 43% of total participants, and 82% of ‘no change’ respondents have had a befriender less than five years, despite comprising 69% of total participants

⁴ 55% of ‘no change’ respondents gave positive responses to satisfaction with letters received, compared to 82% of total participants; 25% of ‘no change’ respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to a much smaller 9% of total participants; 20% of ‘no change’ respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to only 10% of total participants

⁵ 36% of ‘no change’ respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to 63% of total participants; 36% of ‘no change’ respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with visit received, compared to only 23% of total participants; 28% of ‘no change’ respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to only 14% of total participants

⁶ 95% of ‘no change’ respondents were people who have some form of other contact, despite comprising only 85% of total participants

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

Rating	Frequency	Percentage	Change since last year
Much better	68	40%	+7%
Better	61	36%	-10%
No change	38	23%	+3%
Worse	1	1%	0%
Much worse	0	0	-1%

It made me think to myself that I am a better person and I can turn my life around, thanks to my befriender

New Bridge helped me to have a much better outlook on my life and look to the future and leading a better life

The New Bridge befriending service has provided service users with a profoundly positive outlook and hope for the future, with 77% of respondents giving positive responses, although this is 2% lower than last year’s result. The responses below explore how New Bridge’s befriending service has greatly improved users’ outlook on the future. Many now feel hopeful and optimistic, with support from non-judgmental bendifenders helping to alleviate depression and loneliness, as well as helping them to mature, gain new perspectives and see new possibilities ahead. The participants express confidence in life after prison, with some specifically noting that continued support beyond release has been a crucial source of encouragement.

- *“Knowing that there will be life after prison makes me more optimistic about restarting my life and making friends”*
- *“my self-esteem is reinforced by having a New Bridge befriender, following a life of loneliness, self-doubt and hopelessness, he and some departments in the Whatton prison have transformed me for the better, made me more positive“*
- *“Yes, before was in depression and on medication, due to a feeling of hopelessness about the future, but my befriender has provided a space for me to feel hope for what lies ahead”*
- *“Gives you hope that there are people out there who are not judgmental”*
- *“I feel like a have a better/brighter future due to the support and kind words from my befriender and New Bridge”*
- *“I feel there is a future unlike before”*
- *“It has been spoken about how even after release they didn't think that we would need to stop, the way of writing stays the same but I was worried because after release is when I may need their support more and so by them saying they will still be there meant a great deal, so more hopeful”*

23% of respondents reported no change and 1% gave negative responses. While some participants appreciate the support and encouragement provided by their befriender, some feel that their fundamental outlook on the future remains unchanged. The impact of having a befriender is still uncertain for some, and a significant number report that their future feels predetermined or bleak due to their circumstances. Further analysis of those reporting no change or negative change indicates:

- People serving an indeterminate sentence are more likely to report no change⁷
- People in prison for the first time are more likely to report no change⁸
- The longer a person has been befriended, the more likely they are to report positive impact⁹
- People who are satisfied with the number of letters they receive from their befriender are more likely to report positive impact¹⁰
- People who are satisfied with the number of visits they receive are more likely to report a positive impact¹¹
- People who have no other contact (outside their befriender) are more likely to report positive impact¹²

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

Rating	Frequency	Percentage	Change since last year
Much better	65	38%	+7%
Better	76	45%	-3%
No change	27	16%	-4%
Worse	1	1%	0%
Much worse	1	1%	0%

New Bridge is the best thing I have done. It helps me get through my time in prison and having a befriender lets me know what's going on the outside

83% of service users gave positive responses, which is **4% higher** than the positive response rate in last year's report. Participants report feeling more informed about current events and societal changes due to updates from their bendifenders. Personal connection with someone outside prison provides emotional support, and a sense of normality, and helps bridge the gap between prison life and the outside world. This relationship also aids in preparing for reintegration by familiarising individuals with changes in technology, currency, and everyday life, making them feel more equipped and hopeful for their future outside of prison.

⁷ 21% of 'no change' respondents were serving an indeterminate sentence, compared to only 12% of total participants
⁸ 65% of 'no change' respondents were people serving their first sentence, compared to only 54% of total participants
⁹ 43% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than one year, compared to only 32% of total participants; 51% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than two years, compared to only 43% of total participants; 73% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than five years, compared to only 69% of total participants
¹⁰ 69% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to 82% of total participants; 17% of 'no change' respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to only 9% of total participants; 14% of 'no change' respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to only 10% of total participants
¹¹ 43% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to 63% of total participants; 29% of 'no change' respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to 23% of total participants; 29% of 'no change' respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to only 14% of total participants
¹² 94% of 'no change' respondents were people who have some form of other contact, despite comprising 85% of total participants

For example, one service user stated that they are “more aware, more understanding, now more open” and “often now able to look forward instead of self-harm”. Another stated “I feel a lot more connected, before I had a befriender I felt completely lost and disconnected to the outside”. More responses include “Yes, I have family visits but the visits from my befriender are good because even though she knows about my offences there is no judgement from her or hard questions to answer like with my family” and “I felt alone before I contacted New Bridge but now, I don't feel like that anymore and that's because of New Bridge and my befriender.”

