

Befriending Young Carers

A Pilot Study

Report prepared for the
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

by Jo Aldridge and Saul Becker
Young Carers Research Group
Loughborough University

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Jo Aldridge and Saul Becker

"I hadn't realised how important the relationship was to Julian until there was a mix up about what time I was to arrive. Julian had been waiting for an hour and was in tears because he thought I wasn't coming. I arrived at the time I had agreed and he ran out to meet me and gave me a huge hug. He said that day about how much it meant to him to have somebody spending time with him on things he liked doing, like his art work and things like that."

Jonathan, befriender

"I like Jonathan, we've made puppets and we went ice skating. It's good he's a man because if it was ladies or people who are married they probably wouldn't be able to skate."

Julian, young carer

The Young Carers Research Group

The Young Carers Research Group (YCRG) based at Loughborough University was established in 1992 under the directorship of Dr Saul Becker. The Group conducts applied research and policy evaluation concerned with community care, children and young carers' issues, and works in close collaboration with a multi-agency steering committee and national organisations concerned with carers issues, particularly the Carers National Association, Crossroads, and the Gulbenkian Foundation. The Group currently have three contract funded researchers, Jo Aldridge, Chris Dearden and Betty Newton.

The Group's project work has included: a study of young carers in Nottingham; a follow-up study of young carers' parents; young carers' experiences in France, Sweden and Germany; a briefing pack for UK professionals; the first directory of young carers' projects in the UK; an audio training pack for UK professionals on young carers' issues; a resource and information pack for young carers; the production of principles and guidelines for young carers' befriending projects and an evaluation of the first young carers' respite care scheme. The Group's latest report, *Young Carers - The Facts*, is the largest study ever conducted on young carers and was published by *Community Care* magazine in November 1995.

In addition to this work members of the Group have presented papers and seminars at over 40 international, national and local conferences and have published numerous reports and articles for journals. Over the past three years the Group has been at the forefront of developing awareness of young carers' needs and rights amongst professionals and policy makers in the UK and abroad. Since its formation in 1992 the Group has received 14 externally funded contracts from local authorities, health authorities, voluntary and charitable organisations and trusts. It has also worked closely with the Department of Health's Social Services Inspectorate in raising awareness of young carers' issues. A number of documentaries have been made focusing on the work of the Group, including a 'World in Action' report broadcast in October 1995. Findings of the Group have also featured in every quality newspaper.

In 1997 the Group will commence two new projects, in partnership with the Carers National Association: a new edition of the *National Directory of Young Carers Projects* and national monitoring of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act.

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Introduction

This report charts the progress of a pilot befriending service for children who care. It is also the follow up to our initial research into young carers and befriending which culminated in *A Friend Indeed: The case for befriending young carers* (Aldridge and Becker, 1994). In this we defined a *model* for a befriending service from the recruitment of staff and volunteers, to implementing safeguards and policies (such as confidentiality and equal opportunities policies as well as guidelines for befrienders). If *A Friend Indeed...* was the theory behind befriending children as carers then the pilot study represents the practical application of such hypothesis.

Using the original study as our point of reference we set up a pilot scheme, appealed for and recruited volunteers to act as befrienders, matched those volunteers with the young carers and evaluated the progress of the relationships over a six month period - which included ongoing support and supervision for the befrienders.

Here we present the results of the pilot scheme from the initial recruitment procedures to the evaluation of the befrienders, support workers and young carers (and their families) using case studies, interviews and the results of questionnaire monitoring.

The information relating to the initial recruitment and training strategies included in this report is, we would argue, as relevant as the results of the befriender/young carer relationships themselves. Such detail, as outlined in the text and the appendices, provides important material for all those interested in setting up similar schemes for children who may want to adopt and adapt this information for their own use. It is imperative that anyone interested in implementing befriending services for children understands the importance and need for rigorous safeguards to protect children, volunteers and agency staff alike.

Section One: Procedure

1. Collaboration

We approached Southwell Diocesan Council for Family Care (see Box 1) who had extensive experience in working with children and their families as well as in volunteer recruitment. The agency had been involved in the consultation process during the research and compilation of *A Friend Indeed* (Aldridge and Becker, 1994) and had expressed an interest then of further collaboration with the YCRG. Following discussion with the agency they agreed to work alongside the YCRG, recruiting volunteers as well as offering ongoing support to the volunteer befrienders. As well as Family Care, we also worked alongside the Nottingham Young Carers Project and together we agreed recruitment, application and support procedures for the scheme.

Box 1

About Family Care:

Family Care is a professional adoption, family support, counselling and training agency, based on the Christian values of compassion, respect for others and concern for social justice. They work in partnership with the local authority and other agencies in offering professional, social work services to children and families and provide advice, information, counselling, advocacy and practical help to support families in difficulties. They work as an Approved Adoption Society providing a comprehensive adoption service alongside the local authority and other adoption agencies. They work with the clergy and congregations in the Diocese of Southwell, and with other denominations in Nottinghamshire to promote the interests of children and families. They have worked for Nottinghamshire Social Services providing Independent Visitors (volunteers) to work with children in the care of the local authority.

2. Recruitment

i) appeal for volunteers

Family Care appealed for volunteers from the following networks:

- Southwell Opportunities for Service (Diocesan volunteer scheme)

- Youth and Children's Worker at Diocesan Board of Education
- Former young carers
- Local Councils for Voluntary Service
- Appeal in Family Care's newsletter and parish magazines
- Local University - mature students.

As a result of the appeal five volunteers expressed an interest in attending an information evening.

ii) befriending scheme information evening

The five volunteers attended the Information Evening which included:

- Audio material including young carers case studies.
- Printed material about young carers issues, definitions, case studies and research data.
- Presentation by YCRG about the history and background of the scheme; research outcomes; needs of young carers; role of volunteer befrienders; training; objectives of the scheme.
- Presentation by Family Care Director about the recruitment and application process.
- Presentation by Nottingham Young Carers Project manager about working with young carers in the local area.
- Questions and answers.

Three volunteers wanted to take their applications further. The remaining two said they didn't feel confident to take on the responsibility of befriending children. Subsequently two more volunteers (who wanted to befriend as a couple) were located and made applications to become befrienders.

3. Application process

The volunteers were given application forms, which also included a Declaration of Criminal Offences and a Declaration of Health. Applicants were provided with information about the process and about the declarations, confidentiality etc. (see Appendix 1). Applicants were assured that the declaration of an offence would not automatically bar them from being considered as a befriender. The Declaration of Health was intended to advise Family Care where there might be a medical reason which might make it inappropriate for volunteers to become befrienders.

i) application forms

The application forms requested details relating to the applicant's:

- interest in becoming a befriender
- previous experience working with children and young people
- knowledge of the needs of people with disabilities, including any personal or professional experience of disability
- special interests, skills, leisure pursuits
- personal references - names, addresses and telephone numbers of two people who knew the applicant well (not family members)

ii) support worker

On receipt of the application forms a Family Care support worker was linked to each volunteer. The support worker would have a minimum of two visits/ meetings with volunteers and present a report (including the response by the applicant) to Panel. The report included information relating to:

- the applicant's perceived understanding of the role of befriender
- the applicant's perceived understanding of the needs of young carers
- the applicant's perceived understanding of the parents' perspective
- the applicant's perceived motivation

A Support worker would also visit one personal referee.

iii) police and health checks

Police and health checks were initiated prior to the panel interviews. Details relating to the applicant's Declaration of Health were discussed with Family Care's medical advisor.

iv) references

Referees were approached and requested to complete questionnaires about the applicant. Questions related to:

- The referee's relationship to the applicant
- How long the referee had known the applicant
- How the referee perceived the applicant's ability to relate to children and young people (including comments relating to the applicant's honesty, reliability and experience with children)

- Other life experiences relevant to the applicant's role as befriender
- Knowledge of the applicant's understanding of needs of people with disabilities
- Other comments

Support workers also made personal visits to one referee (per applicant) to discuss the application in more detail. The support worker then provided a written report about the interview.

