



## New Bridge Service Evaluation Report: 2025

*'I would just like to say a big thank you to all at New Bridge, for the work you do with all the support you give. I really believe that many prisoners will go on to be better people and live lives away from crime. Little things make a big difference and New Bridge has done that for me, help me become the better person I am and I will continue to improve to be the best person I can. Thank you'*

## 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 added a new section in to the questionnaire itself, asking for feedback on what service users think makes for a successful befriending pairing – whether shared/similar or different interests, ages and backgrounds, with shared interests by far the most important. We also gathered more feedback on how we can better improve the experience for service users when their volunteer leaves and they get matched with a new befriender. This type of feedback allows us to change the way we recruit and train volunteers, and how we run our operations, 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 48%, the highest rate we have achieved in recent years (2023-4: 41%; 2022: 45%; 2021: 38%; 2020: 41%; 2019: 43%), and the number of respondents has also risen, to 206 (2023-24: 182; 2022: 164; 2021: 156; 2020: 206; 2019: 184).

The feedback in this year's report indicates a sustained level of impact on our service users, and 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.

This is our third year partnering with Arden University's School of Criminal Justice to run our evaluation process, and we are hugely grateful to this year's evaluation team for all of their work analysing the data and putting the report together: Dr David Temple, Dr Mark Duncan, Malcolm Atsou, Fatima Alene Ordonez Nacario, Aleisha Gayle. 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.

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

**Dr Lucy Ball, CEO**  
**December 2025**

## 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 (56%) followed by violence (15%)
  - o 59% of respondents were serving sentences over 10 years (up from 49% last year)
  - o 92% of respondents were men, 7% transgender and only 0.2% female
  - o 47% of respondents were aged over 50 (up from 42% last year)

### 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)
- **79%** report feeling better or much better about **the future** as a result of being befriended (an increase from 77% last year)
- **73%** report feeling better or much better **connected to the outside world** as a result of being befriended (a decrease from 83% last year)
- **80%** report feeling better or much better about **themselves** as a result of being befriended (a decrease from 83% 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:

- 97% of respondents would recommend New Bridge to another person they met in custody (down from 98% last year), and indeed 25% report hearing about New Bridge from another prisoner
- Respondents report connecting with befrienders across a broad range of topics, and 91% say they never run out of things to discuss (a decrease from 94% last year)
- Most respondents (88%) 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 2024 Annual Report ([www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/pages/category/annual-reports](http://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).

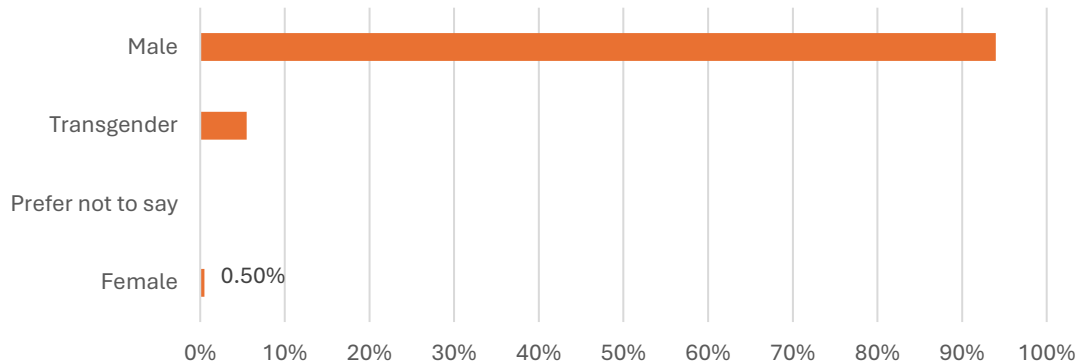
The voluntary sector also facilitates community engagement with marginalised populations like prisoners, promoting restorative justice and rehabilitation over retribution (Clinks, 2016). This is linked to lower recidivism rates and safer communities according to evidence from the UK and worldwide (Prison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

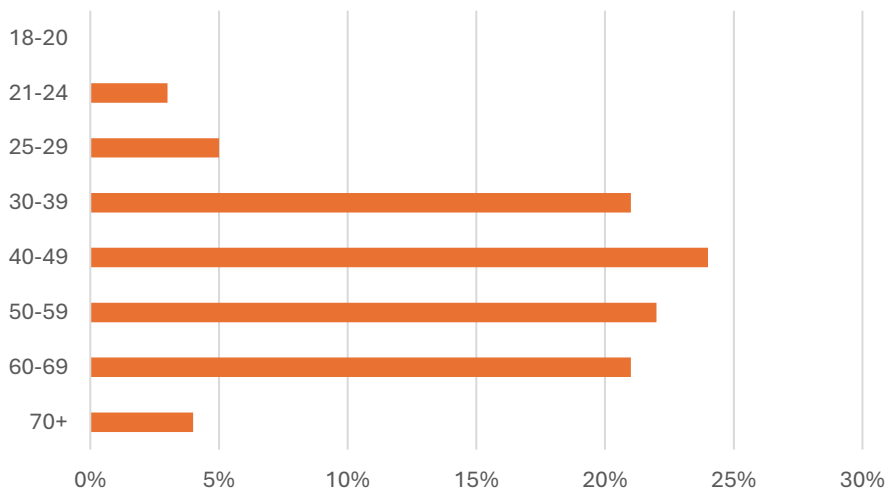
## Demographics

Who are the 206 people who completed our survey?

### Gender identity

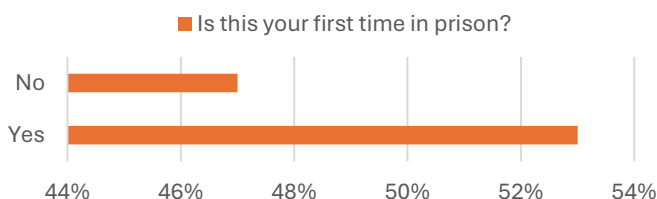


### Age

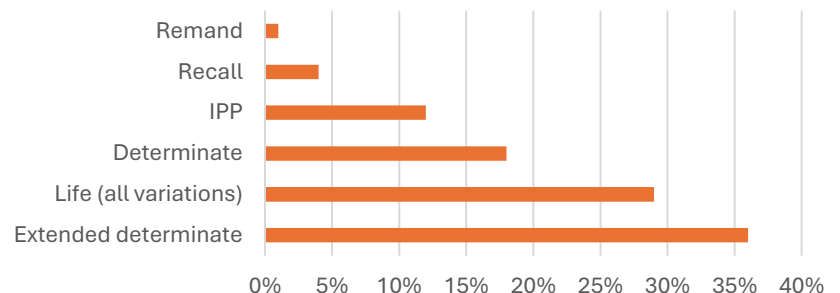


This year, the most dominant group was 40-49 age group, comprising 24% (50), as opposed to last year when the 30-39 age group was the most dominant. However, the 30-39 group remains the largest age group within the prison estate (Gov.uk, 2025). Notably, there were 7 respondents aged over 70 (3%) (see Figure 2). There were no respondents in the 18-20 age bracket. This may indicate a broader ageing prison population (Gov.uk, 2025).

