

Interview with Yvonne Hignell, Care & Support Services Director

What can someone expect when they ring?

Our helpline is staffed by trained and experienced advisors. We listen to people's concerns in that first phone call, see what's going on and we don't make judgements. We are always clear about what Ben can do to help and we will tell you exactly how we can do this. This said, we need to be aware about safeguarding issues, so if we think that someone is at risk we have a responsibility to get in touch with other organisations.

We will make a decision on how urgent a call is and, depending on the situation, we may send a support advisor around that day, or in a few days or the next week. This really depends on the urgency of the situation and the number of separate challenges.

We can also give people phone numbers to call or websites that provide initial support before a support advisor sees them.

Does it matter whether someone uses the phone or goes online?

You have a personal interaction if you call up and talk to someone. Communication with a human being is always going to be different.

For people with hearing loss, the website and its live chat function is very important as it opens up another form of communication between two human beings. It's not only useful for people with hearing loss and social anxiety, but some people find picking up the phone daunting and it helps them to take that first step.

The same people answer the web chat as the phones so you will always speak to someone experienced. We offer the same level of service no matter which form of communication you use.

What type of issues do you deal with?

Think of almost any human challenge and we will have helped someone overcome it. It could be about housing; families who are about to be made homeless right through to people dealing with illness whilst working, but due to the reduction in pay they're falling behind with mortgage payments. Or it could be issues such as alcohol or drug addiction.

We also help a number of people who are nearing the end of their lives or have had a terminal diagnosis, and that's both adults and children.

As time goes on, we find that we are dealing with more complex challenges and so the way that we support people becomes more complex too. We are also seeing an increase in the number of people going through mental health challenges.

When you consider how best to support someone you need to take into account the complexity of what they are facing and all the other people in that person's life.

What partner organisations do you work with?

We work with a number of local organisations so, for example, if someone in Newport said they were facing mental health problems, we will find an organisation near them in Newport. We know that the best support is provided locally and regularly, and will be reliable.

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We partner with regional organisations so if we know that people in an area, such as a county, will be facing certain challenges (such as increasing numbers of older carers) we will seek out partners we can make referrals to on a regular basis. We have a two-way referral process with them.

More and more now we are looking to partner with national organisations such as Step Change, who provide financial advice. There's very much a tiered approach to partnerships.

We also commission organisations to deliver services on our behalf, such as counselling or physiotherapy. We can fund that work and we make sure that they are good quality.

We say that we will do what we are good at and partner with organisations for what they are good at.

Who can call Ben?

You can find out more about our eligibility criteria at <http://ben.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Elegibility-criteria.pdf>

Where else can I find advice?

We have a range of free downloadable factsheets on financial, physical, mental and social health on our website - www.ben.org.uk

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Ben - Motor and Allied Trades Benevolent Fund.

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