4. Panel Interviews

The role of the appointment panel was to consider all the applications and to make a decision about whether to appoint or not. To assist in this, prior to the Panel interviews, panel members had access to:

- Application forms
- Support workers' reports (including the responses by the applicants)
- Completed questionnaires from two personal referees
- Written interviews with personal referees
- Reports from the medical advisor

The applicant and support worker attended Panel together. Panel members consisted of: the Director of Family Care and one staff member (not a support worker), a local retired head teacher, Manager of the Nottingham Young Carer's Project, a member of the YCRG and research manager (as observer only). All Panel members had met and agreed questions prior to the interviews. Panel members followed equal opportunity principles interviewing guidelines.

Questions to the applicants were intended to gain an insight into their understanding of young carer's issues, including the young caring experience and young carers' needs; issues of confidentiality; the parents' perspective; race issues and the qualities the applicants possessed as potential befrienders. Interviews lasted approximately half an hour.

Applicants were to be advised of the outcome of their application by letter within 48 hours of the interview. Appointment would also depend on the outcome of the criminal record check. All applicants were considered

suitable for the role of befriender and were appointed (see Box 2 for profiles of the befrienders).

Box 2

Profiles of Befrienders

(all names have been changed to protect identities)

Jane and Anthony, 32 and 33, live in the city. Jane is a teacher and Anthony is a PGCE student. Both have extensive experience of working with children and young people as well as people with disabilities, both in a professional capacity and as volunteers.

Reasons for wanting to become a befriender: (Anthony): "Young carers seem to have responsibilities upon them that limit their "growing space". I would be glad to be a part of protecting that space for them and sometimes sharing it with them."

(Jane): "I was attracted by what I perceive as the vision of the project: not 'taking over' in the caring role, not an 'official' and not undermining the young carers' relationships at home, but supporting them within their situation, enabling them to enjoy reprieves of childhood 'fun' or simply to be listened to."

Jonathan, 23, lives in the city. Jonathan is a volunteer and a law student. He has extensive voluntary experience working with children and young carers in a variety of settings, as well as working with people with disabilities.

Reasons for wanting to become a befriender: "I have three main reasons for wishing to become a befriender i) my own experience of growing up with an elderly father in which I had certain caring responsibilities and although these responsibilities were limited, and certainly don't sound as demanding as those required of the children highlighted I am aware of how this limited the parameters within which I could be a child. I feel that because of this insight I would like to be part of the support provided for young carers. ii) My academic background is in law and I am interested in fields of law that overlap with social work. I would therefore like some experience of the perspective social work brings to situations. iii) Because of the first two reasons, I wish to support an innovative idea that responds to this discovered situation of need, and contribute to its refinement and development."

Box 2 Cont...

Karen, 22, lives in the city. Karen is a support worker/ care assistant. Karen has personal, professional and voluntary experience of working with children, young people and people with disabilities.

Reasons for wanting to become a befriender: "I had friends at school who were in similar situations and having lived with a terminally ill grandmother myself for five years and seen the effects on my family, I feel I have some understanding, though minimal, of the carer's position. I would like to support someone on a one-to-one basis. I enjoyed an active social life during my teenage years and I would like to play a part in aiding someone else's social development as well as giving them some kind of support in their situation."

Colette, 24, lives in the city. Colette is a nurse. She has experience of young carers through her professional work and as a volunteer, and she has worked with people with chronic illness and disabilities.

Reasons for wanting to become a befriender: "I recognise what an important role these young people play and how little support they actually receive. In my work as a nurse in palliative care I have had experience of these young people, particularly one family who were the obvious carers for their terminally ill mother. Although supported by family they were given very little credit even, and little support by "official services. I feel very strongly that children should be allowed to be children. If this was only once a week then I feel I would be able to play a small part in helping them in their difficult role."

5. Training

All applicants and support workers were invited to attend a training session which was conducted by the YCRG; all applicants and support workers attended. The training schedule included:

Introduction

History and background of the young carers pilot befriending scheme.

The work of the Young Carers Research Group.

The role of Family Care.

Homework!!

Essential reading material.

Video presentation

Young carers and their stories.

Progression of the pilot scheme

Next steps - further training, matching and ...

Evaluation - what's involved over the next six months*.

Young carers issues

The effects of caring on children.

Medical issues.

The role of professionals.

Role of Befriender

Expectations

Skills

Benefits and rewards

Nature of relationship - boundaries and parameters, rules and guidelines*.

Confidentiality*

Support network - social worker, researcher

Befrienders support network.

Relationship with parent/ s/ guardian of young carer.

Role of Family Care

Support

Expense claims

Questions

* = including handouts

The training session was intended to prepare befrienders (and their support workers) as far as possible for the role of befriender and the supervision of that role. It was also intended to increase the understanding of the aim of the project. We felt that although it was important to ensure the befrienders were well prepared to carry out their befriending roles with young carers, we did not wish to restrict them in their friendships by 'overloading' them with information and too many 'rules'. They were given copies of the confidentiality policy and the befriending rules and guidelines (see appendices 2 and 3 respectively) which they were asked to observe and refer to at all times. However, it is important to emphasise that the nature of the project was as a *pilot* scheme and thus one from which we hoped to learn important and valuable lessons.

Further issues that arose from the training session:

Insurance - car insurance and personal liability. No special steps to be taken in terms of car insurance except for car owners to inform their insurance companies that they would be working as volunteers and travelling with children. Personal liability insurance was covered by Family Care's own policy.

Support network: The befrienders were told that they could set up their own informal network of support between themselves, independent of the support offered by family care and the research manager, if they felt this was necessary.

6. The Young Carers and Their Families

Prior to the recruitment of the befrienders we met with the Nottingham Young Carers Project Manager to discuss possible young carers (and their families) who might be interested in taking part in the pilot scheme. The project Manager then approached the families who she thought might be suitable. We then met with the young carers, their families and the Project Manager to discuss the project, the evaluation process and any concerns they might have about the befriending scheme. In all, four families (see Box 3) were involved in discussions about the role of the various organisations involved (Family Care, YCRG, the Young Carers Project) and about the role of volunteer befrienders. All the families involved were given information relating to the confidentiality policy and the rules and guidelines for volunteer befrienders (see Appendices 2 and 3).

On the whole, all the families were keen to be involved in the project. Unfortunately, due to the unavoidable time lapse between the young carers agreeing to take part in the scheme and being matched with befrienders, two young carers withdrew from the scheme as their needs had changed during that time. Two more families were approached and agreed to take part in the pilot scheme.

Although we asked the parents and the young carers about the sort of qualities they might expect in a befriender, we recognised our limitations in meeting specific needs due to the small number of volunteers available. However, as neither the children nor the parents were specific about their needs (although the children were concerned that the befriender should not

be 'too old' which was not a problem as all the volunteers were young adults) this proved unproblematic.

Box 3

Profiles of the young carers and their families

(all names have been changed to protect identities)

Kevin (matched with Colette), age 9; one sister 2 years old. Lives with sister and Mum Pauline who has epilepsy and regular fits. Kevin cares for his mother during her fits. Pauline does not work outside the home.

Julian (matched with Jonathan), age 9; no siblings. Lives with Mum, Trisha, who has epilepsy. Julian cares for his mother during her fits. Trisha works as a freelance hairdresser.

Neil, Stuart, Ella and Kate (matched with Jane and Anthony) ages, 10, 8, 7 and 3 respectively. Live with Mum, Sarah, who suffered a stroke during her last pregnancy and has impaired mobility. Sarah does not work outside the home.

