

Annual Report 2024 - 2025



Supporting organisations to deliver
quality befriending services



Company Information

for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

Registered Company number
SC195896 (Scotland)

Registered Charity number
SC023610

Registered office
5-7 Montgomery Street Lane
Edinburgh
EH7 5JT

Trustees

E Kenward (Chairperson)
J K E Burnett
N Pattinson
B Bowhay
M Niles (Vice-Chairperson)
S Gray (Treasurer)
J Weir (appointed 18.4.24)
R Chadha (appointed 18.4.24)
P Winford (resigned 3.7.24)
C Watson (resigned 9.8.24)

Company Secretary
S E Hunter

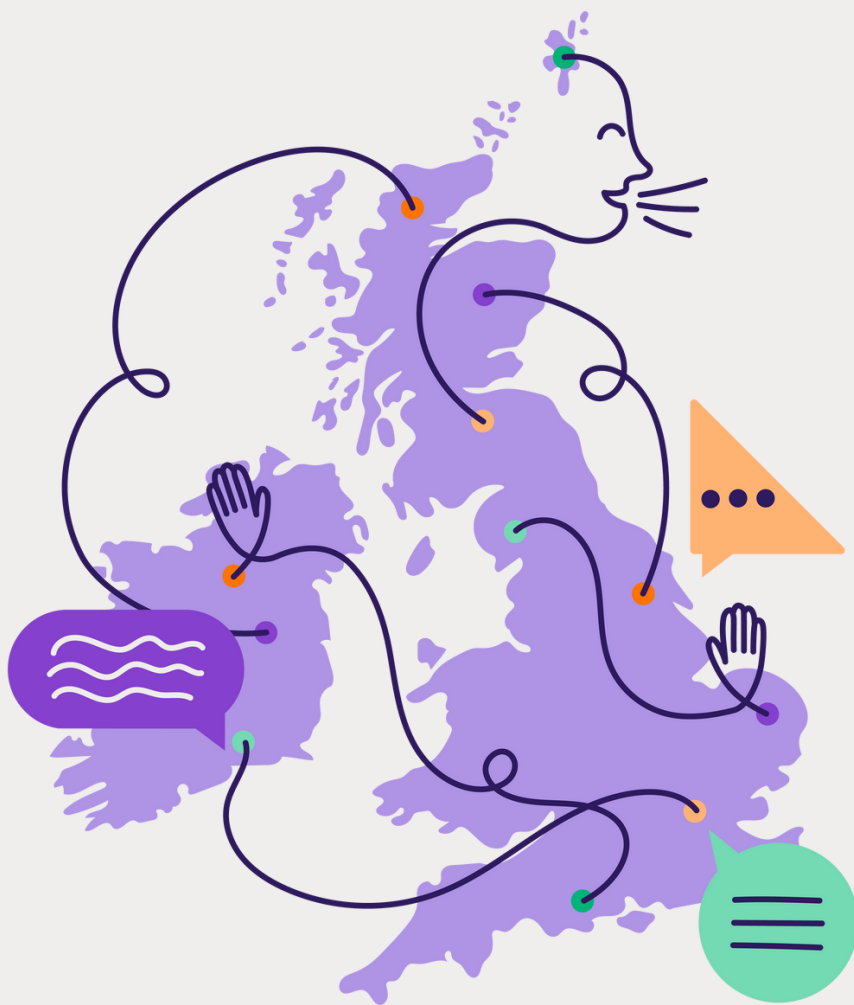
Independent Examiner

J Cordery FCCA FCA CA
Gibson McKerrall Burrows Ltd Chartered Accountants
14 Rutland Square, Edinburgh, EH1 2BD

Bankers

CAF Bank Ltd
25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4JQ

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 8 September 2025 and signed on its behalf
by:
Stuart Gray, Treasurer



Foreword

This year has marked a meaningful chapter in the life of Befriending Networks, one shaped by 30 years of experience and a shared vision for the future.

The pages that follow reflect a year of practical change, shared learning and steady commitment across our befriending community. Whether through the launch of a new Strategic Plan, the long-awaited return of in-person networking, or the transformation of our digital platforms, this has been a year of thoughtful progress, shaped by collaboration, commitment, and a willingness to adapt.

Every achievement reflects the strength of our members, organisations large and small, urban and rural, long-established and just beginning, who continue to offer vital connection and support to individuals of all ages and backgrounds. This network exists because of the time, effort, and care you give to those you support.