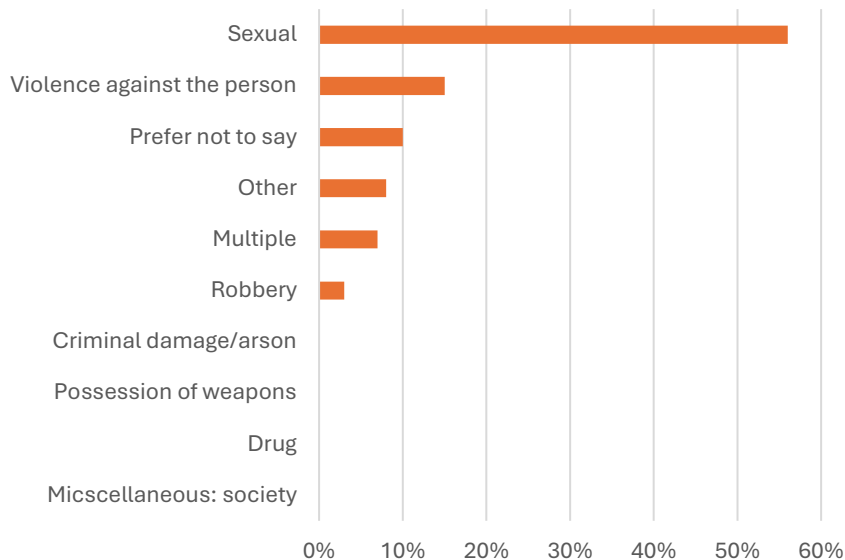
### First time in prison



### Sentence type

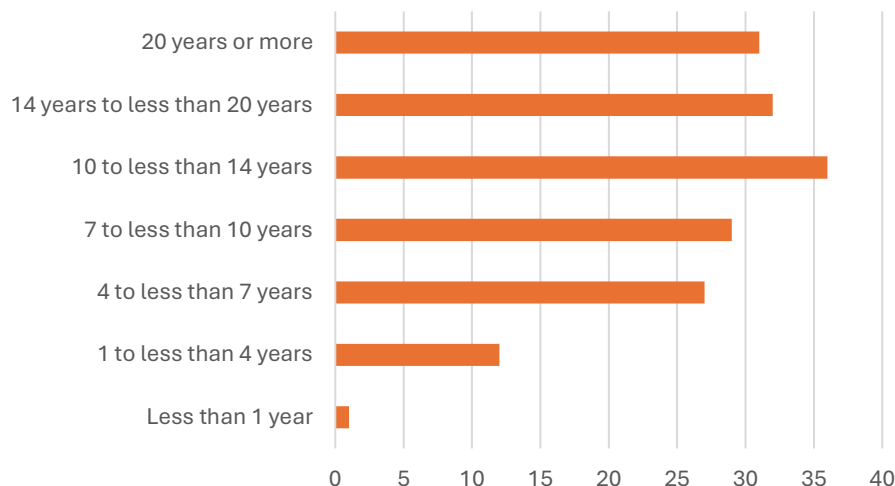


## Offence type



The category with the highest number of respondents was sexual offences, with 114 respondents (56%). This showed a 2% decline in comparison with last year. 30 respondents (15%) (again 2% decline) reported that they had been convicted of violence against the person. Interestingly, recent figures show that approximately 23,933 of the prison population are in prison for violence against the person as opposed to 15,127 being incarcerated for sexual offences (Gov.uk).

## 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: <u>Have you noticed any changes in -</u>	Much Worse (%)	Worse (%)	No Change (%)	Better (%)	Much Better (%)	Positive Resp Rate	Change from previous year (%)
- the way you feel about <b>getting through your sentence</b> as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	27 (13%)	84 (42%)	90 (45%)	87%	0%
- the way you feel about <b>the future</b> as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)	40 (20%)	66 (34%)	87 (45%)	79%	+2%
- how <b>connected you feel to the outside world</b> as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	53 (27%)	58 (29%)	86 (44%)	73%	-10%
- the way you feel about <b>yourself</b> as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	1 (0.5%)	2 (1%)	35 (18.5%)	71 (37%)	82 (43%)	80%	-3%

### Positive responses to impact questions over time:

<u>Have you noticed any changes in -</u>	2025	2023-4	2022
- the way you feel about <b>getting through your sentence</b> as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	87%	87%	87%
- the way you feel about <b>the future</b> as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	79%	77%	79%
- how <b>connected you feel to the outside world</b> as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	73%	83%	79%
- the way you feel about <b>yourself</b> as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	80%	83%	79%

The service is maintaining similar levels of impact over time, even as the number of people completing the evaluation questionnaire increases. The area with the most notable change is the proportion of people feeling connected to the outside world, which has dropped 10 percentage points since last year, and is explored in more detail below.

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	90	45%	-2%
Better	84	42%	+3%
No change	27	13%	0%
Worse	0	0%	-1%
Much worse	0	0%	0%

*Yes, it has gave me a purpose in life and got me through my sentence knowing there is someone to support me all the way.*

87% of service users gave positive responses to this question. The positive response rate for IPP prisoners was particularly high, with 91% of respondents noting the value of support. This is significantly important given the uncertainty around sentence length. Similar to the recurring themes from last year, many described feeling happier and less isolated, with one user stating that they “no longer feel as hopeless about my future” and another that their befriender “made my sentence a lot easier.” Others emphasised the importance of looking forward to letters or visits as this breaks the monotony of prison life. As one noted, “I always look forward to my befriender's letters and visits - makes my time in here go quicker” and another: “before having a befriender each day was the same, but now I have letters to look forward to, have a laugh, let someone new into my life, makes me feel more positive about things.” These reflections underline the importance of having consistent contact to rely on, to make service users’ everyday lives more manageable.

Many responses also specified the value of non-judgmental support and human connection. Service users reported that “I have someone to write to who does not judge me” and “I feel less judged and trust that people can be supportive and show compassion to men like me serving long sentences.” Some simply valued having someone to “listen during visits” or “someone different to talk to”. Confidence and the communication skills of service users were described as being improved, with reports of feeling encouraged to talk about their feelings instead of “bottling up stuff”. This was specifically noted amongst the responses of people serving IPPs, though the broader themes of support emerged from responses as a whole.

Some positive responses include:

*Feel happier in myself as self-belief, confidence, self-esteem has increased dramatically. Thinking more positive about progressing forward*

*It shows me someone is there to visit me & it makes me happy. My mental health has improved after getting a New Bridge befriender*

*thanks to my befriender I am now able to cope with my IPP Sentence*

*my confidence and self esteem has grown a lot, more happier within myself*

*When I am having a bad time I can always write to her, and put how I feel and what is bothering me, and she will always write back with kind words*

*It is just having someone to connect with. I no longer feel as hopeless about my future. It is nice to know that there is someone who thinks or cares about me*

*I'm not lonely no more I talk and don't bottle up stuff and I like writing to somebody*



13% of respondents reported no change in their feelings about getting through their sentence, with some explaining they find their befrienders to have minimal impact in this area due to limited connection, or because they already cope well on their own. However, there are some specific factors which seem to influence the likelihood of people reporting no change:

- Older respondents are more likely to report no change in this area<sup>1</sup>
- People who are satisfied with the number of letters they receive from their befriender are more likely to report positive impact<sup>2</sup>
- People who are satisfied with the number of visits they receive are more likely to report positive impact<sup>3</sup>

Surprisingly, there was little difference with regards to the length of relationship between befrienders, as opposed to last year, where those with befrienders over a longer period considered the befriending service more impactful for getting through their sentence.

### 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	87	45%	+5%
Better	66	34%	-2%
No change	40	21%	-3%
Worse	1	0.5%	-0.5%
Much worse	1	0.5	+0.5%

*When I came in to prison my future looked bleak, now I have a better future I feel [more] confident in [myself], thanks to my befriender*

*It has made me feel much more positive as it's gave me the confidence that I can meet new people and they will see me for the man I am now not the man I was.*

The majority of service users stated that New Bridge provides them with a positive outlook and hope for the future, with 79% giving positive responses; a 2 percentage point higher positive response rate than last year's result (77%). Many described feeling "much more hopeful and optimistic," adding that they now believe they can "live a decent life" when they integrate back into society; they also explain that their befrienders have helped them to "see a better future" for themselves, "grow in confidence," and feel "more determined for the future". Non-judgemental support is again listed as a factor influencing this change, with respondents reporting their befriender "sees me as the person I am, not the crimes I committed," and this "gives me hope other people in society also will" upon release.

Maintaining contact between service users and their befrienders is also a prominent theme, with one stating "we are happy to keep in touch after prison": the continued support appears to motivate users to

<sup>1</sup> 32% of 'no change' respondents were aged 60-69 despite comprising 21% of total participants

<sup>2</sup> 75% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses to satisfaction with letters received (up from 55% last year), compared to 86% of total participants; 17% of 'no change' respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to a much smaller 7% of total participants

<sup>3</sup> 23% of 'no change' respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to 17% of total participants

feel more positive about their future. The responses also demonstrate that even those who previously felt hopeless or isolated shifted their views toward believing in the chance of a meaningful future, with one person stating: “before I had my befriender I felt I had no future, for myself, but since I've had my befriender I am now looking at my future, I am in a much better way, also feel a lot better, and I now feel that I now have a brighter future, since having my befriender.”

