



New Bridge Service Evaluation Report: 2022

'Prison is a hard environment for everyone. And you have no idea the incredible positive impact of a stranger showing you a bit of humanity, kindness and encouragement when all we are surrounded by is damaged people.'

From my heart and soul, thank you'

Foreword

Every 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.

This year's evaluation is slightly different from previous years. We wanted to explore two key topics: firstly, what impact does a volunteer befriender have on the people we support – how does it affect their feelings about themselves and their future, and their sense of connectedness with the outside world? We also wanted to find out more about the befriending experience itself – how many letters do the people we support send to their bendifenders; what topics do they discuss; does the service provide different types of benefit to people based on the length of their sentence or their type of offence? I'm pleased to say that we have been able to answer these questions in the report, which also gives voice to the people we support.

The response rate for this year's evaluation was 45%, slightly higher than in the last 3 years (2021: 38%; 2020: 41%; 2019: 43%).

The key message of this year's report is one of hope: the people we support express their hope for a future that will be different, whether during the course of their prison sentence, or when they are released back to the outside. They describe how their volunteer befriender has provided that sense of hope and optimism about change being possible and within their reach.

We were pleased to partner with **Arden University's School of Criminal Justice** for the completion of this report, through their 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

October 2023

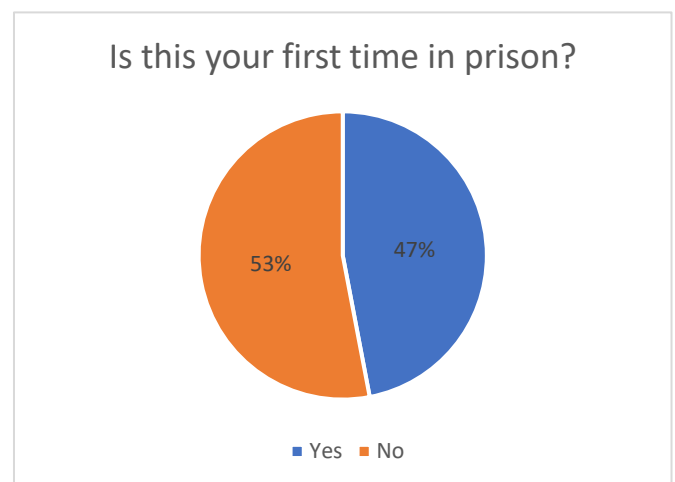
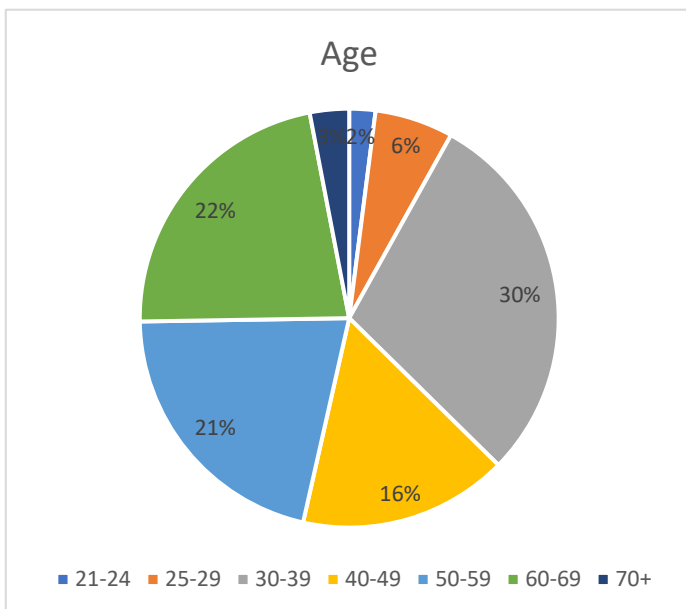
Background

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 benefits of voluntary organisations partnering with criminal justice agencies to offer programmes that foster personal development, skill building, and community reintegration are heavily documented. Research studies have shown the positive impacts of voluntary sector initiatives, for example 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).

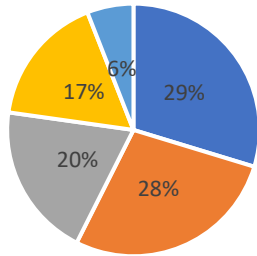
The voluntary sector also facilitates community engagement with marginalised populations like prisoners, promoting restorative justice and rehabilitation over retribution (Clinks, 2016). This is linked to lower recidivism rates and safer communities according to evidence from the UK and worldwide (Prison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

Within this landscape, organisations like New Bridge operate as key participants in the prison voluntary sector. New Bridge runs a befriender scheme, matching volunteers with isolated people across multiple UK prison establishments. Feedback from service users outlined in this report indicates this initiative provides vital social connection, 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 164 people who completed our evaluation questionnaire? [for demographics of our entire service user population, please see our 2022 Annual Report, available on our website]

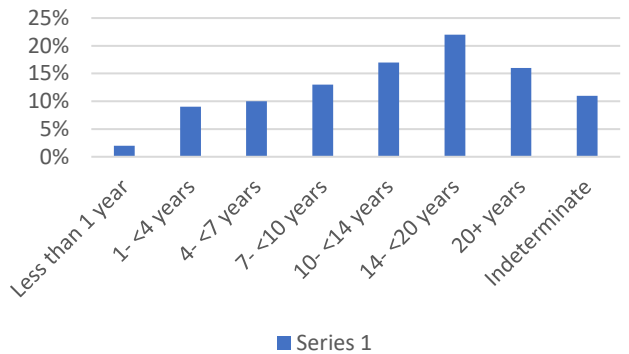


What type of sentence are you serving?

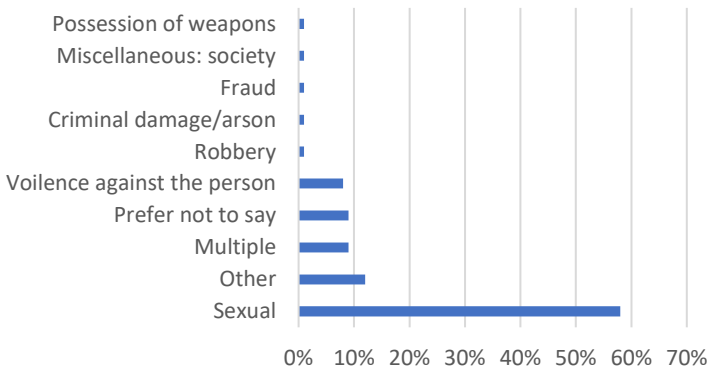


- Extended determinate
- Life (all variations)
- Determinate
- IPP
- Recall

How long is your sentence?

