

Putting Life IN Years (PLINY): Telephone friendship groups research study

Introduction to telephone friendship groups

As you know, the purpose of the research is trying to find out whether telephone friendship groups can be beneficial for older people aged 75 and over and if so, how. You have been allocated at random to take part in telephone friendship groups. A trained [service provider] volunteer will be contacting you by telephone. We have talked to you about what happens during the study however, we have provided some additional information below to help answer some questions you may have about the one-to-one and group telephone calls.

We have provided you will a sheet at the end which you might like to use to make a note of the name of your [service provider] volunteer/facilitator. You can also note down the times when they have arranged to call you.

About the telephone conversions

The [service provider] volunteer will contact you using the telephone number you provided. They will chat to you for about 20 minutes each week for up to six weeks. You can talk with the volunteer about anything you like. They will tell you more about the group telephone discussions and arrange future dates/ times for them to call you. During the one-to-one calls the volunteer will establish the date/time of the group telephone conversations. It is better if these are held at the same time each week.

The group will join together on the telephone for about one hour for 12 weeks. An Operator from a charity we are working with, called Community Network, will connect you to others by your usual telephone at home. This is sometimes called a teleconference.

The [service provider] volunteer is trained to facilitate group telephone discussions and they will make sure everyone has a turn. The volunteer will keep a note of the date/time of the telephone calls with all participants and note some of the topics discussed. This will be used to inform the research study.

Q What happens if I have not heard from a volunteer?

A It can take several weeks for the one-to-one calls to start. A volunteer will contact you as soon as possible.

Q What happens if I do not answer when the volunteer facilitator phones me at the prearranged time?

A The [service provider] volunteer (your group facilitator) will inform the [service provider] Volunteer Co-ordinator that they were unable to make contact with you at the time arranged. The Co-ordinator will try to contact you by telephone to make sure that you are okay.

Q What should I do if I am unable to participant in one of the group conversations?

A If you know in advance, please tell the volunteer facilitator that you will not be available on that day. You can tell them at the start or end of

the group discussion. If you are unwell or your circumstances have changed please telephone [telephone number] to let Community Network know you will not be participating in this week's group conversation.

Q Can I make my own calls, to other members of the group, in between group telephone discussions?

A We do not recommend sharing your telephone number during group conversations. If you do want to share your telephone number to make calls outside the group, the volunteer facilitator will refer you to [service provider]'s Volunteer Co-ordinator who will ask you to give written permission to share your telephone number with another participant.

The volunteer facilitator will remind all participants that sharing personal information is for each individual to decide. They will also remind participants that any calls outside of the group telephone discussions are not part of the research study i.e. you will have to pay for such calls yourself.

[service provider] and Community Network will not pass on your telephone number to anyone else without your express permission

Q What happens if I need help with my health?

A You are free to talk about anything you like in the group; however, the group is a friendship group and not able to offer medical advice. If you are worried about your health you should contact your GP.

Q What happens if I am accidentally disconnected or have to leave for part of the telephone conversation?

A The volunteer facilitator will let alert the Community Network Operator who will call you back. If you have any problems you can dial [telephone number] and press the '#' (hash) key on your telephone keypad. The Community Network Operator will help return you to the group call.

Q Can I increase the volume?

A Yes! Press *6 on your telephone keypad to increase the volume of the earpiece. A list of other telephone keypad options is provided below. You may find these helpful as you become more familiar with the calls. If you have any problems speak to your facilitator or press '#' (hash) to speak to the Community Network Operator.



Q Will I have to speak and make a contribution?

A Everyone gets an opportunity to speak, but you can simply listen until you feel ready to talk.

Q I like the idea, but am a bit worried about taking part.

A Telephone friendship groups are very informal. Most people will be taking part for the first time. The volunteer facilitator (Chairperson) will try to make everyone feel welcome and at ease.

Q Surely everyone will be talking over each other?

A Perhaps surprisingly, this doesn't happen. People usually wait for a

natural pause before talking. The volunteer facilitator will help to advise who is speaking and let everyone have a chance to take part.

Q Who do I ring to link me into the call?

A You don't. Community Network will call you on the phone number you have provided. We pay for the prearranged calls.

Q What can you discuss in a telephone friendship group?

A Anything! The choice of subject is up to you. Once you've started, the facilitator will help everyone to keep to the agreed topic and help the group think about other topics to discuss.

Q Will group telephone conversations be confidential?

A It is up to you to decide how much information you tell people about yourself. You do not have to tell people anything about you that you do not want them to know. The volunteer facilitator will abide by [service provider] policies and procedures for maintaining confidentiality. This means they will not talk about the group conversations outside the group.

Q What if the group call is being recorded?

A We will record a small number of group calls. We are recording the calls for research purposes to make sure that the volunteers run the groups in the way that they have been trained to. You will hear an automated message at the start of the call if it is being recorded.

Q Can I stop taking part in a telephone friendship group?

A Yes, you can decide to withdraw at any time and, if necessary, let the research team know if you no longer want to be contacted. If you do wish to drop out, you do not have to give a reason. Please tell the volunteer facilitator or contact the research team.

Key contacts

Community Network Operator: [telephone number]

[Service provider] – [Customer Engagement Manager]: [telephone number]

PLINY Research Team (University of Sheffield):

Louise Newbould [telephone number]; or

Rosie Duncan [telephone number]

Telephone Keypad - Options

Press	Action
# (hash)	for Operator Assistance
*1	Mute or un-mute self
*4	Decrease earpiece volume (press 8 to exit menu)
*6	Increase earpiece volume (press 8 to exit menu)
*7	Decrease mouthpiece volume (press 8 to exit menu)
8	Exit menu and return to the call
*9	Increase mouthpiece volume (press 8 to exit menu)
*0	Roll call of participants (only you will hear the list of participants in the group)
e.g. To mute/un-mute, press *1 ['*' accesses menu, '1' mutes/un-mutes]	