Other positive comments include:

*My befriender has helped with my confidence and learning how to accept praise, also how to look at the future in a positive way*

*feel a lot more [positive] towards the future and when I get released I have a lot more confidence in what I am going to do since having a befriender*

*[I'm] given massive encouragement and hope by my befriender for the future and release*

*I have received a lot of encouragement from my befriender in all the work I do and have done to engage in my sentence plan. And through all this support feel very fortunate and look forward with hope for the future*

*I can explain things I want to do in my future and have someone to tell what I want to achieve and goals I've set myself and it also gives me confidence and hope to a better life*

*Me and my befriender have spoken up about meeting in the future. As a result I look forward starting a new life on release, with new friends to support me, so I can avoid old habits and a fresh start*

*My befriender is always there for me and supports me in everything which makes me feel good about myself as I'm not going through things on my own which is how I have had to do things before*

*I feel relaxed and hopeful integrating in society knowing that there are pro-social people, who want to help + support me & that the world is not against me*

*I have [definitely] grown in confidence, and I feel more positive about the future. My befriender has played a big part by being consistent*

*There is a lot more hope in the future now and also that support to go with it, they know the struggles from being inside from what I have said and so in the future if they still around then they will be better to support you if you having a bad day and have no one to turn to*

*My future is going to be great, I feel so good about my chances of survival when released at the moment I'm so happy and getting on with my sentence*

20% of respondents viewed the befriending service as having no impact on their feelings about their future, with a further 1% giving negative responses. While most respondents describe appreciating the support and encouragement provided by their befriender, some feel that their fundamental outlook on the future remains unchanged. This could be due to internal factors, such as the respondent displaying high levels of self-esteem or positivity and thus already having a positive outlook. There are also external factors to be considered such as age, use of email, sentence type, first time in prison, satisfaction with letters, satisfaction with visits, and uncertainty about their release date:

- People serving an IPP were more likely to report no change<sup>4</sup>
- People in prison for the first time are more likely to report no change<sup>5</sup>
- Older respondents were more likely to report no change in this area<sup>6</sup>
- People who are satisfied with the number of letters they receive from their befriender are more likely to report positive impact<sup>7</sup>
- People who are satisfied with the number of visits they receive are more likely to report a positive impact<sup>8</sup>

## 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	86	44%	+6%
Better	58	29%	-16%
No change	53	27%	+11%
Worse	0	0%	-1%
Much worse	0	0%	-1%

*[It's] a [lonely] place in jail and the outside world is lost more so without contact so [it's] very [important] to me to feel needed and wanted.*

73% of respondents reported positive change; this is 10 percentage points lower than last year, despite responses indicating a range of positives. Participants report improved awareness of daily life beyond prison, including changes in prices, technology, travel, and social norms, often noting they felt more “up to date,” “in the loop,” or connected to “real life” rather than mediated news sources. Many of the positive responses also note reduced isolation and emotional reassurance. The befriending service is frequently referred to as a “link to the real world,” “a sense of normality,” and “light at the end of the tunnel,” especially for those with limited family contact. Some respondents reported that their befrienders prompted reflection on their lives on release, including rebuilding trust as they prepare for modern society and to reconnect with the community: they claim that befriending made them feel “ready for the outside world” or helped them imagine a “better future.”

<sup>4</sup> 23% of ‘no change’ respondents were people serving an IPP sentence; almost double the percentage of participants serving an IPP sentence (12%) from the overall group

<sup>5</sup> 63% of ‘no change’ respondents were people serving their first sentence, despite comprising 53% of total participants

<sup>6</sup> 38% of ‘no change’ respondents were aged 60+ despite comprising only 24% of the total respondents, whereas 30% of people aged 40-59 stated no change despite comprising 46% of total participants

<sup>7</sup> 75% of ‘no change’ respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with letters received, compared to 86% of total participants. Further, 17% of the former group gave neutral responses on satisfaction with letters received, whereas 7% is the average response rate

<sup>8</sup> Only 50% of ‘no change’ respondents were positive about the number of visits received: on average, 62% were positive. Further, 31% of ‘no change’ respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to 20% of overall participants.

Some other responses include:

*Prison is very isolating so I get to hear new developments in how the world is from a personal viewpoint, not from the news in TV*

*The conversations I have with family are different to those I have with my befriender. I am more likely to find out about day-to-day activities: such as change to infrastructure, card and cash payments, the price of a cabbage! with my befriender. Whereas conversations with family tend to focus on births, deaths, marriages, future prospects, etc!*

*Makes me feel like the world can accept me and won't hate me as much*

*She tells me [what's] she's been up to and [what's] going on in her life. This takes me away from life in the inside and helps me look forward to life on the outside*

27% of respondents reported that their befriender did not alter their feeling of connectedness to the outside world, 11 percentage points higher than last year; however, there were 0 negative responses this year, compared to 2% last year. While some participants appreciate the support and encouragement provided by their befriender, some feel that their connection to the outside world remains unchanged. There are specific factors which seem to influence this:

- People serving a determinate sentence were more likely to report no change in this area<sup>9</sup>
- People serving a sentence for a sexual offence were more likely report positive impact in this area<sup>10</sup>
- The longer a person has been befriended, the more likely they are to report positive impact<sup>11</sup>
- People who are satisfied with the number of letters they receive from their befriender are more likely to report positive impact<sup>12</sup>
- People who are satisfied with the number of visits they receive are more likely to report a positive impact<sup>13</sup>
- People who use Email A Prisoner to communicate with their befriender are more likely to report positive impact in this area<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 29% of 'no change' respondents were people serving a determinate sentence, compared to 18% of total participants

<sup>10</sup> 40% of 'no change' respondents were serving a sentence for a sexual offence, despite comprising 56% of total participants

<sup>11</sup> 42% of 'no change' respondents have had a befriender for less than a year; on average 28% of total respondents had a befriender for less than a year

<sup>12</sup> 75% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with letters received, whereas 86% of total participants gave positive responses

<sup>13</sup> 57% of 'no change' respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with visits received, compared to 62% of total participants; 24% of 'no change' respondents gave negative responses on satisfaction with visits, compared to 17% of total participants

<sup>14</sup> 21% of 'no change' respondents Email A Prisoner with their befriender, whereas 36% of total participants use this platform

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	82	43%	+6%
Better	71	37%	-8%
No change	35	18.5%	+4.5%
Worse	2	1%	-1%
Much worse	1	0.5%	-0.5%

*I used to feel really low and ashamed because of my offending but my befriender has helped me see there's some value in me and that there's good in me. I'm not perfect but I keep trying to better myself which is the main thing*

80% of service users reported positive change, which is lower than the 83% last year. The majority of service users reported increased confidence, hopefulness, and positivity following engagement with the befriender service, in contrast to their earlier feelings of shame, self-blame, and low self-worth. Several stated that they are moving away from seeing themselves as a “lost cause,” “a bad guy, or “a monster,” and going towards believing that “there’s some value in me,” they are “a good person,” and that “people do care.” The increased confidence and self-esteem of participants showed direct relation to improved communication skills, openness to others, and engagement in activities. Responses show that receiving letters were noted as a tangible boost to mood, with respondents claiming the “elation of getting mail,” “having something to look forward to,” and feeling “wanted, appreciated.” Notably, several respondents also reported being able to think about their lives after release, setting goals, considering careers, rebuilding trust and striving to “better myself.” Some explicitly linked befriending to coping with past trauma, faith, identity, or fear about release, noting reduced rumination and improved emotional regulation. Other responses include:

- ‘More confident and optimistic, and helps my communication skills’
- ‘Moved away from dark thoughts about self-harm suicide etc. In a great place now. All thanks to my befriender’

18.5% of respondents reported that the befriender service did not alter their outlook on themselves, with 1.5% giving negative responses. While some participants appreciate the support and encouragement provided by their befriender, some participants’ feelings towards themselves remain unchanged. There are specific factors which seem to influence this:

