

'I'm really glad I met Laura, she gave me lots of lovely times and was always kind to me' Marie aged 10 whose friendship ended in September 2009 after over 2 years of regular weekly meetings with her befriender. Maria had been a shy, overly cautious child but is now much more confident and has several close friendships.

This has been a good year for the charity although the challenge of raising sufficient funds is always with us. We are very grateful for the support of our all our funders in 2009 particularly all the staff at Capital International in Burgess Hill who raised over £5,000 for the charity last year through their individual and group efforts. We are also grateful to the children from St Christopher's School in Hove who raised £640. Further details of those who supported us, will be posted on the site as soon as our financial year ending accounts these have been completed.

Despite an ever increasing demand for the service the charity has just 3 part time staff and a Volunteer Management Committee of 7 members. We are always looking for skilled people who could make a voluntary contribution and help us ensure that befriending is available to all the children who need it. At present we have 57 children waiting and enquiries are received every week from agencies and parents about possible further referrals.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE CHARITY

Who are we? Fun in Action for Children was set up in September 1999 (Children's Charity Number 1077594). We provide an adult/child befriending scheme for children of school age from disadvantaged lone parent families living in the city of Brighton and Hove in East Sussex. The charity is committed to child safety and operates to high professional standards. We have held the National Mentoring Network Home office 'Approved Provider Standard' award for quality service delivery since 2002 and all our volunteers are rigorously vetted over a 5 stage assessment process. This includes, in depth interviews, home visits, Criminal Records Bureau checks and the take up of 3 detailed references. All volunteers must also complete a 3 day introductory training programme which includes guidelines on health and safety, child protection, the importance of listening and on managing challenging behaviour. We also carry out regular risk assessments for all areas of our work.

What do we do? Children are referred by local child care agencies, schools and by parents themselves. We match each child with a specially selected adult volunteer 'befriender' who sees them every week for 3 - 4 hours over a period of at least 2 years. Although the friendship is undoubtedly a source of fun and enjoyment for the child, there is much more involved. Where a child has a particular interest or skill, for example art or music, the befriender will help them develop this further. They also introduce the child to new interests and opportunities which they may not otherwise have considered (examples include, art, horse riding and an interest in the theatre). Befrienders are aware of the importance of education for disadvantaged children and do all they can to support the child's learning, including talking with teachers, visiting schools and helping the child with reading and homework. Without setting out to do so directly they also support parents by being non judgemental and encouraging, bringing new perspectives to the family and carrying some of the weight of childcare for parents.

How does the service directly benefit children?

- Secure and confident adults are generally people who have had their needs met in childhood. One of the most important of these needs is the reliable experience of warm, affectionate attachments to caring adults, usually the child's parents. A child with a befriender has the opportunity to benefit from *another supportive adult attachment in addition to the parent* thus helping ensure their early childhood needs are being met.



- A parent being out of work can have a 'scarring' effect and children who grow up in workless households' are more likely to be out of work themselves in adulthood (*Cabinet Office – Social Exclusion Task force 2007*). The majority of our children live in workless households, whereas 96% of our current befrienders are either employed or retired and are able to act as positive role models for children to aspire to an occupational identity or engage in further study. Three befriended young people went on to university last year.

Overall befriended children become better able to get on with their lives. They are happier and more confident; they improve their relationships with family and peers and widen their interests and horizons. There is also an improvement in their school work and attendance and this leads to better career opportunities and life prospects.

Who does the befriending? Volunteers are vital to our service for without them there would be no befriending. This year we sent out 105 information packs, interviewed 34 people, trained 28, completed home visits and

accepted 21 new volunteers onto the scheme. Of these 17 were matched with waiting children and 4 were carried forward to the next year. We advertise widely and recruit people from diverse backgrounds. In 2009 those accepted to befriend included 20% gay & lesbian, 10% black and ethnic minority (compared with 6% in Brighton and Hove overall), and 71% who are aged 35 years or over.

Having a befriender is a wonderful thing on so many different levels and makes so much difference to our lives. All children who need it should have access to this service. Jenny, lone mother of 3 befriended children aged under 11 years

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THIS YEAR

1. We set up 17 new friendships (one more than our target of 16)

This includes 11 boys & 6 girls. All of the newly befriended children are from lone parent families experiencing family stress and identified by referring agencies or parents as in need of additional adult support.

64% are aged 9-11 years, 18% are older teenagers and 18% are younger children. Each child has their own story and their own particular needs. These include the following:

- 6 children living with single parents who have severe physical disabilities and mobility problems
- 4 girls living with fathers on their own with no contact with mother
- 4 young people living with grandparents when parents have died or have mental health/ drug problems

2. We accepted referrals for 30 new children onto the scheme

These children all need support that is sustained over a long period. Family backgrounds include:

- A young mother of 4 girls who fled to Brighton to escape domestic violence.
- A severely disabled mother with 2 little boys aged 4 and 8 years.
- Two lively teenagers living with grandmother who is in her 60s and in poor health.

On referral parents were asked to identify problems experienced by their children. These included:

- 58% who are experiencing difficulties in their relationships with others
- 83% who are not getting along well at school in some way
- 93% with low self esteem
- 95% in need of opportunities to get out and about and expand their horizons

3. We supported 38 friendships (*meet weekly*) and 30 Life Long friends (*less regular meetings*)

The charities overarching aim is to improve the life of each child who is allocated a befriender. We have identified 4 positive 'outcomes', which we want to achieve from befriending. The chart below shows the percentage of parents and befriended children reporting improvements against these 4 outcomes in our February – March 2009 survey.

Reports from	Increased confidence	Improved relationships	Expanded horizons	School Progress
Children - 68%	90%	71%	100%	71%
Parents - 89%	87%	74%	91%	74%

This year we have also set up an **exit and entry** monitoring system to record the impact of befriending from start to finish (2 or more years). For this we retained our 4 outcomes (as above) but asked the children *specific questions* under each heading. They were asked to score each of these questions on a scale of 1-9.

- **Suzie** aged 9 years scored herself at 2 (never or rarely) at the beginning and 9 (always) at the end of befriending, in response to the statement ***"I have close friends"***.
- **James** a very nervous and shy lad of 11 years, increased his self rated score from just 3 (rarely) to 7 (usually) in response to the statement ***"I can speak up for things that bother me"***.
- **Marie** aged 10 years rated herself at scale 4 for ***'I think I am a nice person and people like me'*** prior to having a befriender. At the end of 2 years of befriending she had doubled her self rated score to 8.



4. We ran 4 group outings in the year with an overall attendance of 304 people

These included an autumn theatre visit, a Christmas party, an Easter picnic, and a summer barbeque. Group outings are well attended, joyful events and serve to alleviate the social isolation felt by lone parents and children.

TARGETS FOR COMPLETION IN 2010

Targets for current year to 30th September 2010

- Recruit**, assess, train and match a further 21 new befrienders with waiting children
- Provide** emotional and practical support and guidance to children, parents and befrienders to ensure friendships continue and really do make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged children.
- Accept** referrals of new children to the scheme from parents, social workers, teachers & other groups
- Provide** 4 group outings (one each season) for all children and their families and befrienders