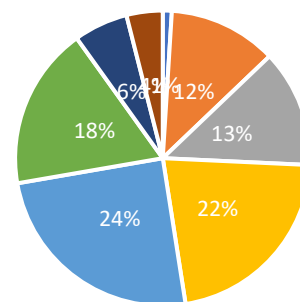


What category of offence does your conviction fall under?



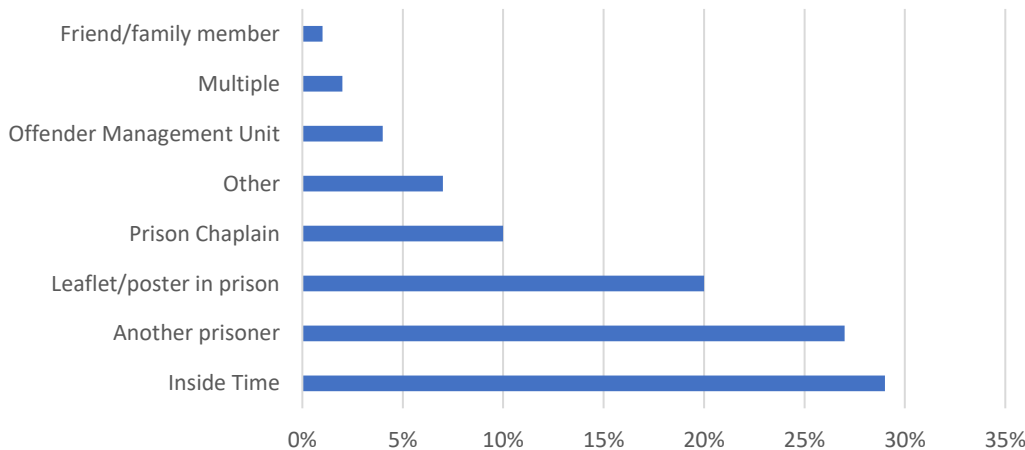
■ What category of offence does your conviction fall under?

How long ago did you get your first New Bridge befriender?



- <1 month
- 1- <6 months
- 6 months- <1 year
- 1- <2 years
- 2- <5 years
- 5- <10 years
- 10- <15 years
- 15+ years

How did you find out about New Bridge?



Impact

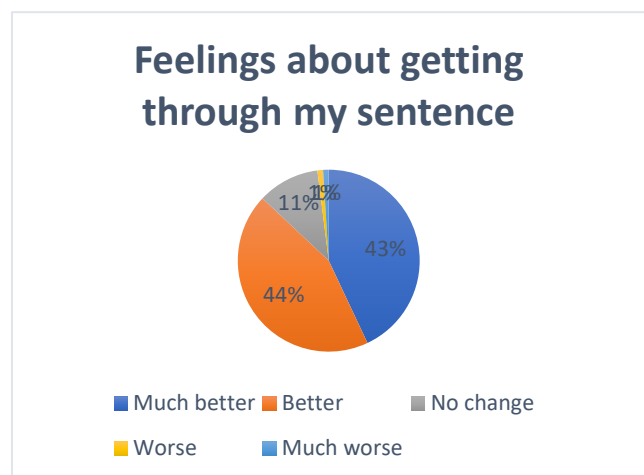
The overall aim of this research was to review the services of New Bridge, to assess how it has impacted those who take part in the befriending scheme and to locate specific areas within the service that could be improved and developed moving forward.

With regards to the former, the impact the services have on those who take part focused on **4 key impact questions.**

Impact question	Much worse	Worse	No change	Better	Much better	Positive response
Have you noticed any changes in the way you feel about getting through your sentence as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	1%	1%	11%	44%	43%	87%
Have you noticed any changes in the way you feel about the future as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	1%	1%	20%	46%	33%	79%
Have you noticed any changes in how connected you feel to the outside world as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	1%	1%	20%	48%	31%	79%
Have you noticed any changes in the way you feel about yourself as a result of getting a New Bridge befriender?	1%	1%	19%	48%	31%	79%

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

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Much better	69	43%
Better	71	44%
No change	18	11%
Worse	2	1%
Much worse	1	1%



87% of service users (140/161) gave positive responses on the support that New Bridge provided which helped them to get through their sentence. Respondents indicated the coping mechanisms they use and how New Bridge support is important and beneficial towards their sentence. The key themes that respondents identified as useful traits their befriender had in supporting them to progress through their sentence were **honesty, caring for the service user, trust, being non-judgemental towards their sentence**

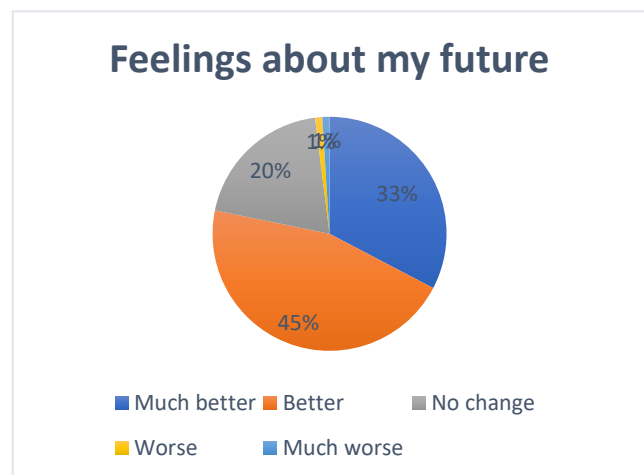
and their offence, providing genuine support and *“not treating them like a monster or an animal”*. For example, one respondent when discussing their experience of the service stated that they *“Feel cared for and supported without being judged”* and another service user stated *“I am able to be open and honest with myself and others, having a better understanding of other people’s thoughts and feelings. Also being prepared to help others talk about things that are a concern”*. This suggests that the service New Bridge provides is key to the development and progression of the respondents’ sentences.