16% of service users stated that the befriender service did not alter their sense of connection to the world outside, and 2% gave negative responses. While some participants appreciate the support and encouragement provided by their befriender, some feel that their connection to the outside world remains unchanged. Further analysis of those reporting no change or negative change indicates:

- People serving an indeterminate sentence are more likely to report no change¹³
- The longer a person has been befriended, the more likely they are to report positive impact¹⁴
- People who are satisfied with the number of letters they receive from their befriender are more likely to report positive impact¹⁵
- People who are satisfied with the number of visits they receive are more likely to report a positive impact¹⁶
- People who have no other contact (outside their befriender) are more likely to report positive impact¹⁷

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

Rating	Frequency	Percentage	Change since last year
Much better	62	37%	+6%
Better	76	46%	-2%
No change	24	14%	-5%
Worse	3	2%	+1%
Much worse	1	1%	0%

A befriender's qualities must be numerous and varied, she/he must be understanding, insightful and most importantly compassionate. My befriender has all of those qualities and by example instills the same in me. His wisdom makes me know that he accepts me completely, along with my misguided past and wrongful behaviour, through him and NB I have been able to rebuild my self image and to understand that I can be worthy

¹³ 22% of 'no change' respondents were serving an indeterminate sentence, compared to only 12% of total participants
¹⁴ 48% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than one year, compared to only 32% of total participants; 67% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than two years, compared to only 43% of total participants; 82% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than five years, compared to only 69% of total participants
¹⁵ 65% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to 82% of total participants; 23% of 'no change' respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to only 9% of total participants; 12% of 'no change' respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to 10% of total participants
¹⁶ only 33% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to 63% of total participants; 39% of 'no change' respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to only 23% of total participants; 28% of 'no change' respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to only 14% of total participants
¹⁷ 96% of 'no change' respondents were people who have some form of other contact, despite comprising only 85% of total participants

83% of service users gave positive responses. The positive response rate for IPP prisoners was particularly high, with 19/20 (95%) of respondents noting the value of support. Compared to last year's report, this year's positive response rate is **4% higher**. The New Bridge befriending service significantly boosts participants' self-esteem and confidence through the genuine care provided by befrienders leading to increased feelings of calm, happiness, and self-worth. In the broader comments when participants expanded upon their responses many reflected they felt more confident and optimistic about the future and feeling some sense of belonging.

One service user stated *"Clearly, my befriender has been a great friend to me in every sense of the word. He cares. How can such genuine concern not make one feel better about themselves? I am without a doubt improved by him and by New Bridge."* Another stated *"I feel more calm, happy and confident."* Similarly, others noted feeling understood, and hopeful, expressing that, they *"feel less of a monster"* and, that their befriender *"made me feel human and that my life can mean something"*.

14% of service users stated that the befriender service did not alter their outlook on themselves, and 3% gave negative responses. While some participants appreciate the support and encouragement provided by their befriender, some participants' feelings towards themselves remain unchanged. Further analysis of those reporting no change or negative change indicates:

- People in prison for the first time are more likely to report no change¹⁸
- People who have always been connected to the same befriender are more likely to report positive impact¹⁹
- The longer a person has been befriended, the more likely they are to report positive impact²⁰
- People who are satisfied with the number of letters they receive from their befriender are more likely to report positive impact²¹
- People who have not yet been offered a visit by their befriender are more likely to report no change²²
- People who are satisfied with the number of visits they receive are more likely to report a positive impact²³
- People who have no other contact (outside their befriender) are more likely to report positive impact²⁴

¹⁸ 76% of 'no change' respondents were people serving their first sentence, despite comprising only 54% of total participants

¹⁹ 82% of 'no change' were people that had not changed a befriender, despite comprising only 64% of total participants

²⁰ 47% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than one year, despite comprising 32% of total participants; 70% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than two years, despite comprising 43% of total participants; 87% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender less than five years, despite comprising 69% of total participants

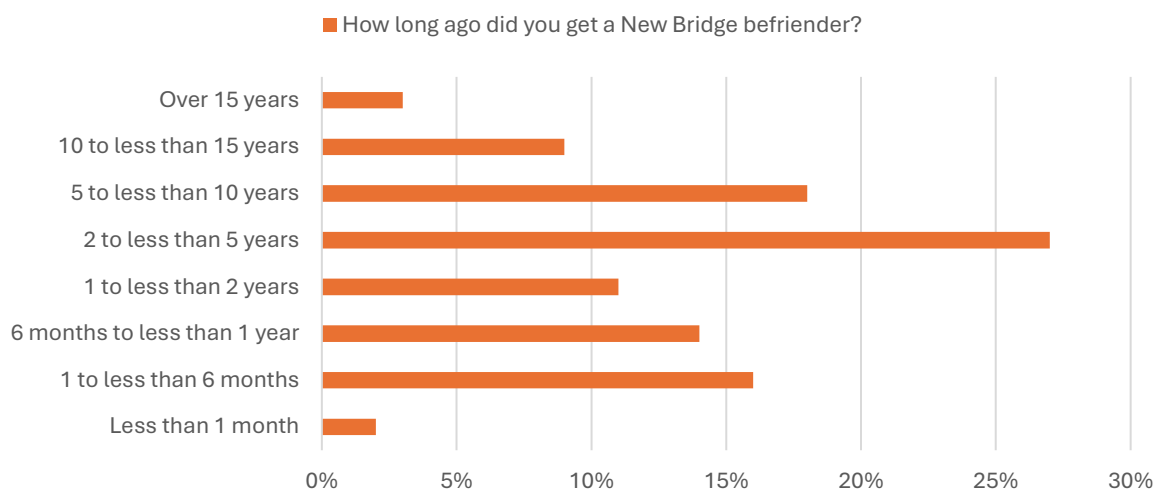
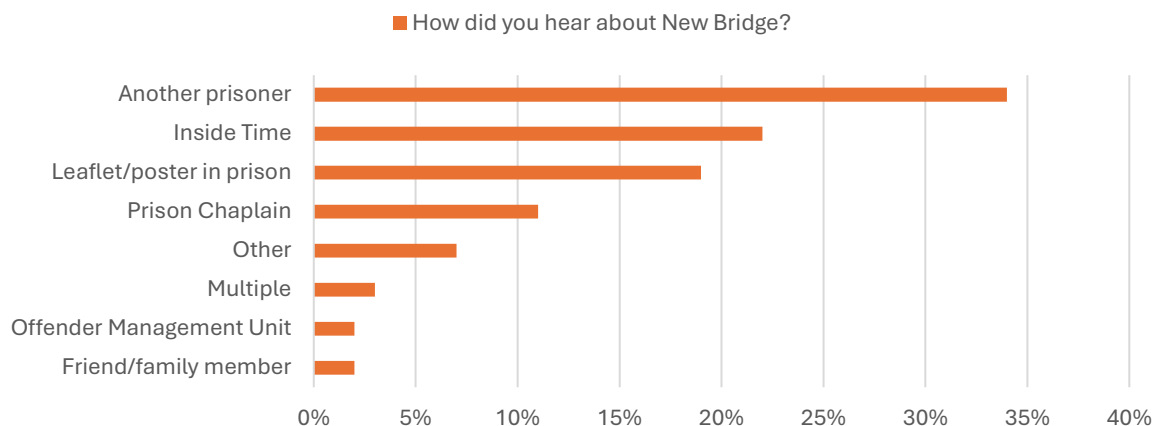
²¹ 73% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to 82% of total participants; 18% of 'no change' respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to only 9% of total participants

