

Phone A Friend

Volunteer Handbook



Welcome to Phone A Friend!

Please read this handbook.

It's a guide for you to use as you begin volunteering. It contains information from your Phone A Friend induction on how the pilot works, practical advice, a little about what you can expect from us and what we expect from you as a volunteer.

We've also included some testimonials from volunteers throughout the handbook, so you can get a sense of what it's like to be a volunteer with East London Cares.

What is Phone A Friend?

Phone A Friend is East London Cares' **friendship matching pilot**, which brings volunteers together with their older neighbours through regular phone calls.

Phone A Friend helps neighbours **to build connections based on laughter, friendship and storytelling**. The programme is all about getting to know another person and building a friendship with them over the phone, rather than any practical or hands-on support.

As a Phone A Friend volunteer you are committing to make four 10-20 minute calls each week for a minimum of four months.

"We end up talking about things that I wouldn't talk about with my friends. Different things that perhaps I wouldn't usually talk about ... like aliens!"

Who are my older neighbours?

All the older neighbours on the pilot are **aged 65 or over** and **live in Tower Hamlets or Hackney**.

Many have lived here for decades, while others are new to the area.

We will always call older neighbours ourselves first before to check that they are suitable for Phone a Friend, and many we have known for months or years through our other programmes Social Clubs or Love Your Neighbour. **We are also connecting older neighbours to various other types of support**, such as help with food shopping.

What makes a great volunteer?

Everyone brings something different to the programme, and being relaxed and yourself is key to having fun on the programme. That said, there are few important things to remember when getting to know your older neighbour:

- **Listen.** Give your older neighbour a chance to talk about themselves.
- **Make conversation.** Tell the older neighbour about yourself, and ask plenty of questions. If you're nervous about running out of things to say, make a list of questions you want to ask before the call. If you're talking about something light-hearted, smile as you talk – it



- **Be empathetic.** If your older neighbour is going through a difficult period, you may need to be extra attentive and supportive. Sometimes remembering small details such as the names of relatives or certain stories can help to show someone that you care about them.
- **Be patient.** It can take time to get to know your older neighbour. Don't put yourself under pressure to become best friends with someone in the space of a few weeks.
- **Be reliable.** When you arrange a time to call your older neighbour, please stick to it. This is a particularly isolating time, and they will be looking forward to and waiting for your call.



"I think I'm a better listener now, and I am certainly much more aware of the challenges facing older people, which is an awareness I try to carry with me when I'm out and about."

What else do I need to remember to do?

We ask all volunteers to log their calls using a **unique online form**. The form allows you to record the date and length of your calls, and to let us know about any highlights or concerns from your conversations. Please log your calls once a week, and share any lovely anecdotes with us!

Please get in touch as soon as possible if you have any concerns about your older neighbour. You can use your unique form, or call, text or email us. No concern is too trivial or small.

How often will you check in with me if there aren't any challenges?

We will check in with you on the phone your after your first call and then again monthly after this. These conversations are to learn a bit more about your friendship and discuss any challenges in more details.



There are short conversations, and we can schedule them at a time that works best for you. The questions focus on what conversations you've been having, how you are finding the pilot, (we are keen to learn so if you have any tips or ideas for how we can improve it, let us know!) the nature of your friendship, and what impact your phone friendship has had on you.

If you ever become unwell, will be unable to make these calls or would like to end your volunteering commitment, please let us know as soon as possible.

"We talk about everything and nothing. I like the fact we're different. She teaches me things, while I tell her about the festivals I go to and my dating life."

Storytelling

Storytelling is a huge part of East London Cares. It's a chance for you and your older neighbour to share your experiences, opinions and stories with the rest of our community. It also helps to show others the value of friendships, and encourage others to support their older neighbours. Please do send us stories and quotes from your conversations that have made you smile.

You can also write a **blog** about what you've gained from your experience with **Phone A Friend** or complete an interview with your older neighbour exploring your friendship.



“Different opinions, different topics of conversation, and different stories. It's much better than just having conversations about going out at the weekend.”