Sally (matched with Karen), age 12; sister 14 months old. Lives with Mum, Beryl who is paralysed from the neck down due to a severe car accident when she was a child. Beryl does not work outside the home.

7. Matching

We discussed 'matching' with the Young Carers Project Manager and agreed on which children would be matched with which volunteers. Family Care support workers were then given brief outlines of the young carers' cases and circumstances, in order to assist them in their support and supervision of the befrienders.

8. Introductions

The befrienders were introduced to the young carers and their families by the Young Carers Project Manager at the young carers' homes. The project manager then left the befrienders with the families in order for them to get to

know one another and to discuss future activities and contact times with the children. The first visit/ activity was arranged as well as the frequency of future visits/ contact.

9. Role of Family Care Support Worker

The support workers would only offer support and supervision to the befrienders, and would have regular contact with them. They did not have any contact with the young carers or their families, unless confidentiality, and the need to break it arose and then the agency would be involved via the Director of Family Care. (For an outline of the support worker's full role requirements see Appendix 4)

10. Evaluation

Following the introductions between the befrienders and the young carers we interviewed them (separately) to evaluate the success of the introductory sessions. Hereafter, evaluation was based on monthly reports. Befrienders completed evaluation forms (see Appendix 5) every four weeks which included questions about the progress of their relationship with the young carers and their families, as well as the progress of their relationship with the support workers. These monthly accounts were then followed by telephone interviews to monitor progress and to assess any problems and/ or concerns. Support workers also submitted evaluation forms (see Appendix 6) about their contact with the befrienders and also about how they perceived the befriending relationship to be progressing. This was then followed by a verbal interview to check on progress.

Evaluation of the young carers involved four weekly interviews with them and their parents (separately) to monitor progress of the befriending relationship, the nature and extent of contact time and visits as well as to discuss any problems or concerns etc.

After six months the project was finally evaluated. Interviews with the young carers and their families were conducted and the befrienders and support workers were asked to submit final reports giving an overview of the scheme.

Section Two: Results

1. Introductions

“The kids haven't shut up talking about them [befrienders] and they really enjoyed themselves. They were kissing and cuddling Jane and Anthony before they left.” Sarah

The Nottingham Young Carers Project manager took each befriender to the young carers' homes for the introductory sessions. Then the project manager left in order for the befrienders and the families to become better acquainted.

The parents were keen to allow their children to participate in the scheme in order to give the children space and leisure time away from the caring environment. This also gave the parents much needed time alone which they could enjoy knowing their children were enjoying themselves.

Generally, the children were keen to have the opportunity to take part in outside activities and to have some time away from the family home and caring environment.

The befrienders and young carers

All the introductions were successful beyond our expectations as the befrienders stayed considerably longer with the respective families than we had anticipated and all the befrienders combined the introductory session with either a home based activity with the young carers or play outside the family home. The success of the introductory sessions was perhaps indicative of the time and effort that was spent on the recruitment and training of the befrienders before they were introduced to the families.

Both the befrienders and the young carers (as well as their families) gave positive accounts of the introductory sessions. The befrienders focused on how the young carers had responded to them i.e. the young carers were 'talkative', 'very easy going', 'keen to be involved'. Whereas during interviews the young carers focused more on activities and future outings. They had to be encouraged to comment about the befriender's personality (although this is perhaps not surprising considering this early stage in the befriending

relationship, it proved to be a consistent feature of the children's conversations throughout the befriending period).

During interview, for example, Julian was very keen to talk about his future activities: 'I'd like to go bowling and skating and I've not been to the pictures. Also we could go to Meadowhall'.

And Sally: 'I do like her, but I don't really know her. I want to go to the pictures'.

The befrienders were clearly aware of the need to get on well with the parents and other family members. The befrienders were very sensitive of the need to involve parents at all times especially when making arrangements for activities away from the family home. For example, from the outset, Jane and Anthony were conscious of the need to discuss outings in relation to the *four* children in the family. It had initially been agreed with the mother (Sarah) that Jane and Anthony would only be able to take the three eldest children out as they couldn't accommodate the youngest child (Kate) in their car. Although it had been agreed before the introductions took place that the befriending would only involve the three oldest children, Jane and Anthony realised the need to emphasise this point again with Sarah, as well as the need to make some concessions:

"We took time to explain to Sarah that although we couldn't take Kate out each time we would try and do some home based activities in which we might be able to include Kate."

The parents

Following the introductions, all the parents seemed more than happy with the meetings as well as with the befrienders themselves. Unlike their children, the parents focused more on the personality of the befriender and whether their child/ren would get along with them. Based only on the introductory session, the parents were able to comment on their children's responses to the befrienders:

"They're a lovely couple, the kids haven't shut up talking about them and they really enjoyed themselves." Sarah about Jane and Anthony

"He likes her I can tell. In fact he said to her last night 'I want your phone number'." Pauline about Colette

The parents also spoke about the activities the befrienders had initiated and planned during the introductory visit and were obviously pleased that the befrienders had engaged in some activity or play during this session:

“Jonathan was sound. Very patient. He sat making puppets on strings with Julian. He didn't just sit and read, he really did things with him.”
Trisha about Jonathan

The parents were also keen for their children to go out and enjoy themselves on future visits with the befrienders as it would give them (the parents) much needed respite. As Pauline said: 'Obviously it will give me a break and I'll enjoy it all the more because I'll know he's having a good time'.

It was very encouraging that the parents were so positive about the befrienders at this early stage. It was clear that all the parents were reassured that they were to be involved in the planning and negotiation of all their children's outings and activities with the befrienders. We recognised the importance of reassuring the parents from the outset that they would be in control of the befriending relationship in the final instance and that they would always be able to end the relationship at any time if they felt this was necessary.

Support workers

Although the support workers discussed the introductory visits with the befrienders and recognised how successful they had been, their task of offering on-going supervision and assistance had not yet fully begun.

2. Relationships

Setting the scene

Contact time, visits and activities were organised and negotiated between the befrienders, young carers and the parents. The befrienders took the young carers out for a range of activities such as swimming, ice skating, bowling, shopping and going to the cinema. Most of the befrienders said that they felt restricted in their activities at first as their initial visits took place during the winter months. This did not seem to affect the children as they consistently looked forward to every visit.

Generally outings/ visits lasted between 2 - 4 hours each time. Very little contact was initiated by the young carers; the befrienders generally initiated both telephone and personal contact. The befrienders had little contact with other family members during their visits apart from parents and siblings and none of the befrienders had any contact with welfare professionals. The need for befrienders to break confidentiality did not arise throughout the befriending period.

The progression of relationships: case studies

Befriender: Karen. Young Carer: Sally

The introduction between Karen and Sally had gone well. Karen said she felt she had got on well with both Sally and her family:

“It was good and when [the project manager] left it was fine. I've arranged to go out with Sally on Saturday. She's quite talkative, happy to chat away and Mum talked as well as a man who was there although I didn't know who he was.”

Both Sally and her mother seemed happy with their involvement in the scheme and with Karen as a befriender. Sally was keen to plan her next outing:

“I do like her, although I don't really know her yet. I want to go to the pictures with her.” Sally

“They're going out on Saturday. I think they'll get on once they get to know each other.” Mum, Beryl

In light of this promising start it was disappointing to both Karen and her support worker that Sally withdrew from the relationship and thus from the project. Following their first outing (when Karen took Sally shopping and to the cinema) Karen tried to set a date for another visit, but Sally was evasive and refused to set a specific date. When Karen tried telephoning Sally to organise a visit Sally handed the phone to a man (who Karen did not know) and he told Karen that Sally did not want to see her anymore, nor have any further involvement in the project. Karen elected to speak to the Young Carers project manager rather than try and persuade Sally to discuss her reasons for her withdrawal. However, both Sally and her family were

reluctant to explain, even to the project manager, why they wanted to withdraw from the befriending project.

