



TOMNET

THE OLDER MENS NETWORK INC

Telephone Peer Support Program

Overview

- Provide conversation with older men in the community who may be isolated due to health, transport and mobility issues
- Engage with older men in the community impacted by a significant issue
- Re-engage Members
- Contact TOMNET Members on a regular basis (2-3 times per month if required – varies according to each individual)
- Help new Members integrate into the mens network

What is the Telephone Peer Support program?

Service by TOMNET Volunteers to provide emotional and social support to TOMNET Members and older men in the community who are isolated due to health, transport or mobility reasons.

Why we have a Telephone Support program?

There are many reasons men do not engage with other people on a regular basis. Health issues, transport and grief are examples which preclude men from being active, often resulting in men being isolated within their own homes or dwellings. Isolation results in withdrawal from society, loss of connections with friends, feelings of hopelessness, and possibly depression.

The aim of the Telephone Support program is to reconnect older men with their peers, fostering an environment of social and emotional support on a regular basis.

How did we start the Telephone Support program?

1. Volunteers within our Membership were asked to participate in the program
2. The Volunteer Coordinator sourced potential contacts from within TOMNET - the initial primary focus was on isolated and vulnerable Members
3. Volunteers agreed to contact older men and engage in meaningful conversation
4. Volunteers determine the frequency of phone calls with the older men
5. Volunteers provide regular feedback or concerns to the Coordinator
6. The Volunteer Coordinator is the main point of contact for Volunteers of the program

Sources of older men suitable for the program include local hospitals, Aged Care facilities, Senior Citizens Assoc., Meals on Wheels, Lifeline - organisations that have contact with older men.

How we handle Confidentiality and Privacy

Organisations that have regular contact with older men may have strict rules governing the access to older men's details that are required. In order to access these details, we ensure all State and Federal rules and regulations are followed. TOMNET Volunteers are inducted, undergo Police Checks, have current Blue Cards, and sign confidentiality agreements. When Volunteers are recording details from phone calls, for example, confidentiality is upheld at all times.

Privacy is extremely important and taken very seriously.

How we manage and identify older men suitable for the Telephone Peer Support program

The Volunteer Coordinator selects and identifies older men in the community using a list of criteria. The Coordinator may choose to use only one or more of the listed criteria.

The criteria used to assess a potential participant:

- Referred by a health professional, family member, or self-referred
 - » May also be suitable for a home visit after initial consultation
- Community groups – Lifeline, Meals on Wheels
- Word of mouth referrals
- Evaluation by a TOMNET Counsellor and identified as lonely or isolated upon joining the organisation
- Members who have not been active in the group for 2-3 months

- Members identified through our Home Visiting program
- Members who no longer attend weekly meetings or interest groups because of health or transport issues
- Older men referred by Members or their families
 - » Major life changes – eg death of partner, major health issue etc

Older men identified are added to the Telephone Support Register. The Support Register lists basic information:

- Name
- Age
- Phone number
- Interests
- General information discussed during future conversations.

What our Volunteers know

The Volunteer Coordinator manages the activities of the Volunteers. Volunteers participating in the program are required to attempt contact with the listed participants.

- Allocated a minimum of 5 to 10 phone numbers
- Agree to call on a regular basis e.g. fortnightly or weekly at a mutually agreed time
- Assess suitability for both parties – common interests?
- Engage participants in meaningful conversation
 - » Current events, hobbies, life stories etc.
- Calls will vary in length
 - » Must be sufficient enough to be meaningful

Older men who are isolated may display no signs of being at risk, these men may have strong family networks in place but still qualify in terms of little to no contact with other older men.

When do the Volunteers contact participants – steps involved

- Volunteer is provided a list of the participant details by the Coordinator
- Volunteer decides time and place to make phone calls
 - » Options include: at the Volunteers home, the TOMNET Centre, as a group
- Volunteer discusses with the participant when the best time is to call in the future – this would be mutually agreed
 - » The offer may not be accepted by the participant – this will happen occasionally

TEMPLATE

Support Register

Example

Support Register example

Name	Phone	Notes
Joe Blog	4699 9999	Lives alone, health ok

Comments Template example

Name	Phone	Date phoned/answered

Suggested procedure for Support register and description:

1. insert name and phone number
2. insert date of phone calls
3. add notes or on separate sheet
 - » these notes required for Volunteer Coordinator
 - » limit specific personal details due to confidentiality

TOMNET is about older men supporting each other through hidden hardships to improve mental health, well-being and prevent suicide.



What if Volunteers identify someone who requires additional support or help?

Volunteers may encounter a participant showing signs of requiring additional help, perhaps from a trained Counsellor. Ask the person if they would like to speak with someone about their issue. If available, make an appointment to talk to one of the Counsellors or provide the older man with the contact details of your local Lifeline, Beyond Blue or Mens Helpline. At TOMNET, the Volunteer contacts the Volunteer Coordinator and informs them of the issue.

“TOMNET has over 280 Members in Toowoomba, plus affiliated Rural groups, Men at Work groups and Volunteer Training programs.”

What the program cannot provide:

1. Health service - Volunteers are not required to offer medical assistance or opinion. Illness will be discussed at some point, participants may be suffering depression, illness or trauma. Volunteers may or may not be aware of these situations prior to phone calls. Volunteers do not provide medical advice, but should be aware of any immediate medical needs which may need to be acted upon i.e. ambulance, Lifeline. Concerns may be raised with TOMNET Counsellors, providing the privacy of the Member is upheld.
2. The Telephone Peer Support program is at its heart a phone service. As a Volunteer within this program you are not required to visit the TOMNET Member. As the relationship/ friendship develops there may be scope to expand into the Home Visiting program. Volunteers would be required to discuss with the Volunteer Coordinator prior to home visiting.
3. The Telephone Peer Support program is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Boundaries are set initially, but both parties will set the agenda and frequency of phone calls. Due to conflicting personalities, time or other circumstances, not all phone calls or match-ups will work, or be sustainable. Members must be aware that they may discontinue phone calls if they feel that conversations are not beneficial to either party. The Coordinator should be advised of any concerns arising from a phone call.
4. The program is not part of a Membership drive. The program relies on connections being made between Volunteers/ Members with other older men (Members or not). These connections may evolve into future Membership or increased involvement in TOMNET by the participant, however this is not the primary purpose of the program.



The TOMNET Centre

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