The growth of the Quality in Befriending Award, the success of our Journey Across Befriending events, and the hundreds of hours of training, support, and shared learning are all practical examples of our values in action, to be supportive, collaborative, and sector-leading. These are not just words on a page, but principles lived out by a dedicated staff team and trustees. So I want to thank each member of staff and the board for your wisdom, creativity, and steadfast service. You have navigated change with resilience and remained focused on what matters most, ensuring that meaningful connection is available to everyone who needs it.



Emily Kenward

Chair of the Befriending Networks Board of Trustees

September 2025



Report of the Trustees

for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

Objectives and Activities

Befriending Networks is the network for befriending organisations. Established as a charity in 1994, we have thirty years of experience supporting and connecting befriending services.

Our vision is of a society where quality befriending support is available to everyone who needs it, and the importance of meaningful connection is recognised.

As an intermediary between our members, supporters and stakeholders, we strengthen the befriending sector. We aim to support organisations to deliver quality befriending services.

We achieve this by:

- Maintaining and expanding an effective and connected network of members.
- Providing information, resources, training, awards and consultancy for all aspects of befriending.
- Raising the profile and an understanding of befriending and its impact.
- Coordinating Befriending Week, our annual campaign taking place 1 to 7 November.

What is befriending?

Befriending is a relationship supported by an organisation to enable meaningful connections. Befriending is diverse. The meaningful connection can be between people with shared or different life experiences. Befriending can be for all ages and stages of life. Befriending is a planned social interaction which can take place in a 1:1 or small group settings. In our network, there are delivery models which include face-to-face befriending, taking place in the home or community and distance befriending, including telephone and video calls, letter writing, and gaming. Some services provide a mixed or hybrid offer to their service users. Befriending will achieve positive outcomes and prevent negative ones, for individuals and communities. Befriending reduces loneliness and social isolation by increasing connections. The befriending relationship is nurturing, enriching, and trusting.



Achievement and Performance

Charitable Activities

In 2024/25, we marked and celebrated 30 years of Befriending Networks. We have reflected on our history and the early stages of the association and recognised our growth and development. Whilst our core purposes remain unchanged, in 2024/25 we evolve with the publication of a five-year strategic plan, the re-introduction of in-person networking, the replacement of our website, and supporting our member through an ever-changing and challenging social and economic context. We are guided by our members and our values to support, collaborate and lead.



[Befriending Networks is a] central point of contact for expertise - the 'go to' place. I feel like you have our back.

— **Member, focus group contributor**



We are all in this together and everyone has a nugget of gold to help someone out. Very grateful to be part of the support network that Befriending Networks offers us all.

— **Member, Wales, Journey Across Befriending attendee**



I truly appreciate all the resources and support you continue to provide – it's invaluable as I plan for the year ahead.

— **Member, England, by email**

Befriending Networks provides a comprehensive range of support and services to more than 300 befriending projects, at all stages of development. We achieve this through our core charitable activities, including:

- Membership support, information and networking events
- Training, learning and development sessions, e-learning, toolkits, and masterclasses
- The Quality in Befriending Award
- Writing, publishing and disseminating resources and good practice guides
- Representing the befriending sector, and partnership working in the fields of volunteering, social connection, and age and ageing
- Curating monthly newsletters and maintaining our website and social media channels

We love that we are part of something much 'bigger' and can 'tap in' to support and training as needed.

— **Member, England,
6 month check-in**

We've used all your services and it's definitely good value for money. It is the only membership we pay for.

— **Member, focus group contributor**

Membership Services

Our membership services team are proactive and responsive in meeting the needs of our diverse membership. Our approach to relationship management throughout the membership year involves contact at two, six and ten months of membership. Reactionary support is highly valued by our members, whether they are starting in their service or are established services seeking to navigate new challenges. This support takes place 1:1 either by email, phone, video call or on occasion in-person.

In 2024/25, we provided 82 opportunities for our network of members and non-members to connect at one of our free events. This brought direct benefit to 854 people. These events included highlights such as:

- delivery of our in-person Journey Across Befriending Roadshow events across the UK.
- our research event on volunteering and caring responsibilities.
- a masterclass on community development and reducing health inequalities.
- our annual online Befriending Week conference.
- 11 online meetings of our Leaders and Managers Network, benefiting 85 leaders.
- 37 thematic or topical networking sessions covering themes such as befriending with refugees, disability focus within befriending, befriending at the end of life and in hospices; 12 of these sessions focused on supporting organisations to make the most of the benefits of their membership of Befriending Networks. These events reached 324 attendees.
- Ministerial meetings between our members and elected representatives of the devolved governments in both Scotland and Wales.