During interview, Sally's mother said: 'I don't know why she pulled out. She never really said'. Sally told the researcher: 'I did like the befriender, but I wasn't really bothered about it. We only went out once. I weren't really bothered about anything'.

Karen felt that Sally had enjoyed her company and their first outing, and so was surprised when Sally withdrew from their friendship:

"I was told by the young carers project manager that Sally had said she couldn't be bothered with a befriender. I wanted to get to the bottom of why she said this as I am sure she enjoyed our time together and I can't understand it. But obviously she has made her decision and I have to go with that."

The reasons for the family's withdrawal remain unclear. Karen was keen to be matched with another young carer, but this wasn't feasible in the remaining time available.

Overall progression of the relationship:

Despite the positive early indications, this relationship did not progress due to Sally's withdrawal from the scheme.

Befrienders: Jane and Anthony. Young Carers: Neil, Stuart, Ella and Kate.

From the outset Jane and Anthony had lengthy discussions with Mum, Sarah, about including the youngest child, Kate in their visits. As there were transport difficulties and often the three older children were actually caring for Kate much of the time (and thus wanted a break from *all* caring duties), it was agreed that Kate would not be included in the trips away from the family home. Jane and Anthony tried to arrange their contact with the family so that every alternate visit they did home-based activities and thus tried to include Kate.

This situation with Kate proved problematic throughout the befriending period. Essentially it led to communication problems and discrepancies between the accounts of the befrienders, the children and Mum, Sarah. Although the befrienders seemed to feel that the relationship was progressing well and running quite smoothly at first, the young carers and the mother

(although happy with the befrienders themselves) often complained that the befrienders didn't visit very often (and didn't include Kate when they did visit). This was difficult to corroborate as Jane and Anthony said they visited regularly. However, the children and the mother didn't seem to feel this was either often enough or consistent with Jane and Anthony's promises.

Jane:

"I don't feel we're doing anything spectacularly wonderful; Sarah's so positive and they've done all the hard work for us. She really has a great relationship with the children. We don't take them out every week, but we have contact every week."

Sarah:

"They've cancelled for the last couple of weeks and the kids are getting fed up with it. They're supposed to be coming on Friday. The kids are getting as they don't want to go out because they don't involve Kate. They're a pleasant couple though."

It was apparent throughout the relationship that the issue over Kate would be problematic and it seemed that Sarah was never really happy with the fact that Kate wasn't included in trips out (even though she had agreed Kate could not be included before the befriending started). She may have conveyed her disappointment over Kate's exclusion to the other children, as they talked about this during interview, but never mentioned it during their trips out with Jane and Anthony. During interview Sarah did say that she wanted a break from *all* her children and in fact she did manage to engineer a situation where Kate went out with the befrienders and the children on a couple of their outings.

Jane:

"We've taken Kate out but it wasn't our decision. She was in her coat when we arrived and I think Mum wanted her out. It was a local trip so I suppose it was OK."

This occurred again on a later visit. Anthony:

"We were told Kate was coming with us. It wasn't talked about. That's been the main issue."

Jane and Anthony seemed to cope with the situation over Kate well and didn't have any conflict with Sarah or the children over it, despite their misgivings about taking Kate with them. It was clear that Sarah needed a break from all the children and they from their caring duties so Jane and Anthony tried to accommodate Sarah's needs as far as possible. They also coped well with trying to befriend *four* children.

Jane:

"It's no more of a burden befriending four children than we recognised when we began. We both realise that we put a lot more time into them than other children we have a natural friendship with. But they're great kids. I don't know whether they say the same that it's all going well. They've been really friendly. Outings are quite a time commitment it's true, especially since there is not a great deal going on in their village so there's a lot of travelling and at times we have felt like we'd like to have a simple neutral ground to take the children. The children are also car sick. It's a big commitment, but that's right. It should be."

Despite the problem over the youngest child, the children enjoyed their outings and seemed to get on well with Jane and Anthony from the start. The children looked forward to their visits and were keen to see more of their befrienders.

Neil:

"They're good fun and we love going out with them. We wish they'd come more often, but they have to see other people as well they told us."

Sarah:

"They're a lovely couple, the kids haven't shut up talking about them and they really enjoy themselves when they're out."

Once again, during interviews the children were especially keen to talk about their activities:

"We've been swimming and it's great fun when we go. At Christmas they came and they bought us Ker Plunk." Neil

"We enjoy going out with them. We've been bowling, swimming, to the Charlie Chalk factory last week. It was great." Ella

"I like Jane and Anthony. We do things at home." Kate

Although, at times, Sarah and the children seemed to be giving different impressions of the progression of the befriending relationship during interview than in their conversations with the befrienders (i.e. visits weren't often enough, the befrienders often cancelled), Jane and Anthony's reports indicated that the children were relaxed, easy going and keen to enjoy themselves when they were out. The children certainly never conveyed any of their concerns (about Kate or the infrequency of visits) to the befrienders. As we have said, Sarah's need for a break herself may have been relayed to the children as they only discussed Kate's exclusion as a problem during interview when their mother was present (and not to their befrienders). Or it may simply have been that the children felt unable to talk to Jane and Anthony about this. Certainly, the befrienders were unaware of the family's concerns, and their ongoing reports suggested that the relationship was progressing very well:

"Things have continued to be very easy, relaxed and positive. The children are eager to see us, keen to do anything and very cheerful."

"There has not been any intense or deep and meaningful problem-focused conversations. We've just let them choose the level - which is delightfully chirpy."

"They talk very readily about anything and respond sensibly to deadlines, requests and very low key rules and regulations (i.e. who sits in the front of the car)."

"Sarah is extremely warm and positive. It feels like she'd like us to take the children for longer and she jokes about this."

"[the children] are warm and open towards us; are excited to see us and like talking on the phone when we ring. They seem to enjoy their trips out and have made advances in their swimming."

"We feel we are establishing an easy relationship with them. They are a pleasure to be with and they are well behaved when they're out."

Jane and Anthony clearly recognised their developing relationship with the children over the befriending period. They were especially pleased with their relationship with Stuart who had been very shy and reserved with them initially. Over time they observed not only his growing confidence with them on a personal level, but also his advances in other areas, particularly during sports.

Anthony:

“They seem to have made advances in their swimming, and Stuart particularly has shown a determination to continue learning and this was good for his confidence.”

Overall progression of the relationship:

The relationship progressed well between the children and the befrienders, despite the difficulties in establishing close relationships with so many children and despite the ongoing problems over the youngest child, Kate. It was clear that the children enjoyed their trips out as well as Jane and Anthony's company. The befriending also provided a very welcome break for Mum Sarah (although she would have liked the befriending to have included all four children) who had no outside support and no opportunity for a break from the children or from being cared for by them. Jane and Anthony were able to observe the children's developing confidence both physically and personally.

Befriender: Colette. Young Carer: Kevin

From the outset Kevin seemed to respond to Colette well. Even Kevin's mother, Pauline, seemed surprised that he had immediately taken to Colette. During the introductory session Kevin had asked for her telephone number and wanted to plan their first outing.

Kevin's enthusiasm for his outings with Colette continued throughout the befriending period, despite the fact that he went out with his friends on a regular basis (and despite Colette's bouts of illness which disrupted the relationship). At the time Kevin and his family were approached to take part in the befriending scheme, Kevin had few opportunities for activities outside the home. However, in the time between them agreeing to take part and the befriending actually starting, Kevin's network of friends had widened

considerably. Despite this, his contact and activities with Colette continued to be important to him:

Colette:

“We get along fine. He obviously looks forward to going out and I'm enjoying it. It helps also that Pauline is so laid back.”

