

Introductory Pack



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Improving quality of life through friendship



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1. Background to Linking Lives

Linking Lives UK emerged from a successful charity based in Wokingham Borough – The Link Visiting Scheme (www.linkvisiting.org). Initiated in 1998 through Woodley Baptist Church in Berkshire, The Link Visiting Scheme now works in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies and local churches around the Wokingham area, engaging in befriending for many socially isolated older people and, pre-Covid, operated a wide variety of well attended social activities and events.



In 2012, the possibility of extending the reach of the local befriending scheme to other areas of the UK began to be explored and this was assisted through a partnership with Cinnamon Network who provided advice and guidance in community franchising, as well as initial start-up funding. In 2016, the decision was made to create a new charity to develop the national initiative into the future (while the Link Visiting Scheme continues to flourish in Wokingham) and Linking Lives UK was registered with the Charity Commission in November 2016 (Charity number 1170325).



LINKING LIVES UK



CINNAMON
NETWORK

We were delighted to be nominated by Cinnamon Network for an award at the 2016 Christian Funders Forum Awards event in Lambeth Palace, where we received the Silver Award in our category of 'Best Replicable Project'.



2. Our Aims & Values

The purpose of Linking Lives UK is to connect those experiencing loneliness and isolation with the UK's largest body of motivated volunteers, the Church. As our strapline puts it: "Improving quality of life through friendship."

We do this primarily through equipping the church to respond with the setting up and running of local befriending schemes called 'Two's Company Befriending'. We believe that the church has a distinctive and crucial role to play in addressing these issues and this includes responding to physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs.

Our values reflect the Christian ethos of the charity:

- **We want to serve those who are most alone and to bring hope**
- **We particularly value one to one relationships**
- **At the heart of everything we do is the love of Jesus**
- **We want to build mutually beneficial relationships of trust**
- **We deeply value understanding everyone's story acknowledging that we are all equal**

We expanded our network during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 with a plan to establish at least fifty new scheme per year across the UK within the next three years, utilising the Two's Company Befriending model.

A map of current Two's Company Befriending schemes can be found on our homepage at www.linkinglives.uk.



"My befriending experience has offered my over 70 scheme member the 'fresh air' of conversation, expression of feelings and, most of all, a friend with whom she can share both difficulties and positive experiences. It has been a delight for us both. We've shared laughter and future hopes. Befriending has blessed me as well as my scheme member."

Befriender

3. Loneliness and Social Isolation

Loneliness and social isolation are growing issues in the UK. The Covid-19 pandemic has made us increasingly aware of the problem within society and the hundreds of people who are facing feelings of chronic loneliness. This infographic, from before the pandemic, highlights some key statistics of the scale of the problem and just some of its effects on physical and mental health.

Not only is loneliness widespread, it is also a serious threat to life. It is estimated to be as dangerous to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and more dangerous than obesity.