82

networking opportunities



854

beneficiaries

Learning and Development

Our learning and development offer remains of a very high standard, consistently being evaluated positively. In 2024/25, we delivered more than 200 hours of training across 40 opportunities for learning through our Vital Skills, Topical Training and Good Practice programmes reaching 218 learners. 98% of Topical Training delegates agreed or strongly agreed that the course has provided them with new ideas or new information they could apply to their role. We provided bespoke training, design and facilitation to six organisations who commissioned our services this year.



40

Good Practice, Vital Skills and Topical Training sessions for **218 attendees**

I think this is one of the best training courses I have been on. I found it very helpful and have shared the learnings with the team. I would advise anyone to attend this course.

— **Member, training evaluation**

A key area of transformation for us this year was the reimagining of the **Befriender Training Toolkit** on our new website, with free access to all our members. To support this transition, 13 Toolkit 'how-to' sessions were made available to members. The Toolkit itself builds capacity in our network by providing organisations with 47 educational resources, videos, guides, facilitator notes, and side deck templates for upskilling volunteer befrienders.



12

Befriender Training Toolkit How-to sessions for **64 attendees**

Quality in Befriending Award

Our Quality in Befriending Award was redeveloped this year, with clearer and more efficient processes introduced for Reaccreditation and Excellence Awards. This resulted in 15 organisations achieving the Quality in Befriending Award, of which 10 organisations achieved the Award for the first time. Two organisations achieved the Award through our passporting partnership with Age UK. The Quality in Befriending Award is the only Award of its type to recognise quality policy and practice specific to the context of befriending; 15% of our members hold the Award.

15

awards
accredited

10

first-time
recipients

15%

of members hold
Quality Award

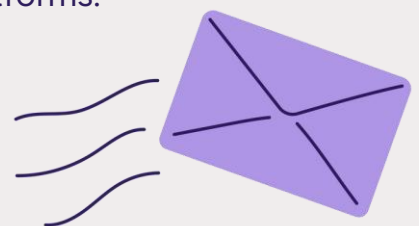


I think the Quality Award is a great way to make sure your befriending service has the best practices and policies, and you are delivering the best services you can. The assessor was very responsive and helpful throughout the process, and most of all understanding of the uniqueness of our befriending programme and the need for our policies to reflect that.

— **Award holder, Scotland**

Monthly Newsletters

Our monthly newsletters continue to be well received, and we have 1512 subscribers to our general newsletter and 228 to our Children and Young People newsletter. We have also introduced a Research Newsletter in January 2025 which will be sent out to all subscribers three times a year. Alongside our newsletters, we send regular emails to our members and connect with both a range of stakeholders via our social media platforms.



Highlights of Charitable Activities

Website launch

We delivered one of the largest pieces of digital transformation our charity has experienced with the replacement of our website in September 2024, with full integration with our customer record management software and finance software. As a 'remote-first' organisation, our website is our primary interface with the sector and partners. For our members, this has provided an improved experience for booking events, finding resources, contributing and sharing news, contacting one another and promoting their services. Our directory of befriending services is our most visited section of our website. Our accessible and inclusive website equips us for the future, giving us increased functionality and options as we develop services.



Policy and Advocacy

We championed the befriending sector on policy issues relating to volunteering, wellbeing and loneliness on more than 55 occasions this year through policy forums, working groups, and strategic meetings. We co-chaired, with Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland, the Action Group on Isolation and Loneliness and launched the Scottish Forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness, which has more than 100 organisations participating. We have supported the activities of the Campaign to End Loneliness as a member of their UK Advisory Group. We engaged with policymakers and academics nationally and internationally on policy and practice which would address social isolation and loneliness.



Annual Conference

Our Annual Conference remains a well-regarded opportunity to bring our sector together for learning, connection and collaboration. Held during Befriending Week, with 102 delegates, the 2024 event received a 93% satisfaction rating.

I think you all did a very good job, accessible for all...It is one of the best online conferences I have been to recently.

— **Member, Conference feedback evaluation**



Being a Befriender events for volunteers

Being a Befriender was our first event directly delivered to volunteer befrienders within our network. This networking social took place during Befriending Week 2024. The online event explored volunteer experiences, including their motivation for befriending, the benefits of befriending, and was a celebration and recognition of volunteers in our communities.

