

Friendly Places

Understanding the Impact



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Introduction to Friendly Places

Friendly Places is an awareness-raising initiative with two aims:

- To help **faith-based organisations** (FBOs) realise that they have a role to play in supporting those struggling with their mental health, and equip them to do this better
- To highlight to the **health and care system** the positive and significant role that FBOs can and often are already playing as communities that provide welcome and acceptance for people struggling with their mental health, and encourage better links between the system and FBOs

Friendly Places works through:

- A simple **pledge** that anyone can sign to express their commitment to supporting FBOs in their role
- **Tips and resources** on the FaithAction website, to support FBOs in becoming more mental health-friendly. See www.faithaction.net/friendlyplaces
- A **workshop** around two hours in length, delivered by FaithAction and aimed primarily at representatives of FBOs, to help them think about mental health and the ways in which their organisation can become more welcoming and supportive. Some training sessions were also attended by mental health professionals. In the course of 2015-16, an element was added to the workshop focusing on dementia. This included how FBOs can support sufferers, as well as messages about reducing risk.

The Friendly Places pledge

I believe that there is a significant and positive role for faith communities to play in the support of mental health.

I pledge to support faith groups in my community to become Friendly Places which welcome and support those struggling with their mental health.

104 individuals and organisations signed the Friendly Places pledge in 2015-16

The impact assessment

Our impact assessment focused on whether those who had signed the Friendly Places pledge or taken part in the training had **taken action** to make their organisation more mental health-friendly. We did this through:

- An open invitation, through our e-news, for organisations to feed back with any action they had taken since signing the pledge or taking part in training
- Direct contact with those who had taken part in the training in 2014-15 to see if they had taken action
- Asking workshop participants what action they planned to take as a result of the session, 'tomorrow', 'next week' and 'within the next three months'. These actions were written down and collected in. Participants were contacted by email after 12 weeks (6 weeks in the case of the final session), reminded of the action they pledged to take, and asked whether they had managed to complete it

We also wanted to attempt to measure whether the initiative had had an impact on **how welcoming** organisations signing the pledge or taking part in the training had become.

We attempted to measure this quantitatively, by asking those taking part in the training how welcoming they would say their organisation is, and asking again at a later time point. However, responses at follow-up were too low to allow for meaningful comparisons (see page 15).

We have therefore used case studies to illustrate the impact of Friendly Places on organisations.

To obtain case studies we conducted telephone interviews with:

- Representatives of two churches that took part in training in 2014-15
- A rabbi who had signed the Friendly Places pledge
- A chaplain from a Gurudwara that hosted training in 2016

We developed the format for the training and the case studies with advice from the **Mental Health Providers Forum**.

Findings: People see their organisations as welcoming – but with room for improvement

109 people received training in 2015-16

Table 1: How welcoming would you say your organisation is? (1 = not welcoming at all; 5 = extremely welcoming)

	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Attendees
Session 1		1	1	3	4	9	12
Session 2			6	9	1	16	24
Session 3			1	5	2	8	8
Session 4		1	2	7	4	14	19
Total	0	2	10	24	11	47	63

This included **63 people trained at four sessions** within the period within which the evaluation was conducted. A further session and a webinar option were added after this period in order to meet our target of 90 people to be trained. As these were held relatively late, there was no opportunity to follow up attendees at these later sessions.

The 63 who attended the earlier sessions were asked “How welcoming would you say your organisation is?” 47 people answered this question (see Table 1).

74.5% (35) rated their organisation as 4 or 5

This finding confirms the idea on which Friendly Places is based, namely that faith communities are often already providing a place of welcome, making them a resource for supporting those suffering with their mental health. However, there seems to be a recognition that there is ‘more to do’, and this was backed up in pledges for action in the qualitative responses.

Findings: Three kinds of action were planned as a result of training

The following pages give a selection of the kinds of actions that participants pledged to take following the workshop. These have been categorised under three headings:

- **Personal action (eg in their interactions with others)**
- **Spreading the message (ie disseminating learning from the workshop)**
- **Practical steps within FBOs (ie to make organisations more welcoming)**

These pages are followed by a selection of the actions that were reported at follow-up, and four case studies.