Initially, Pauline had been very keen to ensure that Kevin would get on with his befriender and that he would enjoy himself during the befriending period. From the outset, Pauline had expressed her need to be very much involved in all decisions about outings and activities. Following the introductory session, Pauline was reassured both that Kevin and Colette would get on well and that she would always be involved in planning their trips out.

Pauline:

“I'm really happy with the scheme. Kevin really enjoys his time with Colette. There are no problems. He doesn't have to tell me he enjoys it. I can tell.”

Like all the children, during interview Kevin was keen to talk about the details of his outings with Colette - 'Some of the time we've been to MacDonalds, the pictures, bowling'.

However, partly because Colette was aware of Kevin's growing network of friends, she wondered at times how essential her visits were to him. Indeed, at first, Colette clearly underestimated the importance of her visits to Kevin, but over time she began to realise how much he enjoyed their one-to-one contact:

“Kevin is keen to keep going out. He asks if he can go out the next day when I've been. I do realise that he seems to enjoy going out with one particular person. We have seen many of his friends when we're out and he is not embarrassed that he is with me.”

As the relationship progressed Kevin had begun to open up to Colette and to talk about some of his worries to her, particularly about the bullying he was experiencing at school.

Colette:

“On one trip out bowling Kevin met some of the boys who bullied him at school. He tried to run off. I looked after him and we talked about it and when I took him home we talked about it with his mum.”

Despite this progress the relationship was disrupted by Colette's persistent illness which she felt had an impact on the progression of her relationship with Kevin. Certainly the fact that she was ill for a month midway through the befriending period and again for the final month meant the relationship lacked consistency and Colette said that as a result, Kevin would sometimes forget she was coming:

“During the time of the project I was unwell alot of the time. I was off work and waiting to be sorted out at the hospital. I feel that this will obviously have reduced the effect of the project.”

Overall progression of the relationship:

This relationship had the potential to be very successful but was unable to progress to its fullest potential due to the befriender's illness and inability to meet regularly with the young carer.

Befriender: Jonathan. Young carer: Julian

This relationship above all the others perhaps provides us with the greatest insight into how important one-to-one friendships can be for young carers. Julian quickly grew very fond of Jonathan and eagerly looked forward to every visit. From the outset it was clear that Julian was going to get on with Jonathan as they spent a considerable amount of time together. Even during the introductory session they spent a couple of hours doing art work and making puppets. Jonathan later reported: 'Julian told me no one had ever sat down and done this sort of stuff with him before'.

Julian was a very reserved child who was always reluctant to talk during interview. Throughout the befriending period he never responded as well in interview as he clearly did during his meetings with Jonathan. Indeed, up until the time the relationship was due to finish, it was only through Jonathan and Trisha's (Julian's mother) accounts (as well as the accounts of the support worker) that we were able to perceive just how well the befriending relationship was progressing.

Jonathan:

"This month we went swimming again and ice skating. We're getting to know each other quite well now and have had quite a lot of fun messing about. These trips made me feel that there is real benefit in the scheme. I can see how excited Julian gets about being taken out and how it is really good for him to get the chance to do these activities. He really learns quickly and that's really fulfilling to see."

After only two months Jonathan could tell just how important the friendship had become to Julian:

"I hadn't realised how important the relationship was to Julian until there was a mix up about what time I was to arrive. Julian had been waiting for an hour and was in tears because he thought I wasn't coming. I arrived at the time I had agreed and he ran out to meet me and gave me a huge hug. He said that day about how much it meant to him to have somebody spending time with him on things he liked doing, like his art work and things like that. It scared me a little bit as I don't want him to be hurt when the time is up, but it did make me feel pleased about how the relationship is working out."

Another indication of how well the relationship was progressing on both sides was the increasing amount of time they spent together during visits. Initially weekly contact lasted between two and three hours, but this soon increased to five hour sessions and Jonathan was often invited to stay and have a meal with Julian and Trisha.

Although during interview Julian's conversation focused mainly on their activities, over time he did start to talk more personally about Jonathan:

"I like Jonathan, we've made puppets and we went ice skating. It's good he's a man because if it was ladies or people who are married they probably wouldn't be able to skate."

Later:

"I like going ice skating, swimming and we're going to Meadow Hall...Mum says if I behave. I like Jonathan. I enjoy being with him."

The three way relationship between Jonathan, Julian and Trisha was complex at times and problems did emerge mainly as a result of Trisha's various strategies to cope with Julian's behaviour . It was clear that Trisha found it

difficult coping with her epilepsy, being a lone parent and the other relationships in her life (she had an older son who lived with her parents except during the school holidays when he lived with Trisha and Julian). During interview Trisha often complained about the problems she had coping with Julian's uncontrollable behaviour. Although Jonathan never experienced such behavioural problems in Julian when they were together, he realised Trisha and Julian had difficulties in their relationship and tried not to get involved. However, Jonathan said he sometimes felt he was taking on some of Trisha's 'parenting' duties:

"Because sometimes I don't think Trisha much enjoys being a parent because it traps her in, and I think this sometimes has a negative impact on Julian's development. She often puts him down in front of me and tells him off and threatens him and I think he needs a lot of encouragement, which I try to give him during visits."

Jonathan also said that at times he felt the boundaries of the befriending relationship were compromised by Trisha's need for respite. Thus, he was often asked to stay in with Julian while Trisha went out. Jonathan also felt that Trisha sometimes manipulated the befriending relationship.

It was certainly clear from the interviews with Trisha that, unknown to Jonathan, she was using the befriending relationship in her 'reward and punishment' strategy of coping with Julian's difficult behaviour. Although she was quite open about this during interview, she failed to explain the situation to Jonathan. Trisha:

"[Jonathan] is brilliant. How he puts up with Julian I don't know. He's just uncontrollable and I break before him and start fitting all over the place. I picked Jonathan up last night and he took Julian to MacDonalds and the ice rink. Julian's just full of it and he enjoys it so much. I'm working on a reward and punishment system. If he's bad I take the telly watching off him, pocket money and also it will include Jonathan too. Jonathan will have to bear with me. He's nine; he's got to stop this behaviour. He can't put me under. I've had enough. One night I couldn't restrain him and I will be fetching the social workers and this time it won't be respite I'll say to them 'take him off me for good'."

Although Jonathan didn't know that Trisha was using the withdrawal of the befriending relationship as a form of punishment for Julian when he misbehaved, he was aware that at times there were communication difficulties between himself and Julian and he couldn't account for this:

"I've been a bit confused. We've arranged things and they keep falling through at their end and I wonder what Trisha tells Julian. I feel there might be some game playing going on. When we speak on the phone Julian doesn't say much and I make the arrangements with Trisha and I wonder what she's telling him because he seems to expect me at different times."

Julian was also clearly confused by this situation. For example, during one interview he said he hadn't seen Jonathan for a long time and that Jonathan was supposed to be ringing him but never had (Jonathan said this wasn't the case, all their outings were arranged when they met). Julian seemed quite distressed and asked the researcher to intervene:

"I enjoy going out with him. He's supposed to be ringing me but he hasn't. Are you going to phone him now? Will you give him a message? Tell him to ring me. Now! Please."

Despite these problems the relationship between Jonathan and Julian continued to progress well. Trisha was also keen for the relationship to continue and was increasingly aware of the positive effect the befriending was having on Julian:

"Julian absolutely idolises Jonathan. It has been a success and a great help for me. It's only a few hours but it's a help. I can't do the ice skating and swimming because of my epilepsy and somebody like Jonathan can and he has the patience."

Later:

"Julian's got attached to Jonathan and it's had something to do with Jonathan that he's settled down. He seems more grown up and has more friends. He's enjoyed being with Jonathan and his visits. If I spoke to Jonathan... I don't know...if I agree to fund it, maybe he'll agree to keep seeing Julian."