11% of respondents (18/161) stated no change and 2% (3/161) gave negative responses. Here, some felt they had not progressed their sentence (IPP) or that their mindset would be the same with or without a befriender. However, there are factors to consider regarding this, including age, the type of sentence they are serving and broader support networks. Indeed, 61% (11/18) of the respondents who reported no change were people aged 50+ despite comprising only 46% of total respondents. Furthermore, 44% (8/18) were people serving life sentences despite comprising only 28% of total respondents. It is also worth noting that 33% (6/18) who stated no change were people in contact with ‘friends and family’, despite this comprising only 23% of total respondents: those with such support noted *‘I would be dealing with the sentence with or without the befriender’* and *‘I am lucky as I have a lot of support anyway.’*

Nonetheless, the service New Bridge provides improves the mental health of its service users during their sentence in many ways. Another positive element of support was providing assistance with developing communication and confidence building with literacy. One service user shared their experience with managing their sentence with the support of New Bridge by stating that *“Quite recently I realised just how much self-criminalisation I was perpetuating and how low my self-esteem was as a result. My befriender kept boosting me a little & eventually, I raised it with my offender supervisor & offender manager. They then arranged for psychology to do some 1-1 sessions to address this, something new to the prison. My befriender kept my spirits up whilst psychology developed some materials & I completed this in January. Now there is a plan to lower my category in the autumn, this wouldn’t have happened otherwise”*. This sentiment clearly demonstrates the importance and value of the service and the work the bendifenders do for service users during their sentences.

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
Much better	53	33%
Better	75	46%
No change	32	20%
Worse	1	1%
Much worse	1	1%



New Bridge provide service users with a positive outlook and hope for the future, with 79% (128/162) people giving positive responses. Through the care and support of the volunteers, service users have **matured**, gained **new perspectives**, and seen **new possibilities** ahead. Whereas service users previously felt defined by their crimes and lost in the system, the bendifenders made them **feel useful, worthy, and human**

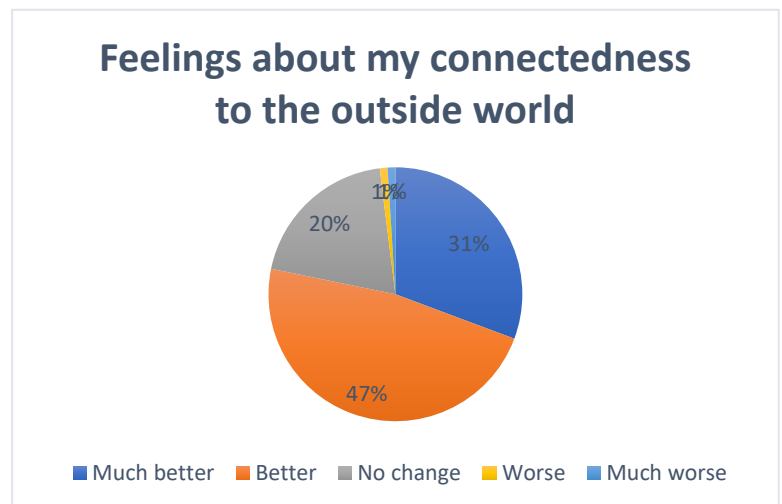
again. As one service user described, the volunteers' "caring, kind and supportive approach" gave them confidence to build relationships without fear of judgment for past mistakes.

Although 20% (32/162) stated no change and 2% (2/162) gave negative responses, this was often because they were already broadly positive about the future: one person noted 'I always have a positive outlook for my future'. However, there are other factors to consider regarding these responses, including previous number of sentences served and age. Indeed, 29% (21/73) of all in prison for first time answered no change, whereas 13% (11/86) of all not in prison for first time answered no change. This is also reflected in the number of 'positive responses' for those in prison for the first time (70%) and more than one time (85%). It is also worth noting 22% (10/32) that stated no change were people aged 60-69 despite comprising 22% of total respondents.

Many service users now enthusiastically look forward to release and rebuilding their lives with a fresh vision. As one shared, 'For a long time I had no vision of the future outside of prison. Now I talk openly about what I would like to do when I finally get released'. Overall, the befriender service has empowered prisoners to see themselves as more than statistics. They feel capable of pursuing dreams, making friends, and not giving up. The volunteers' compassion has ignited positivity, maturity, and hope within the service users for fruitful lives ahead.

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
Much better	49	31%
Better	76	48%
No change	32	20%
Worse	2	1%
Much worse	1	1%



One of the main benefits of the service provided by New Bridge highlighted was the access to information about the outside world that service users gained from their befriending relationships which helps them maintain meaningful connections with society, with 79% (125/160) giving positive responses. One service user felt more informed about current events and topics after discussing them with their befriender as 'whatever is happening in the outside world, me and my befriender talk about it, I feel [more] informed about whatever the subject of our talk was and this seeps into other conversations I have on the wing or at work.'

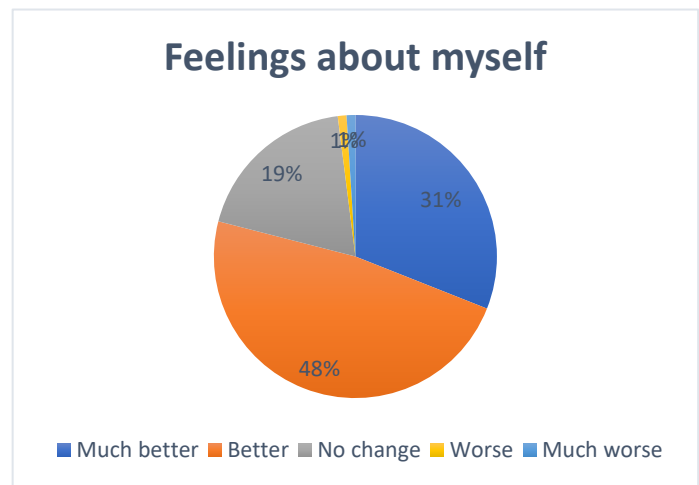
Some service users stated that the befriender service did not alter their outlook on the world outside: 20% (32/160) stated no change and 2% (3/160) gave negative responses. However, there are factors to consider regarding this, including previous number of sentences and length of befriender relationship. 59% (19/32) of those who stated no change were people on sentences of 10-20 years (59%) despite this group comprising only 39% of total respondents. Due to serving long sentences, it can be difficult to focus on life outside, as one respondent noted: 'I try not to think about the outside as it makes your sentence harder'. Additionally,

25% (8/32) that stated no change were people who have been with their befriender for 6-12 months despite comprising only 13% of total respondents, demonstrating how important long-term relationships are for bringing about change.