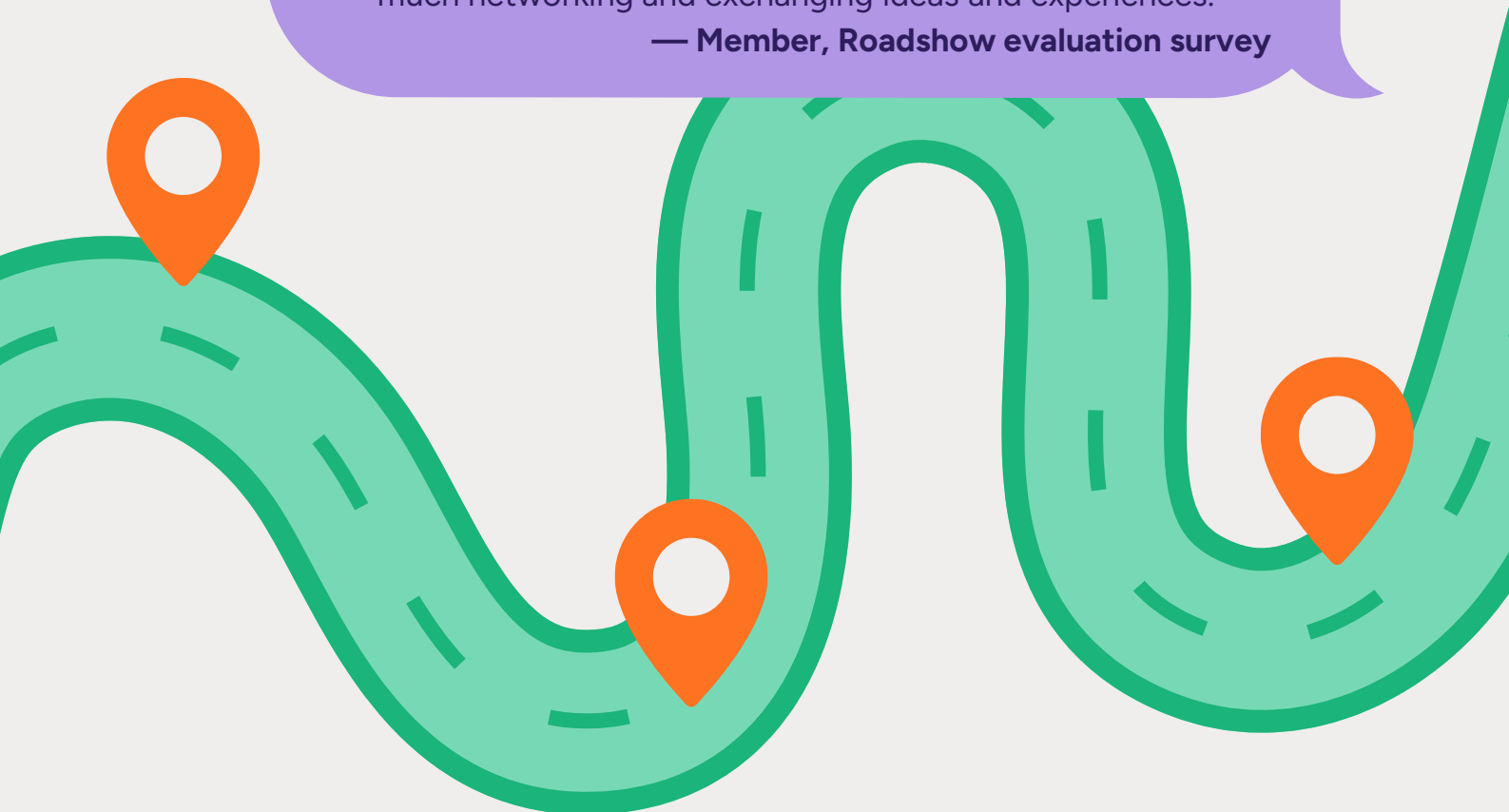
Journey Across Befriending Roadshow

The 2025 Journey Across Befriending Roadshow series was designed to give our community a chance to connect and share successes, challenges, and ideas. The events were our first in-person networking events since 2020. After years of connecting online, it was an absolute pleasure to meet members and non-members face-to-face. Over six venues and two online sessions, we connected with 161 people.



How we enjoyed your Roadshow. Thank you. It was informative, interesting and a relaxed atmosphere, enabling much networking and exchanging ideas and experiences.

— Member, Roadshow evaluation survey



Case studies: Membership Support



Bright Hope

Bright Hope are based in Coalville in the Midlands and have been members since May 2024. They have one member of staff to launch, develop and run their befriending project. She only works one day a week and started the role with limited befriending experience. She attended our Making the Most of Membership session and our Befriending Training Toolkit How-To. She has also taken up the offer of 1:1 support sessions with two different members of staff who have been able to support and advise on various aspects of developing the project. In June, she attended our in-person roadshow in Tamworth and found the opportunity to learn and network with other organisations beneficial.

