

# Acting in **Good Faith**



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**ROC Care  
Rathcoole**

CASE STUDY

# Newtownabbey

## Methodist Mission and ROC Care Rathcoole


ROC Care Rathcoole is a partnership project between Redeeming our Communities (ROC), a UK wide charity formed in 2004 which has projects based across the UK meeting a range of social needs, and Newtownabbey Methodist Mission. Newtownabbey is one of five City Missions run by the Methodist Church in Ireland. City Missions are deliberate expressions of social and community concern by local congregations.

While all churches are encouraged to be involved in the life of their local communities, the City Missions have been given the “mission” status because the main emphasis of their work is outwards - seeking to provide support to people in the surrounding communities. The Newtownabbey Methodist

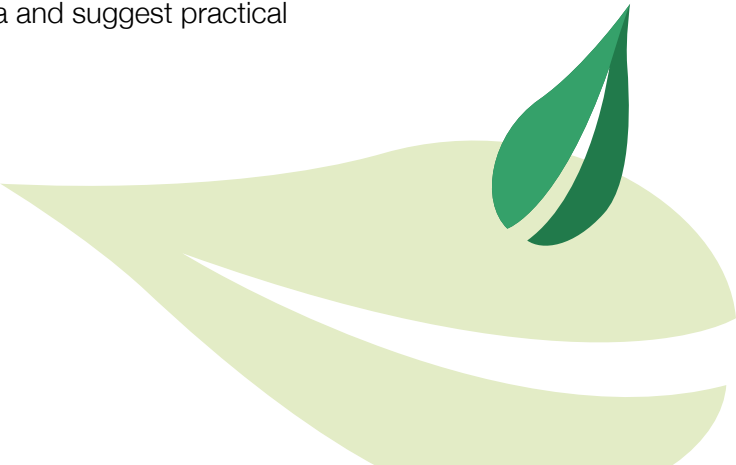
Mission has developed a range of projects from its base in Rathcoole on the outskirts of North Belfast including a charity shop, a voucher scheme for heating and electricity for those waiting for social security benefit decisions and a toy appeal each Christmas which distributes approximately 300 parcels.

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ROC Care Rathcoole developed as a result of a consultation process with local people and community organisations undertaken by Newtownabbey Council in 2015 to develop a Rathcoole Action Plan. As part of those discussions the social isolation of older people in the area was identified as a key concern. That provided the group with the motivation to do something to address this need. ROC then undertook a “ROC Conversation” which is a community engagement event where local church leaders, statutory agencies, politicians and citizens come together to discuss the issues in an area and suggest practical solutions.



At that event participants identified a group of people in the area who were very socially isolated, either through age, illness, disability, bereavement or caring responsibilities. A project was developed to address that social isolation based on learning from a pilot project ROC had undertaken in Manchester.

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## Services ROC Care Rathcoole provides

ROC Care offers a volunteer to act as a befriender who is tasked with providing a weekly visit or phone call to a person who has been identified as socially isolated by a referral agency. ROC Care befrienders will visit or call the client at an agreed pre-determined time. Befriending is simply “a voluntary, mutually beneficial and purposeful relationship in which an individual gives time to support another to enable them to make changes to their life.” (Mentoring and Befriending Foundation).

The project is flexible with some clients preferring a visit once a fortnight with a phone-call in between. The Project Co-ordinator visits the client for an initial assessment so they know what the service offers and consent to taking part. The client is then matched with a ROC Care volunteer. It can take a few visits by befrienders to allow the relationship

and rapport to develop and with some clients it can take patience to build trust. Every client is unique and the relationship develops at its own pace. As resources are limited the project can only work with clients who are resident in the Rathcoole estate, are aged 60+ or are housebound with a health problem or disability and are identified as socially isolated.

ROC Care recruits and train volunteers from the local community to become befrienders. All new volunteers must complete an application form, provide 2 references and complete all sessions of training where an informal interview takes place. Through this process, the project identifies if volunteers are suited to the befriending scheme. Referrals are made by a wide range of frontline workers and agencies. Referral agencies must seek consent from a client and their family to be referred to the project.