Although Jonathan had agreed to keep in touch informally with Julian once the befriending period was over (in order to try and make the ending less painful for Julian) there would be no further visits as Jonathan was leaving to work in America. Because Jonathan had been increasingly aware of Julian's attachment to him he had tried to prepare Julian, in advance, for the end of

the befriending relationship. This proved to be a painful process for both of them. Jonathan said:

“One lesson I've learnt - it's not so much how many times you see him as much as the long term nature of befriending which is important for him. It's important for Julian to have a relationship that goes on for a long time.”

When Julian talked about the end of the relationship during interviews he seemed to find it hard to accept that he and Jonathan wouldn't be going out anymore, even though he knew Jonathan was leaving to work abroad:

“I haven't been ice skating for a long time. I like swimming better and I went to the pictures with Jonathan for the first time to see Toy Story and I really enjoyed it and I want to go again - I really want to go. Jonathan's going to America. He's told me all about it. Will I have another person? I'll miss him.”

Overall progression of the relationship:

This relationship progressed very well despite some difficulties which emerged as a result of the conflict between Julian and his mother. Julian grew very attached to Jonathan in the befriending period and found the prospect of ending the relationship very difficult. Mum, Trisha also valued Jonathan's commitment to the relationship as well as the impact he had on Julian's behaviour.

3. Support workers

Three support workers were involved in the project and were each assigned a befriender to offer both support and supervision. During the six month befriending period they would have contact and meet with the befrienders on a regular basis (at least once a month) and would be available in case of emergencies. Support workers were also asked to complete evaluation forms which included questions about their contact with befrienders and their perceptions about the progression of the befriender/young carer relationship.

Communication between befrienders and support workers sometimes proved difficult because of the different work schedules involved (some of the befrienders worked shifts and were difficult to contact). However, all the befrienders were aware of the need for personal support and supervision and

the relationships between them and the support workers, on the whole, were successful.

The measure of the success of the *supportive* relationship between befrienders and support workers did, however, seem dependent on three factors: the level of support required; the compatibility of the befriender and the support worker; and certain methodological issues.

Generally, the befrienders didn't seem to require a great deal of support in terms of their relationships with the young carers and their families. This is perhaps indicative of good recruitment and training procedures and the fact that few problems arose between the befrienders and the young carers. However, some of the befrienders clearly felt compelled to meet with their support worker even though they didn't feel the need for support.

One befriender said: 'I didn't really get the point of meeting and it didn't seem that [the support worker] did either. Maybe it was just because no problems have arisen yet'. Another reported: 'At present I feel our visits are going OK and do not particularly have any problems to discuss with a support worker'. Even the support workers themselves acknowledged that they sometimes felt superfluous to needs, as one of them said: 'It is always more difficult when things are going well to know what to talk about'.

However, it would be easy to underestimate the support workers' presence as a 'safety net' (in case of problems or emergencies they would always be available to offer assistance) and as an essential supervisory safeguard. In short, the support workers may not have always been needed, but at least they were there.

In relation to compatibility, some of the support worker/befriender pairings worked well, others not so well. One befriender said:

"There were some good things about it, in terms of support and affirmation about what I was doing or should do, but it could have been so much better."

However, the assessment stage was clearly a testing ground for compatibility and the fact that, in this case, the befriender's support worker had not carried

out his assessment may have accounted for the fact that their relationship took some time to become established.

Befriender:

“When the befriending actually started my support worker and me were relative strangers. This may have been a factor.”

Support worker:

“One disadvantage may have been that I did not do his assessment and therefore to meet him as a supervisor took longer to establish a relationship.”

When they were compatible the befriender/support worker relationship worked well:

“During our report/ interview process we felt very warm and confident towards [her] feeling she listens well, is perceptive and would give more advice if we requested. She also shares a good sense of humour.” Befriender

and later:

“She is great - very approachable and easy to talk to. We had a meeting arranged for last week, but she had to cancel it. It's been rearranged. We do feel we can contact her if we need to and we feel well supported.”

“They are very open and use 'supervision' and agency contact thoughtfully and appropriately, therefore my job becomes easier.”

Support worker

Methodologically there may have been factors which served to impede the support workers in their supportive (as opposed to their supervisory) roles. For example, although it was decided that the support workers should have no contact with the young carers and their families and thus would know few details about them - except for basic biographical information, anything else would be divulged by the befrienders during meetings - this may, on occasion, have adversely affected the support workers' ability to fulfil their role to its fullest potential.

For example, in the case of the young carer who withdrew from the scheme, because the support worker had very little information about the young carer and her family, it was very difficult for her to offer her full support so early on in the befriending relationship when it was needed most (i.e. when the relationship ended abruptly). As a consequence, the befriender felt let down by her support worker's approach during this time:

“She was good at listening to what I had to say and she helped me think more about the possible reasons for Sally's decision. However, I did find that she was making some quick judgements on the family without knowing enough facts and I felt she was categorising the family and their problems which wasn't very helpful for me. I felt it wasn't her place to judge the family. She should have just concentrated on how I perceived it and helping me to think through my feelings and perceptions.”

However, as we have said, the support worker had very little information to help her support the befriender fully:

“It was difficult to tell how the relationship was progressing between them both after only one visit and my one meeting with her [the befriender].”

It became apparent that, at times, the role of the researcher in the scheme also restricted the progression of the supportive relationship between befrienders and support workers. Inevitably, because the researcher was familiar with the young carers and their families involved in the scheme, during interviews the befrienders would often use time with the researcher as an additional form of support. This proved problematic for some of the support workers, as one explained:

“We discussed how a supervisor can help in being available to discuss difficulties and he [the befriender] was able to understand how his contact with you [the researcher] had left me in the dark about the situation with the young carer.”

So, the relationship between befrienders and support workers was successful to varying degrees depending on compatibility, the level of support required and certain methodological factors. However, the *supervisory* role carried out by the support workers was a crucial one and in every case was very successful. It was clear from ongoing evaluation that all the support workers

closely followed the progress of the befriending relationship and met regularly with the volunteers.

Section Three: Summary and Recommendations

This pilot befriending scheme was successful both in its execution and in the outcomes of the various relationships involved, including the befriender/young carer partnerships and the associations between befrienders and support workers.

In assessing the success of the various affiliations we must, in the first instance, accredit the efficacy of the scheme's formulation. Indeed, one of the lessons we can learn from this project is that design and implementation - effective recruitment, appointment and training procedures - are as important as the outcomes of the relationships themselves.

Creating friendships for children - in this instance young carers - is pioneering work and this project has provided us with great insight into the amount of time and commitment needed in making such friendships work.

None of the relationships involved in the befriending scheme was straightforward, but they survived the six month 'test' period thanks to a number of significant contributions, which of course included the young carers and their families and the volunteers as well as agency staff and support workers. In relation to the latter, even if some of the support workers and befrienders didn't establish an immediate rapport, the assistance offered was both positive and consistent. Supervision was effected commendably and ensured none of the relationships became either self-governing or completely autonomous of the agency itself.

Interestingly, all the befrienders initially questioned their significance in the lives of the young carers and thus the effectiveness of the befriending partnerships. We could argue that this was merely a reflection of their *adult* perspective of the befriending relationship - a perspective which clearly underestimated the level of enjoyment the children derived from the befriending and its associated activities. Thus, to the befrienders, the relatively little time given over to their relationships with the children (on average 2- 3 hours per week) was clearly a significant factor in the children's lives. The 'time out' that the befriending represented for the young carers was clearly very important to them, as the case studies reveal.

The break from caring the children gained from the befriending was clearly also (equally) important to the parents involved. All of the parents at some time said they often hadn't the time, patience or the ability to engage in regular activities with their children and welcomed the opportunity afforded to them by the scheme to have time alone when their children didn't have to care for them. Undoubtedly, without the co-operation of the parents and their commitment to the project the befriending relationships could not have endured. As Jonathan said:

"That I developed a good relationship with Trisha was I think [because] she was committed to the scheme and seemed to embrace it wholeheartedly...eventually she bent over backwards to assist me in making my relationship with Julian develop and, on balance, I think her positive attitude made a crucial contribution to our relative success."

