

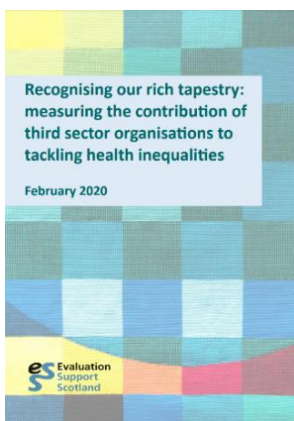
## Befrienders Skye and Lochalsh case study

This is one of a series of case studies showing the kind of **evidence** organisations collect to **prove** their contribution to tackling health inequalities.

Befrienders Skye and Lochalsh have used “[Recognising our rich tapestry: measuring the contribution of third sector organisations to tackling health inequalities](#)” to **explain** and **prove** how their service contributes to tackling health inequalities.

Health inequalities are the unfair differences in people’s health which lead to differences in life expectancy between the most and least disadvantaged people in Scotland.

### Introduction



Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) developed **Recognising our rich tapestry** in collaboration with third sector organisations, sector intermediaries and commissioners. This work was funded by

Public Health Scotland. The resource intends to help:

- third sector organisations explain to funders and partners how their work contributes to impacting on inequalities
- funders and commissioners better understand better the third sector’s contribution

**Section 1** of this case study includes a logic model which **explains** how Befrienders Skye and Lochalsh’s work links to tackling health inequalities.

**Section 2** sets out evidence to **prove** this.

### About Befrienders Skye and Lochalsh

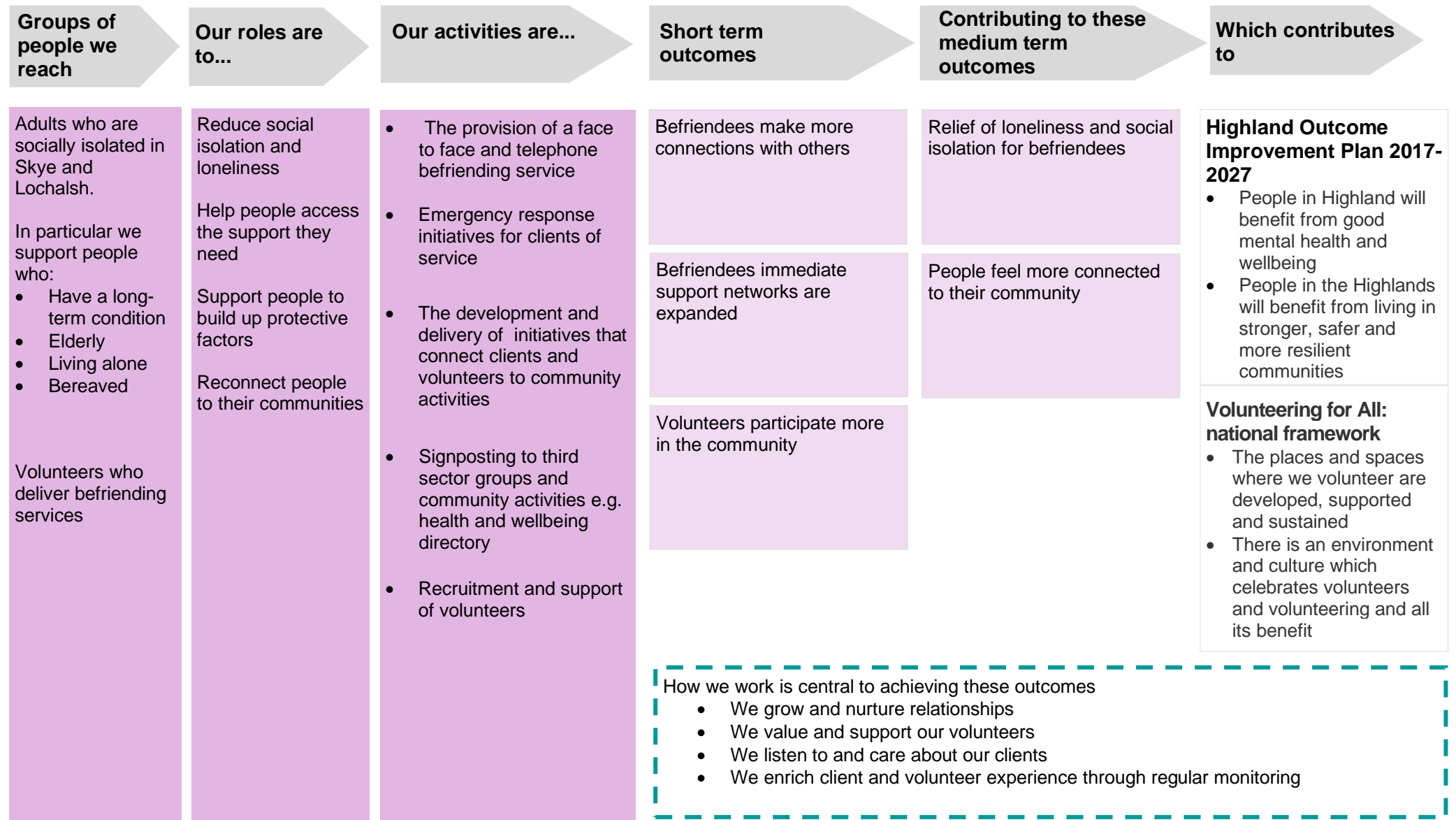
Befrienders Skye and Lochalsh is managed by [Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations](#). The service provides face to face and telephone befriending services, as well as tailored activities to reconnect people to their communities.

