

INTRODUCTION TO THE ARCHWAY FOUNDATION AND THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF ITS SERVICES

Founded in Oxford in 1982, The Archway Foundation has been responding to the needs of adults of all ages, struggling with the pain of loneliness and its associated causes and impact.

PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC - The Archway Foundation provided:

- **Initial individual assessment** of people referred to us, usually a home visit. These visits have not taken place since the first lockdown and we have a waiting list of 50 people awaiting such an assessment visit.
- **An Individual Support Service** where a volunteer is linked with an Archway Friend to provide fortnightly face-to-face meet ups, sometimes in the person's home, sometimes in a café or to go for a walk. The aim is to provide regular human contact and emotional support to promote social confidence. For some Friends, the aim will be to move on to attending one of Archway's social groups and / or engaging with activities and groups in the local community. For some who are housebound/ in residential care, it will be providing continuity of contact, emotional support and personal encouragement. Increasingly we are seeing people with high levels of complex needs, requiring us to recruit volunteers with some relevant experience as well as training volunteers in higher level skills.
- Supportive Social Contact in a group setting. The social groups in **Oxford** were known as

Monday Evening: A large social gathering usually with some form of entertainment or talk from guest speaker), with subsidised transport for those unable to attend independently.

Wednesday Welcome: A morning call in café, with breakfast food, board games, and opportunities for conversation and social contact.

Social Hub*: Meeting on alternate Tuesday afternoons this was a group for young adults, many struggling with mental health challenges, some on vocational courses at Oxford College and having support needs due to autism, learning difficulties, physical disability etc

Social Space* Meeting on alternate Tuesday evenings this group for young adults attracted people in the 30 to 40's age group who struggled with social confidence/ friendships/ mental health.

*(*Specific Funding for Social Hub and Social Space ended in 2020).*

Social groups in Abingdon were on alternate Friday afternoons and evenings. The afternoon group was of a similar model to Wednesday Welcome and the evening group a similar model to the Monday Evening Social in Oxford.

THE ONSET OF THE PANDEMIC: resulted in cessation of all face-to-face contact and the provision of a Telephone Support Service, initially targeting those who were in receipt of the Individual Support Service or had regularly attended a social group within the previous 7 months. Staff made the calls but as it became clear that the lockdown was going to be for longer than initially indicated, we invited existing volunteers and recruited new volunteers to undergo training (delivered on line) to provide telephone support. Staff retained the calls to Friends with complex needs. This enabled us to extend the Telephone Support Service to people on our waiting lists. **Currently there are 201 Friends in receipt of Telephone Support and 63 volunteers being supervised and supported by staff.**

Digital Exclusion: A survey on access to and use of digital communication confirmed our impression that the majority of Archway Friends do not have access to technology. To maintain connection and belonging we introduced 'The Bright Side'. This fortnightly newsletter, posted to over 250 people, and emailed to volunteers, has provided an opportunity for readers to contribute poems, stories, artwork etc. and receive information on the latest Government guidance on Covid restrictions.



Christmas & Easter Goody Bags: At Christmas and Easter last year and again this Christmas, the staff team filled over 250 gift bags for staff and volunteers to do doorstep deliveries as a means of reminding those living alone and often feeling excluded, that they have been remembered. The deliveries also provide an excellent opportunity for face-to-face welfare checks, identifying what might otherwise remain hidden needs and supporting people to gain access to the right form of help to address these.

Since the easing of some restrictions/protections:

- **Individual Support Links** have been risk assessed to enable those who wish to do so, to meet face-to-face. Only around 50% of the links have opted to meet face-to-face and the majority do so outdoors, such is the level of anxiety.
- A focus group, representing Friends from across all groups, was held to explain Archway's current position and to invite ideas from Friends reading next steps.
- A Zoom meeting was held for volunteers again to explain the current situation and to seek ideas.
- Two small pilot groups have taken place, one in Oxford and one in Abingdon. Using a Trauma Informed approach to post-Covid recovery, Archway Friends have expressed appreciation of the opportunity to have a safe space to share face-to-face with others, their experience of the pandemic, their concerns and current needs.

Impact of our work during the pandemic: A Storytelling Project was initiated to capture individual narratives of how the pandemic and Archway's support had impacted on the lives of those taking part. <https://archwayfoundation.org.uk/our-friends-stories/> We are currently planning to survey a sample of those in receipt of Telephone Support to give us further insight into the impact of this intervention.

THE PLAN GOING FORWARD is to:

- Implement more small groups January to March 2022 to give everyone who used to regularly attend a social group, the opportunity to have a face-to-face meeting and a safe space to share experiences of the pandemic, their current needs and ideas for how these might be met. We are using these groups as an opportunity to re-assess levels of loneliness, giving a baseline from which to measure the impact of any future interventions.

- Re configure our services to offer a pathway of support which can include
 - a) **Telephone Support** (for those not ready for face to face contact or waiting for an assessment visit, link to an Individual Support Volunteer or access to a social group.
 - b) **Individual Support** (for those not ready for social contact in a groups setting or whose situation means a group is unsuitable).
 - c) **Supportive Social Groups**; the format, size and content of which is still under discussion and development

THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES are:

- Transitioning from Telephone Support and Bright Side publication to face-to-face services.
- Reconfiguring Supportive Social groups whilst still running telephone support services
- Managing the hopes and expectations of Friends and volunteers, many of who have participated in the old format of social groups for many years and have a strong desire for their return even though we have tried to make it clear that whilst some form of supportive social contact within a group will be developed, the social groups will not be in the format they were prior to the pandemic. (The reasons for this are: The groups had become very large, with some being at capacity. For adults struggling with loneliness and associated loss of social confidence it is hard to integrate into a large gathering. We have waiting lists of people wanting and needing our service. We do not have the same level of resources available to us as we did prior to the pandemic as some grant funding has ended, fund-raising activities have been curtailed and overall income reduced.)
- Taking the opportunity brought about by the pandemic to re think Archway's services and develop them to meet current and future needs.