It is important, when considering the accounts of the young carers, to bear in mind the ages of these children. For we feel their age was a significant factor both in the children's performance during interviews and in their approach to the befriending relationships. The average age of the children was around nine years and the fact that we didn't have access to a wider age range perhaps indicates an empirical shortcoming of the project. However, the age group represented could account for the fact that the children used the project more as a form of respite than a therapeutic mechanism. We intended for the befriending to be child-led and the fact that the children didn't use the relationships as a forum for person consultation or 'soul searching' was neither surprising, given their ages, nor unexpected given their needs (i.e. for a break from caring and to simply enjoy themselves). Furthermore, the fact that during interviews their conversation was determinedly activity led was again perhaps indicative of the children's young ages. Arguably, the young carers weren't likely to talk about the progression and development of the befriending relationship in a way an older child might.

Furthermore, given the time restrictions placed on the befriending relationships it was perhaps significant that the children - knowing their associations were thus circumscribed - didn't, on the whole, use the relationships to exchange confidences with a person they wouldn't be seeing in six months time. This was a regrettable albeit unavoidable aspect of the project.

We are aware that the young carers involved in the project won't, on the whole, have benefited from friendships thus created and withdrawn, but our hope is that other children will benefit from the lessons learnt here. In relation to the case studies, although we have said that the relationship between Jonathan and Julian was the most successful, considering the strength of the attachment (certainly on Julian's part) and how painful it was for him when the relationship ended, we should perhaps reconsider how we measure success in this respect. For the future, we would assert that any befriending associations such as these should be created on a long term basis. We only have to consider Jonathan's experiences with Julian to confirm this:

"Now that our friendship is being artificially ended it makes me angry. I know that was the deal at the start, but for a child who needs a bit of stability and acceptance it's hard to see how ultimately he will have benefited. It wasn't so much the frequency of the contact that appeared to be important to Julian, but the fact of it and now it will end. Julian needs ongoing support. A less frequent contact model over a longer period of time would appear more appropriate. If Julian isn't given support he will develop his own strategies of coping. These might not be perfect but it is worth considering if this might not be better than temporary intrusions that create false hopes."

Although the needs of young carers are diverse, we know the notion of providing them with someone to talk to, some personal one-to-one contact is essential (see Aldridge and Becker, 1993). And if such befriending is what they need then it must be both long term and child-led (that is, created on their terms), but it needn't necessarily be to the exclusion of other forms of support. It was clear from the interviews with the young carers that the Nottingham Young Carers Project played a crucial role in their lives. It provided them with respite and the opportunity to meet and engage with other young carers.

Where there is such a project in place we would suggest a one-to-one befriending option could be built in to complement the social service offered by such a project. Where young carer's projects aren't operating then it would be necessary either to implement a befriending scheme or to try and incorporate one into existing services (e.g. via self-help groups or carers services).

The lessons are clear from this pilot befriending scheme: young carers need respite and they need friendships for themselves. Such friendships, though artificially created, if consistent and long-term, could help relieve the tensions and difficulties many young carers experience. The friendship between Jonathan and Julian only serves to reinforce this point:

“Almost immediately we developed a relationship of trust. I think we were quite well suited to each other but I also think it worked because, in our own ways we were both committed to making it work. Initially it seemed important just to spend time with Julian so we spent a good few hours drawing and doing other sorts of art work. This is one of Julian's great strengths and he clearly enjoys what he does. I think he valued the chance to share what he was good at with someone who encouraged him in what he did. Watching Julian respond to encouragement and develop his personality and abilities at the things we did together is something I will treasure.

“We did more things together and so understood each other better and seemed to develop a mutual respect. It would be interesting to me to know exactly what Julian made of our friendship, but it appears that he sees it in this way. It all makes it very difficult to end the relationship. The befriending scheme by its nature creates an artificial situation at the beginning. But after the start I don't think our friendship was artificial.”

Appendices

One: Information for Volunteers

We ask all prospective volunteers who wish to be appointed as 'Befriender' to a Young Carer to complete these forms.

You will understand the responsibility involved in befriending a child or young person and the need to ensure their safety.

We therefore ask you to complete:

1. a declaration relating to a criminal record check
2. a declaration of health form
3. an application form

Please be assured that the declaration of an offence will not automatically bar you from being considered as a Befriender.

We ask you to complete a declaration of health so that we can be advised where there might be any medical reason which might make it inappropriate for you to become a Befriender. We would wish to avoid setting up a relationship which resulted in a young carer's needs being overshadowed by the health needs of his/ her Befriender.

The application form provides us with some background information about yourself including why you want to be considered for this kind of voluntary work. We ask you to provide details of two people who can provide personal references. It would be helpful if it at least one of these lives in Nottinghamshire as we will need to have direct contact with one referee. This enables us to get a fuller picture of you as a potential befriender and gives the opportunity for any points or questions to be clarified by someone who knows you and supports you in your application.

The information we gain from these different sources along with the personal and panel interviews will be kept confidential by this agency unless requested by an appropriate authority.

The report for the interview panel will be shared with you. Information from reference checks remains confidential and cannot be shared.

We want this selection to be a two way process so that it becomes clearer for all concerned whether it is appropriate to appoint you as a 'Befriender' with the inherent responsibilities in this role.

Should you not be appointed you will be given the reasons for this and an opportunity to talk this over with your support worker, or myself as Project Manager.

Director, Family Care

Two: Confidentiality

Young carers must feel that they can place their trust in the project, the agency involved and the befriender and that anything they disclose would not involve intervention from sources outside the project. However, there are instances where confidentiality must be breached if the agency and its staff are to fully protect the welfare and well being of young carers (and also those of the volunteer befrienders).

Although offering a confidential service, with provisos, is an apparent contradiction, in the final instance the lives of the children must be protected. Many organisations whose objectives are to serve the needs of young and vulnerable children face such a dilemma but as far as befriending is concerned the balance must be struck between the child's need for a confidential setting in which to base their friendships and, objectively, the protection of their physical and emotional well being.

The young carers and their families have been given copies of the confidentiality policy. They understand that the befriender would not break confidences unless under exceptional circumstances (see below). Furthermore, they understand that consent will always be sought where it is deemed necessary to breach confidentiality.

Any case notes or files on the young carers and their families are strictly confidential, kept to a minimum and stored securely. The young carers and their families can have access to all information stored about themselves. Any media coverage or publicity concerning the befriending project will not breach confidentiality.

Confidentiality - guidelines

1. All volunteers must know, understand and abide by the confidentiality policy.
2. All volunteers should know and understand the policy on the discovery and disclosure of abuse.
3. Befrienders should not involve other volunteers in the befriending relationship.
4. Befrienders should not introduce others into the befriending relationship unless explicitly requested by the young carer.
5. Befrienders should not talk to the media about the relationship or encourage the young carer to do so.
6. Exceptions to the confidentiality policy include:

Where a child has specifically requested the befriender involves others in the relationship, or requests further support;

Where the young carer, care recipient or befriender is considered to be at serious risk from physical, mental or sexual abuse or neglect.

7. Procedures:

Breaking confidentiality should not be the sole responsibility of individual befrienders (unless a child's life is considered to be at risk). Befrienders should liaise with their support workers at all times.

Breaking confidentiality should be an agency decision and the director should be responsible for making referrals to the local SSD.

The agency and Project Manager should support young carers in the possible consequences or outcomes of the above action.

Young carers should always be told of the need to break confidentiality, why the need has arisen and the possible outcomes should be explained and discussed.