²² 45% of 'no change' respondents had not been offered a visit, despite comprising only 31% of total participants

²³ 38% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to 63% of total participants; 38% of 'no change' respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to only 23% of total participants; 23% of 'no change' respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to only 14% of total participants

²⁴ 100% of 'no change' respondents report having some form of other contact, despite comprising only 85% of total participants

Service



How many letters do you receive from/send to your befriender each month?

Letters received	Percentage	Letters sent	Percentage
0	7%	0	3%
1	47%	1	48%
2	32%	2	33%
3	11%	3	9%
4	3%	4	4%
5	1%	5	1%
Other	1%	Other	2%

The majority of letters received and sent on a monthly basis was between 1 and 2, though it was refreshing to note that of the 153 respondents that there was correspondence between either side at least once a month (94%).

To what extent are you satisfied with the number of letters you receive each month?

Satisfaction with correspondence	Percentage
Very satisfied	51%
Satisfied	31%
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	9%
Unsatisfied	6%
Very unsatisfied	4%

82% of respondents reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with the number of letters they receive each month. On the whole the correspondence between befriender and respondent seems to be considered more than sufficient. A number of respondents report appreciating that bendifenders also have a life and other responsibilities

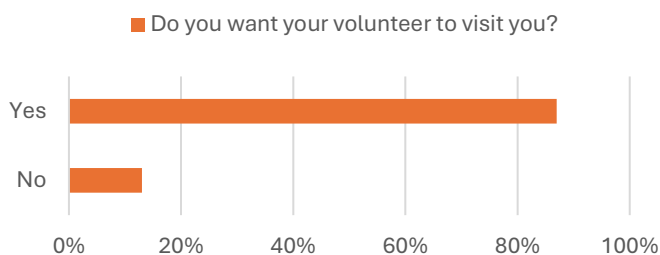
outside of their befriending; the general sense for those that are dissatisfied is 'loneliness' and not having other contact with the outside world.

Has your volunteer offered to visit you?



69% of respondents reported that their befriender had offered to come and visit them. Reasons such as distance to travel, other commitments, access to the prison, relatively new connections may be factors for the 31% who have not had an offer to visit.

Do you want your volunteer to visit you?



87% of respondents reported that they did want their volunteer to visit them, with the remaining 13% indicating they did not. This statistic could also have a bearing on the previous question, with the befriender knowing that the respondent did not want a visit.

If you have received visits, on average how many times does your volunteer visit you each year?

No of visits	Percentage
1	38%
2	26%
3	16%
4	16%
5	3%

We had a day for people who don't have visits at all or very often and some New Bridge befrienders attended this. It was a wonderful day where we: talked, played games and had some food and drinks. This was a great day and I wonder if it's something that could be done more often as it was really helpful

[In order to maintain clear boundaries and to manage the costs involved, we ask volunteers to visit each prisoner a maximum of 4 times per year].

To what extent are you satisfied with the number of visits you receive?

Satisfaction	Percentage
Very satisfied	41%
Satisfied	22%
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	23%
Unsatisfied	7%
Very unsatisfied	7%

A significant portion of the respondents expressed positive feedback regarding the number of visits received from volunteers: 46 reported being 'very satisfied' and 25 'satisfied' with the number of visits, with 63% giving positive responses (up from 56% last year). Whilst variable, the most satisfied tended to report receiving on average 2 to 4 visits per year (the

same as last year).

However, 16 respondents indicated their dissatisfaction, categorizing their experience as either 'unsatisfied' (8) or 'very unsatisfied' (8). It is important to contextualize these responses as they predominantly originate from individuals who are relatively new to the service [volunteers are not allowed to make their first visit until they have been writing for at least 6 months]. This distribution suggests that whilst the majority of long-term users have a positive perception of the number of visits they receive, initial engagement challenges for new users may need to be addressed to enhance overall satisfaction.

Benefits of New Bridge as a service

Respondents highlighted several key benefits that significantly impact their wellbeing and outlook. Many commented that the service helps them feel connected to the outside world, providing a crucial link to society, and that this connection fosters a sense of hope and belonging, making them feel valued and understood without facing judgement.