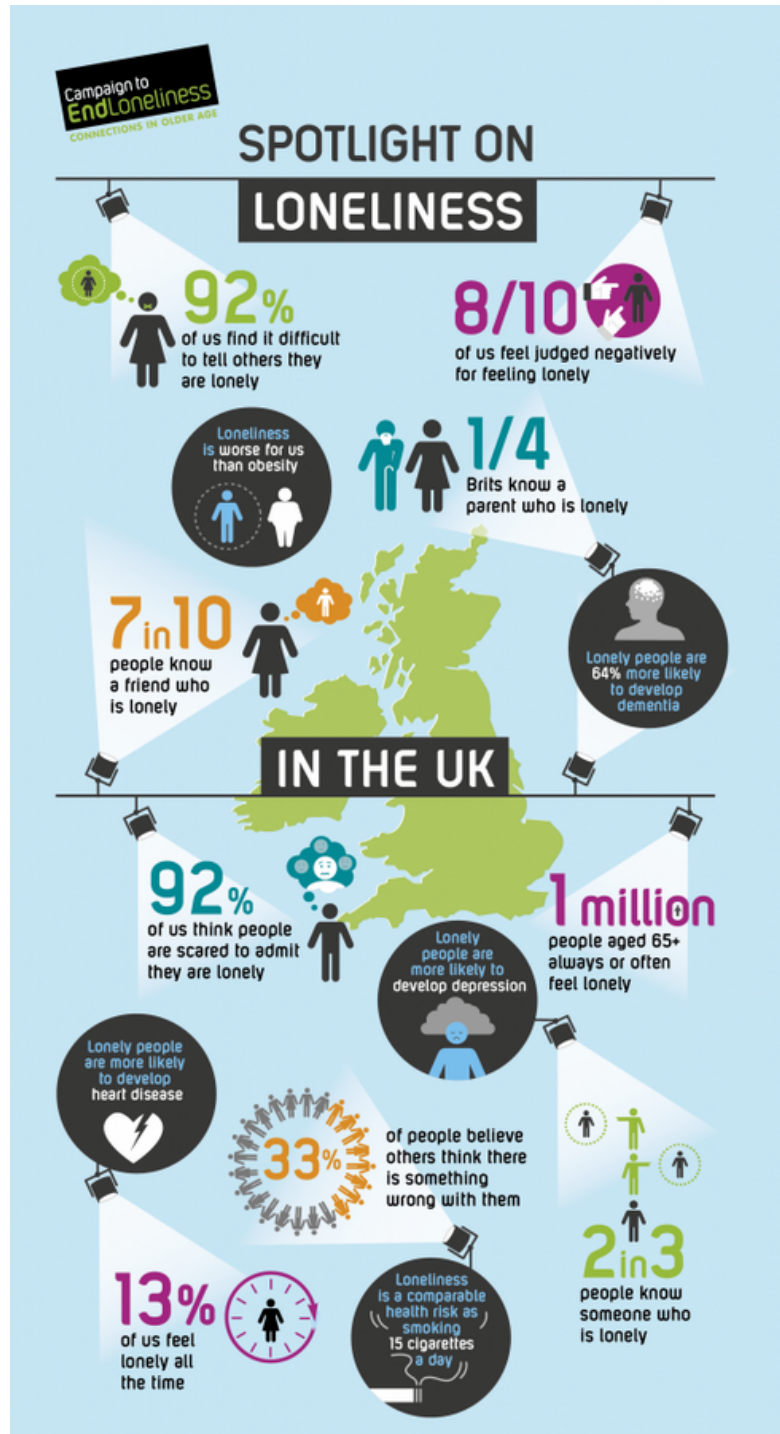
In 2018 the government appointed it's first Loneliness Minister to begin to address the issue on a national level.

The Bible shows that God never intended us to live in isolation

During the pandemic, communities rallied together to help those facing isolation, but this support is gradually reducing.

However, we believe the Church can and should play a key role, providing more valuable and lasting solutions than purely "social" initiatives.

Jesus demonstrated a deep empathy for the isolated and lonely, and, from Genesis 2:18 onwards, the Bible shows that God never intended us to live in isolation.



We believe the Church, as Christ's body on Earth, is called to reach out into society and address this issue. Our purpose at Linking Lives UK is to provide practical support to churches and organisations doing that.



4. Befriending as a tool

What Is "Befriending"?

The dictionary definition of befriending is "to become or act as a friend to..." someone. This is not quite the same as "making friends", the way we do with someone we meet socially or at work, and just "click" with.

This is a deliberate, conscious, intentional act, and this relationship is intended to be beneficial, potentially to both parties.



Befriending provides companionship for isolated people, the chance to develop a new relationship, and even sometimes offers opportunities to participate in social activities.

The benefits of befriending

The results of befriending can be very significant. Befriending often provides people with a new hope and focus on life, it can open the door to a range of other activities and increase self-esteem and self confidence.

Befriending says 'you matter', through personal contact with another person, and places a value on them that they may otherwise have lost through lack of connection with the outside world.



**"Befriending says
'You matter'"**





5. The 'Two's Company' Befriending model

'Two's Company Befriending' seeks to mobilise the Church's team of volunteers to become an answer and a lifeline to many who will be experiencing loneliness. Two's Company Befriending serves to provide the framework for this process which the local church can take and use to fit to its own context. We have three models of befriending: **Home Visiting**, **Telephone Befriending** and a **Hybrid** that combines both Home Visiting and Telephone Befriending.

