



# Befriending and Family Learning

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### Abstract

The purpose of this briefing is to create a document explaining the benefits of using befriending to facilitate a family learning project.

### Keywords

Befriending, Befriender, Befriendee, Mentoring, Family Learning

### Key Points

- Befriending is a service where a volunteer helps and supports people to improve their lives.
- Family Learning is a method that helps adults and children learn together.
- Anyone can benefit from the support of a befriender, whatever their age or circumstances.
- Working in a group can provide more benefits than working on one's own.

## Introduction

Working with the whole family is beneficial for the personal and academic development of children and young people. For this reason, People Know How has created this document to help apply the method of befriending within family groups. This paper suggests that using befriending with both the children and the parents from one family unit can lead to more positive outcomes, especially if the benders then facilitate family learning activities.

### What is Befriending?

Befriending is a voluntary and mutually beneficial relationship in which an individual offers their time to initiate, support and supervise another to make changes in their life. These individuals are known as "befriender" (person who offers

their help) and "befriendee" (person who receives it). It is important to make a clear distinction between befriending and friendship. Friendship is a private and

**“Befriending is a relationship between a volunteer and a recipient which is initiated, supported and monitored by a voluntary or statutory agency.”**

**- Scottish Befriending Networks**

mutual relationship, however befriending is the provision of a professional support service (1). The befriender can share their views and opinions, or any personal information they feel comfortable with, and which does not exceed agreed service boundaries, so the befriender gets to know them in the relationship (2).

It is also important to note the difference between befriending and mentoring. Both forms of support aim to build supportive, trusting relationships over time and both include social elements within them. The main difference between the two is the emphasis placed on goals. Mentoring focuses more on goal setting within a time-limited process whereas befriending tends to develop more informal, supportive relationships, often over a longer period of time. (3)

There are different types of befriending which account for the number of people involved and the method that is used to provide the service. Firstly, the type of befriending is determined by the number of people participating. Befriending can be:

- **One to one:** one person befriends another.
- **One to many:** an individual provides support for a number of people either in a small group setting together or individually (5).
- **Group:** allows for people to meet together in activity groups with the outcome focused on positive social interaction with more than just one person. This is a valuable part of the service for befriendedees as many of them are able to attend the groups with their befriender who is there to support them. It allows people to participate in activities in a very informal manner (6).

Secondly, the different methods of befriending are:

- **Face to face:** allows for the development of an ordinary, warm, reliable relationship with another person. Usually takes the form of a

weekly visit from the befriender to the befriendedees home, or enjoying coffee, lunch or other activities out-with the befriendedees home.

- **Telephone befriending:** for people who prefer to chat on the phone, someone who may be waiting for a while before they are matched with a suitable befriender. It can also be used for a befriendedee who is feeling vulnerable and may benefit from the extra contact. This allows the service to reach out to more people with transport restrictions (7).
- **Internet-based:** using electronic methods such as email to deliver support - often referred to as e-befriending (8).

The main objective of befriending is to improve the life of a person by supporting and promoting their well-being, personal development and self-determination capacity. More specifically, services often aim to enable their befriendedees, whatever their age to:

- Become less socially isolated;
- Develop their self-confidence and emotional growth;
- Increase their capacity to use personal resources;
- Enhance their skills for forming and maintaining relationships with others;
- Develop greater resilience;
- Feel supported by someone who is consistent and reliable; and
- Experience some purely social interaction on a regular basis (4).

Anyone can benefit from the support

of a befriender, whatever their age or circumstances. Often, a service is set up to support a particular group of people who have requested or have been identified as needing support, for example:

- Socially isolated people such as older people and people of all ages with mental health problems.

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Unemployed people.
- Offenders and those at risk of offending.
- Young people in care.
- Refugees and migrants (13).

Not only can befriending improve the life of the befriended but it can also improve the lives of those surrounding them. There have been a number of schemes that established peer-to-peer befriending for parents in order to improve outcomes for the whole family. Parent befriending is associated with improved confidence, problem solving abilities and decision-making skills and can lead to an increased sense of belonging to the community for the parents. These are all instrumental in improving their parenting methods and often lead to positive outcomes for their children (18).