- People serving their first prison sentence were more likely to report no change in this area<sup>15</sup>
- People serving a determinate sentence were more likely to report no change in this area<sup>16</sup>
- Older people were more likely to report no change in this area<sup>17</sup>
- People who use Email A Prisoner to communicate with their befriender are more likely to report positive impact in this area<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> 74% of ‘no change’ respondents were serving their first sentence, despite making up only 53% of total participants

<sup>16</sup> 28% of ‘no change’ respondents were serving determinate sentences, despite making up only 18% of total participants

<sup>17</sup> 34% of ‘no change’ respondents were aged 60-69, despite making up only 21% of total participants; 16% of people aged 40-49 stated no change despite comprising 24% of total participants

<sup>18</sup> 19% of ‘no change’ respondents use the Email A Prisoner with their befriender, whereas 36% of total participants use this service

- The longer a person has been befriended, the more likely they are to report positive change in this area<sup>19</sup>
  - o However this is not necessarily tied to being befriended by the same person: those who have had more than one befriender are more likely to report positive change<sup>20</sup>
- People who are satisfied with the number of letters they receive are more likely to report positive change in this area<sup>21</sup>
- People who are satisfied with the number of visits received are more likely to report positive change in this area<sup>22</sup>

The table below is a compilation of the most common complaints regarding the neutral group on all four impact questions. Although points 5 and 6 only represent 6% of all the complaints (the other 94% are mostly out of New Bridge’s control), this could be an issue which could occur every year. Point 5 seems to be a problem in the quantity of letters received, while point 6 could link to a qualitative problem, that for example, there is not a good level of rapport between befriender and service user. In both cases, ensuring service users are aware they can contact New Bridge to inform them of the situation or request to be put back on the waiting list for a new befriender could be a short-term solution for this issue.

Top complaints in the ‘no change’ category for Impact questions	Frequency	Percentage
1. Release date too short/too far away/unknown	15	10%
2. Don’t talk about future/world/self/getting through	6	4%
3. Other support	5	3%
4. Service user independent/positive	4	3%
5. Last letter/email few weeks/few months ago	4	3%
6. Depends on pairing befriender/barely know them	3	2%
7. Just had a new befriender/too early	3	2%
8. Uncertainty relation befriender after release	2	1%
9. Other	113	73%

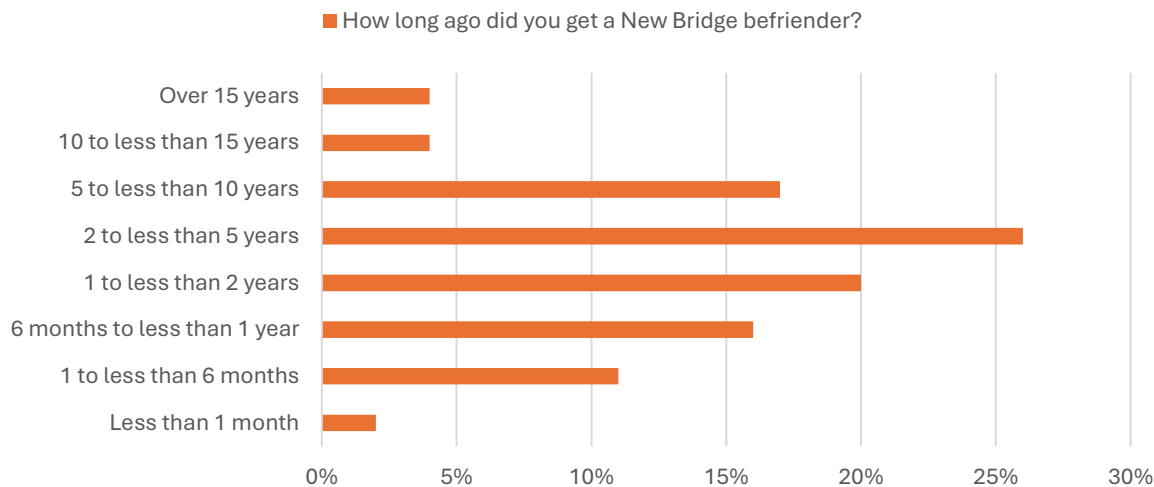
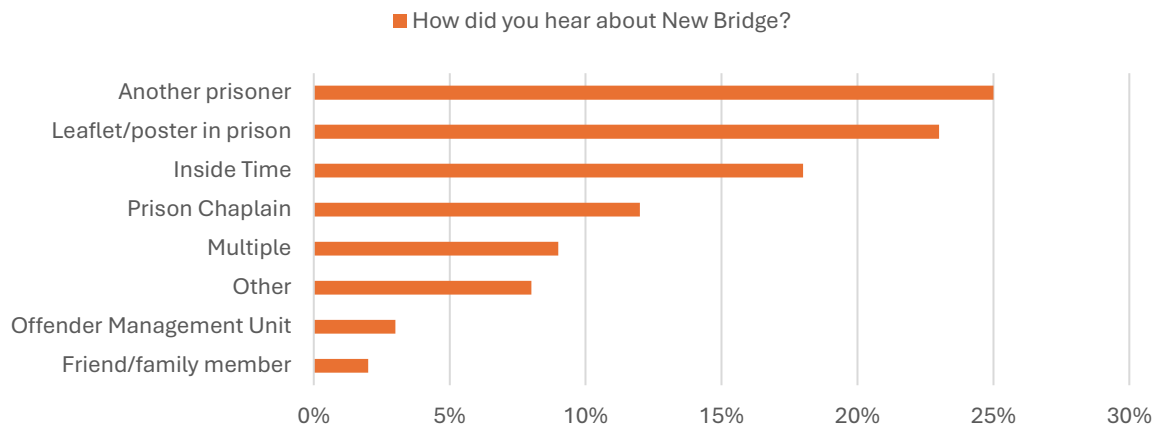
<sup>19</sup> 41% of ‘no change’ respondents have had a befriender less than one year, despite this group comprising only 28% of total participants

<sup>20</sup> 74% of ‘no change’ respondents had not changed a befriender, despite this group comprising only 66% of total participants

<sup>21</sup> 77% of ‘no change’ respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with letters received, whereas 86% of total participants gave positive responses

<sup>22</sup> 21% of ‘no change’ respondents had not been offered a visit, as opposed to the average of 30% who had not have been offered a visit; 48% of ‘no change’ respondents gave positive responses on satisfaction with visits received, whereas 62% of total participants gave positive responses; 33% of ‘no change’ respondents gave neutral responses on satisfaction with visits received, whereas 20% of total participants gave neutral responses

## Service



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

Letters received	Percentage	Letters sent	Percentage
0	6%	0	4%
1	65%	1	61%
2	19%	2	19%
3	2%	3	5%
4	1%	4	2%
5	1%	5	0%
Other	6%	Other	9%

The majority of letters received and sent on a monthly basis was between 1 and 2, with similar proportions to last year. It was refreshing to note that 94% of respondents reported correspondence between either side at least once a month.



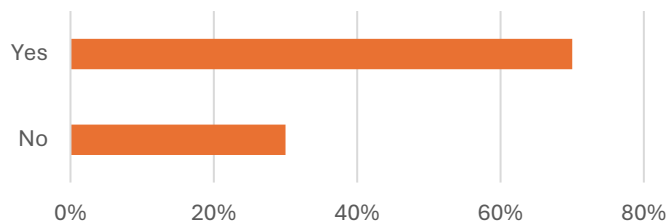
## To what extent are you satisfied with the number of letters you receive each month?

Satisfaction with correspondence	Percentage
Very satisfied	51%
Satisfied	35%
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	6%
Unsatisfied	5%
Very unsatisfied	3%

86% of respondents reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with the number of letters they receive each month, an increase of 4 percentage points from last year. The majority who responded with dissatisfaction noted the infrequency of letters they receive, hoping for more. Additionally, a few responded about missing letters in prisons.