1. Home Visiting

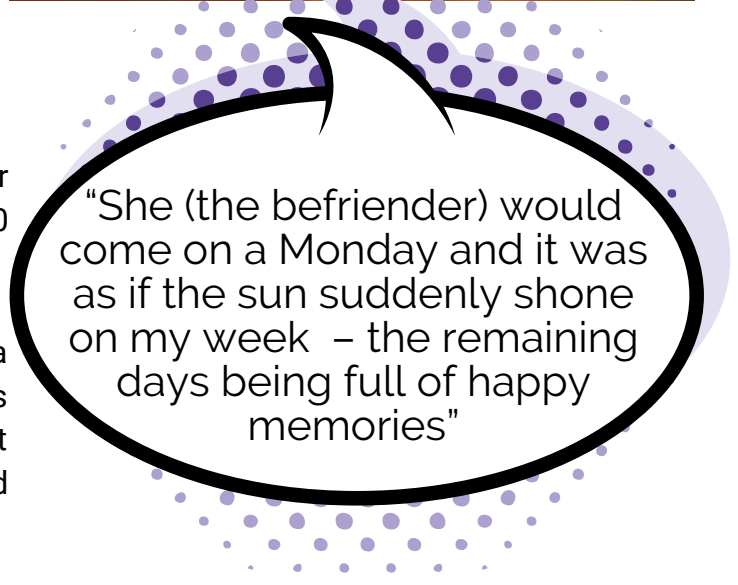
These visits usually take place on a weekly basis for around one hour, where a volunteer befriender would visit a 'scheme member' in their home, following social distancing guidelines. Volunteers may also accompany the person they visit to local places of interest or community activities and events.



2. Telephone Befriending

This model is where a volunteer befriender would call a 'scheme member' for around 30 minutes once a week.

Both these forms of contact often have a significant impact in addressing loneliness and social isolation; there is evidence that such activity can improve physical and mental health as well as self-confidence.



"She (the befriender) would come on a Monday and it was as if the sun suddenly shone on my week – the remaining days being full of happy memories"



3. Hybrid

It is possible for schemes to combine both elements of home visiting and telephone befriending within their church or charity setting to create a 'hybrid' approach, using whichever method is most appropriate for the scheme member and volunteer. This creates a flexibility that can be useful in these times of uncertainty as we come out of lockdown.





6. The Two's Company Befriending process

There are some defined steps involved in running a Two's Company Befriending scheme and full training, support and advice is provided throughout this process from our Linking Lives headquarters. Briefly the process involves:

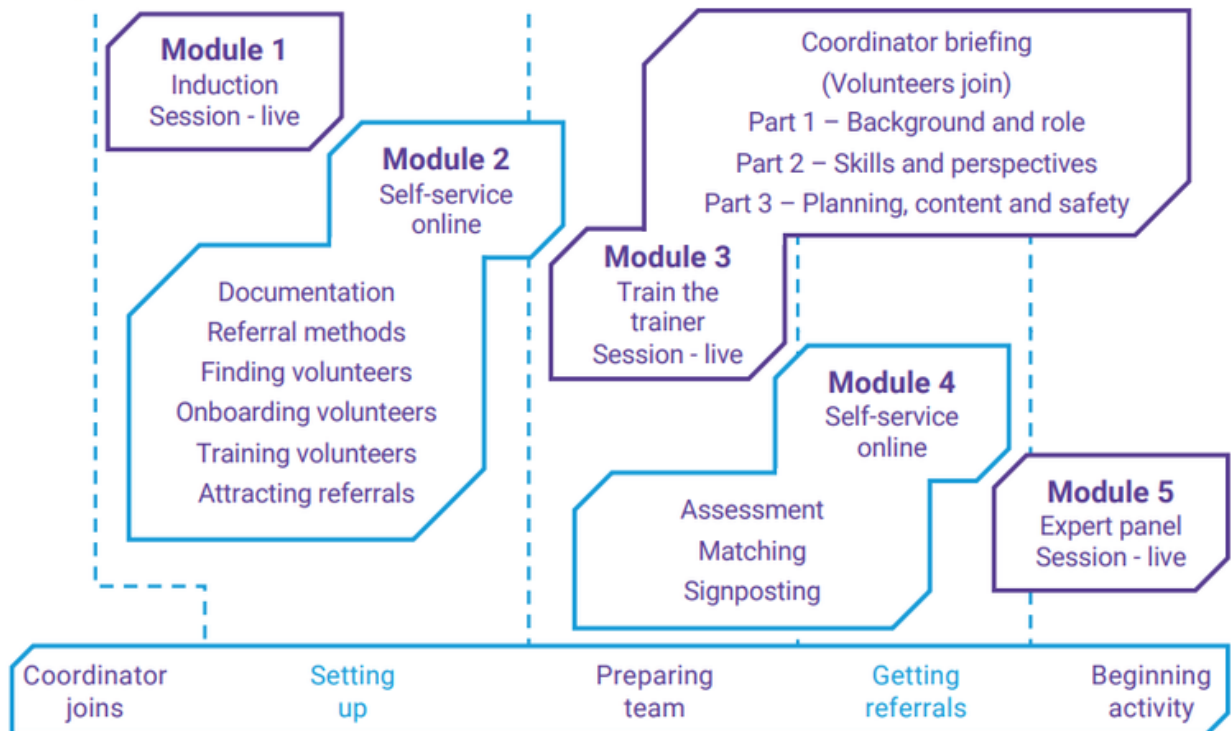
1. APPOINTING A COORDINATOR

Each local scheme will require a nominated Coordinator to look after the day to day running. This can be done on a voluntary or paid basis - Linking Lives can provide fundraising advice if needed. A full breakdown of this role can be found on page 13 but briefly includes recruiting volunteers, finding referrals, pairing volunteers and overseeing the scheme. All of this can be done remotely either by telephone or video conference calls.

2. COORDINATOR TRAINING

Coordinator's would be required to complete the Two's Company Befriending Coordinator's training, some of which is via zoom and some via short training videos. The training is 'modular' and designed to cover specific aspects of the scheme in turn, at the pace of the individual Coordinator and scheme.

The diagram below outlines the five modules and what is covered in each one. It is possible to complete the whole training within a month if necessary. However, it can be done over a much longer time period if required.





The Two's Company Befriending process (cont.)

3. RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

All volunteers recruited for befriending would need to undergo Safeguarding Training and checks, including an enhanced DBS and references, as well as Two's Company Befriender training.

4. SEEKING REFERRALS

Referrals of those requesting regular befriending would be received from existing local contacts within the community. This could include GP's surgeries, social workers and charities. Guidance on where and how to seek referrals is given in the Coordinator training.

5. PAIRING VOLUNTEERS & SCHEME MEMBERS

The Coordinator pairs the volunteer and scheme member together, based on common interests.

6. BEFRIENDING BEGINS: HOME VISITS OR PHONE CALLS

We recommend home visits to last around 1 hour and telephone calls 30 minutes per week. (All telephone calls will be from the volunteer's own phone with their number screened from view.) If both parties are happy with the match, befriending will continue for a period of time agree by the volunteer, or for as long as the scheme member finds it beneficial. If not, the Coordinator should be informed and will then find an alternative match. A brief record of each conversation is kept, for safeguarding and monitoring purposes.

7. FEEDBACK

It is important for any concerns regarding the scheme member to be fed back to the Coordinator for further action or signposting to other agencies as appropriate.



7. Linking Lives Partnership

We invite churches interested in setting up their own Two's Company Befriending scheme to become a partner with Linking Lives UK. We have been excited to see the number of local befriending scheme growing significantly in recent months and the sense of 'family' within the network has been beneficial to many Coordinators and Volunteers as they have been able to meet and share ideas with each other.

There are many benefits to partnering with Linking Lives UK and these are highlighted below:

✓ **Initial training and guidance in setting up a befriending scheme**

We have created a comprehensive process to enable churches to set up a befriending scheme in their local community. This is accompanied by detailed manuals and pre-recorded films.

✓ **Volunteer training**

We also have a volunteer training package specifically for use in training an initial group of volunteers

✓ **Access to tried and tested document templates**

We have put together a comprehensive set of documents which are used for befriending schemes and these are regularly reviewed and improved where necessary.

✓ **Dedicated local webpage**

A localised webpage is created for all partner schemes providing information about your services and contact details

✓ **Access to online members area**

This provides an opportunity to access newly produced national resources and reports, latest Two's Company documents and a forum to share ideas with others – all in one place!

✓ **Access to Microsoft Office 365**

This enables you to have your own dedicated email address along with access to online documents and other helpful apps

✓ **Access to regular coordinator gatherings**

These are held by Zoom every two months and provide an informal opportunity for Coordinators to discuss new ideas or raise any concerns. Updates from Linking Lives UK are also shared. Monthly Zoom prayer meetings for Coordinators are also available.



✓ Access to regular workshops and written resources

We run regular issue-based workshops and training sessions which are open to all members. These are held both online and in person across the UK. These sessions provide a way to improve the way in which we operate and serve those in our local communities.

✓ Attendance at our annual national conference

We hold a conference once a year at which a keynote speaker will address an issue relevant to older people, social isolation and loneliness. There are also practical workshops, lunch and crucial opportunities for networking!