### **What is Family Learning?**

Family Learning is a method that provides adults with the knowledge and skills necessary to assist their children in their educational process, but also encourages all family members to learn together, in all directions, as an approach to intergenerational learning. The

learning may be informal, through events such as family fun days, or more formal - family learning courses are delivered in settings such as schools, children's centres and community centres (9) (10). It refers to learning activities where children and their parents learn together, gaining new skills or knowledge. These activities contribute to a culture of learning within the family and can improve the life chances of those involved (11). So, the main purpose of Family Learning is to foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage (12).

**“Family learning is a powerful method of engagement and learning which can foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage.”**

- Education Scotland

### **Befriending supporting and facilitating Family Learning?**

There is a vast array of evidence that highlights the benefits of befriending parents and children, but few if any schemes have established befriending with the parents and children from the same family. If we could establish a service that would reach out to the parents and to the children individually, they could achieve greater individual outcomes. It could lead to even greater outcomes if then the befrienders were to bring the whole family together to engage in collective family learning.

Indeed, befriending, when employed within family learning, can offer direct

support to a young person, family member or the whole family. This approach can also bring young people and their families together as a group. The opportunity to work with others, rather than on their own, can provide distinct benefits to the befriended:

1. Increased productivity and performance: Groups that work well together can achieve much more than individuals working on their own. Sharing and discussing ideas can play a pivotal role in deepening the understanding of a particular subject area.
2. Skills development: Being part of a team helps develop interpersonal skills such as speaking and listening as well as team working skills such as motivating others.
3. Knowing more about yourself: Collaborating with others helps identify our own strengths and weaknesses (14).

Bearing this in mind, we must highlight the work that People Know How has done previously to reach this conclusion. Through work previously carried out in secondary schools, in Edinburgh, our research has identified young people and families requiring support with family learning. People Know How is offering help to those families through a befriending approach. Befriending is being applied as follows:

- People Know How is going to support 15 families weekly from 5 school catchment areas with an established team of volunteers. Before matching young people, families and volunteer befrienders, they carry out an extensive



People Know How volunteers with children and young people

assessment with each family to know how to support them best in their learning.

- People Know How will support befrienders by providing training, supervision and expenses; and provide a professional service to its befriendeds, including referral, waiting list, assessment, matching, and ending procedures.
- Befrienders will be chosen carefully. They will be recruited and selected to ensure they have qualities and skills to allow them to offer the best possible service. For example, it is essential that recruits accept each person for who they are, appreciating their differences without discrimination because of gender, race, culture, etc. That is, to respect all people as being of equal worth. It is also important that befrienders respect others' choices, lifestyles, rights etc. without imposing their own beliefs and values.
- Families will have to set achievable outcomes in relation to the available resources so befrienders



People Know How volunteers with children and young people

can know how to work with these families and how to achieve those goals.

- Befrienders will be trained in order to provide the organisational skills required to work within organisational and personal boundaries, an ability to make use of the training previously done, while also being provided with support and supervision. It is also important that the befriender work within the confidentiality policy.
- Meetings with families will be at home, in school or a community resource. Each befriender will work with a family over the project and they will be their main point of contact. Holding sessions with the schools will be also important to support parental educational engagement; including participation in parents' evenings.
- Befrienders at People Know How will provide a range of confidence building support, encouraging the members of the families to work with each other. This will include help with home/school-work and engaging them in available

resources. This is to increase family connectedness by working with families and young people to promote education in the home, school and community. Befrienders will also encourage children to share details of their experiences of school with their families and encourage parents to engage with their child's education.

- Since befrienders are going to work with different types of people, it is advisable that they have different personal qualities that allow them to adapt, like the following ones:
  - Warmth, an ability to engage in relationships
  - Good communication/ interpersonal skills (individual/ group issues)
  - A level of self awareness
  - An ability to reflect on the befriending relationship
  - An ability to work on their own, common sense
  - Some insight into the potential significance and importance of the relationship
  - Reliable, consistent, dependable
  - An ability to handle a level of stress
  - A balanced awareness of own needs in befriending work
  - A capacity for empathy and understanding
  - Willingness to question own assumptions.

### Conclusion

Befriending and family learning help people of different ages overcome some of the difficulties that they face in their day-to-day lives. If befriending was to be established with the different members within one family, there could be greater

positive impact on all involved. This is particularly true if befrienders also facilitate family learning activities, which help the family expand their skills and communication together.

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