



Friendships For The Future

Welcome



BEFRIENDER'S STARTER PACK

How you can make a difference to a child's life

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INFORMATION FOR BEFRIENDER



Background to FUN In Action

FUN In Action is a registered charity founded in September 1999 as a voluntary befriending scheme for children from lone parent families (however where the need is very pressing we will accept a child from a 2 parent family). We currently take children from all areas of Brighton and Hove.

FUN In Action is based on the work of *Friends United Network ("FUN")* an long established London befriending project, and modeled on **Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America**, the internationally renowned mentoring scheme.

How the project is set up and managed

Staffing

All the casework staff employed by the project are professionally qualified, either as social workers, counselors, or teachers. They also have had extensive experience of working with children and families. The present *FUN In Action* Project Manager has particular experience of working for many years for Friends United Network and brings her considerable expertise acquired in inner London to the Brighton project.

Management

As a registered charity the work of *FUN In Action* is overseen by a Management Committee who act as trustees and delegate the responsibility for the running of the organisation and its finances to the Project Manager. The Committee meets every 6 weeks.

What do we do?

FUN In Action recruits, assesses and trains befrienders who are then matched with a particular child who they pledge to see regularly over a 2-year period (with older children we are able to consider a 1 year commitment).

Who are the children and families?

The children are aged between 4 and 16 and generally live in lone parent families throughout Brighton and Hove. They are referred either by parents or by local statutory and voluntary agencies. The reasons for referral vary. A child may be having difficulties at school, may be being bullied or lack confidence. There may be extra demands on the parent's time because of family illness or disability or mental health problems.

The families too are all different although they do share similar circumstances. Being lone parent families they are usually under-resourced and struggling to cope with housing or financial problems. Parents are often isolated and overstretched by the demands of childcare and domestic duties. We involve parents in every step of the process and they get to meet with the potential befriender before any 'match' is set up.

How a befriender helps

A child benefits principally from having an additional "special person" in their lives - a person who can offer them a secure place in their affections, who is able to "be there" for the child over a long period of time and who the child can rely on for additional guidance and support. The parent also benefits from getting a much-needed break and having someone to talk with about the child's problems.

Who are befrienders?

Befrienders come from different ethnic backgrounds, have different jobs, and different experiences of life. What they all share is an honest desire to help a child and the time available to do that. You need to be over 25 and able to offer a regular long-term commitment. You don't need to have had a lot of previous experience with children but you do need to be interested in learning about what helps children to feel confident and secure. You must be able to empathize with the difficulties facing lone parents and most of all you need to like children and enjoy their company. A large dollop of humour is also very useful.

We do not promote befriending to any particular distinct group because we believe the most important thing is finding the right befriender for a child or young person. We therefore welcome applications from individuals, gay, lesbian or straight and from couples either single sex or male/female couples. Everyone is assessed, checked, trained and accepted using exactly the same criteria based on the personal qualities needed to care and support a child.

Do we turn people down?

Yes we do. A percentage of the people who come forward are not accepted as it is felt that befriending is not right for them at this particular time in their lives. Being accepted as a befriender is also dependent on the receipt of satisfactory references (from 3 friends/colleagues and professional contacts) and a Criminal Record Bureau Disclosure (on both the prospective befriender, partners and, if appropriate, flat mates). If we do have to turn people down we explain why we cannot accept them and if appropriate we recommend other volunteer projects.

What do we offer you?

Befriending a child can be great fun and you are likely to have many memorable times together. However, there is also a serious side to the work. All close relationships have their ups and downs - establishing a trusting friendship with a child particularly someone who is wary, can take time and patience. Our role is to support you – to listen, to respond to your training needs, to negotiate with parents, to help you make sense of a child's behaviour – to offer whatever it takes to ensure that you and your friend stay together and build a lasting friendship. The enjoyment and satisfaction that comes from seeing a child succeeding and happy makes it well worth the effort.

As well as one-to-one support we offer a full training programme, which includes child protection, and on-going support groups where you can share your experiences with other benders.

We believe that benders benefit from being given clear guidelines about their rights, roles, and responsibilities. These are summarized in the 'Policy Outline' document enclosed with this Pack. At various stages in the process of becoming a befriender you will be given copies of relevant policies and procedures. You will then be asked to sign an agreement to abide by such policies before going ahead. **Our commitment at all times is to the protection of the children befriended under the scheme.**

Benders are also part of the wider community of *FUN In Action* and are encouraged to come along and join the outings and events, which we organise for **everyone** involved in the scheme. These include picnics in local parks and by the sea, outings to places of interest in Sussex and a grand Christmas party complete with an entertainer and Father Christmas. Attendance is not compulsory but people do really enjoy the opportunity to meet informally in this way.