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## Links with other partner organisations in the area

ROC Care is committed to working in partnership with a wide range of organisations in the area. The project has received support and funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal project in Rathcoole and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, APEX Housing Association and the Aviva Community Fund. The project takes referrals from a wide range of partners including GPs, health visitors and social workers, Rathcoole Citizen's Advice, Age NI Community Navigators and other charities. APEX Housing Association places the project flyers in its "Welcome Pack" for residents and they also work closely with other churches in Rathcoole.

Inniscoole Day Centre, run by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust is trying to connect its clients with ROC Care's service, where appropriate, for ongoing support for clients who are leaving their services and may be at risk of social isolation.

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## How does ROC Care make a difference in the lives of people it works with?

For service users the project makes a difference by providing a caring befriending service for people who are socially isolated and fulfils the need for social interaction. There is clear medical evidence emerging that loneliness and social isolation have detrimental effects on mental and physical health. Clients look forward to their befriender visits and have developed positive relationships with project volunteers. Befriending, conversation and spending quality time with people is a key aspect of the project. Project volunteers get a great sense of personal satisfaction and achievement knowing they are making a positive relationship with someone who really needs the company.

The project focus is firmly on befriending rather than on pastoral visiting. Not all the volunteers are from a faith background but, for those who are, some of them see their befriending as an important way of sharing and giving back to the community. For the wider community the project offers a practical response to loneliness and isolation and can complement the work of statutory services whose resources are stretched.



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## ROC Care Client Dawn Talks About Her Experience:

*I was referred onto the befriending scheme by Arthritis Care. I had previously participated in a programme run by the charity. ROC Care has helped me a lot. It is lovely to open the door and see Tracey's smiling face. We have good conversations, she is so easy to chat to. My family work and have their own commitments so can't be with me all the time. I really appreciate Tracey coming. The weekly visits have made all the difference in the world. I look forward to my Wednesday night visits – they are something to look forward to in the week.*

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## What are the key challenges the project faces?

The first group of volunteers were full of enthusiasm when they completed their training but the project initially took some time to get referrals so that created frustration for some volunteers who were keen to get started. Like other volunteer-led projects there is a level of volunteer turnover particularly if a volunteer's circumstances change and they can no longer commit to the project. That leads to the loss of good volunteers and the need to replace them – which can take time.

The project doesn't work with clients who have been diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer's disease as it doesn't have the resources to work with this client group. Where appropriate these people are signposted to East Antrim NI Alzheimer's Society.


Currently all referrals to the project are female so whilst the project has some male volunteers it hasn't been able to offer them placements with people in need. Clients are asked at their initial interview their preference and to date all have asked for a female befriender. ROC Care and referral organisations need to develop a better understanding of why men are not coming forward to use the service.

The project is relatively new and face-to-face work with clients began in Spring 2017. People in the area remember previous befriending schemes which offered services to local residents and then withdrew as funding came to an end, so the project has had to build up trust in the community with referral agencies and with clients to show that it is here for the long haul.

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## **Andrea Watson Community Access Support worker for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in the East Antrim area speaks about their work with ROC Care Rathcoole:**

*🍃 I receive referrals from social workers who deem the service user to be socially isolated. I source social outlets around their local area and one of the main requests I get would be to source a befriender. For referrals in the Rathcoole area I would suggest ROC Care. ROC Care offer a great service and Mary and Keeva are both very dedicated in their roles. All volunteers are trained and are matched to a service user. They offer a friendly service and have had great reports and feed-back from service users. Most people just want a chat and to feel part of the community. Also service users look forward to an allocated person/friend to call out weekly. This means so much to someone when they have no one else to talk to or turn to in times of need. ROC Care offers a great service that I will continue to use and recommend. 🍃*

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## For further information on ROC Care Rathcoole contact:

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