Feedback from Member

"When I started in the role as Befriending Service Lead, I felt out of my depth and overwhelmed. Befriending Networks was a huge support to me and helped me navigate my way through the process. They gave me advice and reassurance, which in an instant gave me the confidence to explore and expand my ideas. They have been a huge help, and as a result our befriending service is starting to thrive."

Member (England)

A member in the south of England contacted us in May 2024 via email about some boundary issues surrounding a long-standing match. As the query sounded complex, we arranged to have a telephone conversation to discuss in more detail. A number of things were shared explaining how the volunteer had crossed boundaries, including having a key to the client's house and accessing the house alone to sort things out while the person was in a care home. This is an ongoing situation and had escalated.

We recommended reminding the volunteer of boundaries and giving them some options about what they could do, including ending the match and staying 'friends' outside the project. This was followed up with a detailed email confirming the key points of our verbal conversation and some recommendations. We also signposted them to several relevant documents on our resources section of the website.

Feedback from Member

"Thank you so much for your time yesterday - it was such a useful conversation which I will relay to [my colleague] on their return. I will endeavour to draft something and look for further advice should we feel we need it. Many thanks."

Strategy and Planning

In May 2024, following a period of member engagement, we published our Strategic Plan for 2024-29. This introduced seven strategic objectives and three organisational values, which provide the framework for all future activities.

Organisational Values

We are supportive.

We are well informed and share our expertise, knowledge and insight. We value learning and consider different perspectives, reflecting our members' experiences and needs. We listen and understand.

We are collaborative.

We connect with people. We care and are approachable. We are respectful to each other, our members and other organisations. We are effective and efficient.

We are sector-leading.

We are resourceful, adaptable and innovative. We lead a valuable network which gathers, amplifies and represents the voice of befriending at all levels.

Our objectives and values are reflected in our day-to-day work and through staff work planning and programme delivery. Our board receives 6-monthly reports on our Key Performance Indicators and reviews the Strategic Plan at our annual joint staff and board day.



Download our
Strategic Plan 2024 - 2029
befriending.co.uk/about



Membership Change and Mitigation of Impact

At 31st March 2025 our membership size was 314 organisations (55% in England, 37% in Scotland, 3% in Wales, and Northern Ireland, Ireland, and International 5% of membership)

We have experienced change and turnover within our membership. In 2024/25 we welcomed 40 new members, and 7 former members re-joined. We sadly said farewell to 94 members in the same period. The result of this was a retraction in overall membership size for a second year. We have focused on membership relationship and retention through 6-month and 10-month check-in calls, a 1-month grace period following expiry of membership, and the option to use our fee reduction policy. We have kept our membership subscription fee unchanged since 2018. In autumn 2024, we formalised our processes for the identification and contacting of prospective members in a bid to reach new organisations and invite former members back into our network.

Despite these supports and efforts to retain members, financial pressures have impacted the befriending sector: with the ending of some befriending projects or the full closure of charities, some former members had insecure funds, which has meant that they cannot commit to a membership subscription fee. Our staff team have assisted organisations with appropriate endings, transferring matches, and supporting the wellbeing of staff experiencing job losses.

Through 2024/25 we engaged members to be ready to introduce a new fixed subscription fee for international and for-profit services, removing income bands for these membership types. A fee reduction policy was also introduced for eligible organisations experiencing financial difficulties to request financial assistance. In March 2025 we announced that we would apply a 10% increase to our annual subscription from 1 April 2026.



Organisational Development

We introduced our five-year Strategic Plan 2024-29 in May 2024. It provides clarity to our organisational direction and purpose, and communicates our intentions to our members, stakeholders and partners.

The most significant area of work and investment in our organisation was the replacement of our website in September 2024 and the integration of our website with our performance management and customer record management systems. This was a considerable digital transformation project for a charity of our size. The outcome of which has been a more agile, responsive, inclusive, and future-proofed digital platform for us to deliver our services.

Our staffing structure had small adjustments to maximise capacity, knowledge and experience. We welcomed a new Communications Officer with expertise to support the continued development of our website, and we appointed a role dedicated to the assessment and development of our Quality in Befriending Award. These changes were made after vacancies arose. We have a staff team of nine, all working remotely, with a capacity of 6.9 full-time equivalent.