Numerous service users have developed a more positive outlook on the world beyond prison walls, with one such service user stating that *'being locked away for eight years with very limited access to the outside world (New Bridge) makes me feel positive about other people and a bright future.'* Other service users also highlighted how the service supports them to build social skills, which they believe will help them establish new relationships and rebuild their lives upon their release.

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

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Much better	50	31%
Better	77	48%
No change	29	19%
Worse	1	1%
Much worse	1	1%



79% (127/159) of service users gave positive responses about New Bridge’s befriending service helping to provide improved self-perception. A common theme was that those who participated in the service felt more confident and optimistic about the future, more worthy and had a sense of belonging in the world. One service user commented that their befriender has *'been one of a number of things that have helped me to build my confidence and helped me realise I am a worthwhile person who can make real connections with others'*.

Service users often praised New Bridge befrienders for their non-judgemental attitude, which helped them be more open about their mental health and understand their addictions. One service user reflected on this by saying *'I struggle psychologically with past trauma and experiences; my befriender encourages me to be vocal about everything and it is not pleasant but [sic] allows me to connect more emotionally'*. Another service user noted the difference the befriender has made by stating that *'The change I've seen in myself since having and writing to my befriender has been immense, because I talk about everything that goes right and focus on the positives and I talk about everything that does not go so well. I give myself a chance to learn a lesson from whatever it was that didn't go to plan'*.

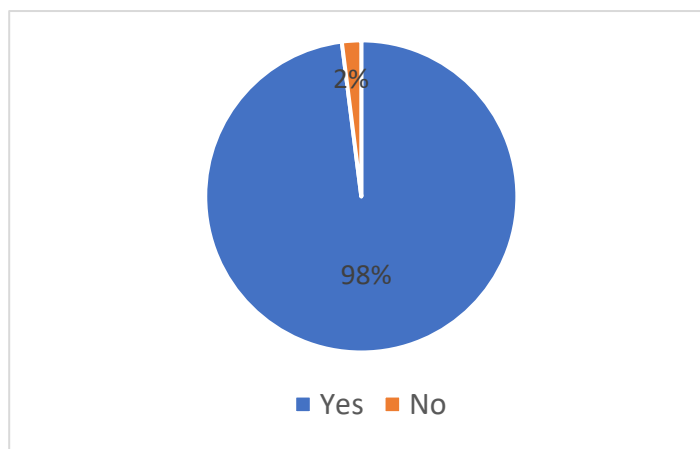
Some service users felt that their befriender did not change how they felt about themselves, with 19% reporting no change and 2% giving negative responses. As one person stated, *'I would love a clean slate and fresh beginning, but this is not ever the case. I am a sex offender and unlike murderers, bank robbers, and burglars; we will never be offered any help or assistance, we are condemned for life!!'*. However this comment is unusual: 25% of people in prison for non-sexual offences reported no change in self-perception, whereas the rate for those with convictions for sexual offences was lower at 13%. Indeed, the rate of positive responses ('better'/'much better') was 86% for those with convictions for sexual offences, but lower at 72% for other respondents, highlighting the particular impact of New Bridge’s work on people serving sentences for that category of offence.

As with the broader connection to the outside world, length of the befriender relationship is important, with 66% (19/29) of those reporting no change having been with their befriender for less than 2 years despite this group comprising only 48% of total respondents. As one respondent noted, this will improve as the relationship progresses: *'it is only a short time and there is no change at present, over time this will change as we get to know each other more'*.

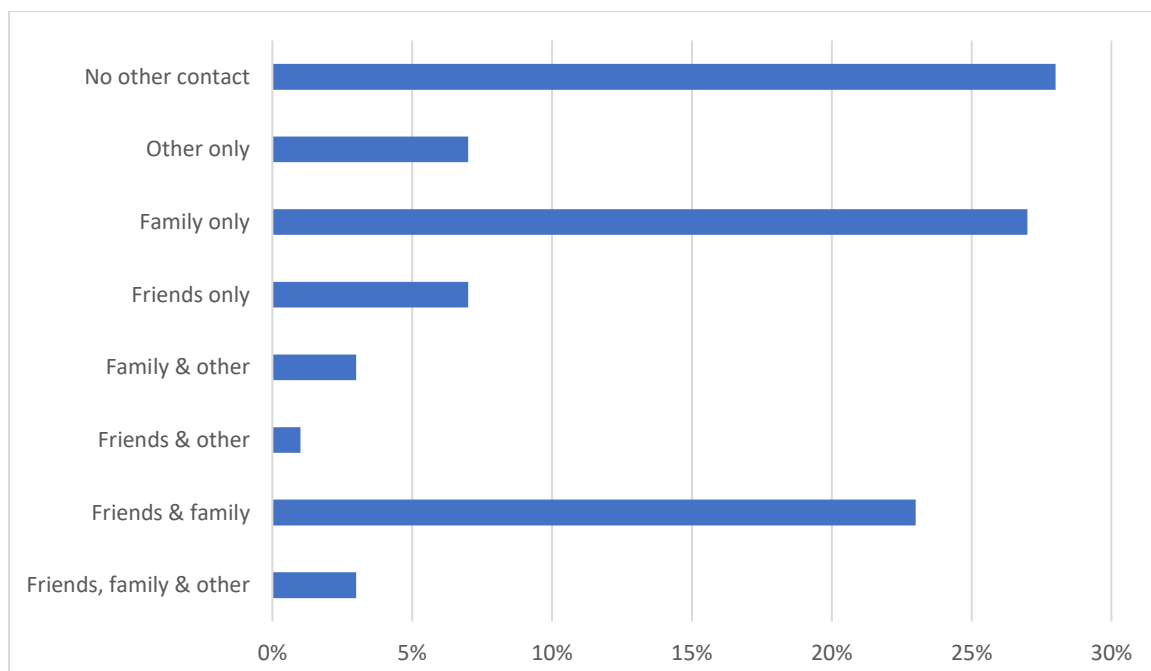
It is worth noting that those few that gave negative responses were the same two or three respondents, who had had a breakdown in their relationship with befriender.