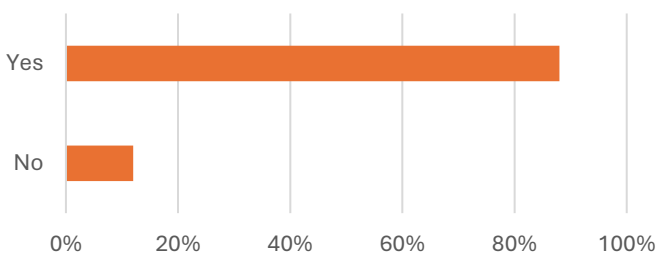
Nonetheless, satisfied respondents note that befrienders carry their own responsibilities and lives outside of prison.

## Has your volunteer offered to visit you?



70% of respondents reported that their befriender had offered to come and visit them, 1 percentage point higher than last year. Reasons such as distance to travel, other commitments, access to the prison, relatively new connections may be factors for the 30% who have not had an offer to visit.

## Do you want your volunteer to visit you?



88% of respondents reported that they did want their volunteer to visit them, 1 percentage point higher than last year, with the remaining 12% 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	30%
3	9%
4	18%
5	5%

*I found that on my visit with befriender, it felt like having a visit from an old friend. We were at ease and conversation just happened. John brought us some lunch and a drink which was fantastic to eat with each other. I am so grateful for him travelling so far from London for a couple hours visit. I have a great deal of respect towards him.*

[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	32%
Satisfied	31%
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	20%
Unsatisfied	10%
Very unsatisfied	7%

A significant portion of the respondents expressed positive feedback regarding the number of visits received from volunteers: 43 reported being 'very satisfied' and 42 'satisfied' with the number of visits, with 63% giving positive responses (the same as 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, 24 respondents indicated their dissatisfaction, categorizing their experience as either 'unsatisfied' (14) or 'very unsatisfied' (10) with negative responses rising from 14% to 17% compared to last year. Based on the written comments, the reasons for dissatisfaction are unfulfilled expectations and promises, administrative delays, and poor communication as key issues, while others pointed to distance, volunteer availability, and prison transfer disruptions.

### Benefits of contact with Befriender

Respondents highlighted several key benefits of the contact with their befriender, which had significant positive impact on their wellbeing and rehabilitation. First, the regular interaction with their befriender provided a renewed sense of hope, with 'looking forward' to communication a key theme. As one person explained, it "helps me with my self esteem, makes me feel more hopeful for future, makes me want to treat women better, makes me a better person", and another "the benefit I get is that I feel supported, cared for where I am not judged that helps me thrive as I work on my rehabilitation".

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, befriending offered “outside support which links the incarcerated with the 'real' world and instils a pro-social mindset”. Similarly, others noted “it makes me feel good to know there is someone outside who cares enough to give time to write to me”, and provides “somebody different to speak to through letter writing and receive visits. It also strengthens my support network now and when released in the community”, and another “I can chill out. It can calm me when upset just to share and get some feed back. I look forward to my letters very much.” Similarly, another noted “they are there to write to and so things you don't normally tell people you can and so open up better. It gives you a good feeling when they write and you are replying, that someone wants to be there for you.” This contributes significantly to their self-worth and emotional well-being, and also provides an ‘escape’ from day to day prison life, as one person noted “the benefits are being able to get a letter from a nice person and takes you out of a lonely isolated place and there is people who care”, and another “knowing the real world hasn't written you off as 'just a wrongun'. Get your mind out of prison for a while”.

Furthermore, befrienders offer a non-judgmental space where individuals can express their emotions freely, as reflected by one user who pointed out that they appreciate “someone new and not family. Someone who understands what we going through plus they see you as a person not a prisoner”, and another noted “a non-judging friend who doesn't see me as a prisoner. Good for mental health and gives me a purpose.” This emotional support is critical for relieving stress and anxiety, providing a much needed outlet for offloading burdens. Engaging with a person on the outside is also an important form of support as an “opportunity to take my thoughts and head out of the mundane prison life and explore + discuss 'real world' news”; it “gives me a chance to vent and off load and also the opportunity to get my head out of prison for a bit.” Similarly, another person noted it “allows contact with a 'normal' person that's not just family. makes you feel more included in society + less of an outsider looking at the world” and another appreciated “being able to open talk to someone about myself where I struggle to do this with family and that fact that they understand to care about my mistakes in life by trying to help a person deal with it in an effective way.”

It is also particularly valuable for those with no contact with friends or family. As one person noted “for me it's having someone to talk to as I haven't got anyone in my life”, and another “there are so many benefits it's impossible to write them all in this small space. I have no contact other than befrienders & it makes my time go much easier.” Finally, the encouragement and support from befrienders provide prisoners with a reason to move forward. One user points out that it “helps me feel connected to outside world, gives me hope for meeting new people in the future and helps me manage my depression.”

Overall, the contact with befrienders offers invaluable emotional and social support that fosters personal growth and enhances the wider rehabilitation process, with reduction of feelings of isolation a significant and recurring theme. 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 “I do not feel lonely anymore. Support given to my spirit are huge.” 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 contact had “reinforced 'faith in

humanity'. Simply, knowing it will all be possible to reenter society and rebuild a life for myself, and that there are people who are willing to accept you at face value.", while another user emphasises that they "feel less isolated, more valued, greater sense of self-worth and connection to the real world."

### Areas of improvement for contact with Befriender

The majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the befriending service in its current form, reflected in one comment that "I think it works brilliantly and I struggle to see how it can be improved.", with another stating "Not a lot really, we have a good relationship and I'm very grateful for them.", and another "I feel little as I have very good contact with my volunteer through letters and visits when times allows."

However, some have commented on the frequency and speed of the letters (and visits) they receive, with one explaining "regular contact could be improved not waiting months for a letter" suggesting more frequent correspondence could enhance their experience. Another suggested "faster contact. When I send a letter, sometimes it takes a month or so from when I send it before they receive it", and another "I have much respect to my befriender, but I would like more letters and maybe visits as I have nobody in my life." Others have also highlighted broader breakdowns in communication, with one user stating they'd like to "find out why all of a sudden why they are not writing as much".

Participants have shown interest in future innovations, such as the incorporation and increased use of video calls/purple visits and perhaps phone/voicemail, for example one user commented "maybe encourage more in-person visits + video calls + phone calls + emails." This comment nicely encapsulates the broader requests for increased and varied contact as reflected in the below quotes:

- *'Easier and quicker access to visits from the befriender'*
- *'More visits. A letter is nice to get but a visit is always better'*
- *'Apart from having more visits nothing really. I also think purple visits would be a nice addition as well'*
- *'If face-to-face visits are not an option due to distance, etc, Could video calls through purple visits" be considered as an alternative?'*
- *'I would like an opportunity for phone calls or purple visits or a meeting service'*
- *'If had some sort of number that you could add to phone them, a time would have to be pre-arranged and some sort of call forwarding but as with letters or visits, being able to just have a chat'*

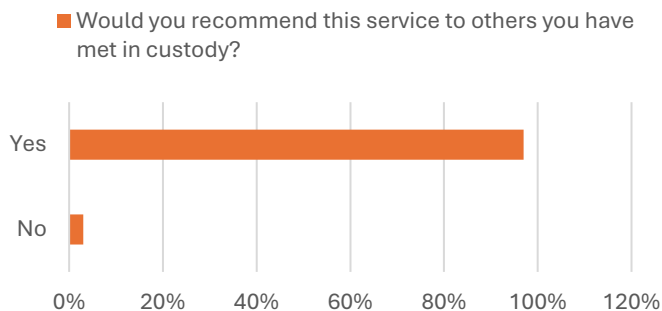
As noted earlier in the report, the use of Email A Prisoner does seem to be linked to impact, at least tangentially. Increased use of this service was also noted as an area of improvement. As one person noted, "emails would be good but I'm happy I receive a letter from somebody.", and another "email is more efficient, costs less, exempt from payment". Similarly another noted the point around efficiency, "email with a reply, every now and again as well, as the post not being forwarded in a prompt time." Though some people using the service already did highlight some areas to improve its use, with one noting "nothing really. I would like more space to reply to emails. But I think that is down to emailaprisoner.com", and another "being able to talk on the phone as letter and e-mails can take up to more than a week to receive?".