Befrienders Skye and Lochalsh is a very small, local project. One part-time co-ordinator supports 27 clients and 23 volunteers, providing around 60 hours of befriending contact a month.

While the service is open to anyone over 18 in the Skye, Lochalsh and Wester Ross region of the Highlands people using the service tend to be those who are socially isolated due to loss or lack of social networks.

## SECTION 1 – Explaining the links to health inequalities

This **logic model** explains who Befrienders Skye and Lochalsh reaches, roles the service plays, activities, outcomes the service achieves in the short term and how these outcomes contribute to strategic priorities.



## SECTION 2 – Proving the links to health inequalities

### Who we try to reach

Those who are socially isolated in the area of Skye, Lochalsh and Wester Ross.

### How we know we reach the right people

We gather information from clients when they are referred to us from local GPs, social workers, third sector organisations and families.

This information shows that:

- Many clients have long-term health conditions (74%) that restrict their ability to participate in group activities. This is often compounded by rural and remote places of residence and lack access to transport.
- At time of writing, 22% of clients were shielding due to Covid-19.
- 81% of our clients live alone with a large proportion of these being over the age of 85, which accounts for a natural decline in their social network due to death of friends and loved ones of a similar age group.

All clients referred to our service have been identified as socially isolated, around 50% of these have acknowledged, during conversations, that loneliness is one of their main reasons for taking the service.

## Outcome 1: Befriendees make more connections with others



The impact of our service on a person's well-being is measured through **verbal** and **written feedback** as well as **observations** made by the befriender and the co-ordinator.

The following quotes are typical of the type of feedback we receive from clients:

It's good to have someone new to talk to. I am enjoying it.

It helps to know that there is someone keeping an eye on you.

It (the call) makes my day.

During the first Covid-19 lockdown we sent growing packs to our clients and volunteers. Feedback received after the project was encouraging and showed that connections could also be maintained through written communications and activities. Clients said:

Thank you for arranging all the lovely telephone calls, it's really helping to speak to strangers about my problems.

I think the befriender scheme is wonderful.

## Outcome 2: Befriendees immediate support networks are expanded

Our service supports befriendees to develop support networks. Establishing trusted connections between the client, volunteer befriender, co-ordinator and referrer, help to develop a safety network for each client. Issues or concerns can be identified earlier and interventions taken sooner, which means over time a client's community of support will become stronger and more resilient.