One user eloquently summarized the sentiment by stating 'New Bridge makes me believe I may one day be accepted back into society'. This powerful endorsement underscores the service's role in offering emotional support and a positive outlook for reintegration, which is essential for their rehabilitation journey, and is also reflected in the following quotes:

- *“I’ve developed a meaningful, interesting, supportive relationship with someone outside of the prison bubble”*
- *“someone else to talk to besides family and friends, especially is good if you have no one”*
- *“it gives me a friend on the outside who knows my crimes and chooses to write to me. Sharing interest and gives me source of hope”*
- *“reduces isolation and feelings of being excluded from the real world, increases feelings of self-worth”*
- *“keeps me sane, gives me ability to feel human”*
- *“it is good as you build a friendship with people outside your family, helping build support network to help me in the future”*
- *“each needs are unique to the individual, I am high profile, my letters end up in media so for me it is trust, New Bridge gives me that trust, free to write without no worries”*

Areas of improvement for New Bridge as a service

The key themes emerging around potential improvements were:

- Increasing levels of engagement
 - More letters (or speeding up response times)
 - More visits
 - Implementing more tools, e.g. video calls
- Speeding up/simplifying the joining process

The majority of participants expressed satisfaction with its current form, reflected in one comment that *“I think you are doing a good job for inmates, as some people have no one out there thank you”*, with another stating *“Nothing, I think New Bridge is a superior service in comparison with other 'pen pal' agencies for prisoners out there”*, and another *“Nothing, I think it’s perfect! (although being cheeky, free postage would be great!)”*. However, some have commented on the frequency, clarity (some noted difficulty reading letters) and speed of the letters (and visits) they receive, suggesting more frequent correspondence could enhance their experience. As one person suggested, *“to receive more letters from my befriender, letters I really look forward to receiving and it’s important to speak to someone on the outside”*; others highlighted this whilst reflecting this can be unavoidable: *“sometimes there is severe lag in communication, although I think that’s just life and prison”* and *“I wish the response speeds were better but I understand why they’re not”*. Similarly, at times respondents noted a desire for more visits and that a visit may have been offered sooner, for example *“The level of text written communication and to arrange (visits), but after 8-9 months, never ever she has (not) mentioned”*, and another *“As I said before, more visits from my befriender would be fantastic, either socially (in person) or through prison video (a service similar to skype).”* Indeed, participants have shown interest in future innovations, such as the incorporation and increased use of video calls/purple visits and perhaps phone/voicemail (and if possible, seeing photos of their befriender to aid a sense of connection), which could further strengthen their connection to the outside world and provide an even greater sense of support and engagement.

Interestingly, another comment on accessing the service initially is worth noting, as one person note *“Easier to sign up. I know of people who have asked but OMU never did the paperwork”*, and another explained *“The first time it took a long time to find someone. The second was much faster. So maybe speedup the*

initial 'red tape'?". Others also noted having a better awareness of their circumstances, particularly in the early stages: *"When providing a befriender, perhaps making them aware that prisoners would benefit, socially & emotionally from regular contact."* Similarly, another noted *"more LGBTQ people, trans people to help people like me, come out or to answer questions"*, and another *"Maybe understanding of background of prisoners before prison and a greater understanding of life in the prison as each prison is different."* This was highlighted on both sides, with another suggesting *"upon being matched with a befriender good to know the do's and don'ts and what you can and cannot ask, saves us asking the befriender."*

The perception of contact with benders and changing them is generally positive, though as one person noted sudden breakdown in communication is difficult: *"Sometimes a befriender stops writing and it can feel like the prisoner is at fault but doesn't know why- others they're rude- and it can feel very depressing because you've built that relationship"*, with another adding *"Once contact has stopped, check to find out why. I am personally left not knowing if I said something wrong."* One suggestion around support more broadly worth noting here is *"Possibly 6-10 monthly check in to see how things are going and if visits are happening, do you feel comfortable with your befriender etc. etc."*, with some also suggesting having multiple benders to help increase the sense of speed and quantity of interaction and another *"to be able to add your befriender volunteer to your visitors' list"*.

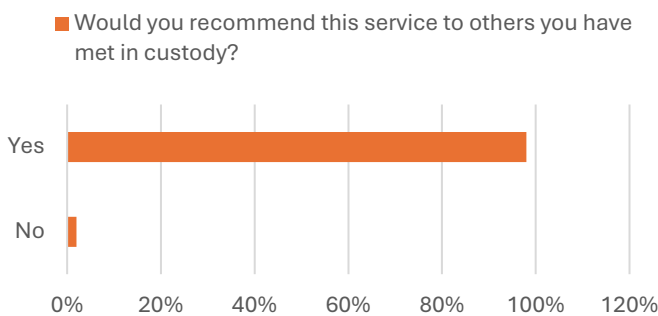
Benefits of contact with Befriender

The contact between individuals and their befriender has been identified as having significant positive impact on the well-being and rehabilitation of those involved. Based on their feedback, several key benefits have been highlighted. First, the regular interaction with their befriender provides individuals with a renewed sense of hope, which is essential for maintaining a positive outlook during challenging times. As one person explained, *"it makes life richer and less lonely, and hopefully this connection will last beyond prison transfers and maybe even release, which would be really special"*. Additionally, contact with a volunteer serves as a crucial link to the outside world, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of belonging to a broader community: as one respondent stated, the support offered *"makes me believe that I may one day be accepted back into society"*.

