



What is b.friend?

b.friend is a project of Bridges for Communities which enables volunteers to provide one to one social support to isolated asylum seekers and refugees in the Bristol area.



b.friend provides a thorough training programme and ongoing support to volunteers, who commit to meeting up with their befriender once a week for a year.



Befriending is listening, drinking tea, laughing, being compassionate, hearing difficult stories, showing empathy, visiting a museum or art gallery, being committed, going for a walk together, learning from another culture... and it can have a profound impact on both the volunteer and the person they meet with!

b.friend also runs the Craft Collective, a friendly and nurturing sewing-based group based at St. Stephen's Cafe in the city centre on Saturday afternoons.



Update – effect of Coronavirus

The danger of refugees and asylum seekers becoming isolated has become even more acute as a result of the current restrictions on mobility and social contact. The spread of Coronavirus adds another layer of uncertainty and worry to people's already difficult lives. Even though the volunteers cannot go and visit people in person at this time, they continue to have contact with them by phone or using the technology that is available. The sewing machines used by the Craft Collective have been delivered to the homes of the women in the group, together with some fabric, so that the women can continue to make items while they have to stay at home.

Befriending stories February 2020

"It is always a joy for me to reflect on befriending stories. St. Michael's should rightly feel proud to be a part of these transformative relationships. In this brief report I have chosen two partnerships to document for you. I hope that these illustrate the importance of standing alongside the vulnerable and being a voice for the voiceless."

Sam Sayer, Project Manager



Catriona and F

F, a refugee from Iran lives with her daughter, R who is 14 years old. Early in the partnership with Catriona the family were relocated from St. George to Henbury which has had implications for R's schooling. She has struggled to settle in her new school and F has now found herself a long way from her Church and support network. Catriona has sometimes found it difficult to get over to Henbury and has also noticed that F will cancel their arrangements to meet at short notice. This is often the reality of befriending someone who is struggling with low mood. F has a daughter in her early twenties who chose to stay in Iran and is at College there. F is extremely worried about this daughter and her safety. Catriona persists in meeting with F and often takes F to a Café for a drink and a chat. As well as struggling with depression, F has physical issues that add to her difficulties. Life is not at all easy but F is devoted to her daughters and is doing all that she can to establish a life here for her family.

Steve and Z

Steve has been matched for 9 months with Z, a young man in his twenties, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan. Z is living with a great deal of insecurity as his asylum claim has been refused and there is one appeal option left for him. Should this fail he will be deported back to Afghanistan. Throughout the partnership Steve has helped Z in many practical ways from sourcing cricket kit and waterproof boots to accompanying him to see his solicitor and his appeal hearing. Steve also helped Z to contact Bristol Refugee Rights and his MP over a problem with his accommodation, where Z had no heating in his room over a 12-month period. This problem was thankfully resolved quickly and demonstrates how hard it is to advocate for yourself if you are vulnerable and unable to speak good English. Steve has found it satisfying to notice Z's English improving over this time and has worked hard to help him with this.

How can I get involved?

b.friend relies on volunteers to help provide support to asylum seekers and refugees. If you think you may be interested in helping during the current season as we respond to the challenge of the Coronavirus, or may be able to give a little bit of time each week once this has passed, then please get in touch with sam@b-friend.org.uk

Prayer requests:

1. Please pray for refugees and asylum seekers who feel particularly alone and isolated during this time. Pray that God would comfort them and be close to them.
2. Pray for those who are self-isolating and don't know others who are able or willing to help with food, medicine etc. Pray for God's provision and for the right help to be available.
3. Pray for those who are anxious about their asylum status and their future, that they would know God's peace and have hope for the future.
4. Please pray for those who are vulnerable due to pre-existing health conditions, that they would be able to stay safe.
5. Please pray for Sam and all the volunteers with b.friend, that they would know how best to provide love and support to those in need.

More information from: www.bridgesforcommunities.com
Or contact Sam Sayer: sam@b-friend.org.uk

Chris Gane is the link person at St. Michael's



b.friend

 **Bridges**
for Communities
Connecting People Across Cultures