As an employer, we onboarded the assistance of a managed HR advice partner, employee assistance provider, and health and safety specialists. These three services provide assurance to trustees of our legal compliance, helps us to manage risks, and supports the wellbeing of our workforce. An environment and sustainability policy has been approved and is being piloted with staff involvement in its continuous review. We continue to be a living wage employer, a carer's positive employer, and are advancing the principles of fair work.

The board welcomed two new Member Trustees, bringing further sectoral experience, diversity and leadership to our governance team. There have been sustained efforts in developing the board, including an annual skills and capacity audit, sharing of trustee learning and development opportunities, alongside trustees taking areas of lead interest on strategic and governance tasks to support the CEO.

9

staff members



Future Plans

We will work with our existing funders to deliver agreed service outcomes. We will seek to generate income for our core activities and emerging projects and programmes from a range of sources in addition to membership fees, including through sponsorship, donations, and trust fundraising.

In the year ahead, we intend to complete the review of our governance by inviting our members to approve an amendment to our Articles of Association, making them fit for our future.

We intimated to members that we will implement a membership price increase in 2026/27. We will publish and keep up-to-date our membership fee policy, mergers policy, and fee reduction policy. In 2025/26 we will increase the fees for our learning and development, whilst also modernising our offer using e-learning, hybrid learning, and offering in-person guest speaking services.

With significant investment in our website replacement, we must continue to consolidate and improve our digital presence. We will focus on marketing and digital communications as a means to extend our engagement with members, partners, and prospective members, as well as an opportunity to increase income through paid events and bespoke commissions.

At a policy level, we will continue to work with key actors in the space of social connection, loneliness and social isolation. We have established good, trusted relationships for collaboration with policy makers, government, civil society and academia. We intend to be globally focused and remain open to opportunities within the UK and internationally to advance our policy priorities.



Financial Review

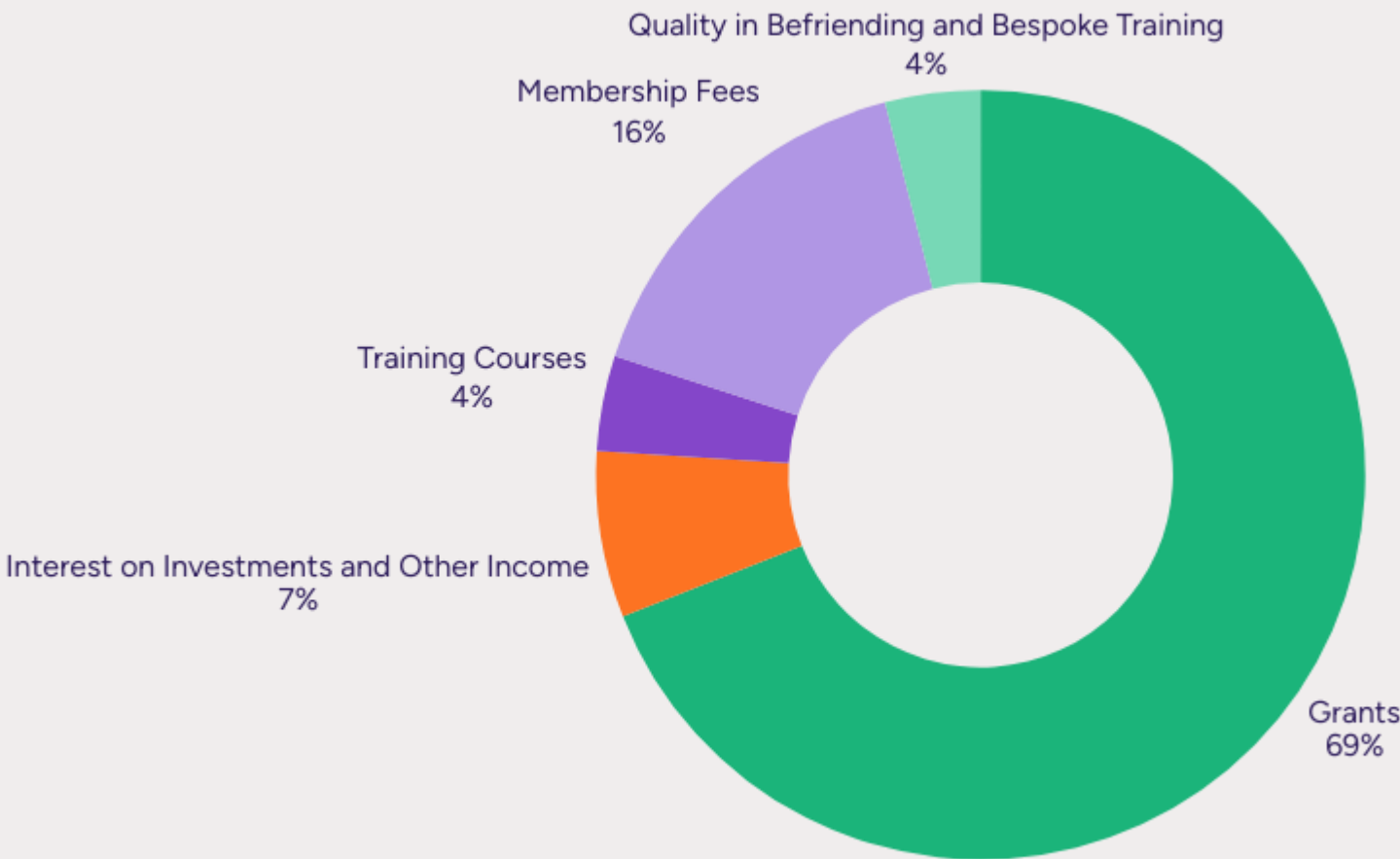
Statement of Financial Activities for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