In order not to exclude those people whose finances are limited from applying to befriend, Fun in Action undertakes to reimburse travel costs for attending interviews and training at our offices in Preston Park in particular circumstances. Once matched with a child volunteers can also claim any reasonable expenses incurred on their one to one outings up to a maximum amount as outlined in our finance policy (this varies depending on the age of the child). Fun in Action is however a small charity with limited financial resources and benders are asked to be aware of this when making claims.

Comments from parents and children who are already befriended on the scheme

"George lost his mum very early and has gained confidence due to his befriender".

" The service is much better than we had expected. Darren's school attendance and attitude has improved a lot as a result of Hailey's influence. He also has a lot more interests and ideas for the future".

" Bethany has improved greatly at school and has been able to make some new friends. She is much more socially confident since having a befriender. "

A few questions you may have

How do you choose a child for me?

Throughout the assessment and training period we build up a picture of you – your interests, strengths, background and life experiences. We balance this with our knowledge of the child's needs and the family situation.

Will I be police checked?

All applicants are required to complete a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure form before being accepted onto the scheme. Any Disclosure information revealed will not be used unfairly and a criminal record will not necessarily be a bar to obtaining a position. If there are any matters that do come to light in the disclosure information these will be discussed with you.

How do I then get to meet the child?

Having identified a possible child or children, these are discussed with you and a decision is made to go ahead with one particular child. We then arrange for you, together with your caseworker, to meet with the child and the parent at the family home. There is then time to consider how everyone feels and to make a decision about whether to go ahead. Sometimes – particularly with a very young child – a parent may request a first meeting without the child present in order that the adults can explore how they will get along together. The success of the friendship is dependent on a respectful relationship developing between the child's parent and their befriender so these meeting can be very helpful.

How often do the befriender and the child meet?

You arrange with the parent a time to call and take the child out. We ask you to see the child once a week but recognise this might not always be possible given work and holiday arrangements. If you can't keep to these commitments you will need to let the parent and the child know in advance and if you are away then to stay in touch by phone or letter.

What sort of things do we do together?

The outings usually last for 3-4 hours and can include anything from playing football to sitting chatting in a café. Whatever you and your friend decide would be mutually enjoyable. The emphasis is on time spent together not on providing expensive treats. After a suitable probation period it is possible that the child may visit with you at your home always providing certain conditions are met.

Do we get paid?

Befrienders are not paid but there is a fund (albeit limited) to cover the expenses you incur when you see your child every week.

FUN In Action for Children

Outline of Key Policies

(Details of these policies & procedures are covered as part of the pre-match training and copies are included in the Code of Conduct given to each befriender)

CHILD PROTECTION

FUN In Action will ensure that all befrienders are aware of their Child Protection procedures through:-

- ❑ Induction training covering child protection and *FUN IN Action's* policies and procedures.
- ❑ Making copies of the relevant documentation available to befrienders.
- ❑ **Convictions:** Due to the nature of the work, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exemption Order) allows for spent convictions to be disclosed.
- ❑ **Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure:** All befrienders (and any persons sharing living space) must agree to undertake an Enhanced CRB. Those with a history of sexual, violent or recent alcohol or drug dependency related offences are unlikely to be eligible for the scheme.

DATA PROTECTION

FUN In Action is registered with the Data Protection Registrar and agrees to protect all confidential information held on files. All information supplied by a befriender will be used solely for the purpose of assessing each befriender's suitability to befriend a child. Records will not be disclosed to a third party without the befriender's consent unless under a Court or other legal obligation.

Our policy on the secure handling, retention and use of Disclosures and Disclosure Information adheres to the Criminal Records Bureau Code of Practice, which means that it is held secure and disposed of after six months.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Principles of Confidentiality governs all our work. *FUN In Action* seeks to safeguard the rights of the individual and personal information will not be shared with other parties without consent except where the safety and well being of a child is in question.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Fun in Action is committed to the fair treatment of its volunteers regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, responsibilities for dependents, age, physical/mental disability or offending background.

The recruitment of all befrienders operates with reference to our Equal Opportunities and Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policies.

INSURANCE

- *FUN In Action* will provide relevant insurance cover for all befrienders. Befrienders should check the details of this cover with the project.
- Befrienders using their own car for voluntary work purposes should inform their insurance company in writing and ask for this to be added to their cover. (This does not involve any additional premium.)

HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES

- *FUN In Action* will ensure that advice, information and training are given about Health & Safety issues in relation to their role.
- *FUN In Action* will give befrienders clear guidance about their roles and responsibilities.

BEFRIENDER'S EXPENSES

FUN In Action has a small fund to cover expenses. All befrienders will receive a claim form, which covers general expenses such as fares, snacks and cost of outings. These claim forms should be submitted with receipts (where possible) on a monthly basis.

INDUCTION AND TRAINING

- a) *FUN In Action* will: -
 - Provide an induction programme to enable befrienders to carry out their role;
 - Provide ongoing training sessions on specific issues relating to the work;
 - Respond to any training needs identified by befrienders.
- b) Befrienders are expected to-
 - Attend induction and ongoing training sessions;
 - Raise areas of training need with their caseworker.

BEFRIENDER'S SUPPORT

FUN In Action recognises the need and importance of ongoing monitoring and support. Provision will be made for regular individual supervision and will also provide a forum for befrienders to meet and share experiences.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Any grievance by a befriender will be quickly and effectively examined. A mutually agreed resolution will be sought either through raising the issue with the Project Manager or a nominated officer on the Management Committee.

At a later stage all befrienders will be required to sign and agree to abide by the *FUN In Action's* Policies and Procedures.
Any befriender failing to comply by them will be automatically asked to withdraw from the organisation.

Fun in Action for Children

The Process of Becoming a Befriender

Stage One – Interviews & Training

- Befriender starter pack sent in response to enquiry
 - Befriending Application Form sent to applicants interested in starting assessment
 - 1st Interview with FUN staff (approx. 30 minutes)
 - ID taken up (one photo ID & bill / bank statement etc)
 - Sign befriender trainee agreement
 - References (3 written ref. including one professional)
 - Mandatory training (overall time approx 12 hours)
Three Saturdays from 10:00am till 2:30pm
- Session 1:** Defining the role of the befriender
Session 2: Listening and child protection guidelines
Session 3: Policies & procedures outline and summary of key learning points
- 2nd In – depth Interview (1 ½ + hours)

Stage Two – Home Visit Interview (allow approx 1 ½ hours)

The befriender receives a visit and safety check at home by casework staff. The staff need to ensure the home is a suitable environment for a child to visit. This is also an opportunity to meet and discuss the application with the applicant's partners or children. The intention is to get a more comprehensive picture of the person by seeing them in their own environment.

Stage Three – Final Overall Assessment

Once the above 2 stages have been satisfactorily completed and all 3 referees have been approached then the caseworker will gather together all the information provided and make a **Full Assessment** of the applicant's suitability to befriend a child with FUN in Action.

If everything is satisfactory, the applicant is made a formal offer of acceptance on the scheme subject to a satisfactory **Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure being received**. Under our commitment to the rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1074, having a criminal record will not necessarily bar applicants from working with us. This will depend on the circumstances and background of any offences.

Once this final assessment stage is completed then the applicant becomes a '**Probationary Befriender**'. The probation period lasts for 3 months.

Befrienders are also asked to sign a Befriender Code of Conduct Agreement Form thereby agreeing to abide by the FUN in Action policies and procedures as laid down in this code. This involves adhering to a programme for supervision and support. In the future if the befriender fails to adhere to this code it may be necessary to exclude them from the service.

Stage Four – Setting up a Friendship

- Caseworker identifies possible children and discusses these with the Probationary Befriender.
- Befriender meets the family including the child with the caseworker at the family home.
- In some cases – particularly with a young child – the befriender will meet with the parent and caseworker alone before being introduced to the child.
- If all parties agree and are happy with the arrangements (Time is allowed to ensure questions can be raised and everyone is in agreement before the friendship is confirmed) the match becomes official and the first outing is arranged.

Stage Five – Ongoing Support

Although the befriender is now matched their responsibility to their caseworker and to *Fun in Action* continues throughout the friendship. Befrienders are required to: -

- Attend regular Support Group meetings and other specific training.
- Undertake regular one-to-one supervision with their caseworker.
- Keep in regular telephone contact with their caseworker as per an agreed schedule. This is particularly important during the first 3 months of a friendship.
- Follow-up assessments are undertaken after the first 3 months of the match (and again at a yearly review). If everything is satisfactory the probationary period is completed. **The monitoring supervision continues.**
- Befrienders are encouraged to participate in outings and events to meet with other befrienders and to be part of the wider network of *FUN in Action*.