The friendship developed with their befriender is particularly valuable, as it enables individuals to feel valued and cared for, which is often a missing element in their lives. This sense of being valued contributes significantly to their self-worth and emotional well-being. Furthermore, benders offer a non-judgmental space where individuals can express their emotions freely, as reflected in one comment that *"I found a person who has helped me help myself over the years, they provided honest, unbiased feedback on many issues without judgement"*, and another *"friendship, care, no judgement, support, hope, kindness"*. This emotional support is critical for relieving stress and anxiety, providing a much needed outlet for them to offload their burdens, as a different source of support, as *"it is contact with someone who does not put pressure on you, unlike family or friends can do"*. It is also particularly valuable for those with no contact with friends or family: as noted by one person *"it is essential to my wellbeing, as I do not have any living family, that is my only contact with outside world, thank you for that"* (see also contact and relationships, and additional comments sections).

Finally, the encouragement and support from befrienders provide prisoners with a reason to move forward. This relationship is instrumental in motivating them to pursue positive change and at times stating an aim to avoid reoffending. Overall, the contact with befrienders offers invaluable emotional and social support that fosters personal growth and enhances the overall rehabilitation process. These interactions not only benefit the prisoners but also contribute to a safer and more connected community. Participants find the New Bridge service particularly helpful and beneficial in building a support network, which plays a crucial role in their mental health and overall wellbeing: as one person noted *“it allows me to feel like somebody outside of the system cares about me”*. By providing consistent emotional support and fostering connections, the service helps users feel less isolated and more hopeful about their future reintegration into society: as one person noted *“to be told/shown life outside (the bigger picture?) to also show them the person you are, can become with a little belief/encouragement. Gives you a positive spin on the world and makes you feel worthwhile and not worthless”*, and another *“I feel much less isolated now 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”*. These endorsements highlight the service’s positive impact.

Satisfaction

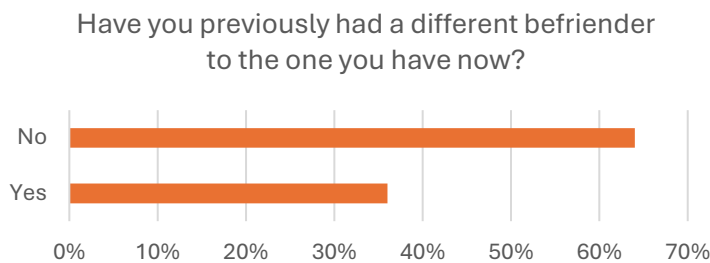


An overwhelming 176 out of 180 participants, equating to 98%, indicated they would recommend the service to others. This high recommendation underscores the perceived value and effectiveness of the service among its users, and is the same as last year (98%). Here, the value of the service for those with minimal contact and the mental health benefits were often highlighted, with some noting how they had actively promoted the service, as reflected in the following quotes:

- *“I know prisoners can feel abandoned by friends and/or family , it is important to retain social skills”*
- *“Its a great support for people who don’t have or have little contact with anyone outside of prison.”*
- *“I have recommended and explained it's helped me not to be lonely or left out from mail or visits.”*
- *“Very helpful, especially for those with no other outside contact.”*
- *“Having someone other than family to confide in has been amazing. It can help change your outlook on life after prison.”*
- *“100% it is a safe space to open up and connect with a person who will walk next to you during this chapter of life”*
- *“I already have recommended New Bridge to others because its just really nice having someone there to talk to who is not involved in prison or anything like that.”*
- *“If you are alone and just want to talk with someone not involved in inside it's a great experience”*
- *“I think it works well for prisoners mental health that has no one on the outside”*
- *“it helps to cope with loneliness and the isolation.”*
- *“Having a penpal to write is excellent for improving your mental health.”*
- *“it's helped me get through tough times, especially my own mental health”*

- *"I do recommend this service and I tell others if you have no friends or family, there are people out there who do care."*
- *"I have recommended this service to others through a poster I made that is on display on all wings & an article in the prisoner news letter."*
- *"Considering the environment I'm living in, there are people forgotten about, this service could fill that gap."*
- *"This is a brilliant service and if someone or something can put a smile on you in prison. It's worth it."*

Experience



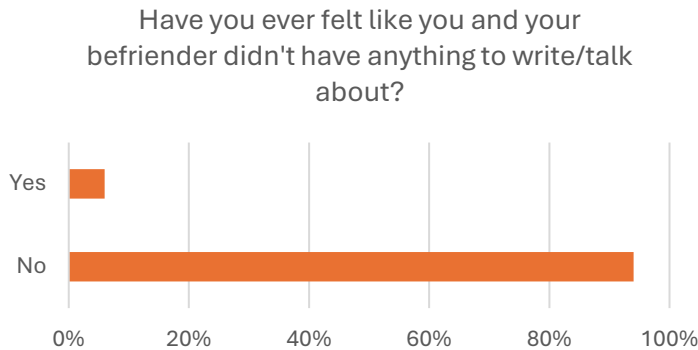
All of the befrienders I've had over the years have been kind, caring, and very supportive, it's helped me as being in prison is a lonely place itself not to mention challenging as well along the way and to be able to just chat to an outside person helps a lot I have found

Those who had experienced a change in their befriender (usually when a volunteer retires from their role) described the process as challenging due to the personal connections they have established, with some noting that the speed with which they are informed could be quicker: as one person noted, *"difficult, build up a professional relationship, then gone, it was difficult not knowing what happened, sad I will never know now"*. Increased clarity around the transition was noted by some as an area for improvement, with one person noting *"Would have been nice to know why the ex-befriender couldn't write no more"*, and another stating *"It felt quite difficult because he just stopped writing, I did not know if it was me or I had done something"*, and another *"Quicker than I thought, but I did feel deserted at first when befriender had too much on."* However, they expressed understanding that volunteers have personal lives and circumstances can change. Some did find the initial 'getting to know' their new befriender tricky, as one explained *"It's ok as the new person already gets that info needed but also certain things get re-lived like when opening up again"*, and another stated *"difficult as I felt abandoned and felt that I had done or said something wrong, it took a few months with my new befriender to move past this."*

