

Glens Befriending Service

Volunteer Handbook

Thank you for giving your time to befriending. A regular conversation, shared activity or friendly visit can make a real difference to someone who feels isolated. This handbook explains your role, the support available and what to do when you need help.

1. Welcome and your role

We provide free befriending support to adults experiencing isolation in Glen Urquhart and Strathglass. Our aim is a community where adults can feel connected, supported and able to participate. Our values are commitment, transparency, compassion, trust and teamwork.

What you can expect from us

- Respect, dignity and fair treatment.
- A clear role, induction and appropriate training.
- Support from the Befriending Coordinator, regular check-ins and someone to ask for advice.
- Opportunities to give feedback and recognition for your contribution.

What we ask of you

- Be reliable and let us know when your availability changes.
- Treat people kindly and respectfully, respecting their choices, privacy and independence.
- Stay within your agreed role and follow current guidance and policies.
- Attend required training and report concerns promptly.

Your role is companionship

You are not expected to provide personal or clinical care, professional advice or an emergency service.

If someone needs more support than you can offer, speak to the Coordinator.

This handbook supports the volunteer arrangement; it is separate from the employee handbook and does not create an employment contract.

2. Getting started and staying supported

Before you begin

The Coordinator will explain recruitment, identity checks, references, adult PVG checks and induction. You will receive the guidance relevant to your role, including driver documents if you transport clients. Complete the required checks and training before beginning your agreed activities.

Befriending volunteers receive Helping Hands training through Highland Hospice, including Adult Support and Protection. The current volunteer refresher cycle is three years. The Coordinator will explain any additional training you need and keep a record of completion.

Your match

A new pairing has a trial period so you and your befriender can see how it works. Agree a regular pattern of contact with support from the Coordinator. You can ask for a change of match or stop volunteering if the arrangement is not right for you.

Keeping in touch

- Submit the monthly activity update and expenses through the Coordinator's update process.
- Take part in the regular check-ins with the Coordinator, normally every three months.
- Tell the Coordinator about changes to your contact details, health or circumstances that affect your role.
- Ask for help if the relationship becomes difficult, someone's needs change or you feel overwhelmed.

Attendance and illness

If you are ill, late or unable to attend, tell your befriender or the Coordinator as early as possible. Do not visit while infectious. For sickness or diarrhoea, wait at least 48 hours after symptoms stop; ask the Coordinator about other illnesses or any additional precautions.

Taking a break or leaving

You can take a break when you need to. Let the Coordinator know so arrangements can be made for your befriender. After a longer absence, we may need to refresh your training or checks before you return. Your feedback is welcome when you leave.

3. Visits, outings and journeys

Home visits and the buddy system

Follow agreed visiting arrangements. Do not make an unplanned visit because someone has not replied; contact the Coordinator if you are concerned.

- Agree a buddy or nominated contact before the visit. If you have no local buddy, agree arrangements with the Coordinator, including their availability.
- Message your buddy when you arrive, when you leave and when you are home safely. Let them know if your plans change or you are delayed.
- Agree when they should expect to hear from you and what they should do if you do not check in.
- Your buddy needs your contact details and a way to contact the Coordinator. Share client details only where necessary under agreed service arrangements.
- Be aware of safe exits. If you feel unsafe, leave when you can safely do so and seek help.

The buddy system supports personal safety; it does not replace safeguarding or emergency procedures.

Safe outings and journeys

- Agree the destination, activity, approximate timings and return arrangements with your befriender.
- Check mobility, accessibility, walking distances, toilets, rest breaks and support needs. Ask the Coordinator if unsure.
- Consider weather, route, traffic and your befriender's wellbeing. Change or postpone plans if needed.
- Carry a charged phone and contact details. Agree buddy/check-in arrangements for the outing.
- Agree how you will stay together or meet again if spending time separately. Respect independence and agreed support needs.
- Only assist within your role, training and ability. Do not lift someone or provide substantial physical assistance; ask about alternative transport or support.
- If someone becomes unwell, you become separated or another concern arises, stop and seek appropriate help. Call 999 in an emergency.
- Make sure your befriender returns to the agreed destination. Seek advice if you are concerned about leaving them safely.

4. Driving and practical safety

Using your own vehicle

Only transport befriendees as part of your agreed role and in accordance with the Volunteer Driver Policy and Guidelines and Volunteer Driver Risk Assessment.

- Hold a valid driving licence and provide the Coordinator with the required licence, insurance and MOT documents for annual checks; MOT applies where legally required.
- Tell your motor insurer about voluntary driving and obtain confirmation of suitable cover. Whether business use is needed depends on your insurer; do not assume a particular category is sufficient.
- Keep the vehicle safe and roadworthy. Follow seatbelt requirements and the driver guidance.
- Do not drive while fatigued, unwell or affected by alcohol, drugs or medication that impairs driving.
- Report changes affecting your driving status or cover promptly.
- Do not smoke or vape with a client in the vehicle. Follow the driver guidance about additional passengers or pets, considering the client's comfort, consent and safety.

Accidents, incidents and near-misses

Follow the Accident and Incident Quick Guide: stop safely, check for injuries, call emergency services where needed and support your passenger. Collect details and evidence only if safe. Do not admit liability at the scene. Inform your motor insurer as soon as possible.

Report accidents, incidents and near-misses promptly to the Coordinator and complete the relevant incident form within 24 hours. Urgent reporting must not wait for the form. Safeguarding concerns follow the immediate reporting process in section 5.