✓ Telephone and peer-to-peer support

Our team is available for any advice or guidance, and other members of the network are often able to provide mutual advice and support based on previous experience. We have also set up a 'buddy system' for new schemes wishing to link with more established ones.

✓ Annual review

If required, we can arrange to carry out an annual review of your local scheme. This is usually done by video conference call and includes a review of volunteering, referrals, training, PR, teamwork and fundraising.

Your contribution to the partnership

In return for the support provided by Linking Lives, we ask that each partner upholds the values of the charity and ensures that all volunteers and coordinators are recruited, vetted and overseen in accordance with their local safeguarding policy. In addition to this we would ask that schemes

- Participate in Linking Lives gatherings and training
- Support and share learning with other members of the network where helpful
- Assist in raising the profile of Linking Lives/ Two's Company Befriending

If you have any questions regarding this, our Partnerships and Support Services Manager will be happy to talk to you further.

Cost

The partnership subscription to Linking Lives UK is £300 for the first year, then £200 each year afterwards. This can be paid monthly if preferred. The subscription contributes towards the overheads of the charity, annual reviews, conference and ongoing support and advice. The fees will become payable on the anniversary of your last payment each year and we will contact you with details of how this applies in your situation.

If this fee is prohibitive for your church/ organisation, please do contact us as we are keen to ensure that costs do not prevent befriending schemes being established and maintained.

8. Getting Started

We have developed an easy to follow step-by-step guide which incorporates a training package to enable each befriending scheme to be set up effectively and in a way that maintains sustainability. We recognise that each local community is different and so we have also ensured that there can be flexibility of approach where necessary.

1. Initial Registration & Linking Lives Partnership

Once a decision has been made to begin the process of setting up a Two's Company Befriending scheme, an online Registration Form will need to be completed and returned to us for consideration. After this a member of our team will arrange a Zoom call with you to get to know you and discuss next steps.

After the Zoom call, we will send you a Linking Lives Partnership Agreement, along with an invoice of fees, to complete and return to us.



2. Planning & Preparation

After receiving a signed Partnership Agreement from you, there are several actions that can be taken on a local level to prepare you to start your scheme. Some of the key actions include:

- Networking & Researching on a local level
- Identifying a Coordinator
- Building an effective team
- Ensuring adequate safeguarding processes are in place
- Raise any necessary funds

3. Training For Coordinators

Once the initial scheme preparation has been done, your Coordinator can then begin their training over a series of modules. These include:

- How to set up your scheme
- How to safely recruit volunteers
- Where and how to obtain referrals
- The matching process
- Providing ongoing support and supervision



Access to the document templates will be given as the training is completed. Your local scheme webpage will be created at the end of this stage

4. Launch Your Scheme!

Begin befriending! The overall process can take between two to six months (depending on any existing community activity locally and the availability of someone to coordinate the planning and preparation).

9. Resources Required

In our experience, the most effective and sustainable way to run a Two's Company Befriending scheme is for a Coordinator to be available for a minimum of one day per week, preferably on a paid basis. This ensures that the necessary liaison with local organisations, volunteers and those requesting a befriender can be achieved and that the administrative aspects are adequately maintained. This could, however, be achieved on a voluntary basis provided the time is clearly dedicated to the scheme.

Linking Lives can provide advice and guidance on seeking funding to employ a part time Coordinator. Please let us know if this is something your scheme would benefit from.

Guidance on Appointing a Coordinator can be found on the next page.



In addition to a Coordinator, volunteers form a core part of the scheme and are asked to allocate one hour per week if home visiting or 30 minutes if telephone befriending. Each volunteer would usually befriend one person each and all volunteers are required to provide references and a clean DBS (criminal record) check.



10. Appointing a Coordinator

A vital part of any befriending scheme is that of the Coordinator, as this person will oversee all aspects of the befriending including safe recruitment of volunteers and receiving and managing referrals. It is therefore important that the person is suitable for the role. We have included a description of what this role entails, to ensure the appropriate person is appointed. We recommend that you use these documents to support and inform your own organisation/church recruitment process and policies. This must be in accordance with your Safeguarding policy, as the Coordinator will interact directly and indirectly with vulnerable adults in the course of their role.

Coordinator Role Description

Summary and Main Purpose of Role

- To be responsible for the day to day safe operation of Two's Company Befriending locally ensuring that scheme members and volunteers are well supported and equipped.
- Liaise with other key local agencies as necessary.

