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Befriending

Do

Deliberately bring together a member of the public and a person who needs support who are both interested in making friends.

Story

Peter is a skilled artist who has had an alcohol problem in the past. A befriender introduced him to a local art group and attended with him for the first six sessions before tapering out. Peter's artistic skills make him a well-respected member of the group and he now meets his befriender on another evening.

Hints & Hazards

Some people want a friend but don't know how to be friendly, so a tolerant friend can pursue the friendship when others might be put off. Once they have broken through to friendship, the person may become more friendly to others, or the relationship may be strong enough to allow some shaping of behaviour. *Firth and Rapley (1987 p33)* suggest that 'Befrienders should see themselves as bridges – essentially temporary – between a person with a disability and a range of acquaintances and activities which involve others'. Befrienders get paid in some way, and real friendship is not done for money. The befriended might learn that they are unworthy of a true friend, and the befriender learns that some people are not suitable as potential friends.

Relationships can be built on a shared wish for friendship (which might be corrupted by a power dimension), based on a common interest (which might change and leave the person with neither interest nor friend), or be focused on helping the person gain confidence or skills (see 7b8 Mentoring). The befriender might make new community links for themselves, but may not support the disabled person to do likewise. Some projects call people 'befrienders' but they are actually service volunteers. In a true friendship project, the agency does not seek long term control of the friendship or place unnecessary demands on the new friend. Will there be an opportunity for people to move from the regulated world of 'befriending' into the unregulated world of friendship?

For more, see *Befriending Network Scotland 2009*.