Despite the difficulties, respondents noted that the allocation of a new volunteer was generally a smooth process. As one person noted, *"It was a easy process and my new befriender is similar to my first befriender. So the change was easy"*, and another *"It was fine and I understood these things do happen. I appreciate the speed in finding me a new volunteer."* They appreciated being informed in advance about the possibility of a change and reassured that New Bridge would do everything possible to find them a new volunteer quickly. As one person noted: *"the process was easy and no problems got a letter explaining what happened and just write to new friend"*, and another *"This has happened twice. The changeover was seamless really. On the last occasion New Bridge used email to inform me, including a reply, which was even quicker + helpful"*, and another *"really good as my old one knew she would be leaving so arranged my new one beforehand and we got really well"*. This proactive communication and commitment to continuity (and also openness to change) were seen as critical to maintaining the service's positive impact. As one person noted: *"it was sad to lose my previous befriender, but also exciting to meet someone new"*, and another *"for a*

while I didn't have a befriender as she have left NB, I am delighted that shortly after I received a lovely letter from my new volunteer". Others also saw this as a potential opportunity, as one person noted "not too bad I would like someone who is trans female so I could ask questions."

Have you ever felt like you and your befriender didn't have anything to talk/write about?



The overwhelming majority of respondents (94%), replied no, indicating that levels of positive engagement/connection are higher than last year (90%).

What topics do you and your volunteer tend to connect on?

Topic	Frequency	Topic	Frequency
Prison Life	119	My transition and issues with gender.	5
My Future	106	Gym/Keeping Fit	5
TV	99	Religion/Faith	5
Music	95	Encouragement to be legit and healthy	4
Sport	64	Poetry	3
Politics	43	Nature/Climate	3
Life in general	20	Sci-Fi (Fantasy/Dragons)	3
Animals/Wildlife	11	Gender equality	3
Travel	10	Family history/heritage	3
Gardening	10	Place (London)	2
Volunteers Life	10	Job	2
Films	9	History	2
Family	8	Cars	2
Books/reading	8	Paranormal/ Ufology	2
Food and Cooking	8	Spirituality	2
Hobbies	6	Freedom	2
Holidays	5	Knitting and sewing	2
Video Games/Gaming	5	Military	2
Art and Crafts	5	French Language	1
Jobs/Employment	5	Dance	1
Education (College and Uni)	5	Weather	1
Help when I'm in need of support	5	Cost of Living	1
Hopes and aspirations for future	5		

Most participants indicated that they connect with their volunteers on a wide range of topics, including TV, music, politics, prison life, friends, family, hobbies, and religion, with similar proportions to last year. This diverse array of subjects helps foster meaningful and engaging conversations, contributing to the positive experiences reported by users of the New Bridge service.

Are you in contact with any friends, family or other organisations?

Relationship	Percentage
Friends, family, and other	6%
Friends and family	22%
Family and other	3%
Friends and other	2%
Family only	34%
Friends only	7%
Other only	11%
No other Contact	15%

My befriender allows me to Say what I really feel without judgement, worry, repercussions. I can get things 'off my chest', rant, scream, and feel better for it. I cannot do this to family/friend as they would worry. I cannot do this to staff as they hold it against me in some way

The participants who have contact compared their relationship with their befrienders and they responded that the relationship with a befriender is distinguished by its non-judgmental, objective, and emotionally safe nature, offering a unique form of support that contrasts with the more complex dynamics of relationships with family and friends. They feel that it is easy to open up to someone who will not judge them for their crimes, someone that they can share even prison experiences with (they don't want to worry family members), someone who cares about them. As one participant stated: *"Someone outside of the ripple effect of my crimes. Knowing my crimes when first contacting is comfort as there is less guilt. Shows that people can look past the crimes."*

Additional comments

Service users had the opportunity to add additional comments to express their opinions on the service New Bridge provides. Overall, comments collected from the data provided largely displayed gratitude and a sense of improvement to service users' mental health and wellbeing. Service user comments share appreciation and concern towards their befriender indicating the strong development of befriending relationships. The service has such a seemingly positive impact, makes many prisoners feel valued and understood, without judgement and prejudice. Those using the service understand and appreciate the impact the service had on them and their life: below is a selection of comments which reaffirm core themes noted throughout and highlight service users' appreciation of the service and the benefits of New Bridge:

- *"I am so grateful to NB service , as I found it to be amazing organization which genuinely supports prisoners irrespective of the crime committed, its a positive feeling to have someone to communicate with on a monthly basis"*
- *"Just a big thank you to NB 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"*