Findings: Pledges for personal action

“Contact someone who I know has been ill and therefore not been at church for several weeks”
– Faith group member

“Send my friends a text to let them know I'm thinking about them”
– Faith group member

“Make sure I listen, rather than jump to fix-it mode” –
Faith group member

“Take a day off (for own mental health)”
– Faith leader

“I have new next door neighbours. I haven't seen them yet. So I will put a hello card through their letterbox”
– Faith group member

Findings: Pledges for spreading the message

“Talk to the children so they know how important it is to welcome people”
– Faith group member

“I will speak to the mosque committee about introducing pastoral care to the mosque”
– NHS worker and faith group member

“Provide information from today to our eldership/ trustees, for the new Helpdesk we are setting up”
– Faith group member

“Contact vicar to be discussed at our next Mission, Life & Worship committee”
– Faith group member

“Help new staff to understand the importance of feeling welcome”
– Voluntary organisation worker

Findings: Pledges for practical steps within FBOs

“Try and arrange a public meeting for the local community to bring about more awareness”
– Faith leader

“Encourage those with mental problems to share their stories”
– Faith group member

“Offer extra training to our volunteers”
– Voluntary organisation worker

“Look at [having] a Welcome Team (currently have sidespeople/stewards who may be friendly faces)”
– Faith leader

“I have a list of dementia friendly ideas for a church – I want to go through this to check what we are doing and what we can work towards”
– Faith group member

Findings: Actions taken

21 workshop attendees gave a response at follow-up about their actions. Below is an illustrative selection of the actions they reported. Only 2 people reported that they had not yet taken any action.

"I have briefed one of the Elders who discussed the information at the Elders meeting" – Faith group member

"Stewards and Ushers are now identifiable" – Faith group member*

"I organised a Seminar ... on the theme 'Getting the balance right' so I incorporated mental health by emphasizing Mind Body & Spirit"
– Faith group member

"Reviewed the various surroundings of Trust's sites"
– Mental Health Trust worker

"[The] workshop ... has really caused me be more thoughtful about the plight of those I meet and know. I now visit one person weekly instead of fortnightly, and phone or send a text in between visits. He actually gave me a hug one week..."
– Faith group member

"[I gave a public] testimony about my experiences with mental health"
– Faith group member

*One of the tips provided in the training is to make it clear who is available to offer assistance or pastoral care.

Case study 1: Christ Central Church, Redhill

Attending a Friendly Places training session in 2014 was the catalyst for a process of review for Christ Central, looking at how prepared the church was to deal with mental health issues, and what its approach to these issues should 'look like'. This coincided with the incidence among church members of a number of pastoral issues that had a mental health dimension. The result of these two circumstances arising at the same time has led to a much greater awareness of mental health among the church leaders and members of the congregation.

For example, training within the church has been enhanced, with over 30 members with leadership responsibilities having attended an external mental health-related training course. This includes the leader of the 'welcoming team' who greet people at church services, and for those responsible for prayer ministry, pastoral care and children's activities. Such people are now aware that on any Sunday there are likely to be people attending the service who, unbeknown to anyone present, have mild or significant mental health issues. The welcoming team are more equipped to identify people attending services who might be suffering from mental health issues, to ask appropriate questions and listen well, and to follow up any causes for concern. They are also aware that mental health can be an aspect of other issues too. Among the congregation is a GP with responsibility for IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) in the local area, who has been able to advise church leaders on mental health issues.

The leaders therefore feel more confident in relating to people facing mental health issues, which has also meant they are able to be more welcoming – and more able to act when they identify people experiencing problems. In one case, a leader spotted that someone leaving the church centre was evidently in difficulty, followed the person and eventually prevented them from taking their own life. They are also more aware of when and how they need to involve professional support: for example, knowing the questions they might ask a person about their relationship with their GP, and the emergency telephone number for the local crisis team.

Links with local services have increased and Christ Central now routinely hosts local IAPT services within the church building, and has also hosted a six-week 'Emotion Gym' run by the NHS and Virgin Care, helping people maintain and improve their mental wellbeing. Future plans include running a centre where people can come for client meetings, potentially staffed by a nurse practitioner. The church also continues to offer what one of its leaders calls 'mental health triage' through its regular pastoral care. A church leader describes Friendly Places as the first resource that the church has found helpful in looking at mental health from a faith perspective, and something that sparked a significant improvement in terms of the church being equipped to support people with mental health issues.

Case study 2: Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue

Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue (NPLS) has recently developed a focus on mental health and wellbeing, sparked by a recognition that great difficulties are prevalent in society and that members of its own community were facing mental health issues. Friendly Places has helped NPLS to recognise that as a place of faith, it has a significant part to play in meeting the needs of its community in the area of mental health. The synagogue has come to understand how important it is for it to provide resources, safe spaces and activities that can help bring a sense of meaning in people's lives.

