The Newham Bereavement Service, a partnership between St Joseph’s Hospice and Newham Talking Therapies, offers befriending to bereaved individuals. The community-led service supports people to cope with the loss of family or friends. The service is delivered by volunteers and since 2012 has matched over 100 befriending ‘pairs’.

What is going well?

After the death of a family member or friend, befriending can be important at a time of reduced social networks and activities. Specifically, befrienders can play a vital role in combating loneliness in older adults. An evaluation of the service reviewed by Which? reviewed the experiences of both the volunteers and people using the Newham Bereavement Service. Befriending was found to have a positive impact on bereaved individuals over a period of time:

- Befriending built stronger communities by emphasising to clients that social bonds were still present, beyond the loved ones they had lost
- The informal setting of befriending (e.g. home, café or community centre) highlighted the social nature of the relationship. This also encouraged those who were socially isolated to engage more with others and the community
- The emotional support that was provided by befrienders had a therapeutic effect on bereaved individuals and had a positive impact on a person’s ability to move on from their grief

Learning for others: Bereavement can have a negative impact on an individual, causing loneliness and social isolation. In turn, this impacts on everyday aspects of a person’s life including mental and physical well-being. Befriending can have a positive impact on bereaved individuals by encouraging them to engage with others and recognise the social relationships and bonds that exist in their life. What is important about befriending is giving a bereaved person the chance to talk, share their experiences and be listened to in a non-judgemental way.

Want to read on? The full independent evaluation of the Newham Bereavement Service by Which? is available here.