

What is a befriender?

Someone that takes you out and like goes places with you and all that.
(Frazer)

One of the people that talks to you about your behaviour?
(Finlay)

Takes you out. (Mhari)

Someone who takes care of you? And, who makes you feel happy. (Sheila)

A befriender is a person who works with you and helps you through difficulties.
(Fiona)

It's someone who takes you out and they do lots of fun activities with you. (Ishbel)



Why I have a befriender



To help parent
So she can get a bit of peace. (Bruce)

Emotional support

Because I have problems... Like I have worries about my mum and not just that about my mum and dad split up and sometimes I cry about that. (Katrina)

Social support

Because naebody comes for me and all the time they don't like playing wi me and then I just need to stay in and play my Xbox. (Craig)

Don't really know

I don't know why I'm getting a grownup friend cause I've got loads of friends already... I think it (will be) fab... because it means that if I don't want to be friends with one of my friends any more there'll be a spare one. (Lewis)

School support

To build my confidence and help me go to school. (Stuart)

Contact details

Centre for Research on Families and Relationships
23 Buccleuch Place
Edinburgh EH8 9LN
www.crfr.ac.uk

Befriending Networks
www.befriending.co.uk



About my befriender

Children speak about their adult-child befriending relationships



Background

Befriending projects for children recruit and train adult volunteers to support individual children or sibling groups, through engaging in weekly leisure activities with them. The children face difficulties either at home, in school or in the community, and many of those referred face problems such as their own learning or behavioural difficulty; the disability of a sibling; parental substance abuse or imprisonment; domestic abuse or the death of a parent.

The 'Me and My Befriender' Research Project



Befriending Networks, an organisation promoting befriending, indicates that children referred to projects come disproportionately from lone mother families and that staff are concerned about the lack of male volunteers for the higher number of boys needing befrienders.

The 'Me and My Befriender' study gathered details of the experiences of 26 children attending 9 befriending projects in Scotland and England. The study wanted to understand how children viewed the befriending relationship. The 17 boys and 9 girls, were aged 6-15 years and came from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The study was interested in the children's views at various stages in the befriending relationship; 17 children were interviewed prior to them knowing who their befriender might be. Some 10 of these children were interviewed a second time, after meeting their befriender. The remaining 9 children had more long-term relationships with their befrienders. In addition, interviews were conducted with 18 lone mothers/female carers and 3 lone fathers and with project managers in each of the befriending projects. All names are pseudonyms.

This briefing is based on the project 'Plugging a gap? Children's experiences and perceptions of male befrienders' funded by the Economic and Social Research Councils (Grant Number RES-000-22-421) led by Dr Sue Milne, Research Fellow at the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/befriending/index.html>

Two further briefing papers are available:

- Me and my befriender: an overview of the research findings together with key messages and practice, policy, research implications
- More male befrienders wanted for children: why we want more male befrienders for boys, and for girls.

Research findings

Adult-child befriending relationships

Younger children see an advantage in having an adult befriender who can take them out places they could not go themselves because they do not have the finances, transport, or the confidence, and because they are not meant to be out without someone to look after them:

You get to ride on your bikes... like ride your bike with your befriender and she'll tell you when to stop if a car is behind you. She'll look after you on the road. (Heather)

Friendships

Older children emphasise the nature of the interpersonal relationships and spoke of their befrienders as being like a big brother or a friend. Eilish's befriender is in her 40s:

We get on, I treat her like a friend... she texts me, I text her, so, it's not different really... I speak to her in the same way I speak to my friends. (Eilish)

Doing activities TOGETHER

The children want an adult befriender who will do activities WITH them. Initially many said they wanted a young befriender, but came to realise that older people can also join in:

My sister's befriender, she's 60 I think, she's something like that, she actually went on the trampolines. (Andrew)

Group activities

Some of the projects organise group activities for the befrienders and children, and sometimes for families. Others have a project room where the befrienders can bring the children to do activities, often with other befrienders and children present. Hamish enjoyed the contacts he made with other children, their befrienders and with the project staff:

All of them feels like my family. (Hamish)

Transcending gender

Most of the children have a strong sense of their own gender identity. Their preferences for the gender of a potential befriender tend to match their own. However, the children's activity interests generally transcended gender and this was perhaps why Malcolm, a teenage boy said:

I prefer a woman, because I just like women instead of men. Women are more playful. (Malcolm)

Even though Ailsa had been adamant that she did not want a male befriender she changed her viewpoint after she and her brother were matched with a man:

I feel more confident because he helps me. He's a lot different to other men I know... because he asks more funny stuff. (Ailsa)

Having a befriender is helpful for me because

It's made me do more activities like unicycling and skateboarding and... like to make friends and loads of other stuff. (Duncan)

It's making me happier. (Finlay)

It really has boosted my confidence... I've went out and I've done stuff that I wouldn't have done, like horse riding and stuff like that, I wouldn't have thought of doing that before... and just learning to talk to people... I don't know what I would do if I didn't have one. (Eilish)

By helping me to calm down a lot more... [by] being a lot more, bit more kind and when I'm writing things through, she just tells me to calm down. (Ishbel)

You get to go out, like I don't normally go out into the town... I get the train into town, I meet him on the train, like I've never done that before, like go on the train myself to meet someone... I get to go out instead of just sitting in the house. (Frazer)

It helps me to reach my goals, like swimming and stuff. To sing better, dance better, be confident to do stuff. (Ailsa)