Satisfaction

Would you recommend this service to others that you have met in custody?



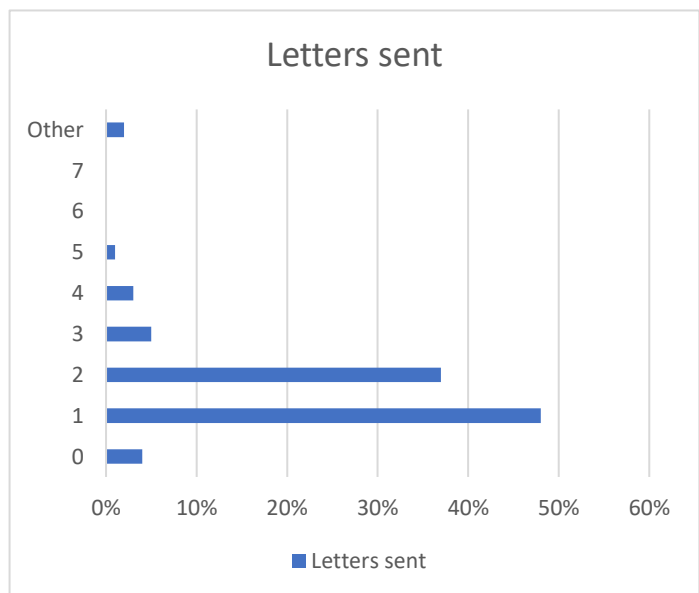
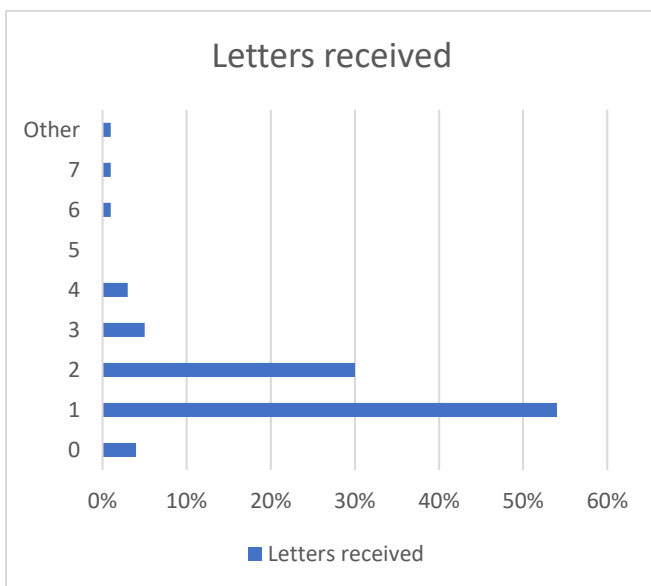
Are you in contact with any friends, family or other organisations?



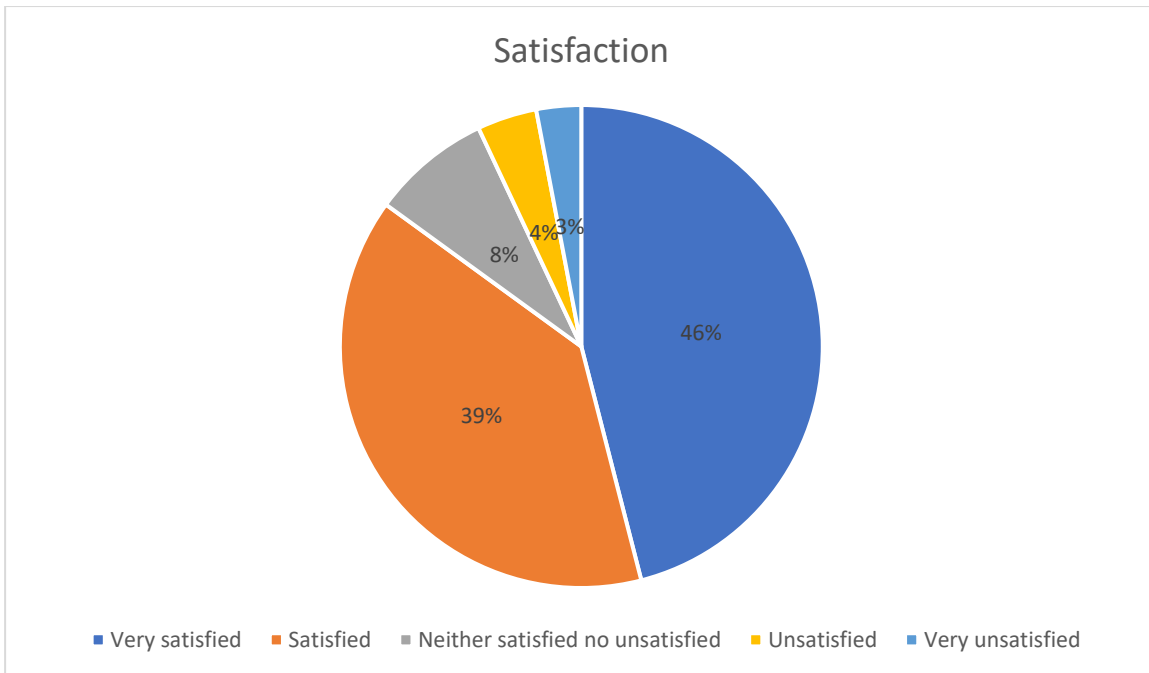
Many service users have limited contact with friends and family whilst incarcerated. This makes the New Bridge befriender service invaluable for providing human connection and support. By giving service users a non-judgmental listener to confide in, the befriender service allows them to **authentically express emotions and feelings**. This emotional outlet and human connection empowers service users to reflect on their goals and progress. As one respondent simply stated, having the opportunity to speak to someone kind and supportive *‘makes a difference’*. The service provides **companionship to isolated service users** and **helps reveal their humanity**. As two respondents put it: *‘I lost all my friends and family when I came to prison, so they make a chance for people like me to rebuild their lives and have contact with someone’*; *‘I get visits once every three months which makes me feel a bit normal while being in prison as I not got family coming to visit me or friends and partner’*.

