

“Fun in Action for children has been an important part of my son’s Peter’s life since he was 5 years old. Because of his special needs, it has been particularly hard for him to form normal friendships and he has been denied the ordinary social networks that other children enjoy. His relationships with his befriender gives him unconditional acceptance and recognises his many talents. It has helped him so much in relating to the outside world. Fun in Action not only provided the needed support, but I have found the telephone line to the office a life line. They are always there to talk to me about my worries with complete understanding”.



BACKGROUND TO THE CHARITY

Fun in Action for Children was set up in September 1999 as a children’s charity (Charity Number 1077594) 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 the National Mentoring Network Home office ‘Approved Provider Standard’. Referrals have increased year on year and there is always a high demand for the service.

Each child is matched with a specially selected adult volunteer ‘befriender’ who sees them every week for around 4 hours. How they spend their time together depends on the interests and particular needs of the child. It can be anything from a game of football, a theatre outing, a bike ride, swimming or even fish and chips by the sea. If a child has a particular interest or skill, for example art or music, the befriender will help them develop this. Often the befriender will support the child with their reading or other school work. Once a relationship of trust has been established, the adult is able to have considerable influence on the way the child feels about themselves and how they view their life and their prospects. He will also introduce the child to new ideas and experiences which broadens the child’s horizons and presents him with new possibilities.

Our immediate aim is to improve the wellbeing and self esteem of disadvantaged children from lone parent families. Our long term goal is to increase the children’s social mobility and improve their chances in life.

WORK COMPLETED BY THE CHARITY LAST YEAR.

We accepted referrals for 25 children who needed befriending support last year. Of these children:

- **Almost all needed opportunities to get out and about** and try new things and experiences.
- **Nearly 70% of the children had low self esteem and lacked confidence**
- **Around half were having some kind of problem with their schooling** (application to school work, poor attendance, being bullied, not being able to keep up with the work or problems with accepting authority).
- **Just under 50% were reported as having difficulty in their relationships with others** – including their parents, siblings and peer group.
- **Around 40% of all new referrals were from the Social Services Children’s Disability Team** where lone parents were struggling to cope with the many extra demands presented by their disabled children.
- **36% of all the children referred to us last year had either a parent or sibling with a disability.** Where a parent is disabled, this limits the normal activities children can access with them. Where a sibling is disabled, a disproportionate amount of parent’s time is taken up and the able bodied child often misses out.
- **Nearly half of the children referred to us for support last year were in the age range 9-11 years.** Soon these children will be moving on from the security of their small primary school to the more demanding environment of secondary school. Those with problems will find the transition most difficult. Having the support of a befriender at this time can make all the difference to successfully settling in.

“I am learning to ride a horse with my befriender and this has helped my confidence” Hilary aged 9

We set up 13 new adult /child friendships in this year.

- 5 of the children matched with bendifenders this year were boys and 8 were girls
- Half of the children matched with bendifenders this year were referred directly to the service by their parents. The remainder were referred by schools and by Social Services

Josie aged 13 was referred by the disability team and was matched with a young 24 year old female graduate. Josie has only been living in England for a short time and because of her disabilities has found it really hard to make friends outside school. Her new befriender is not so much older than Josie and so has been able to introduce her to a range of young people's activities including, theatre, coffee shops, shopping in the lanes, music venues and dancing. This child's mother is deeply committed to her daughter's wellbeing and is delighted with the befriender. The friendship has been in place for 4 months and already the tensions in the family are easing and Josie is much happier and has more confidence in herself.

Luke and Mark – both young teenagers - were matched with male bidders this year. Neither of the boys have contact with their father. In both families mother was having persistent problems with adherence to boundaries on behaviour and school attendance. We felt the boys needed role model support and so we matched them with men who are mature and had had direct experience of fatherhood. Already their behaviour has improved. However change on all levels can take time to fully bed in. Both Luke and Mark continue to challenge the discipline of school at times and their bidders remain committed to working with them and their teachers to find solutions.

We also matched two little boys Jimmy and Darren. Neither boy sees their father regularly. Jimmy, a very lively and spirited little boy was matched with a long established gay couple to help provide the calming male presence he needed. This has been a great success and Jimmy is now more settled and is learning to slow down and reflect on his actions. Darren is a very sensitive gentle boy who tries hard to be good. He has been matched with a caring young man who takes into account his sensitive nature but who also encourages Darren to relax and have fun.

