



Friendships For The Future



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

What having a befriender for your child can mean for you

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If you are a parent on your own then it is likely you have to juggle with many demands on your time and energy. You may have practical concerns about housing and finances or one of your children may be going through a troubled patch.

No matter how competent you are, it can be very difficult being the only adult bringing up a family. The scheme we offer may be able to help.

What Do We Offer You?

FUN In Action for Children (“FUN In Action”) is a registered charity set up in September 1999 as a voluntary befriending scheme for children growing up in lone parent families. It currently operates in Brighton and Hove and the surrounding area.

We set up lasting friendships between children and adults from outside the family. We refer to the adults who work for us as ‘befrienders’. If you had a befriender for your child he or she would call regularly once a week and take your child out for an outing usually for at least 3 hours. Outings are agreed between the befriender and the child or young person and can be anything that both agree is enjoyable. It isn’t about providing the child with lots of treats or presents but building up a close friendship, very much as you or I might have had when we were young with a kindly elderly neighbour or a special teacher. The idea is that the child gets another adult in their lives who they can talk to and who shows over time that they care about them and can be trusted to stay around even if there are difficulties. You as a parent also get a break and a chance to recharge your batteries.

Befrienders are not paid, they volunteer because they want to offer some direct help where it is needed. Because we believe that having a close friendships can make a difference to how children feel about themselves, and because it takes time for people to really become good friends, we ask befrienders to make a 2-year commitment to the child they befriend. This may seem a lot but in our experience people who are serious about being a befriender understand the need for something long-term and are willing to make that commitment.

Parents as Partners

We are a voluntary not a statutory organisation. This means you always have a choice about whether to join us and use the services we offer. It also means that you are key partners in any decisions we make. If you did decide to ask us to find a befriender for your child the decision as to who it would be would be one we would make together. If you were not happy with the person we recommend we would listen to you and look again together at who else might be suitable. Once your child has a befriender and throughout the time you are involved with the organisation we will want to know what you think about things and will take seriously your suggestions and any concerns you have.

Who Runs FUN In Action

Our service is run by a:

- Project Manager - **Anne McLaren** (a senior social worker with 20 years previous relevant experience in social work, youth work and children’s education)
- Caseworker – **Ghislaine Picchio** (trained social worker with extensive experience with children as well as in alternative health and counselling).
- Administrator –

All our staff work part-time but the office is covered every weekday. Our work is supervised by an external consultant psychotherapist and overseen by a Management Committee who act as Trustees and have responsibility for the proper running of the organisation and its finances. The Committee meets 6 times a year.

The Befrienders - Who Are They?

The befrienders are ordinary men and women from all backgrounds. They must be 21 years or older to be accepted. We actively encourage older people to apply because we value their experience. What we look for are people who are honest, reliable and trustworthy and who can understand how a child feels. They must also be open and adaptable - people who can *work with us and with you*. Some people have children of their own - often these have grown up and left home - others are younger people who like children and feel they have some time to spare and want to use it productively.

How Do We Select Befrienders

We put a lot of time and effort into deciding whether to accept a person. It takes about 3 months before we make a final decision. During this time the person has two long interviews lasting in total about 4 hours, attends over 15 hours training, and has a home visit from one of our caseworkers which lasts up to 2 hours. They are also police checked through the Criminal Records Bureau disclosure system. Any partners and flatmates are also interviewed and police checked.

Our aim is to get to know as much about the person - their history, childhood, present lives, work - as we can. The more we know and understand the person the better we are able to make judgements about their suitability. We are particularly interested in understanding **why** they want to befriend and **what they can offer** a child.

Only when all stages of the selection and screening process are complete, will a new recruit be considered for matching. **If for any reason at all we are uncertain about a person we do not accept them.**

Befrienders are also given a Befriender Guidebook on completion of their training, documenting all FUN In Action policies, procedures, rules and expectations of volunteers. Before going ahead to be matched with a child befrienders must sign an agreement that they will abide by these rules.

Questions You May Have

□ *What do the befriender and child do together?*

They might go to the park, swimming, play football, visit places of interest, bike ride, cook, garden, shop – whatever is agreed by them both to be an enjoyable use of their time.

□ *Who monitors what the befrienders do and how they behave towards the children they take out?*

We supervise all our ‘matches’ closely particularly during the first year. We are very strict about volunteers needing to report back to us regularly - at the beginning this is on a weekly basis. Although we aim to work in partnership, befrienders must accept our authority and bring any problems they have to us when they arise. We also keep in regular contact with you and like to know how the child feels about his / her friendship.

□ *Will I have to pay towards the outings?*

There is no charge to parents for the service we offer. Volunteers may claim travel expenses and there is a small fund for occasional treats and special celebrations.

□ *How do we decide which child to match with which befriender?*

We take into account interests, personality, family background and look for similarities between the child and the potential befriender. Your comments and your feeling are a crucial part of this ‘matching’ process.

□ *Will the befriender come at a set time every week?*

It is up to parents to make their own arrangements with their child’s befriender. It’s really what suits both parties. So some may come on a regular day at a regular time and others may prefer a more flexible arrangement.

□ *What about my other children - is there anything for them?*

We have regular outings and events where everyone comes along and has a good time. These include group picnics, country outings, theatre visits, craft days and sporting events. Usually one child is befriended in a family and then if that goes well and the other children are interested then we will look for befrienders for them as well.

Before we can accept your child on the scheme:

- Your home situation needs to be relatively stable, i.e. you are unlikely to be moving out of the Brighton & Hove area within the next 2 years.
- You need to discuss the idea fully with your child and you both need to agree that having a befriender is a good idea.
- Your child needs to be between 5 and 16 years of age and be the kind of child who would be able to make a relationship and benefit from it.
- *If there is a history of domestic violence or some situation involving your child which could constitute a risk to a befriender, you would need to discuss this with the caseworker staff before we could accept a referral from you.*
- As you will be making arrangements with the bendifenders for taking your child out regularly, your home situation needs to be such that you can fit in with these arrangements on a regular basis.
- Bendifenders are ordinary people who want to give some of their time on a voluntary basis to help a child. They are not professional child-care workers. If your child has extreme behavioural difficulties we may have a problem finding him or her a bendifender. Please speak to the staff at FUN In Action if this is the case.
- In order to make the best possible match you will need to sign the Referral Form for us to collect and provide some details about you and your child's situation to a prospective bendifender. Similarly, with their permission we try to give you as the child's parent as much information as possible about the background of any potential bendifender so that you can make an informed decision about whether the person might be suitable.
- We will be sensitive with any information you provide and if there are any particular details you would prefer not to disclose to the bendifender, we will respect your wishes. We also ask you to respect the privacy of any personal details disclosed about your children's future bendifender.
- Please note that FUN In Action operates a Confidentiality Policy, which means that any personal information is shared on the strict understanding that it is entirely confidential to FUN In Action. It will not be disclosed to a third party outside the organisation without your consent, except in very particular circumstances.
- FUN In Action is legally bound to conform to the Children's Act 1989. In the event of any suspicions, investigations, court order, or legal action, FUN In Action will be required to disclose personal information without your consent. We will ensure that if this does occur you, as a parent, will be notified why this information needs to be shared and who will be told.
- We are registered with the Data Protection registrar and:
 1. All records containing the personal details of families belonging to the scheme are kept securely filed in locked cabinets.
 2. Information about families, which is stored on computers are securely protected by pass codes.
 3. Parents can have access to their files providing the FUN In Action staff is notified in advance.
 4. FUN In Action will continue to hold the family file until you withdraw from the scheme.

If you would like to know more about our scheme or anything is not clear do give us a call

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