That said, the use of the service and phone calls, were also related to reduced costs of communication, which was a broader theme, with one person asking "if it is possible to have phone contact and self addressed envelope to New Bridge (if the inmate has no money to buy stamps)", and another noting "the befriender struggles with the cost of paying for postage stamps e.t.c.". This was also related to visits, with

a response stating “it would be nice if more support could be given to my befriender, logistics, transport money (fuel, train tickets, etc), advice to help her visit me.”

Some also commented on their experiences of the quality and nature of communication itself as an area for improvement. For example, one person noted “I think for him its a hobby, a service - I don't believe he sees me as a person - his email could be generic.”, and another “not sure that my befriender understands my situation. (Lifer/IPP) Though it is nice to hear what they are doing, I'm not sure they are interested in what I have going on.” The lack of personal touch could also be related to those that commented “I think it should be mandatory that no false names are given as that's fake and not a proper way to befriend anyone”. Others related this to pictures, with one commenting “cutting down the time have to wait for a visitor and making it easier to arrange visits. Allow normal pics so we can see the person we talk to”, and another “I think sending each other a pic would be nice to ease the strange feeling of writing to a stranger that never seen before.” Though others recognised the broader reasons for this, as one noted “I think some of the 'rules' New Bridge has for befrienders can make it difficult to feel like you are creating a genuine friendship, but I understand why they are there.”

## Satisfaction



An overwhelming 198 out of 204 participants, equating to 97%, indicated they would recommend the befriending service to others. This high approval rating from the respondents emphasises the perceived value and effectiveness of the service among its service users and is similar to last year (98%). Here, the value of the service for those with minimal contact and the mental health benefits were often highlighted as reflected in the below

quotes:

### Valuable Support:

- *'Its a great service if you have no one on the outside. It could be a life saver for someone'*
- *'It can make the world of difference if your open to the opportunity of additional support and have limited or no contact with life outside'*
- *'Especially to those like me: estranged from family/friends + facing a longtime inside custody'*
- *'It's helped me and I know others less fortunate (isolated) who have no human contact o/s prison'*
- *'I think its a fantastic thing, because some people have nobody in here'*
- *'It is an excellent way for those with no support to talk to someone'*
- *'I think what you all do is great a lot of people don't have anyone else in prison so having a volunteer is really good'*
- *'I feel everyone could benefit from this service like I have over the years'*
- *'I know people who have lost a lot ie: family and friends, prison friendships are good, but often change as prisoners move on or are released, so a steady friendship is important'*
- *'Yes, because people sometimes do not have anyone on the outside and it a wonderful to get a letter'*

- *'There's a lot of lonely people in prison that have no contact with anyone, I feel a New Bridge volunteer would cheer them up'*
- *'It is good to meet new people and can help those like myself with no family to have at least one person to contact or a chat'*
- *'I have lost contact with everyone outside that I used to know. It is great to find someone to talk/write to'*

#### Connection and Mental Health:

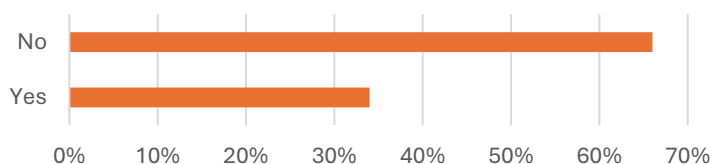
- *'Good way to converse with individuals who haven't lived a life of crime and allows to create a more social perspective'*
- *'To have somebody to communicate with. increase self-confident, self-esteem and self-worth'*
- *'It gives the person something to look forward to a letter/visit'*
- *'Because is dose help with contact to the outside world and mental health'*
- *'I have had so much help with New Bridge and if you have no one to talk to they can really help'*
- *'It has helped me to cope better with my sentence + would be of benefit to people who don't have anyone else'*
- *'It's helped me though loneliness and hard times and if I know someone is in that position I talk to them and Recommend Newbridge'*
- *'It makes me look forward to my letters killing the boredom and time'*
- *'Someone Prison can be very isolating and confidence destroying and it helped to have someone not here to speak to'*
- *'Befriender is actually somebody who I can actually talk to and not put on a mask'*
- *'I think its good for morale and its really nice to receive a letter, when you both get along, cheers you up'*
- *'It has helped me mentally gave me a purpose and enjoyment'*

Additionally, users went onto highlight how they had actively promoted the service;

- *'A few other prisons I have signposted already have said they enjoy their penpal'*
- *'I have had 4 friends sign up and befriend. I think its a great charity'*
- *'I have recommended it to others. Two of my friends have signed up after discussing New Bridge'*
- *'I have recommended New Bridge to other people & have even made my own poster which is displayed on most wings'*
- *'I have recommended to others because New Bridge befrienders provide some normality + stability when most of prison is chaotic'*
- *'It was recommended to myself and I too have already recommended to others as at someone to write to and have that supports on officer and inmates about my friend and New Bridge'*

## Experience

Have you previously had a different befriender to the one you have now?



***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***

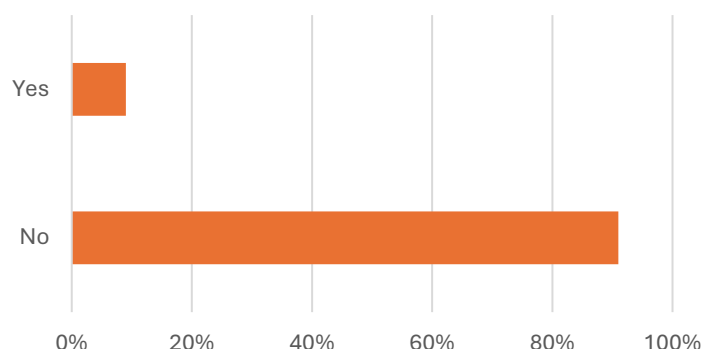
Those who had experienced a change in their befriender often found the process to be relatively smooth, and whilst disappointed at times, were optimistic about the potential for developing a connection with a new befriender and understood that there are broader reasons underpinning the reasons for a change. Some respondents found the process of changing befriender to be challenging due to the personal connections they had established, with some noting that the speed with which they were informed could be improved. Increased clarity around the transition was requested by some, with others blaming themselves or believing they were at fault, particularly where they were not informed of changes. New Bridge's proactive communication and commitment to continuity were seen as critical to maintaining the service's positive impact.

Experience of changing befriender	How to improve process
This transition was swift and smooth. I expected it to take longer.	No. It takes as long as it takes it can not be helped.
It was scary at first but when you build that bond your worries disappear.	Keep them informed of what is happening and that you are trying your best to find a new befriender for them
There are lots of reasons a befriender cant visit anymore. I am a person who can only talk to a woman as they understand me.	Write to them and tell the prisoner that its not their fault.
I think I have had 4 but you have all ways got me another one really quite fast which has been good.	No I feel you do it really good as it is. As I said I have had 4 now. and while I was waiting for another person someone from Newbridge wrote to me until I got a new one and it did not take long.
I found it easy as my older befriender gave me heads up	Keeping people in the loop so they don't feel that thay have been forgotton
Seamless, quick, efficient, effective pairing.	No
Its nice as you get to talk about things your into and what the new befriender is into but sad as you have lost somebody again	Maybe if you know a befriender is leaving, try and get somebody else in place a little quicker as I've waited up to 6-8 weeks before.
Seemless, I didn't need to do anything at all.	Just to reiterate to befrienders how hurtful it can be to be not contacted without warning. Also that it should be a long term commitment and not just a tick box for uni!
It takes a while to adjust to a new befriender but things are made easier by the new befriender making initial contact.	Things tend to be quite smooth in this regard.
As I hadn't heard from my previous befriender for many month... It was then that I discovered that she was no longer my volunteer	It would be beneficial for all volunteers to notify the person that they are befriending themselves if they know that they are unable to continue providing this service.