One of the rabbis states that this process has led him to be personally much more aware of mental health and wellbeing issues in the community. For example, he sees his role not just as to lead prayers but also to look around the room and see how people are doing, and to notice whether anyone is absent who he would expect to be there, and to follow up with them later.

Since signing the Friendly Places pledge, NPLS has begun a number of activities, including setting up a monthly 'Singing for the Soul' group. The idea of this is to use singing to boost members' own wellbeing, and also to empower them with confidence to help others in the same way, as the group has visited a care home to sing with the residents. The community also offers one-to-one sessions with a Care Coordinator, and has trained one of its members as a hospital visitor for people with mental health issues.

NPLS is also recognising the importance of working in partnership with other organisations, and has established a fortnightly drop-in session at a daycare centre run by Jewish Care. This provides a hot meal and activities for people who are lonely or have memory difficulties. The synagogue is also planning to establish a befriending service and support for carers. By working strategically in partnership, NPLS is learning that although it might not have expertise in a specific area, it can work with others who do. The synagogue also has a contribution to bring, and by complementing each other the organisations can achieve something together that they would not be able to do separately.

Case study 3: Nishkam Centre

The Nishkam Centre in Birmingham is a Sikh faith-inspired organisation working for the benefit of all communities. It was founded by Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ), a Sikh faith-based organisation dedicated to Nishkam Sewa (active, selfless volunteering) to serve the common good.

The centre hosted a Friendly Places training session in February 2016, with participants from different faith groups and some mental health professionals. Since this time, the centre continues to support the initiative and fulfil its pledge by raising awareness of Friendly Places and making connections with related services such as Sikh Rogi Aasra (Chaplaincy Services) and the Places of Welcome initiative. Places of Welcome is a network of faith-based, faith-inspired and community organisations that offer an unconditional welcome, providing refreshments, basic local information and people to listen.

The Nishkam Centre is sharing the message in the local community that individuals experiencing mental health problems are welcomed into the centre and treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity. It has placed signs in its window and foyer area, and updated its website to show how it is linked with and supportive of the Places of Welcome initiative. As part of this, it provides a weekly coffee morning, staffed by volunteers. On International Women's Day on 8 March, a special coffee and cake event was held for women, providing a space in which women felt comfortable to share achievements and concerns.

The centre's chaplain reports that people come into the building to speak with her when they are feeling stressed or low, and she is monitoring the numbers of people who take up this offer, and connecting them as appropriate with other support services.

The Nishkam Centre's future plans for Friendly Places include working with the other GNNSJ initiatives, such as its health centre; adding the Friendly Places logo to leaflets about its offer; and training more of its volunteers (Sewadars) in hospitality and awareness of mental health issues. A number of Nishkam Security's staff and volunteers attended the Friendly Places training as they are often the first people to meet and greet individuals. One of them commented at a follow-up meeting after six weeks: "I think as security guards we always try to assist, and going to the training ... further enhanced and enriched what we were trying to do".

Case study 4: Trinity Church, Sutton

A member of Trinity Church attended Friendly Places training by FaithAction, which started a long process of discussion within the church. The church decided to sign the Friendly Places pledge, and in preparation arranged a meeting after a Sunday service, where an invited speaker from a local mental health charity talked about what it is like to live with mental health issues. The meeting was attended by around 30 members of the congregation, including people with a professional interest in mental health, people who were themselves grappling with mental health issues, those with family members or neighbours affected and others who just wanted to find out more. In the course of the meeting a number of people spoke movingly about ways in which they or their families had been affected by mental ill-health. This meeting helped the church decided to sign the pledge.

Since then, mental health has had a growing profile in the church. The minister says he is much more aware of mental health issues and more inclined to think deliberately about them and make reference to them in church services. Members of the congregation seem more willing to talk and there are more conversations going on. Several significant personal disclosures have been made in the course of regular meetings and these have led to useful discussions.

Trinity considers that signing the pledge has been a useful and significant step and people are beginning to ask “What comes next?” The church is considering this and is planning a meeting close to World Mental Health Day at which people will be invited to say what they think has changed since last year’s meeting and what remains to be done. This meeting will use FaithAction’s resource, ‘Ways to become a friendlier place’, as a key reference document and tool for self-appraisal.