Whilst those with greater levels of existing support see the service as a useful supplement, they often also recognise the benefits for those with ‘no-one’. These service users emphasised how speaking to an unbiased, kind, and respectful volunteer enabled more **open and vulnerable conversations** than with loved ones. One respondent described their engagement with their befriender as follows: *‘Getting to know her has helped me put what my goals are into perspective, it’s humbling to know I met a friend in the worst place...’*. Another shared when discussing their relationship with their befriender that *‘there is an openness and vulnerability that I can be with her that doesn’t make me want to put up a front’*, as they do with friends, with another reporting *‘I can talk to him/her about things that I don’t want to talk to my family about because I don’t want to upset my parents’*.

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



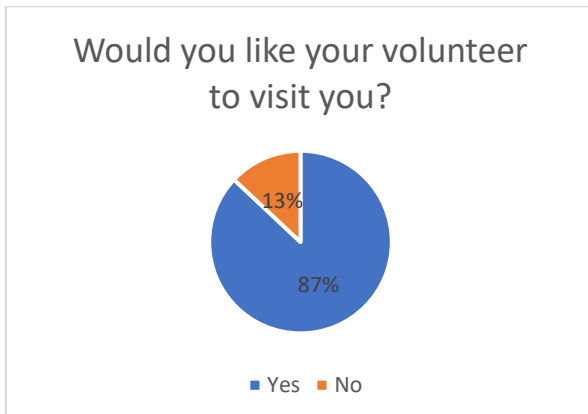
To what extent are you satisfied with the number of letters you receive each month?

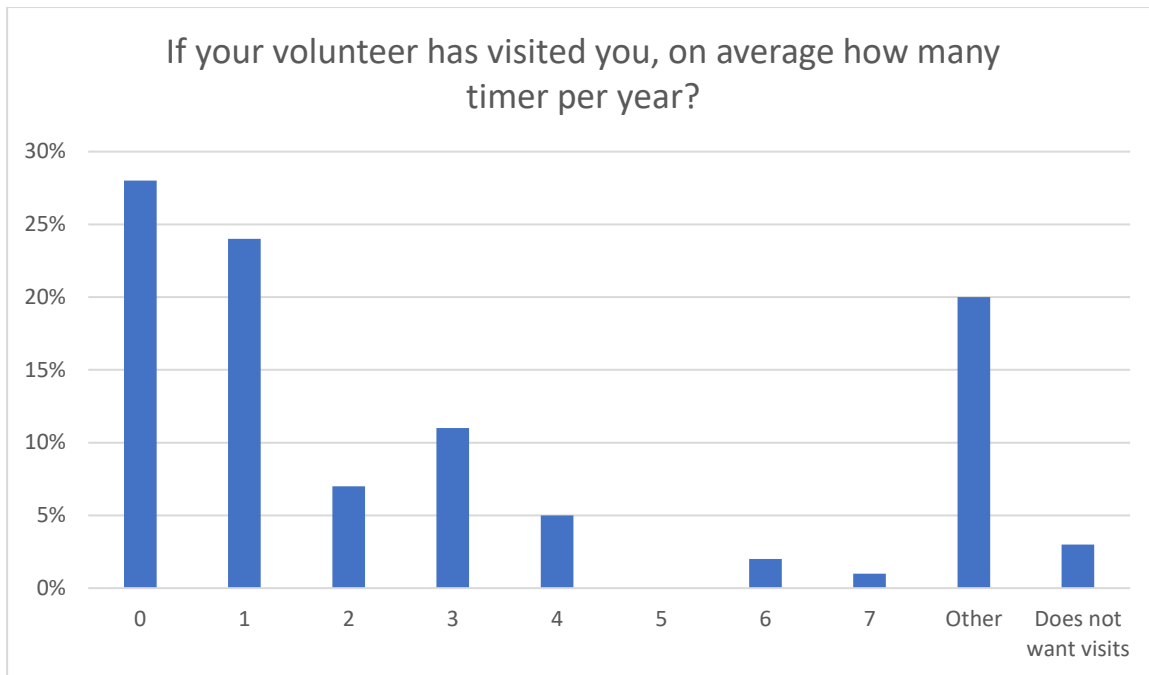


For the majority of service users who responded, 1-2 letters per month was an ideal amount to both give and receive, which accounts for the majority of correspondence with befrienders. Indeed, 85% of service users gave positive responses on their satisfaction of letters received. This appeared to be due to gratefulness for the correspondence, a feeling of not wanting to run out of things to discuss with their befriender, and having limited time due to other commitments and routines within their prison lives.

On neutral responses, it is worth noting that 54% (7/13) of respondents that stated neither satisfied nor unsatisfied were people in contact with 'friends and family', despite those in contact 'friends and family' comprising only 23% of total respondents. Whereas, negative responses came from a limited number of service users whose relationship had broken down with their befrienders. Additional factors mentioned are perhaps beyond the control of New Bridge, such as the cost of sending letters and the delay in post due to prison regimes.

Prison visits



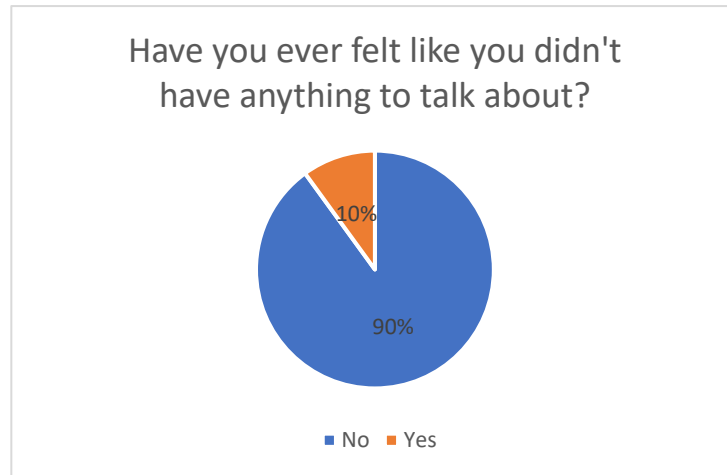


Most respondents have been offered visits (80%). Those that haven't been offered are mostly still to meet the required timeframes (in a befriending relationship for at least 6 months). That said, the majority of respondents would like a visit (87%). Reasons for not wanting a visit included: concern about cost/length of travel for/to their befriender, that they have just got a new befriender, have other sources of visits, or simply would prefer not to have one. It is worth noting that 5% (7/136) of people wanted a visit but had not yet been offered.