Expenses

Submit your activity update and mileage claim through the monthly process. The driver policy provides mileage reimbursement at 55p per mile and parking expenses with receipts. Other reasonable expenses, such as refreshments, follow the agreed service arrangements. Ask the Coordinator before incurring unusual costs or using an outings budget.

Insurance

Soirbheas's insurance applies subject to the policy terms and the activities insured. Ask the Coordinator to confirm cover before an unfamiliar activity. Your personal motor insurance must cover your voluntary driving; Soirbheas insurance does not replace it.

5. Boundaries, respect and privacy

Keep the relationship warm and appropriate

Offer companionship, listen and encourage community connections. Keep to agreed contact arrangements; you do not have to be available at all times. Read the Boundaries and Signposting Guide for practical examples.

- Do not provide personal or clinical care, including bathing, toileting or administering medication.
- Do not lend or borrow money or give medical, legal or financial advice. Ask the Coordinator about signposting.
- Only carry out agreed errands or shopping; keep receipts and follow the agreed money-handling arrangements.
- Avoid significant or inappropriate gifts. Ask the Coordinator if unsure.
- Respect personal space and consent. Physical contact must be appropriate and welcome.
- Keep personal social media and volunteering contact separate where possible. Avoid excessive sharing of personal information.
- Tell the Coordinator if dependency develops or support needs exceed befriending.

Respectful behaviour

Treat everyone fairly. Bullying, harassment, discrimination, threats and abusive behaviour are unacceptable. Follow the Positive Behaviour and Bullying and Harassment policies. Do not shout at, punish or physically restrain a befriender. If a situation becomes unsafe, seek help rather than trying to control it yourself.

Do not volunteer while impaired by alcohol or drugs. Do not smoke during visits. Dress appropriately and look after your belongings.

Confidentiality

Protect personal information whether it is on paper, on your phone or discussed in conversation. Use agreed secure arrangements and share only what is necessary with appropriate people. Do not discuss a client's information with friends, family or other volunteers outside agreed procedures.

Privacy must not prevent safeguarding

Do not promise secrecy. A necessary and lawful safeguarding referral must not be delayed because consent has not been obtained. Follow the reporting process and share concerns with the appropriate contact.

6. If you are worried or something goes wrong

Immediate danger or emergency

Call 999. Protect your own safety. Inform the safeguarding contact as soon as it is safe; do not wait for a reply before seeking emergency help.

Safeguarding: abuse, neglect or exploitation

- Listen calmly and take the concern seriously. Do not ask leading questions, investigate, confront the person accused or promise secrecy.
- Report promptly to the Befriending Coordinator. If unavailable or involved in the concern, contact the Community Grants Manager.
- If the concern involves the Manager, contact the Chair. If it involves the Chair, an uninvolved director should arrange an independent route.
- If contacts are unavailable, including outside working hours, contact the appropriate social work, health or police service directly. For a concern about a child, use Children and Families social work or police.
- Make a factual, dated note as soon as possible, including the person's words, what happened and who was informed. Use the incident form; do not delay reporting to complete it.
- Submit records through the agreed secure route. Do not keep safeguarding records in general volunteer folders.

These steps also apply to allegations against a volunteer or member of staff. Internal complaint handling must not delay protective action or an external investigation.

Complaints and conduct concerns

You can raise a complaint verbally or in writing with the Coordinator or Manager, using the alternative contacts where there is a conflict. You do not have to confront the person involved or try informal resolution first. Follow the Volunteer Complaints and Conduct Policy, which explains fair handling, support at meetings and how to request a review.

If a concern is raised about your conduct, you will have a fair opportunity to respond when safe and appropriate. A placement may be paused to protect people while a concern is considered; a pause is not a finding of wrongdoing.

Whistleblowing

Serious wrongdoing affecting others can be raised under the Whistle Blowing Policy. Soirbheas does not tolerate retaliation for raising a concern you reasonably believe to be true. You do not need to prove wrongdoing before reporting it. Safeguarding concerns still require immediate action.

7. Contacts and current guidance

Use these role-based contacts for support and reporting. The Coordinator is the safeguarding officer for befriending; the Manager is the overall safeguarding lead and befriending deputy.

Contact	Details
Befriending Coordinator	befriender@soirbheas.org 07748 575330
Community Grants Manager	karascott@soirbheas.org 07842 781986
Chair of the Board	chair@soirbheas.org
Emergency services	999

Policies and documents to read

- Safeguarding Policy and its code of conduct.
- Volunteer Complaints and Conduct Policy and Whistle Blowing Policy.
- Positive Behaviour Policy and Bullying and Harassment Policy.
- Data Protection and Privacy Policy.
- Glens Befriending Boundaries and Signposting Guide.
- Volunteer Driver Policy and Guidelines, Driver Risk Assessment, Accident and Incident Quick Guide and relevant incident forms, where applicable.

Use the current versions supplied by the Coordinator or published through the Soirbheas befriending page: <https://www.soirbheas.org/befriending/>. If documents appear inconsistent or you cannot find the current version, ask the Coordinator before relying on an old copy.

Acknowledging receipt

Complete the induction or acknowledgement form requested by the Coordinator so we can record which guidance you have received. Ask questions about anything unclear, and keep this handbook where you can refer to it.

You do not have to handle a difficult situation alone

If you are unsure, stop and ask. The Coordinator can help you decide what is within your role and where further support is needed. Thank you for helping people feel more connected in our community.

Document	Glens Befriending Volunteer Handbook
Updated	14 October 2026
Next review	14 October 2027