- *"I would like to say a big thank you, they make me happy! They are there if we feel down or depressed, they can bring us out of situations like that, they have a good understanding and they listen to what we have to say"*
- *"I really enjoy writing and having visits with my befriender She gave me the confidence to open up to my family about my past and has improved my spelling"*
- *"I trusted no one, but I trust my befriender, shown me there are good people out there, I have serious issues which relate to my past offending, NB has helped me a lot. not judgemental , just decent and kind, also boundaries in place, I've never had boundaries, actually helped me to respect these (in the past never did this). kindness helps me reflect, it's good to be kind, thank you"*
- *"prison life is tough, if you find the right befriender this can re-humanise you! Thanks"*
- *"Hope in the outside community, not everyone will see me as a monster. To pass on my thanks to all the volunteers that give hope to people in prison."*
- *"Just that I have more hope for the future because I've realised that not everybody will judge me and my past mistakes. Also that people will want to get to know me as a person and won't just see me as a sex-offender."*
- *"I feel connected to the outside where as when I came away to prison I felt my world was finished and that no matter what I did next would not matter but I now feel much more positive about the future that could be there and that it is up to me to try and make it happen even if I start it and one of my kids carry it and it may be a start(?) for them(?). This is what New Bridge has managed to make me see. I'm not alone anymore"*
- *"I am just very thankful, firstly for my befriender, and secondly to all at the New Bridge foundation and what it provides for myself and those who use this service. You guys are amazing. Thank you very much!"*
- *"I'd just like to thank New Bridge and a special mention to my befriender. She's really nice to talk to and we've been in contact for the best past of 4 years now. It has given me something to look forward to every week is letters, phone calls, etc. and the service you guys provide is essential and I'm glad I signed up."*
- *"I would like to say thank you for giving me a befriender, who is supportive, kind, compassionate and easy to get to know. I feel a lot better with myself, I am more open and honest"*
- *"my bfrienders letters are always welcome, in many ways they are a clock I know approximately, others have come and gone, despite stating the opposite at the beginning, my NB befriender has remained: which speaks volumes of his commitment, tenancy and character. as I've hinted in questionnaires I am not an easy individual to retain contact with, so my befriender is unique. thus I am privileged to receive his very welcome letters, this does not mean we always agree with each other, times we leave with "agree to differ"*
- *"As a sex offender I had begun to believe I was a pariah not worthy of the kindness of others. Now I've had nice letters I am starting to think I may be worthy of others' kindness."*
- *"I would just like to say after spending 25 years in prison (continuous) friends and family have dwindled away to nothing, leaving me alone. New Bridge have made me feel as though I do matter and my life is more than my crime. My pen friend connects with me on art, music and even gardening. I love the postcards she sends and up on my wall they go. I enjoy telling her about my hobbies, study and qualifications I've earned during my sentence. Thank you."*
- *"I feel more confident in talking about things that bother me. I think this service is always helpful, to anyone, even if they have people to talk to on the outside. It gives people the ability to talk to someone who isn't judging or like a family member or prison staff. It's a easy way to be open to someone. For some people it can give them hope and confidence again, in the future and in themselves. I am very thankful for the New Bridge Service's."*
- *"Thank you for providing this service, thank you for my befriender, I truly, truly mean it. You've helped me change my life. (if I were to elaborate).. Before I met my befriender I had limited support with family/Friends-still do but my life won't really going anywhere, I was deflated, I got on well with the regime but then did something terrible. Since I have had contact with my befriender my life has had a positive gradient, continually progressive, reminded me of the person I can become rather than fixate on what I did and cannot change,*

obviously I have to be the one navigate this ordeal but what my befriender has done, has given me hope and allowed me to shine. Truly a wonderful and remarkable woman, Thank you."

- *"my thoughts , attitudes and behaviours towards women in the past have been very negative, but since talking to my befriender I am thinking more positive and I'm finding myself with more healthy and respective outlook towards women, I'm very proud of myself for this and it will help me in the future, it's helping me having a platonic relationship based on similar interests and respect"*
- *"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. I only joined New bridge because my POM said the fact that I have no external contacts means increased my risk making parole harder. I had no interest in a pen pal. It turned out to be the best decision I have made as I have met an amazing person & made what I hope will be a life long friend."*
- *""*
- *"thank you very much NB for helping another human being in a dark place. A special thank you to the volunteer who has been writing me, I cannot find enough words to thank her! All I can say is God bless all those who are at New Bridge"*
- *"it's always nice to have a letter to write or to receive. It helps with a "sense of purpose". It's nice to share news about one's journey in prison who does not "judge".*
- *"My befriender is awesome, she is kind + offers advice when I need it. I look forward to her visits when we can chat about anything. I feel a lot more hopeful + distressed since having a befriender and promote it to others. It helps normalise my behaviour + makes me certain I won't offend again."*
- *"What you are doing is incredible and I hope you continue to do it for as long as possible"*
- *"nothing to add other than"*
- *"I would like to thank my befriender it has helped me feel better about myself and for not be a judgemental befriender. I have enjoyed writing to her and look forward to her letters every month, I can openly talk to her and I would like to thank her for the support when my dad past away as this was an important part/addition to my support network"*
- *"Since having a New Bridge befriender I have noticed a few changes within myself. I also feel that the changes I have seen, would not have been possible without the help of New Bridge."*
- *"The main thing is for me is that I am now stable in my life and I have a bright future, However I would say that without my befriender I would have never had this outlook. So what I would like is to someone from New Bridge to thank her for changing my life around. I'm sure everyone at New Bridge deserves recognition for what they do. Another main change in the way I feel is just knowing that there are people who don't even know you came and they are willing to give people a change in life and do not judge you makes me feel great. Thank you all."*
- *"As a transgender I feel accepted because the befriender chooses who they have contact with."*
- *"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!"*
- *"Yes they made me see that it was good to be alive even thou I was in prison and that I still had a life waiting for me w/ how I get out with my family and friends who are waiting and looking forward to seeing me again. Than you New Bridge you have helps me more than you know."*
- *"recently I 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 befrienders letters, and she loves I hope reading mine"*
- *"it has taken me 1 and a half year to become comfortable enough to truly open up, be vulnerable and share my feelings with my befriender. I have never done this before, with anyone, and it is only because of her patience and support that I have done this, as a result I am truly starting to understand myself, respond not react and have even come off my antidepressants meds after 15 years, something I never thought I feel strong enough to do"*
- *"I really appreciate what you do, like I said when I first got my sentence I wasn't in a good place with family or my mental health, having a befriender helped me through what for me was a hopeless time! thank you!"*