Main Tasks

- Ensure the safe and thorough assessment and allocation of scheme members with suitable volunteers.
- Ensure that volunteers receive the necessary support and supervision to flourish within their roles.
- Oversee the safeguarding aspects of the scheme in liaison with the church/ organisation's safeguarding officer and policy.
- Ensure that procedures are circulated to and followed by all volunteers.
- Liaise with statutory agencies and other voluntary organisations to ensure suitable referrals are maintained and that the scheme is meeting identified needs.
- To work with members of your team in addressing ongoing issues and agreeing future strategy.
- Liaise with Linking Lives UK in order to remain up to date with national developments.
- Oversee the training programme for volunteers.
- Coordinate the monitoring of all aspects of the scheme.

Specific Tasks

- Ensure that all volunteers have been properly vetted through relevant references.
- Maintain accurate records in accordance with data protection requirements.
- Compile and return Two's Company Befriending quarterly reports.
- Compile and produce necessary publicity material ensuring that it is kept up to date and relevant.



11. Frequently Asked Questions

How long are volunteers committed to befriending?

We encourage volunteers to see befriending as a long-term commitment and most will begin to enjoy their experience very soon after they have contact with their scheme member. If, however, there are reasons why befriending can no longer continue, alternative arrangements can be made. Guidance is given on how to end matches well.

What is the role of a volunteer?

Volunteers are recruited to build relationships with people who often do not have any contact with people on a regular basis and have expressed a desire to receive regular visits or telephone calls. For home visiting, interaction can take place at the scheme member's home, at a local place of interest or a community event or activity. For telephone befriending, the scheme member receives regular calls to their home from the befriender. We ask that if volunteers have a faith, they do not 'proselytize', but if asked about their faith they can respond to such questions.

How many volunteers do you need?

A befriending scheme can begin with as few as five volunteers. We really believe that quality is more important than quantity, especially when beginning a new scheme.

What does the Volunteer Training include?

Interactive training for the volunteers covers a range of relevant topics including: Active listening, Safeguarding, Boundaries, Recording & monitoring and Signposting.

How long does it take to set up a scheme?

This can vary depending on the time a Coordinator has to dedicate to it, but it tends to take around 2-6 months to become fully functioning.

Can this be run as a Churches Together outreach?

Absolutely. We have several successful Churches Together schemes and this obviously increases the capacity a scheme will have in terms of volunteers and other resources.

Is Two's Company Befriending primarily for older people?

Linking Lives was originally set up to address loneliness among older people, but this model is now available to help adults of all ages.

How do we find people to befriend?

As part of the setting up process we provide guidance in how to approach key local organisations such as social services, health visitors, GP surgeries and voluntary/ community groups, in order that you can then receive regular referrals.



Are there any restrictions as to who we can befriend?

We try to ensure that there are as few restrictions as possible so that a diverse range of people can benefit from the service. If a referral is received in which someone has been diagnosed with advanced dementia, or other specific physical or psychological conditions, we would recommend that these are referred to appropriate specialists. We have produced a guidance document on how to sift potentially inappropriate referrals.

How long is the agreement with Linking Lives UK?

A partnership agreement is open-ended. Most partners recognise the ongoing mutual benefits of being part of the Linking Lives family and continue working with us on an ongoing basis. The partnership subscription is operated on an annual basis.

We already run a befriending scheme. Can we make use of Two's Company Befriending resources?

Yes! We have developed an Affiliated Model for befriending schemes that are already up and running but would benefit from using our training and resources. Please contact us for more details about this.

Do you have a logo that we have to use?

We would suggest that you use our Two's Company Befriending branding on your publicity in conjunction with your own church logo and details. We recognise that churches often have a strong presence within their communities and we don't want to detract from that. Branding guidance is given within the training.

Do you have any promotional materials that we can access?

Yes! We have developed several resources to help promote Two's Company Befriending within your church. These include short films and a PowerPoint presentation. Please contact us to access these.

12. Next Steps

If after reading through this information, your church or charity would like to become a Two's Company befriending scheme, the next step would be to complete the online **Registration Form** at <http://linkinglives.uk/tc-registration>, which will register you as a prospective partner with Linking Lives UK.

What information is required to register?

We ask for several key details of the Church setting up the scheme including

- Name of church leader
- Address of church
- Name of Coordinator (if known)
- Correspondence details
- Governing Body/Structure

If you have any questions regarding any of the registration process, or anything else mentioned in this pack, please email angela@linkinglives.uk.

We look forward to hearing from you again soon!

