

FUN IN ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Progress report for funding for the year to the 30th September 2007

“I would never have got this far without Ralph’s support and belief in me”.

16 year old Chris talking about his experience of being befriended for the last 6 years by Ralph a local solicitor, with two grown up children of his own. In 2007 Chris achieved excellent GCSE results with 7 good grades including 3 at Grade A. Chris is now continuing his studies at 6th Form College. His long term goal is to study law at university.

Chris comes from a disadvantaged lone parent family and is one of 6 siblings of whom 4 have been diagnosed with special needs. His mother is dedicated to her family and committed to doing her best for all of them but at times it has been an uphill struggle. She is understandably very proud of Chris’s achievements and is extremely grateful for the Ralph’s reliable support.



Fun in Action for Children was set up in September 1999 (Charity Number 1077594) as a children’s charity operating in the city of Brighton and Hove in East Sussex. We provide an adult/child befriending scheme for children from disadvantaged lone parent families.

Although small, the charity operates to high professional standards and holds a National Mentoring Network Home office ‘Approved Provider Standard Award. Referrals have increased year on year and there is a steady demand for the service. The local authority gave us a vote of confidence last year with an award of a small 3 year grant.

HOWEVER EXTRA FUNDING IS VITAL IF WE ARE TO KEEP THE SERVICE OPERATING.

Our immediate aim is to improve the wellbeing and self esteem of children from socially excluded lone parent families.

Our long term goal is to remove the barriers that limit the life chances of such children and prevent them moving out of poverty and disadvantage.

Each child is matched up with an adult long term volunteer. The role of the ‘befriender’ is to be interested and involved in the child’s life over an extended period. They must stay firmly on the child’s side, persevering in order to establish a relationship of trust. From this strong position befrienders can have a considerable influence. With time their reliable support and guidance transforms the way children feel about themselves and about life in general. The child’s self esteem and confidence improve and so does their behaviour. They get on better with their families and their peer group and are more able to apply themselves at school. Through their weekly meetings the befriender also introduces the child to new activities and experiences which broadens their horizons and encourages aspirations.

Last year our befrienders provided an average of 155 hours of one to one attention every weekend to children who needed it. The use of volunteers makes the service very cost effective with the yearly cost last year being £1,892 per friendship (based on total estimated expenditure against number of friendships).

The service is delivered by two qualified and experienced social work staff. They are supported by 7 voluntary Fun in Action Management Committee Trustees who meet every 6 weeks & oversee the running of the charity.

HOW WE MET THE NEED FOR BEFRIENDING LAST YEAR

Visitors to Brighton and Hove see an affluent city but there are large hidden areas of social and economic deprivation. The National Index of Deprivation 2000 ranks 2 of Brighton’s wards, Moulescombe and Whitehawk (where around half of referrals to the scheme originate) in the top 10% overall deprived wards in the county. Most of the children referred to the charity live in families suffering multiple disadvantages.

A COMBINATION OF FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES, THE HOME ENVIRONMENT AND LOW INCOME IMPACT NEGATIVELY ON FAMILIES AND CREATE PROBLEMS.

NEW CHILDREN REFERRED LAST YEAR =24

CHILDREN NOW WAITING FOR A BEFRIENDER = 57

39% girls, 61% boys, 28% Special Needs, 11% Ethnic Minorities, 70% waiting 1 year +

- We started the year with 55 children waiting & received a further 24 new referrals in the year.
- 22 children were taken off the waiting list (13 matched & 9 left the service) and we closed the year with 57 children waiting.
- Of the new referrals, just over 46% were from parents, 25% from social workers, 20% from teachers and the remainder from other voluntary agencies

NEW MATCHES MADE THIS YEAR = 13

The process of matching befriender and child was characterised by mutual consent and enthusiasm. Children and parents views were sought and teachers and other important adults also contributed. A profile of the needs of each child and family was drawn up and compared with that of possible befriender in order to find the best 'match'. Ethnicity and cultural background were treated as important but not overriding considerations (9% of all children and 8% of befrienders are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds compared with 6% in overall population of the city)

- In this last year we recruited, trained and fully assessed 28 new befrienders of whom 13 were matched with waiting children before the year-end and a further 7 taken forward to be matched in the following year. Of the remaining 8 applicants, 4 people dropped out and 4 are on hold and may go forward at a later date.
- We started the year with 33 adult/child friendships. We made 13 new matches, 7 friendships changed and were transferred to our new category of 'life long friends' and 2 friendships ended altogether. This gave us a total at the 30th September 2007 of 37 friendships & 12 'Life Long Friends' (7 from this year and 5 from the previous year). The 2 friendships that ended in this year did so after 2.2 years of weekly befriending.
- 'Life Long Friends' is a new category we set up this year to record friendships which are more than 2 years old and still ongoing but with less formal contact. The child may have moved away or their needs have changed and they don't need regular weekly support. The befriender's interest and continued involvement is still very helpful to the young person, and the exchange of cards, emails and texts and the occasional get together cements these life long connections.
- In order to be effective in helping a child we also have to help the child's family. Befriending gives parents much needed emotional support and regular respite. Siblings benefit from a more settled brother or sister.

