

## Fictitious case studies of a FoB

Probably the best way to see how a FoB works is through fictitious case studies. If these case studies seem plausible, then a FoB enterprise would seem to be both credible and desirable.

First, some outlines and general principles:

### Tasks for volunteers

The range of tasks undertaken by volunteers comprises:

1. **Routine, non-specialist, practical tasks which support day-to-day living of the client.**

Volunteers will never support a client in responding to a contingency which falls within a specialist competency – eg, a leaky tap, a broken gutter, a fallen fence – nor will a volunteer recommend the services of a particular tradesperson. Volunteers will never seek to impose their own values on a client or offer advice on any matter which could involve the client in financial loss, injury to health or emotional distress. Routine, non-specialist tasks might include:

- Driving a client to appointments
- Routine ‘getting-back-on-top’ housekeeping tasks – eg, vacuuming, washing, etc.
- Tasks related to the organisation of a funeral – eg, telephoning friends and relatives and informing them of the event of the death, and the time and place of the funeral.
- Cooking and feeding
- Elementary DIY

2. **Practical support with specific life skills which were the exclusive preserve of the one who has died.**

Examples are:

- lessons in basic cookery
- everyday financial management (paying the bills). A volunteer would never offer speculative investment advice nor seek access to computer passwords. In all conversations about money matters a third person, nominated if at all possible by the bereaved person, will be present.

### Ron

Norah Baines died at home from cancer at the age of 76. She had been married to Ron for 54 years. Her death happened faster than expected. Their only daughter, Holly, was working abroad as a nanny.

Ron called the FoB. When they arrived, they saw that the events of the past few days had caught up with him. He was exhausted and hadn’t eaten.

Ron and Norah had always been a close couple. Their friends in the village were mostly their own age and not very mobile. Ron and Norah hadn't felt they had much in common with their, mostly, much younger immediate neighbours. Always cheery when they were out, they had nevertheless tended to keep themselves to themselves. But they were known and respected and liked.

In order to tide Ron over the next 24 hours a FoB volunteer came in to help him tidy up and make him a decent meal. The following day, another volunteer came to drive him to the registrar to register Norah's death. Further short term help was found: one volunteer came in for an afternoon and rang everyone in Ron and Norah's address book to tell them of Norah's death (Ron couldn't face endlessly repeating the news). By the time Holly arrived four days later someone had even popped in to tidy up the garden, which had been neglected during Norah's illness.

Ron will be supported in the coming weeks and months. Norah had always done the cooking and washing. A FoB volunteer is going to give Ron cookery lessons over the next few weeks so that he can learn to make himself basic, nourishing meals.

We hope that Ron is going to be able, slowly but surely, to go on living independently without his Norah.

## Sarah

Sarah is a fiercely independent lady brought up in the hard school of stoical self-reliance. She refused any offer of help from the FoB volunteers at first, but we were able to help her out as best we could. Roger Parkin, a volunteer, drove her to the registrar. As he dropped her off he noticed that the lawn needed mowing – and she didn't resist too hard when he suggested doing it because, as she said, she had so many other things to do. While he was there he fixed a hinge on the garden gate. She made him a cup of tea and they chatted about her husband, Richard. It seemed to do her good to talk. She didn't need us after that – but she knew we were there for her.

## Michelle

The death of Michelle's husband Steve was traumatic enough (car accident) but when she came in to arrange the funeral she became very panicky about money. It turned out that Steve had handled the bank account, bills, insurance policies, etc and she simply didn't know what to do or even where to start. We fixed her up with our very nice Mr Baines, who used to be headteacher of the local middle school. He was able to help her out, show her how and offer her a lot of reassurance. For about 6-8 weeks after the funeral he went to see her once or twice a week to make sure she was coping with her daily money management. She's fine, now, and even says she would like to help people like her in the same situation. At all times, a close friend of Michelle was present in order to minimise the risk of Mr Baines making off with her money – not that he ever would! But we believe it's vital to manage risk in a proactive and perhaps seemingly overactive way rather than expose ourselves to suspicion – you know how people talk. In any case, Michelle's friend could often remember things that Mr Baines had told Michelle, which she had forgotten, so it turned out to be more efficient, too.

## Henry

Like a lot of men of his generation, Henry's loss of his wife of 43 years left him without visible means of feeding himself. In short, Maggie had always done the cooking, Bert could just about make himself a cup of tea. Our FoB cooking specialist, Mary Parkin, gave Henry a series of cookery lessons over a period of 12 weeks. She noted the recipes that Henry especially enjoyed, so she put them together into a booklet which she printed off from her computer. In the course of these lessons, Bert learned to create a shopping list and to buy everything he wanted for the week in one shop. This was something he also had to learn, and he did so in the company of Brian Webster, who ran him down to Tesco on a Friday afternoon, showed him where things were, showed him how to identify value brands – and resist offers! Henry says he still misses Maggie's cooking, especially her baking, but there's no mistaking his pride in his achievement. It's given him a feeling of control which we feel has gone a long way to reducing his acute sense of loss.

## The Darley Dale FoB education project

Here at the Darley Dale FoB we have had our educational outreach project running for just six months. Last Thursday we held a showing of the film *Departures*. We have held 2 end-of-life planning events and find that people are far less suspicious of us than if we were a bunch of funeral directors, IFAs and local solicitors. We have joined forces with the local credit union to enable people to save for their funeral. Once they have lodged the funds they get a voucher which their executor can use to buy a funeral anywhere they wish — and keep the change. It's such a simple idea you wonder why the commercial funeral planners never thought of it. We have also held two [Death Cafes](#) and will shortly hold our first [Death Over Dinner](#).

We have begun to contribute to the PSHE syllabus in our local comprehensive school with a series of lessons based on the film *Beyond Goodbye*: <http://beyondgoodbye.co.uk/>

Our experience is that neighbours, ie community members, relish the opportunity to support the bereaved when we ask them to roll up their sleeves and do stuff for them. Makes a change from crossing the street, doesn't it? We find that the bereaved can help themselves a lot by getting stuck in as best they can, too. We reckon that our FoB has created a very dynamic, 21<sup>st</sup> century congregation.

Our funeral director, Mike, has been brilliant. He's given us the use of a small room which we are going to convert into a drop-in resource centre where people can come off the street to read and think, and where we can hold small meetings and consultations. Incidentally, Mike says all this has made a difference to the way people greet him when he's out and about. I like to say to him, "Mike, together we're bringing death to life"!