During the period of these Accounts the Charity received restricted grants and donations of £189,240, with unrestricted funds of £83,242. The restricted expenditure was £196,229, and unrestricted expenditure £127,096. This higher than usual unrestricted expenditure is attributed to the investment of general funds into the digital transformation and organisational development of the charity. This resulted in a planned financial deficit of £50,843.

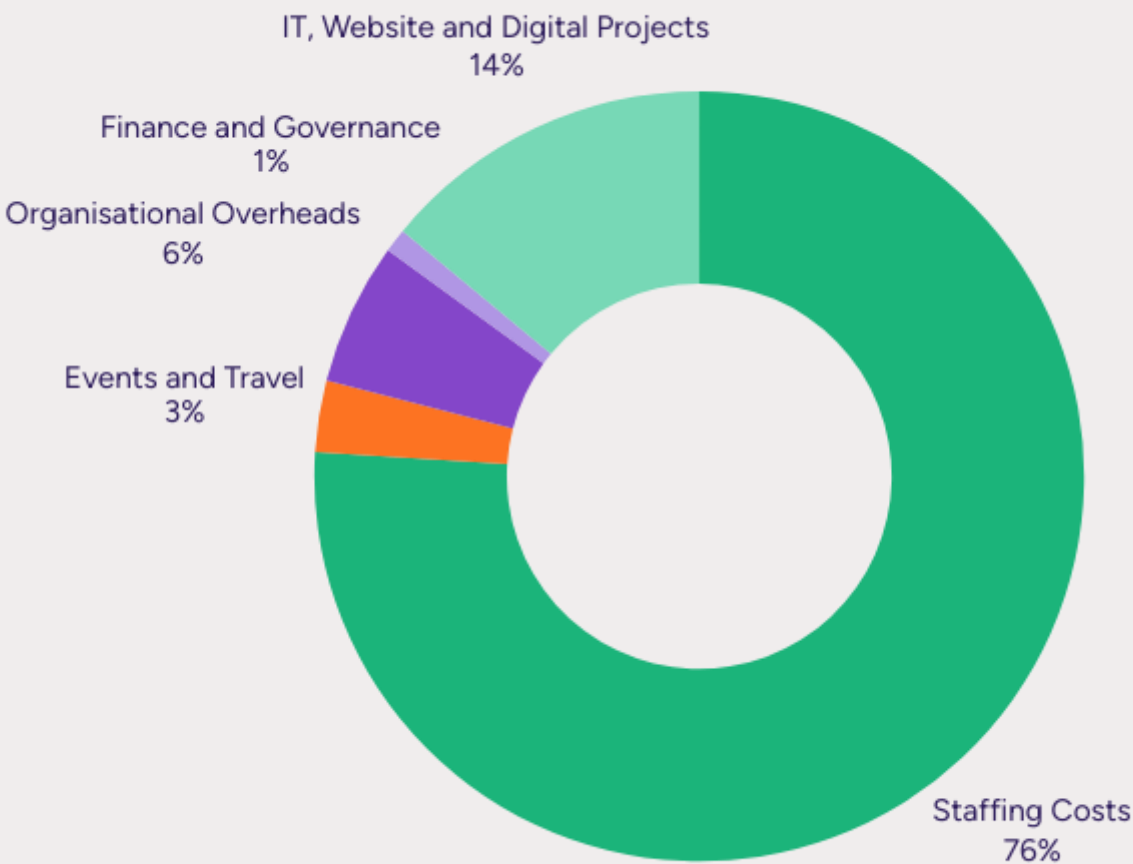
There were unrestricted general funds, designated by the trustees of £79,192 at the year ended 31 March 2025. There were unrestricted reserves of £150,000 at 31 March 2025, which reflects the optimum reserve level as set out in the reserves policy.