4 GROUP OUTINGS PROVIDED WITH TOTAL ATTENDANCE = 260 CHILDREN, PARENTS AND BEFRIENDERS

We organised 4 group outings in the year with a total attendance of 260 people including 119 children. These included a spring picnic, a summer barbeque, a theatre visit and a Christmas party. Research has pointed to the positive effects community group outings have in reducing social exclusion in marginalised families. Certainly they are very popular with our families and help create a sense of belonging.

FRIENDSHIPS AT THE YEAR END = 37 REGULAR WEEKLY FRIENDSHIPS + 12 'LIFE LONG FRIENDS'

46% girls, 54% boys, 32% Special Needs, 8% Ethnic Minorities, 62% of friendships in place for 1 year +

HOW WE DECIDED ON AND SUPPORTED THE ADULTS WHO BEFRIENDED

We completed 2 volunteer recruitment drives last year. From the initial 28 enquirers 46% of applicants completed the befriender assessment process and went on to be matched. Volunteers were assessed rigorously to both exclude those who would present any danger to a child, and to ensure their suitability for what is a challenging role.

Before being accepted, each applicant completed:

- 3 days of group training (including child protection and health and safety).
- 2 in depth interviews looking at family history, stability, attitudes, social networks & motivation.
- a home visit and home safety assessment.
- 3 detailed references & an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Check (applicants & partners).

Once matched all befrienders and their children were allocated a caseworker, who provided regular support and supervision as outlined in our Code of Conduct Guidebook. Support group meeting for befrienders were also held every fortnight and further training made available through lectures provided by the local Child Psychotherapy Trust. When confronted with a new and potentially life long relationship a child's behaviour can be testing in the extreme. Our skilled professional staff support befrienders to stay committed and to wait patiently for the benefits to emerge.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE WE?

Percentage of parents and children reporting improvements against the 4 targets. (February 2007 survey)

Reports from	Improvement in relationships	Increase in confidence/ability to tackle problems	Expanded horizons & interests	Progress at school
Children	71%	82%	100%	65%
Parents	65%	71%	83%	60%

In the first 12 months a befriender's influence is seen in positive changes in the attitude and behaviour of the children. Once these changes are fully bedded in, we see how the child's more settled and contented state of mind moves things forward positively in other areas of his life. With the support of his befriender he will often take up a hobby or develop an existing interest. Attitudes to school work change and the child engages more fully.

In this way the normal process of the child's development, which had been derailed by failures in the child's environment, is set back on track through the befriender's good attentions.

Where families need help to support their children's aspirations, a befriender can work in partnership with the child's parent to make a difference without threat to the parent /child relationship.

At the year end Jack aged 9 years has been befriended for 7 months. Jack lives in a large family headed by a disabled father. He is the youngest of 5 children. Contact with mother is very irregular and there are no grandparents or aunts and uncles living nearby, whom Jack can turn to. Father works very hard to provide a warm clean home and nutritional meals for the children. However despite father's efforts, the older brothers have been in some trouble and there was concern for Jack who was showing a lot of frustration and anger at home. Jack's father came together with his teacher to make a referral to us and last year Jack was matched with a 26 year old professional man who, like Jack, loves sport. His new role model has made a real difference. Jack is much calmer now he has a positive outlet for his interests. Father is delighted that Jack is able to have the experiences he himself is not able to provide.

Mark aged 6 years has been befriended for 8 months. Mark lives with his mother and two older brothers. Father has been very ill over a number of years and this has put great strain on the family. Mark is in many ways a delightful child but his temper tantrums and impetuous behaviour were causing problems for him at home and at school. The pressures on the family meant that he was rarely disciplined and spent too much time alone playing his game boy. Since going out regularly with his befriender (an older experienced mother of 3 grown up children) Mark has learnt to moderate his behaviour and cooperate more. He is also developing age appropriate interests like dinosaurs and collecting sea shells.

Maria aged 5 befriended 11 months. This little girl is the third child in a family of 4 children all under 8 years old. She was desperate for 1/1 attention as there was only mother at home and no extended family. In order to get noticed Maria resorted to kicking and pinching her siblings and unhappily trailing her mother around the house. Now 11 months on Maria has calmed down considerably and is much happier and relaxed. Her befrienders, a young couple, provide 5 hours a week of 1/1 attention. Maria remains a spirited little soul but her energy is now more positively directed. Mother is very pleased with the service which she describes as 'a life line'.

CHILDREN WHO ARE LONG TERM BEFRIENDED BECOME MORE SOCIALLY MOBILE

James is 11 years old and has been befriended for 6 years. James' mother died when he was 4 years old and he lives with his father and younger sister. Father has done a wonderful job since his wife died, but coming from a home where no one is employed, James could not understand why people went outside the home to work. Contact with his befriender Marina and her partner has shown him a broader perspective. Now James asks about GCSE exams and says he wants to be a fireman when he grows up. Both father and his befriender are pleased James is able to think about the future and what he wants to do with his life.

Josie is 14 years old and has been befriended for 5 years. Josie's aspirations have changed over this time. When she was first befriended her desire was to have big family (Josie is one of 5 children). Two years into the befriending she declared she wanted instead to be a classroom assistant. Recently she has revised this upwards and is now clear she wants to be a school teacher. Having a befriender who is able to model a professional work role has helped Josie to widen her horizons. She works hard at school and we are sure she will go on to realise her ambition.

Targets for next year end 30th September 2008

- Recruit**, assess, train and match a further 12 new befrienders with waiting children (one per month)
- 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 and other professionals
- Provide** 4 group outings (one each season) for all children and their families and befrienders