Of all respondents that answered the question, 25/106 had received one visit per year, and 30/106 had received more than one visit per year. Overall, 56% (65/116) of service users gave positive responses on their satisfaction in terms of visits received. Some marked 0 had visits pre-Covid and had not been able to receive visits since. Those that gave neutral/negative/no answer responses on satisfaction – 44% (51/116) - were generally those that had received a no/few visits. It is also worth noting that 61% (17/28) of that stated neither satisfied nor unsatisfied (neutral) were people in contact with 'family only', despite 'family only' comprising only 27% of total respondents.

Negative responses were generally from those who have not been offered, or had one or fewer visits in recent years. That said, many who have had at least one visit gave positive responses, and were grateful for the interaction. Those with two or more visits per year were more likely to give positive responses (particularly very satisfied). It is perhaps unsurprising, that visits were highlighted as a potential area of improvement (see **areas of improvement for New Bridge as a service**).

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



The New Bridge befriender service provides service users with regular human connection and conversation on a diverse range of topics. When surveyed, the majority of service users (90%: 141/156) reported never feeling like they lacked subjects to discuss with their volunteer befrienders. As one respondent stated, *'No, because your volunteers are very friendly'*. The most common topics service users enjoyed exploring with their befrienders were TV, music, the future, and prison life. However, conversations also extended to more meaningful discussions around wellbeing, faith, family, books, hobbies, education, travel, employment opportunities, and LGBTQ issues, and most connected on multiple topics. As one respondent described, *'Always something to talk about and discuss... like a true friend being there for you, no matter the circumstances'*.

While the open-ended conversation helped service users feel connected to the outside world, some noted that age gaps could occasionally limit relatability on certain topics. Others that struggled were generally those with a new befriender, although others noted they had initially struggled but had eventually found things to discuss and broadened their horizons on new topics. Service users emphasised the value of having a consistent, friendly volunteer who would listen and converse about different topics. By providing stimulating social contact, the befriender service helped combat the isolation of incarceration and build supportive relationships.

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

Topic	Frequency	Topic	Frequency
Prison life	118	Art & Craft	8
My future	116	Befriender's life	7
TV	106	Gardening	7
Music	97	Health and wellbeing	7
Sport	64	Movies	5
Politics	57	University/Education	5
Holidays/travel	17	Walking	5
Work and Employment	13	Nature	4
Family	12	Business and Economy	3
Religion/faith	11	Cost of living	3
Hobbies	10	Poetry/writing	3
Life in general	10	Clothes	2
Animals/pets	9	Reading	2
Books	9	Gaming	1
Food/cookery	9	Sexuality (LGBTQ)	1

What do you think are the benefits of the overall New Bridge service?

Service users commented most frequently on a feeling of connection and having **someone to talk to** as the main benefit of New Bridge as a service. One such reflection that demonstrated this was *'this service has made me socially able to connect with people and receiving care, compassion, thoughts and suggestions around the things that I enjoy, I am grateful!'*. Another key theme throughout the data was a shared sense of benefit from a feeling of **connection to the outside world**. Comments such as *'New Bridge helps me get through my day. I get to hear first-hand how the world outside of prison is evolving'* were often highlighted as one of the benefits of New Bridge.

A feeling of **not being judged** was also highlighted throughout the questionnaire as well as improvements to service users' mental health. One respondent stated that the service *'Added sense of self-worth as someone cares enough to write without judgement'*. Other benefits included providing service users with a **sense of hope**, a chance to discuss shared interests and discuss issues, as well as being a key service for those who have none or minimal contact with family and friends. There was also one comment stating that there were no benefits as a befriender had ended a relationship, though others were more constructive in how the service may be improved.

What do you think are the benefits of the contact you have with your befriender?

Similarly to the comments on the benefits of the service as a whole, the main theme highlighted was the **connection** that benders gave service users to the outside world and a **reduction in feeling isolated**. Improvements to respondents' mental health was linked to this improved sense of connection and was highlighted as a main benefit via comments such as *'it's a chance to speak to someone about how your feeling and open up about yourself in a way you would not have done before'*. Other popular threads when reflecting on the benefits of a befriender included talking about shared interests, having **someone who cared** and building a **sense of friendship**.

What do you think could be improved about the overall New Bridge service?

It is taken as a positive that the overwhelming majority of service users highlighted that there were no areas for improvement or that they were unable to think of any ways in which New Bridge could improve as a service. Throughout the responses were comments such as *'this is one of the best services that is available to prisoners, who have no family contact or friends outside, so it does not need to change'* which is a credit to New Bridge and the services they provide. To highlight some of the common themes for improvement however, providing service users with **phone calls to benders that are free** was a heavily raised request. Linked to this was the notion of the **cost to service users** of phone calls and postage as an area of the service that could be better. This is likely to be reflective of the minimal incomes of people in prison, as well as the current cost of living crisis.

An **increase in the number of visits** was the next most common thread highlighted from this question as well as a general desire to build closer relationships with benders via more regular visits. One respondent highlighted that *'more frequent visits (maybe 2 or 3 per year) would benefit people like myself who maybe only have one visit every two years from somebody I know.'* They also suggested that *'the use of purple/video visits if more social visits are unavailable, would be a significant improvement on the current amount of contact'* highlighting a frequently raised suggestion that the **use of video calling** would be an improvement to the service.

Issues that were raised in more of a negative tone included service users **not being informed when a befriender leaves the service**, and a need for consistency once a service user has built a relationship with

a befriender. This is recognised as a priority concern for service users however it is recognised that, by the nature of voluntary work, the retention of befrienders is likely to remain an ongoing difficulty.