I was told he could no longer write, I was given no explanation. so blamed myself and then worried if his health was ok.	Give more explanation, people worry.
It was so hard for me because I met a good friend.	When the befriender ends up leaving then it would be really nice of them to let the other person know

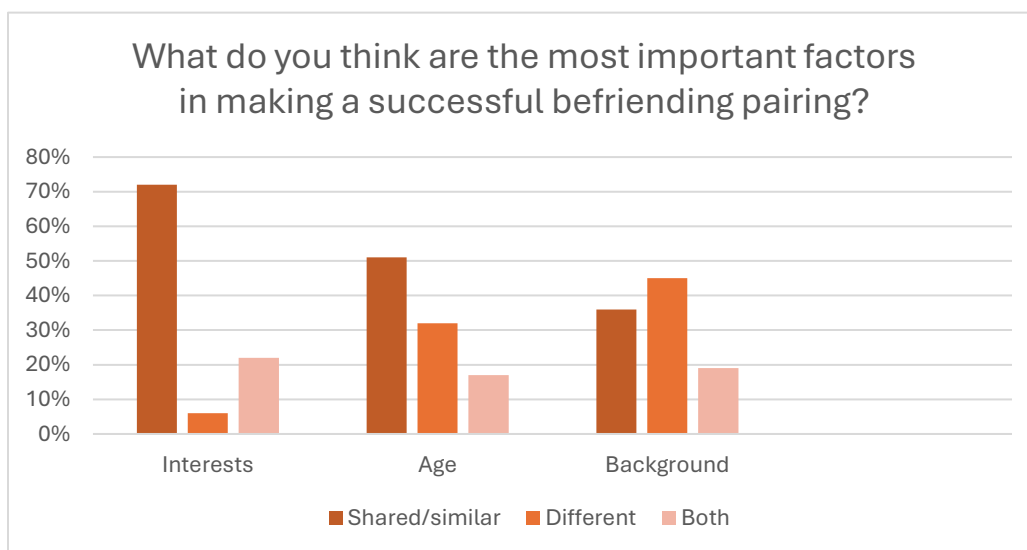
### Have you ever felt like you and your befriender didn't have anything to talk/write about?



The overwhelming majority of respondents (91%), replied no, indicating that levels of positive engagement/connection are slightly lower than last year (94%).

### What are the most important factors for a successful befriending pairing? Interests, age or background?

For the first time, service users were asked to choose between three main factors that they perceived as important in building a successful befriending pairing: interests, age, and background, choosing between shared/similar or different. Some participants ticked both boxes and this was recorded as a separate choice. Based on these figures, it does appear that shared interests (72%) are seen as the most important factor of the three, followed by similar age (51%), whilst shared backgrounds was seen as the least significant factor of the three.



Factor	Percentage
Honesty	13%
Non-judgemental	7%
Understanding	7%
Empathy	5%
Humour	5%
Travel	5%
Personality	4%
LGBTQ	4%
Other	50%

This table represents the findings of 55 responses regarding the qualities considered important for fostering meaningful connections. Honesty is the most frequently cited specific factor (13%), indicating that service users particularly value trustworthy communication. Several factors in the survey appear in a similar range regarding building emotional safety, representing 19% of all responses: non-judgmental (7%), understanding (7%) and empathy (5%); reflecting core principles of open-minded communication and forming healthy relationships.

Other factors that mattered in the survey were travel (5%), humour (5%) personality (4%) and LGBTQ (4%) showing that respondents not only valued emotional support, but also compatibility, light-heartedness and shared identities in helping relationships to develop.

The volunteer being a good listener was frequently cited as an important factor in forging a successful befriending relationship. A recurring theme was the enjoyment of two people from different backgrounds finding a connection and being able to talk about a variety of topics:

- *'We are very different, but I found my befriender very interesting. She is a very nice lady'*
- *'It is good to have different interests & backgrounds so you can learn. Similar age would have been my preference'*

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

Topic	Frequency	Topic	Frequency
Prison Life	136	Jobs/Employment	8
TV	133	Gym/Keeping Fit	7
My Future	132	My problems	7
Music	113	History	7
Sport	78	Places to go	6
Politics	65	Religion/Faith	5
Life in general	25	Science and technology	5
Travel	15	Cars	3
Books/reading	15	Gender/LGBTQ+	2
Hobbies	13	Poetry	2
Animals/Pets/Wildlife	12	Weather	2
Family	12	Clothes	2
Food and Cooking	12	Internet Culture	1
Education (University)	12	Famous people	1
Films	11	Fishing	1
News/Current affairs	11	Geography	1
Video Games/Gaming	10	Slimming injections	1



Art and Crafts	10	DIY	1
Nature/Outdoors	10	Sewing	1
Volunteers Life	9	Military	1
Holidays	9	Languages	1
Gardening	8	Visits	1

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	3%
Friends and family	21%
Family and other	2%
Friends and other	1%
Family only	30%
Friends only	8%
Other only	10%
No other Contact	25%

*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 nature, and not being influenced by the person's past. One respondent shared how their befriender had made a huge difference to them after a lack of friends throughout their life. A frequent reflection was the difference between contact with family and with a befriender, with comments including: *"Befriender makes me happy when she write where as my family don't. Also my family have stopped writing"; "I don't really get on with my family. The relationship is a bit rocky and uncomfortable. My befriender is someone new, not a prisoner. My family isolated me, stopped me from talking to my friends, this is me doing what I want"; "No, as I don't speak or write to them except for the odd phone call".*

The overall consensus was the importance of having someone who was different from family, friends and others that they knew from their time in prison, someone who was positive and kept the participants feeling a semblance of hope, without judgement: *"I can give a natural response that won't be clouded by any history or be too judgemental"; "There's things I talk about with my befriender, especially about prison life, which I haven't shared with my mum for example".*

### Additional comments

Service users were asked to express additional comments or feedback on any further changes in how they feel or think as a result of having a New Bridge befriender. This year's comments continue to reflect strong gratitude for the service with many participants describing New Bridge as an important source of emotional support, hope and encouragement during imprisonment. Responses often emphasise feelings of being valued, listened to, and accepted without judgement, alongside increased confidence, improved outlook on the future and renewed sense of purpose. Some described their befriending relationship as life changing, as they are helped to cope through difficult times, reducing their feelings of isolation and despair. The comments below reaffirm the core themes evident throughout the findings and further illustrate the meaningful impact of befriending on prisoners' well-being and outlook.

- *"I didn't think any one would want to engage with me outside of prison because of my offending but my befriender supporting me and not judging me makes me feel more hopeful I can make friends when I get out and be happy. I've also had issues with my behaviour around women and not showing them respect- my befriender has really always motivated me to better myself at this. I always try really hard to be respectful to her and I think I'm doing well."*
- *"I like to thank newbridge and my befriender for all the help and support given and for my befriender visiting me in prison. you really know someone when you meet them face to face and also have the same common interest. thank you."*
- *"Prison is a depressing experience, but befriender's letters are uplifting. That and her visits are the only uplifting periods in my life."*
- *"Since getting a befriender my outlook on life improved. I can now see a future for myself. I can see a purpose and through New Bridge I feel reconnected to society and not isolated while I serve my time."*
- *"I think this is brilliant and has really got me through some tough times. My befriender is fantastic and I would like to thank her for everything! Keep up the good work at New Bridge!"*
- *"I have found a new confidence and it wouldn't of happened without my befriender and I am so thankful."*
- *"I love the New Bridge it is very great support network as well as they very hard work they do. With more help they can help so many more people. I think community offending manager should know about New Bridge."*
- *"I dont know why many more inmates dont take up this great opportunity with New Bridge as it has changed my thought and how to tackle my time in prison. To be able to have that connection with the outside world is like a breathe of fresh air for me. Keep up this great work. :)"*
- *"Very good service and I would like to volunteer as I will be getting released next year hopefully."*
- *"Having a befriender also gives me another topic of conversation when I engage with other inmates. I am also aware that as we are all monitored by the officers here and being seen to activitely engage in socialable situations is deemed a positive activity and this affects how you are treated, by that I mean the officers are less likely to see you as a problem wheras as a 'loner' or 'recluse' may well be questioned about their well being or even put on an 'act' (constant watch) So my relationship with the officers is also improved as a result of regular visits, thus making prison life more bearable!"*
- *"I wished I had used the New Bridge Service sooner when I first arrived in prison, but I hadn't heard about it until I was about 2 years into my sentence. I think a better advertising campaign would be*

good with more info on what the prisoner should expect. I didn't apply for a while because I was worried about the information you would require from me about my conviction and the stigma's surrounding it."