- *“having a befriender is a positive influence on my overall feeling and mood when I am isolated from most other people”*
- *“This is vital for me and has done so much to help me. Thank you for all you do.”*
- *“I am really happy with the service, even getting a Christmas card seems to brighten my day, I look forward to my monthly letters and can't wait for my first visit, overall well done and thank you very much”*
- *“I am more hopeful about life after release , with befriending someone whilst in prison and they knowing my prison journey ,then they will be a good support network for after release, I was sceptical at first but then after getting a volunteer and writing to them I found it really easy to be able to tell them things that normally I keep in my head and they have been a great support because of my opening up, so I think that I am very lucky to have such a good befriender and has a great sense of humour”*
- *“I'd like to say right at the start of my sentence I was full of shame and guilt. I found N/B as I like the sound of having someone to talk to about everyday things. But over time I have spoken about myself, which helped the way I see myself. It is crazy that every day people give up their time and do help prisoner's in very dark time's. I like to thank my befriender, then the whole N/B team”*
- *“Its a brilliant service New Bridge is a good service. When I am released. I will set up something similar in Pakistan. It gives hope.”*
- *“I can only be grateful to all volunteers at NB, my volunteer has supported me for many years and her support has lifted me up as I have had to face a lot of uphill with the system as I work through the parole process which has been very frustrating, her support have enable me to remain positive, many thanks”*
- *“I see a future for my self now even though I have laid 3 family members to rest. I have found a way to move forward and not wallow in the past moving forward is so rewarding for my self. Thank you for all the support your bendifenders have given me. God bless.”*

Conclusion

As highlighted throughout the report, the responses given across various aspects of the service were overwhelmingly positive, as reflected in the key themes noted of *honesty, care, trust, non-judgement, support, new perspectives and possibilities, meaningful connections, confidence, optimism* and a *sense of belonging*. As a whole the demographics for this year's respondents were similar enough to last year to allow for direct comparisons. Those who derived the most benefit and impact from the service were those with limited support networks, those who have served multiple sentences, and those serving sentences for sexual offences, and to an extent those on an IPP. Some initial trends have been noted in relation to transgender prisoners, and these (and other factors) will be explored further in future reports as the dataset grows enabling year on year comparisons, though the initial findings highlight the broadly positive impact of the service. Overall, responses highlight high positive response rates across each impact question, on **getting through sentence**, with increased rates for **connection to the outside world** and **self-perception**, and as noted throughout there are a range of positive comments which reflect this impact. Similar to last year, the positive response rates were the lowest for **feelings about the future** and these decreased slightly, there is no clear singular reason for this from the data collated and it is worth noting that the majority of responses here are still positive, and a range of comments continue to highlight the broader impact, whilst reflecting external factors which impact this beyond the work of the service. Indeed, these external factors were similar across each impact question (e.g. age, sentence length, first time in prison, and broader support networks in place). It is again worth restating the importance of length of relationship with befriender; satisfaction with (and receiving) letters; satisfaction with (and receiving) visits, where these are each higher, there are greater levels of satisfaction and impact. We have also seen the importance of changing bendifenders and explored this in more detail in this

year's report, again this has tended to be a positive experience with respondents well-informed and keen to engage with new befrienders, though some did note concern and anxiety around this process. Of course, in itself this reflects the value of the service and support offered by New Bridge and its befrienders and the strength of relationships developed.

Methodological notes

The themes in this report are reflective of the demographics of the 182 respondents to the questionnaire sent by New Bridge to those who engage with their befriending service (183 completed and returned the questionnaire, though 1 was excluded from the dataset as they did not consent in-line with Arden Ethical guidelines. Indeed, the research was conducted in-line with Arden Ethics guidelines and The National Research Committee (NRC). Whilst a vital process, gaining such approval, did delay the process of sending out questionnaires. Thus, the response rate was 41%. Furthermore, as part of NRC approval, it was agreed for questionnaires only to be sent to prisons with approval from prison governors.

Data collected from the questionnaires, was analysed via a mixed methods approach, with findings combined within the report compiled by our student researchers on the New Bridge Volunteer Research Assistant (VRA) scheme, Katarina Papazova, Fatima Alene Ordonez Nacario and Malcolm Atsou. Once completed questionnaires were sent through to our student researchers. Data from the surveys/questionnaire was inputted into an Excel spreadsheet. Descriptive statistics and differences between groups were analysed, with key findings presented here around experience and service. We considered the extent to which variables may impact upon participant experience and service linked to demographics (Q's 1-6). Some questions on experience and service were open-ended and any qualitative responses were thematically analysed. These were also cross-referenced with participant demographics (e.g. does age impact on perceptions of the service) to identify any patterns/relationships, with key findings presented here.

In doing so we acknowledge that causality cannot be established as methods used do not allow the impact of New Bridge to be isolated from other experiences/interventions (such as the establishment of pro-social attitudes). It is also worth noting, that as the first annual report produced in this format, prior comparisons are difficult, and that some findings may be anomalies which may only be unpicked through comparisons to future reports. Nonetheless, we do believe that the findings presented here, do reflect the positive impact New Bridge has on its service users, and also help to identify potential areas of development to sustain this moving forward.

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