

14. DCDP Case Study: Food Train Friends

“Friends has changed my life, I now have something to look forward to, places to visit like I did before”.

The Food Train is a Scottish charity which aims to provide support to older people so that they can live independently at home for as long as possible. Rank’s funding enabled Food Train to roll out a city-wide befriending project, Food Train Friends.

Food Train Friends offers companionship, group activities and telephone befriending to people over the age of 65 in Dundee. Many older people in the area are currently lonely with no friends and family, or they often live too far away to keep in touch. This results in numerous older people feeling socially isolated. Food Train’s services are predominantly carried out by volunteers who provide informal social support, take time to listen, and chat about anything from life’s ups-and-downs to the news, hobbies and interests.

Befriending takes place on a regular basis, so customers can rely on companionship, a friendly face and someone to talk to. Where possible volunteers encourage customers to stay active by getting out of the house together, or even just having a walk around the garden. Having this regular contact can make a huge difference to an older person’s life and improve their confidence and motivation.

Food Train Friends Dundee began in September 2015 with the appointment of a development officer. From there, Food Train Friends has gone from strength to strength and now has 29 members, with referrals coming in on a regular basis from statutory and non-statutory organisations, as well as from our volunteers and members. Food Train Friends often works to capacity, but attempt to facilitate new members where they can, or signpost to other local organisations who may be able to offer help.

The process starts with a home visit or ‘befriending assessment’ to determine which type of service is best suited to the individual’s needs. Befriending assessments are vital in ensuring that an appropriate volunteer is matched with the member, increasing the chance of a successful one-to-one match. There are currently eight successful one-to-one matches.

Food Train Friend volunteers are all checked through the Protecting Vulnerable Groups scheme, and undertake training in befriending, moving and handling. Volunteers are offered full support. The charity runs six-weekly volunteer meetings to discuss issues and achievements. Speakers are also invited in to allow volunteers to be kept up to speed on issues that may affect them or their befriender such as macular degeneration and dementia. As one befriender comments on their volunteering experience:

“I get great enjoyment, I leave feeling happy and content knowing I am making a difference to her life.”

Food Train Friends purchased a minibus for Friends outings last year, which allows for flexibility around dates and locations for visits. Members are sent a quarterly ‘Out and About’ programme and choose which outings they would like to take part in. The group has been on 19 outings, and feedback from these excursions is always positive. The Friday Friends Club runs on the first Friday of every month in the Boys Brigade Hall in Lochee; this regular event engages as many members as possible, with no-one turned away.

The club has had visits from other Rank-funded projects including the Rep and Dundee Comic School.

Food Train Friends are focusing on getting information and advice to members about health and well-being, by giving out advice and information (for example, about staying warm in winter and fire safety) as well as running healthy-cooking demonstrations, and gentle exercise sessions.

A key learning for Food Train Friends, from this first year, is that it pays to look after volunteers, to make sure they feel appreciated and listened to.

In 2017, Food Train Friends hope to duplicate Friday Friends Club at the St Aidan’s Centre in Broughty Ferry. There is a real need for the service in the area with many of the local older people having none or very little lunch or activity groups to take part in. We hope to recruit volunteer befrienders over the coming months to make this a reality.

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November 2016**