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds at 31 March 2025	Total Funds at 31 March 2024
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM				
Donations and Legacies	£0	£189,240	£189,240	£210,849
Charitable Activities - Training/Network	£65,445	£0	£65,445	£106,315
Investment Income	£17,647	£0	£17,647	£5,844
Other Income	£150	£0	£150	£202
TOTAL	£83,242	£189,240	£272,482	£323,210
EXPENDITURE ON				
Raising Funds	£2,146	£8,575	£10,721	£32,284
Charitable Activities - Training/Network	£124,950	£187,654	£312,604	£280,827
TOTAL	£127,096	£196,229	£323,325	£313,111
NET INCOME/ (EXPENDITURE)	(£43,854)	(£6,989)	(£50,843)	£10,099
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS Total Funds brought forward	£273,046	£6,989	£280,035	£269,036
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	£229,192	£0	£229,192	£280,035

Where did our funds come from in financial year 2024/25?



Where did we spend our funds on in financial year 2024/25?



Structure, Governance and Management

Risk Management

Trustees have a duty to identify and review the risks to which the charity is exposed and to ensure appropriate controls are in place to provide reasonable assurance against fraud and error. A risk register is maintained and monitored by the Chief Executive and charity trustees at regular intervals. In January 2025, the risk register was subject to an intensive review, with a risk action plan and nominated lead trustees for different risk areas being appointed. Risks are mitigated through appropriate measures and actions. Risk management is a standing item of business for trustee meetings.

The trustees are exercised in their governance regarding financial risk, recognising that charity income requires diversification beyond reliance on long-standing principal funders. The trustees have worked with the staff team to develop opportunities for income generation, and a fundraising plan is in place to support the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2024-29. Trustees are aware of the increasingly competitive nature of grant and trust fundraising. Trustees also note declining self-generated income from learning and development and membership fees. Senior staff have undergone fundraising training in 2024/25. A short-term commitment to invest in fundraising capacity has been agreed from the general fund. An Investments Policy is in place to manage the risks and benefits of investing charitable funds.

One further identified and managed risk is related to our charitable objectives and procedures for general meetings of our membership. This is being addressed through the modernisation of our articles of association, which will be presented to our membership for approval in November 2025.

Other areas of risk, which are carefully managed, are associated with our operational activity and business continuity. This includes data backup and security, protection of our intellectual property, the quality of the information and support we provide our members. We also mitigate risks associated with legislative compliance as an employer, charity, and company.

Strategic Plan 2024 - 2029 Summary



Our vision is of a society where quality befriending support is available to everyone who needs it, and the importance of meaningful connection is recognised.



Our Mission

Our mission is to support organisations to deliver quality befriending services that promote wellbeing and meaningful connections, ensuring that everyone feels valued.

Our Activities

Connected Network of Members

Information, Resources,
Training and Quality Awards

Profile and Impact of Befriending

Befriending Week 1-7 November

Our Outcomes

Sphere of control

Staff and volunteers in befriending services have increased skills and knowledge

Our members can share knowledge and expertise to advance good practices in befriending

Our members value the connection and association that comes from involvement in Befriending Networks

Members, policy makers and other stakeholders have improved understanding of befriending sector impact

Sphere of Influence

Befrienders are well supported to provide nurturing, enriching and trusted befriending relationships

Sphere of Interest

Quality Befriending Services are available to everyone who needs one

Service users experience increased social connection in healthier more equal communities

Our Befriending Policy Priorities

Social connection – loneliness, social isolation, and mental wellbeing.

Volunteering – support, recruitment, retention, and recognition.

Age and ageing – children, young people, adults, older people and intergenerational.

Our Values

Support

Collaborate

Lead

Our Objectives

Supportive a network of quality befriending services

Sustaining a valuable network

Facilitating an empowered network

Developing a digitally connected network

Recognising an impactful sector

Championing the befriending sector

Succeeding as an organisation

This document is adapted from the Trustee's Annual Report and Statement of Financial Activities to 31 March 2025. You can read this and previous year's reports and accounts at www.befriending.co.uk/about/our-impact/



Befriending Networks Ltd is a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in Scotland No. SC195896, Charity No. SC023610

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