What can I help my older neighbour with?

We always make it very clear to older neighbours that your role is to provide companionship rather than practical support. However, given the current context, they may make you aware of things that they are worried about, struggling with, or need help with.

It's important that you **don't exchange your address** with your older neighbour. If your older neighbour needs any practical support, including food shopping, please contact us and we will get in contact with them about the safest and most suitable way to support them with this.

What should I do if I find calling my older neighbour challenging?

Volunteers frequently tell us about how fun and enriching their friendships with their older neighbours are.

However, many older neighbours on the Phone A Friend pilot are feeling particularly isolated and are worried about the current pandemic. They may be managing long-term health conditions, have lost loved ones, or be struggling with their mental wellbeing. As a result, supporting them can be emotionally challenging.

Our role is to support you as well as your older neighbour. **Please call, text or email us if you ever find your calls challenging.**

“Sometimes before going to see my older neighbour, I feel tired and wondering if I will have enough energy to see her ... but afterwards I always feel energised and really happy!”

New friendships can be slow burners. Many friendships have flourished on the programme after a little perseverance in overcoming initial nerves.

Here are some conversation starters to try out:

Which television shows do you like? You could arrange to call after their favourite show has been broadcast, watch it too, and then talk about it!

Do you like reading? You could order one of their favourite books, read it, and start a mini bookclub.

What music do you like? You could listen to one of their favourite songs and discuss what memories it evokes.

How long have you lived in east London?

Crosswords: could you complete a crossword together over the phone (maybe not a cryptic one given the length of the call...).

Share your favourite joke

What period in history would you love to travel back in time to?

What's the best holiday you've ever been on?

Your wellbeing

These are challenging times for us all, and the last thing we want is your Phone A Friendship volunteering to be detrimental to your wellbeing. Staying in touch is really important: we're here to support you too!

What about safeguarding?

We have a responsibility to protect you and your older neighbour from abuse.

Abuse or neglect can take lots of different forms:

- **Physical abuse** includes hitting, pushing, and misuse of medication.
- **Sexual abuse** includes sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting to, inappropriate touching, and indecent exposure.
- **Psychological abuse** includes threats, humiliation, isolation and withdrawal of support.
- **Financial abuse** includes having money or property stolen, and being defrauded or scammed. Indicators include shortages of money, misplaced financial documents and lack of heating, clothing or food.
- **Organisational abuse** includes poor care practice and provision either within an institution or in a person's own home.
- **Neglect** includes failing to provide suitable care and support, or withholding medication, food and heating. **Self-neglect** is when someone is not looking after themselves, perhaps not eating or washing properly, or hoarding and living in a chaotic environment.
- **Discriminatory abuse** includes harassment, slurs and any other type of abuse perpetrated due to the person's race, gender and gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion.
- **Domestic abuse** includes violence, psychological, sexual, financial, emotional abuse and patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour in a relationship or between family members.

Often the perpetrators of abuse and neglect are people who are trusted and relied upon by an older neighbour, such as a family member or carer.

Sadly, since older neighbours often have care and support needs, they can't always protect themselves from abuse or neglect. **It is therefore important that you remain vigilant about abuse or neglect.** Your older neighbour may disclose something to you, or you may notice something. Safeguarding concerns are rare, but **you should report any concerns to us as soon as possible.**

Other questions:

I can't find the link to my form to log calls. What should I do?

Let us know and we can resend it to you. If you're ever unsure about the last call you inputted in the form, we can send you a record of dates you've previously logged.

What should I do if I can't get through to my older neighbour?

If you have arranged a call with an older neighbour and they are not picking up the phone, try calling again- it often takes many older neighbours a little bit of time to get to the phone and sometimes they miss it. If they are still not answering try a couple more times later that day or in the morning, as they might have just been asleep.

If you've tried to contact them without any success on several occasions, let us know as soon as possible, especially if it seems out of character. We will then contact their emergency contact – usually a family member, friend or neighbour – and update you when we know what the situation is.