What do you think could be improved about the contact you have with your befriender?

As with suggestions on how New Bridge can improve as a service, the overwhelming majority of service users highlighted no areas for improvements with regards to their befriender. A comment which highlights this states that *'I have nothing bad to say to improve, I feel that everything with the contact is good and it's the best thing which could have happened.'*

As previously discussed, some of the minor improvements mentioned included access to free phone calls or pre-paid envelopes to communicate with their befriender and an **increase in the level of communication by phone call and visits**. One main suggestion that was frequently highlighted throughout the responses to this question was the **use of the prison email system** which would likely take away the costing issues previously mentioned.

In line with the above comments, the overwhelming majority would recommend New Bridge to others (98%) and were complimentary, with many noting they have recommended New Bridge to others. Those that answered no, generally had broader issues (limited correspondence, breakdown in relationship with befriender).

Additional comments

Service users had the opportunity to add additional comments to express their opinions on the service New Bridge provides. Overall, 69 comments were collected from the data provided which largely displayed gratitude and a sense of improvement to service users' mental health and wellbeing. Respondents' comments share appreciation and concern towards their befriender indicating the strong development of befriending relationships.

Below is a selection of comments which highlight service users' appreciation of the service and the benefits of New Bridge:

- *"I feel my future is closer than before I suppose in more ways than one, obviously time passes by us all but my befriender has continually supported and encouraged me at every step"*
- *"i feel very positive about life on the outside with help from Newbridge & my supportive family/ friend on the outside. Newbridge is a good thing so please keep it going it does help people inside because prison is a very lonely place & let anybody tell you any different."*
- *"(my befriender) is the best friend you could have on your books she is a goddess & her light shines very bright so thank you Newbridge for i'm very happy."*
- *"(my befriender) just makes me wanna be a better person & knowing i have her support & friendship is special to me because we have connected solidly & I feel like I know her forever.- Simple as that!"*
- *"It has helped me to feel less judged when talking to new people, I think she needs to be recognised for the part she has played by letting me have the chance of looking forward to receiving her letters and replying, thank you!"*
- *"I can not wait to get out of prison to tell other people what a wonderful job you all do. As you are all volunteers who give up your free time to make a difference in other people's lives. Prison is not a place to keep coming back to, once I leave I will not be coming back. I am going to rebuild my life back to where I left off but for all the right reasons and to keep away from old friends."*

Furthermore, a sense of personal development via support from New Bridge was a common area that service users raised within the 'additional comments' section of the questionnaire. Below is a selection of comments which demonstrate service users' thoughts on their development since engaging with the service.

- *"Prison is a hard environment for everyone. No idea the incredible positive impact of a stranger showing a bit of humanity, kindness and encouragement when all we are surrounded by is damaged people - from heart and soul - thank you"*
- *"I find having a New Bridge befriender as very positive for me. I'm more sociable and it lifts me up when I get post and send letters. I worried that I'd not get on with it and be asked what I had done, why I did it but I have not and even though I am in jail it does feel i am getting out of myself. The future has become more positive and i look forward to my new bfrienders letters once again."*
- *"Some prisoners find the New Bridge service a link to the outside as in prison can become insular and lose all touch with how to converse/conduct with someone who is no judging. Quite applicable to long-term prisoners who already have low self-esteem and no connections out there"*
- *"The New Bridge befriender was the best thing they did, helped develop as a person and say a big thank you to those who take time out of their lives to write letters and support someone in prison - real stars".*
- *"it has helped me by letting my guard down and opening up and being able to trust a friend and talk honestly to be myself without being judged, I am more relaxed, calm and motivated to do more things and be more proactive about my life. I would like to say thank you to New Bridge and my befriender for being there for me, it's the best support, it gave me my confidence back and to feel cared about."*
- *"Yes, its so nice to see a normal person, write to me with no agenda it humbles me that in life no matter what I've done there are people who won't judge. i do at times think i wish i had helped more people out there (when i was in society) i reflect on this a lot. life has so much to offer, i threw it all away. i'm not a bad person now, my personal benefits are i see good in people now, i truly respect my befriender and she is like a mentor to me. i look up to her, so yes in that sense it is a huge benefit to me."*

This demonstrates that the respondents have developed genuine compassion and sincerity during their time with New Bridge.

Recommendations

As noted, some of the key variables are beyond the control of New Bridge as a service. That said the report has highlighted various areas where respondents felt the service could be improve, such as the costs of involvement with the service, the number of visits/use of video calling, and communication when a befriender leaves the service. Based on these, we would make the following recommendations:

- Ensure that all volunteers offer to visit the people they befriend, and try to increase the frequency of visits.
- Explore the possibility of volunteers using video calls to stay in touch with the people they befriend.
- Explore the possibility of reducing the cost for service users, through an increased uptake of the Email A Prisoner service, or by providing other means such as pre-paid envelopes.
- Review the processes involved when a volunteer leaves New Bridge, and how this is communicated to the people they were befriending.

Conclusion

As highlighted throughout the report, there are a range of factors that may be significant, and following the suggested recommendations may help to further improve the impact of New Bridge. These will be explored further in future editions of the report, as the dataset grows enabling year on year comparisons. What does seem apparent is that the vast majority of respondents found New Bridge to be a beneficial service for them. It seemed to be particularly impactful and beneficial for those with limited support networks, who have served multiple sentences, and for those serving sentences for sexual offences.

Methodological notes

The themes outlined in this report are reflective of the demographics of the 164 respondents to the questionnaire sent by New Bridge to those who engage with their befriending service (167 completed and returned the questionnaire, though 3 were excluded from the dataset as they did not consent in-line with Arden Ethical guidelines). The research was conducted in line with Arden University's Ethics guidelines and after approval from The National Research Committee (NRC).

Data collected from the questionnaires, agreed with New Bridge, were 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. 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. For Likert-style questions, responses were classified as: positive (e.g. better and much better), neutral (e.g. no change), and negative (e.g. worse and much worse). We considered the extent to which variables may impact upon participant experience and service linked to demographics. 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 can also help to identify potential areas of development to sustain this moving forward.

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