- "I just feel that what New Bridge offers is vital and i and a lot of others are grateful."
- "Someting else that I have noticed is that I am able to cultivate friendly relationships with other people even when times are tough and hope seem distant. Many thanks to my volunteer but other volunteers at New Bridge foundation. Thanks."
- "I have nearly done 7 years in prison with no visits whatsoever by choice from 2019 I've been disconnected to the outside world but me joining new bridge and reporting has made me realise that I am not alone and people actually acre in this universe. To the founder of the new bridge good on ya pal!! Your the best and you have motivated my purpose in life and one day when i am free I will hopefully join new bridge in quids will. Stay bless."
- "I would just like to thank you for your service that has helped me and my wellbeing as a person. It has gave me hope and helped me build my confidence in myself and this is my first time using New Bridge and I am really grateful people still care and want to help people who are lonely in prison and feeling isolated. I hope this information can help you to improve and get the feedback that is required."
- "I just feel nice every time I get a letter from [befriender name] she has and is helping me through so much and she always helps me to see the positives in me. Libby is a great befriender she always puts me at ease and we have always got things to talk about."
- "All I want to say is a big massive thank you to you New Bridge as I've been with you for a long time. Without the service you provide I think I would of given up and not become the person who I am now today (A changed person). Thank you so much."
- "My befriender has made a massive difference to me. She I know would play down her part and say she's only just written. However, trust me sometimes an encouraging word or friendly advice is enough to help you to just keep going."
- "I was unsure doing the New Bridge thing I'd tell myself "you wait you get nothing and what's the point?" but thankfully I got over it, I have got a good rapport with my befriender. They make me feel happier about myself. I'm glad a place like New Bridge exists. I'd be a lot emptier without it."
- This cuts down suicidal thought lv been told this by another prisoner who has someone to write to from newbridge you've saved a life welldone."
- "Naturally in the beginning it's a little daunting getting to know another person. I think that puts off some of the inmates I have briefly spoken to, as confidence can be low in prison. But once those few hurdles are overcome it can open up a new world of self esteem, be it receiving new ideas, developing another interest or simply learning that life is not over, but there's still a million of exciting other things to think about. Thank you Newbrige."
- "I hope to leave prison soon. I would like to become a befriender in the future to help people who are are in prison. It does give me hope that their are people out there who care about people and not there crime. My befriender seems like a really nice caring Lady."
- "Since getting a befriender my outlook on life improved. I can now see a future for myself. I can see a purpose and through newbridge I feel reconnected to society and not isolated while I serve my time."
- "Just a big thank you to all involved. Keep up the good work and all the best wishes for the future."

- *"It has shown that I can cope when things change by talking by talking about my issues they tend to be easier to deal with."*
- *"I think my self esteem has improved as I feel like my life is worth more than the mistake I made outside and my befriender has actually opened my eyes to a different much better life that feels achievable. Im very thankfull and would like to say a big thank you as its really helped me mentally and gave me the confidence to live a pro social life :)"*
- *"Having a befriender has changed my life around for the better im a much happier person than i was as having someone on the outside to converse about life with brings for a better future in knowing that you have a friend you can write to or call if feeling down they bring you back up again."*
- *"In the past, I have often focussed how I feel & been selfish in friendships/relationships but through New Bridge I've learned to get to know my befriender slowly & build trust & respect, which I will transfer in new friendships, in the community. So I'm extremely grateful to my befriender & New Bridge for helping me to see the importance of socialising positively & using letters particularly has showed the process which I've found beneficial."*
- *"I feel that my New Bridge befriender is more of an actual friend; not just a volunteer."*
- *"[Befriender name] writes lovely letters always helpful because I'm hesitant how or what to ask as I don't want to impose or offend her. Looking forward to a possible visit as stated earlier not sure how to approach it. Letters feel they free flow rather than struggling to put pen to paper."*
- *"Sometimes we need someone to talk to, vent our emotions, I understand this as a listener. Pen-pal is the best thing happening to me since coming to prison. I sent a letter to Inside Times to explain what benefits we have from New Bridge and I encourage their companies to give donations to you. Unfortunately, it was not published yet. Thank you for everything you're doing for us."*
- *"I was very much reluctant at first to getting a befriender, but its one of the best things ive done in prison, it gives you a good outlook and a nice feeling to know that there are good people out there willing to give there time to prisoners, makes you feel worthy about yourself. so since ive joined I have definitely grown more in self, confidence. And look forward to meeting good people on release."*
- *"I just want to thank my befriender for her honesty in her approach to myself and look forward to more contact in the future. Thank you."*
- *"My new bridge befriender has made a big difference in my life and i am thankfull for everything my befriender has done for me; i would not change it for the world, so thank you from the bottom of my heart to all of you. i am in a better place in my life because of my New bridge befriending team, Could not of done it with out the support... Thank you again..."*
- *"Before I had a befriender I had no confidence in myself I used to always put myself down always thinking others were better than me. Thats not the case now I now believe so much in myself, I now write letters which I would never do before having a befriender. I always think now that I'm as good as anyone thanks to [befriender name] she helps me believe."*
- *"As previously said I tend to be more open and expressive when to my volunteer than when writing to family. They are getting to know me from being in prison and so that someone takes the time to want to do that and be a support for the future is really special. In a way it will also be more of a reason to stay out of trouble as it well feel like you letting them down as well as yourself. They have really helped a lot just being there to write to when things are good or really bad and so without that things would just get bottled up inside so they have really been invaluable to me."*

- *"This service is great. It has helped me alot as I come from mental health hospital to prison So its helping me build positive relationships and my self worth and self asteam."*
- *"Thank you to all of the volunteer befrienders at newbridge. Your work is very special and I hope in the future new bridge will allow ex-prisoners to become a part of the scheme or even part of the work force would be AMAZING."*

## Conclusion

As highlighted throughout the report, the responses given across various aspects of the service were overwhelmingly positive, as reflected in the key themes of *honesty, caring, trust, non-judgmental, support, hope, optimism, confidence, meaningful connections, self-esteem and positivity*. 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 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, with the same rate as last year for **getting through sentence**, and increased rates for **feelings about the future**. The positive response rates were the lowest for **connection to the outside world** and **self-perception** and these both decreased from last year, with a relatively sharp decrease for the former.

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 and stability; satisfaction with (and receiving) letters; satisfaction with (and receiving) visits: where these are each higher, there are greater levels of satisfaction and impact. Additionally, the use of email a prisoner has also emerged as an interesting factor in this year's report, and greater use of this service (where possible) could be explored given its links to satisfaction rates. Overall, the report again reflects the value of the service and support offered by New Bridge and its befrienders and the strength of relationships developed.

## Methodological notes

Arden University's School of Criminology, Criminal Justice & Law and New Bridge have followed up on their previous reports (see Trundle et al, 2023; Papazova et al, 2024) as part of their ongoing commitment to continuously improve the quality of services provided to those in custody as part of their Volunteer Research Assistant (VRA) scheme. New Bridge coordinates volunteer befriender schemes across multiple UK prison establishments. Feedback outlined in this report 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.



For 2025 New Bridge have again reached out to the service users they support to gather feedback via questionnaires. The analysis of this feedback is essential to help New Bridge better understand the experiences of those that they serve from a volunteering perspective and for New Bridge to identify potential areas for improvement in their service. The questionnaires have been slightly amended from the previous ones undertaken to capture a few other perspectives from those in custody, with additional questions on factors for successful befriender pairing. This report will showcase the qualitative and quantitative findings from the data analysed and will serve two important purposes. Firstly, it will be used to help New Bridge refine and improve their services to better meet the needs of their service users. Secondly, the report may be shared externally with stakeholders such as HMPPS, funders, and volunteers, so they can gain a better understanding of the work that New Bridge is undertaking. It is believed that this 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.

**Contributors:**

Dr David Temple, Dr Mark Duncan, Malcolm Atsou, Fatima Alene Ordonez Nacario, Aleisha Gayle

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