The church is part of a local partnership of churches, and has included some references to mental health and events like World Mental Health Day in the partnership’s magazine. It is now planning to publicise the Friendly Places initiative more widely through other local publications.

Challenges in implementing Friendly Places

There have been some limitations when implementing Friendly Places, largely due to the way in which faith groups tend to be structured and operate.

Reluctance to sign the pledge in an organisational capacity: Those attending the training are often members of faith groups with a level of existing interest in mental health. Despite the intentional simplicity of the Friendly Places pledge, these individuals have tended not to feel empowered to sign it on behalf of their organisation. In some cases there is a council or board that must approve the pledge, which may meet only from time to time. In some cases, faith leaders themselves have attended and felt able to sign there and then. In the other cases, we have encouraged people to sign in an individual capacity, and followed up with them later.

Wanting to make improvements before signing the pledge: While FaithAction developed the pledge as a statement of intent, some organisations have been reluctant to sign it until they have put into place the tips and recommendations that accompany it. We have stressed that this is not a necessary precursor, but we applaud the commitment of these organisations and recognise that they are likely to be having an impact whether or not they have actually signed.

Not recognising/prioritising a need for change: A small number of those attending the training report a lack of interest from their organisations, or interest that has not led to any action. In many cases this is likely simply to be due to the slow pace of change in some organisations, and the fact that faith leaders and group members are often busy with existing priorities. The following quotation is an isolated example of resistance to the initiative, but still suggests that Friendly Places might eventually have an impact through the commitment of individuals:

"I have fed back to the PCC [parochial church council]. I have identified areas of improvement but have met resistance. The key people in the church are reluctant to make any changes and think what they are doing is enough. It has been disappointing but I will not give up." – Faith group member

Challenges in assessing impact

Low numbers of those responding to our follow-up emails in the weeks following the training has made the assessment of impact challenging. In addition, **we did not always have telephone numbers for participants** (as a further means of follow-up), as in some cases we had asked the organisations hosting the training to recruit participants in order to maximise attendance.

As indicated on page 3, our intention was to measure whether participants' perceptions of how welcoming their organisations were had changed in the weeks following their attendance at the Friendly Places training session.

The 63 individuals who attended the first four training sessions were followed up (after 12 weeks in the case of the first three sessions, and 6 weeks in the case of the final session), and again asked to rate how welcoming their organisation was on a scale of 1 to 5.

Only 18 responses to this question were received, making meaningful comparison impossible. However, of the 18, 15 (83.3%) rated their organisation as 4 or 5.

No conclusions can be drawn from this, as these 15 could all be drawn from among the 35 who answered 4 or 5 when questioned the first time. However, it could also be an indication that some people did see their organisation as having become more welcoming since they attended the Friendly Places training.

Should FaithAction carry out a similar evaluation in the future, we will ask people to identify themselves at the first time point (on this occasion scores were given anonymously at the session itself, with a follow up by email which was not anonymous). In this way, we will be able to track improvements in individual organisations.

We will also collect telephone numbers from attendees wherever possible, allowing another means of follow-up in addition to email.

Conclusions

- According to the perceptions of members attending the training, **faith groups are already good at offering a welcome to those attending**. However, there is a recognition that **more can be done**.
- The kinds of action that participants saw as open to them were **improvements in their personal interactions with others; disseminating learning** from the session within their organisation, and taking **practical steps** to make their organisation more welcoming (such as making people responsible for greeting visitors, or taking steps to reduce stigma: in line with the tips provided at the training and on the website).
- The impact assessment, although limited in some ways, **strongly suggests that these actions are beginning to be taken**, and that FBOs could be becoming more welcoming as a result.
- The feedback from participants in the training, as well as from the case studies, suggests that Friendly Places is acting as a **catalyst** for thinking about mental health and reviewing current practice. This sometimes happens in conjunction with faith groups becoming more aware that members of the group are experiencing mental health issues.
- The case studies also suggest that where **faith leaders** have taken on board the Friendly Places messages, the initiative has been part of **raising their awareness of their personal role** in supporting the mental health of those in their care.
- While most people who attended the training were representatives of FBOs, some were mental health professionals, and some of these mentioned their own faith involvement. Such individuals could be invaluable for helping to **strengthen links between mental health services and FBOs**. For these participants as others, Friendly Places provides an opportunity to reflect on such opportunities and take action.