Of the 8 girls matched with bidders in the year, 2 were from an isolated family consisting of mother and 3 daughters. Mother is extremely caring but suffers from severe depression and the girls were very much in need of some light hearted adult attention. Both had suffered racial bullying at school. We matched the 2 school age girls with thoughtful women in their thirties and both children are blossoming from the extra attention.

"I got 10 recommendations for my work at school and my befriender says she is proud of me". Penny aged 14

15 Weekly adult/child Friendships ended in the year

- **Of all the 15 friendships that were completed, 10 were transferred to our "Life Long Friends List".** This is a new category we set up last year to record friendships which are more than 2 years old and ongoing but where the contact between the befriender and the young person is less regular and formal. In most cases these are teenagers whose needs have changed but do not want to cut off completely.
- **The average length of the friendships that ended or were transferred was just under 3 years.**
- **All the children transferred to the Life Long Friends list have benefitted from befriending.** Two are completing their A levels and the remainder are settled in school. Six now have clear ideas about the direction they want their lives to take. Only one has been in trouble since the formal befriending ended and with extra support he has now settled down.
- **Of the remaining 5 friendships that ended, 2 were with older children who feel they no longer needed support, 1 child has been re-matched and the circumstances have changed for the remaining 2 children (parents have new partners) so they are now better supported at home.**



We provided 4 group outings in the year attended by 365 people including 185 children

These included an autumn theatre visit, a Christmas party, an Easter picnic in the spring, and a summer barbecue. Feedback from these events is very positive with parents and children (and grandparents) reporting how much they enjoy the experience of meeting up with others in similar circumstances.

13 Volunteer Bidders accepted onto the scheme in the year.

From the 19 people who came forward to bid (35 enquiries) 13 went on to complete the full assessment and be matched with a child. All potential bidders completed 15 hours of preparatory training including child protection, health and safety and care and control in the bidding relationship. All bidders also completed 2 in-depth interviews, were visited at home and completed a home safety check. Three detailed references were taken up and bidders and partners and housemates completed enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Checks.

- Two applicants were turned down
- 13 applicants were accepted. Of these 5 were male and 8 female
- 1 is from an ethnic minority background
- 4 are gay or lesbian

"He gets on with his friends so much better mainly because he does not blow his top so much". Mother of Steven aged 9 years befriended for nearly 2 years.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION - PARENTS & CHILD SURVEYS FEBRUARY – MARCH 2008

Percentage of parents and children reporting improvements against the 4 targets (February – March 2008 survey)

Reports from	Increased confidence	Improved relationships	Expanded horizons	School Progress
Children	86%	78%	87%	82%
Parents	89%	89%	100%	67%

THE POSITION OF THE CHARITY AT THE YEAR ENDING 30TH SEPTEMBER 2009

We currently have 35 ongoing match friendships in place where volunteers and children meet up every week for around 4 hours. This works out at 140 hours of direct attention for needy children each week. Of these:

- 17 are boys and 18 are girls
- 11 are aged 4-8 years, 12 are aged 9-11 years, 12 are aged 12+ years
- 15 children were originally referred by parents, 14 by Social services, 5 by schools and 1 by Young Carers
- 10 children have a disability
- 9 children have been on the Child Protection Register in the past
- 17 children have either a parent or sibling with a disability
- 10 befrienders are male and 26 befrienders are female
- 13 befrienders are aged < 35, 14 befrienders are aged <50, and 9 befrienders are aged >50
- 7 befrienders are gay /lesbian
- 3 befrienders are from black or ethnic minority backgrounds
- 5 children are from black or ethnic minority backgrounds
- The average length of all friendships at the year end was 2 years and 5 months

At the year end we had 56 children waiting for a befriender. Of these:

- 34 are boys and 22 are girls
- 8 are aged 4-8 years, 26 are aged 9-11 years, and 22 are aged 12+ years
- 44% children were referred by Social Services, 23% by parents, 11% by schools, 12% by other agencies
- 23 of the children have a disability – predominantly learning disability, autism, ADHD, learning delay
- 14 parents have a disability
- 11 children were previously on the Child Protection Register
- 12 boys need a male befriender

In addition we have 22 children on our Life Long Friends List

Targets for current year to 30th September 2008

- Recruit**, assess, train and match a further 15 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