**Observations** made by the befriender and co-ordinator as well as the successful **resolution of issues** identified through our service tell us we achieve this outcome. Here are some case studies from our work:

- One of our clients was feeling particularly isolated and cut off, during the first Covid-19 lockdown. One of her main sources of relaxation is reading. However, due to ill health and the library being closed because of the covid-19 pandemic, she was finding it increasingly difficult to source new books and reading material. We matched her with a volunteer who shared her love of books. They speak once a week via telephone and the volunteer collects books from people in her local area and sends them to the client via the fresh fish doorstep delivery service. The volunteer also liaised with the library when it reopened to ensure the client was able to have her carer collect books from the library. This was of great benefit to the client and helped her greatly.

- Due to a recent divorce one of our first clients had moved to a new community and was referred to the befrienders service as she had lost connections with friends and a wider support network. We matched her with a volunteer who provided her with help and support to move to her new house and to settle into the local area. He helped her with DIY tasks in the new house. Eventually this gave the client the confidence to volunteer for our organisation as a proof-reader and as a reporter for the Agricultural Society, which helped to widen her social network and she felt she no longer needed the volunteer to visit her.

While the majority of our clients remain with the service for the long-term, some do discharge themselves when they feel ready.



We also receive **verbal feedback** like this from befriendees:

The people who have called me have been amazing, so kind and caring. I feel it is now time for me to move forward a bit more "on my own" as I am learning how to cope and deal with grief. So thank you, and the wonderful people who have called, and helped me during these last 11 weeks.

## Outcome 3: Volunteers participate more in the community

One of the key factors in social isolation is retirement and living circumstances, 56% of our volunteers are retired or do not work, 25% of our befrienders decided to volunteer due to Covid-19 lockdown as they had more spare time to dedicate to volunteering and their regular social connections suddenly stopped.

Making connections with clients has allowed our volunteers to broaden their social network and build relationships with people outside of their usual social group. As a volunteer befriender they gain access to a dedicated social media group where they can meet and build relationships with other volunteers, enabling volunteers to strengthen their connection to the wider community.



Volunteers feel valued being part of this essential service; **they have told us:**

It has been good to feel involved and to contribute to the community, even if it is in a very small way. I have enjoyed this very much; it has been good to talk to a range of different people in different parts of the Island, it is a good way of building links between people and maintaining community spirit. At some point all of us will need help from our neighbours.

Volunteering takes my mind off how much I am missing my own family. I feel I am helping a little bit.

Communicating with people who are isolated and alone makes me feel as though I am doing something to help and it makes me feel good about myself, I get a lot of enjoyment from it.

Volunteering is much more than a caring commitment to one another within our own Island community. For myself, I do believe it has been beneficial in that I feel I am contributing by doing something positive to help, however small that might be. Volunteering helps to give my life structure and purpose.

I thoroughly enjoy making phone calls to local people who live on their own twice a week. I get to talk to a variety of amazing men and women, most of whom have lived on Skye for longer than I have and have some wonderful tales.

Here are [videos](#) of some of our volunteers talking about their experiences of befriending.

## Strategic priority

We use existing research to prove our contribution to strategic priorities.

The [Campaign to End Loneliness](#) indicates loneliness is likely to increase an individual's risk of death by 26% and is as bad for a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. By building up social connections for isolated people in our local area we know we are contributing directly to these strategic outcomes:

- **People in Highland will benefit from good mental health and wellbeing**
- **People in the Highlands will benefit from living in stronger, safer and more resilient communities**

'[Social isolation and loneliness in Scotland: a review of prevalence and trends](#)' (2018) identifies nearly 73% felt not very much/not at all involved in the local community and 14% reported they had fewer than three people they could turn to for comfort and support in a personal crisis. Our work clearly helps volunteers to be more connected to their community. We also contribute to some of the Volunteering for All outcomes:

- **The places and spaces where we volunteer are developed, supported and sustained**
- **There is an environment and culture which celebrates volunteers and volunteering and all its benefit**

If you want to explain and prove your contribution to tackling health inequalities please read "[Recognising our rich tapestry: measuring the contribution of third sector organisations to tackling health inequalities](#)" and follow the steps set out in the resource.

[From the source to the sea: Understanding how befriending can help Fife Health and Social Care Partnership address its priorities](#) can help other befriending services measure and demonstrate their contribution to strategic level outcomes.

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