Consent to break confidentiality should always be sought from the young carer. If this is refused, the young carer should be informed of all decisions made and offered support throughout.

8. Breaking confidentiality, if not in line with the above guidelines, should carry serious disciplinary consequences.

Due consideration and application of all the above issues should ensure the safety of young carers when participating in befriending relationships.

Three: Rules and Guidelines for Befriending

Here we will outline the rules and guidelines governing the befriender/young carer relationship (which both parties should read and understand and the volunteer befriender especially should refer to at all times).

We have divided the guidelines into *general principles* regarding the volunteer's role as *volunteer* and the volunteer's role as *befriender*; and *specific guidelines* relating to the nature and extent of the befriending relationship (do's and don'ts):

General Principles

- Know, understand and be committed to the project's aims and objectives
- Know, understand and be committed to the confidentiality policy
- Know and understand guidelines on disclosure or discovery of abuse
- Know your limitations in terms of commitment
- Maintain agreed level of commitment in relation to agreed contact time with the young carer
- Communicate with agency staff
- Liaise with support workers at all times
- Relate to other volunteers and agency staff with respect
- Participate in additional training sessions and supervision
- Participate in support groups
- Inform the agency and the project of any changes in personal circumstances or details (change of address, holidays, breaks etc.)
- Declare all convictions for abuse
- Claim travel, child care expenses
- Don't just disappear

Guidance for befrienders

- Be enthusiastic and self motivated
- Be able to give and receive support
- Be sensitive to young carers' needs
- Use listening skills at all times
- Understand the rights of children; the rights of young carers
- Act with dignity and integrity
- Accept lifestyles different from your own
- Be able to deal with stressful situations
- Be able to cope and respond to emergencies or crises
- Work hard at making the relationship work
- Be informed and know solutions (or where to go for advice and information)
- Help in decision making without directing
- Offer reassurances, treat child with empathy
- Make the child feel secure in the relationship

Specific Principles for Befrienders - Do's and Don'ts

- Don't burden the young carer with your own problems
 - Don't promise anything you can't deliver or raise expectations you cannot meet
 - Don't involve other volunteers in the relationship
 - Don't take the young carer home or introduce them to your own children
 - Don't drive the young carer in a car unless covered by insurance
 - Don't direct support at parent/care recipient
 - Don't engage in power relations
 - Don't make value judgements
 - Don't lend or accept money from the young carer
 - Don't allow the friendship to become independent of the agency or project
 - Don't break confidentiality (except where child protection issues are concerned)
 - Don't break the law or encourage the young carer to break the law
 - Don't ignore violence or law breaking
 - Don't overstep boundaries
 - Don't talk to others about the relationship
 - Don't talk to the media about the relationship (or the project) or invite the young carer to talk to the media
 - Don't try to cope with complex problems on your own
 - Don't contravene, contradict or interfere in child (young carer)/ parent (care receiver) relationship
 - Don't be confrontational
 - Don't abuse the relationship or the child
 - Don't give medical advice
-
- Do be mindful of other relationships (work alongside and negotiate with parent/ care receiver or young carer's family as well as other professionals involved in their lives)
 - Do approach the relationship without prejudice and with equality
 - Do treat the relationship as a friendship
 - Do accept and respect child's decision to withdraw from the relationship
 - Do observe birthdays and festivities (the purchasing of small gifts may be acceptable with prior consent from parent/ care receiver)

Four: Role of Family Care Support Worker

1. To have regular agreed contact with the volunteer befriender - a minimum of once a month.
2. To offer support, encouragement and supervision to the befriender, giving an opportunity to discuss any concerns or worries he/she may have concerning the befriender/young carer relationship.
3. If any problems arise relating to confidentiality (and the befriender's need to break confidentiality with the young carer), the support worker would seek to liaise immediately with the Nottingham Young Carers Project Manager and the agency director to agree action. If an action cannot be agreed, then the agency director takes responsibility for making the decision and ensuring subsequent action is implemented.
4. To complete evaluation forms on a monthly basis and return these to YCRG. YCRG will also have regular telephone contact with support workers to check on general progress, if and when support workers feel this necessary.
5. To be involved in final review interviews with YCRG after six months.

Five: Befriender's Evaluation Form

Name

How many times have you contacted the young carer by telephone in the last four weeks?

.....

How many times has the young carer contacted you by telephone in the last four weeks?

.....

Have you visited the young carer at their home in the last four weeks?

.....

If so, how many times?

.....

Have you met at a designated meeting place away from the young carer's home in the last four weeks?

.....

If so, how many times?

.....

Please give details (where you met, how long you were with the young carer etc.):

.....

Have you picked the young carer up from their home and taken them out for activities in the last four weeks?

.....

If so, please give details (where you went, how long you were out for etc.):

How do you feel your visits/ activities have been progressing? (please give details including positive and any negative outcomes):

How do you feel your relationship with the young carer is progressing? (i.e. how successfully do you relate with one another? is there a relationship of trust? is the young carer keen to continue the relationship?)

Have there been any specific problems with your relationship with the young carer?

Have there been any specific positive outcomes in you relationship with the young carer?

Has confidentiality (or the need to break confidentiality with the young carer) been an issue?

How much contact have you had with the young carer's parent/s/ guardian/s during your visits with the young carer?

How do you feel the parent/s/ guardian/s have responded to you?

Have the parent/s/guardian/s made any specific comments to you about your relationship with the young carer? (please give details including negative and positive comments, if any):

Have the parent/s/guardian/s made any specific comments to you about the befriending project?

During your visits to the young carer's home have you had any contact with any other family members? (please give details):

During your visits have you had any contact with any welfare professionals? (please give details):

Please feel free to add any further information you feel may be of relevance:

Six: Support Worker's Evaluation Form

How much contact have you had with the Befriender in the last four weeks?

.....

How much contact have you initiated in the last four weeks?

.....

How much contact has the befriender initiated in the last four weeks?

.....

Was your contact with the befriender by telephone and/or in person? (please give details):

What specific problems have they conveyed to you about their relationship with the young carer?

What positive outcomes have they conveyed to you about their relationship with the young carer?

Has confidentiality (or the need to break it) arisen? (if so, please give details):

How do you feel your relationship with the befriender is progressing?

How do you feel the befriender's relationship with the young carer is progressing?

Please feel free to add more information that you feel may be of relevance:

Publication List: Young Carers Research Group

Caring Crises, Caring Breaks:

An Evaluation of Two Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes

Chris Dearden and Saul Becker

January 1997, ISBN, page length and price to be announced

Befriending Young Carers:

A Pilot Study

Jo Aldridge and Saul Becker

December 1996, ISBN 0 907274 18 8, 45 pages, £10.00 per copy

Young Carers in Southwark:

The Hidden Face of Community Care

Betty Newton and Saul Becker

November 1996, ISBN 0 907274 17 X, 50 pages, £10.00 per copy.

Young Carers at the Crossroads:

An Evaluation of the Nottingham Young Carers Project

Chris Dearden and Saul Becker

April 1996, ISBN 0 907274 16 1, 56 pages, £7.00 per copy.

Young Carers - The Facts

Chris Dearden and Saul Becker

November 1995, ISBN 0 617 00577 X, 36 pages, £4.99 per copy

The National Directory of Young Carers Projects and Initiatives

Chris Dearden and Saul Becker

August 1995, ISBN 0 907274 13 7, 78 pages, £4.50 per copy

Young Carers in Europe: An Exploratory Cross-National Study in Britain, France, Sweden and Germany

Saul Becker (editor), Jo Aldridge, Diarmuid Brittain, Jochen Clasen, Berthold Dietz, Arthur Gould, Linda Hantrais

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Getting it Right for Young Carers: A Training Pack for Professionals

Chris Dearden, Jo Aldridge, Betty Newton and Saul Becker

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