



PFFS Services - Befriending

Why does PFFS offer a befriending service?

Many people feel isolated and lonely when a relative or close friend goes to prison. They may not want to talk about the situation they find themselves in to anyone else because they are afraid of being judged, or they do not want other people to know. They may have recently moved away from close relatives and not had a chance to make new friends yet. They may have drifted apart from their families and friends because of their association with the prisoner, or for other reasons. When under stress and dealing with situations that are entirely new to them, people may need someone to talk to even more than usual. The PFFS befriending service offers a listening ear and a friendly face, either someone who will visit the family in their home on a regular basis, or who will keep in contact with them by telephone.

Who will the befriender who visits me be, and what will she be like?

Befrienders are volunteers who have been interviewed and thoroughly trained by PFFS. They will also have had a Criminal Records Bureau check. PFFS asks for people who are empathetic, friendly and reliable. All our befrienders are female. As the vast majority of people who need this service are female and either partners or mothers of prisoners, and many have dependent children, we recruit only women for this work. They will be mature people with sufficient life experience to have insight and understanding of other people's

problems. PFFS recruits volunteers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

I'd like a befriender, but my home circumstances are not ideal for having a stranger come and visit.

Befriending does not have to take place in the family's home. Some befrienders meet their families for lunch or coffee outside, or meet them at our office. Others don't meet face to face, but keep in contact through regular chats on the telephone.

Is this service only offered to people in London?

Home visits can be offered only to people in London. However, telephone befriending is a possibility for people who live in other parts of the country. The befriender will telephone about once a week.

How does the system work?

The Befriending Service Manager will contact you by phone or may visit you at home to explain what the service offers and identify what you want. She will aim to find a befriender with whom you will have something in common.

How are befrienders allocated?

The first criteria PFFS considers is location. The Befriending Service Manager will allocate families to befrienders who live or work within easy reach of your area, although they will avoid sending a befriender who lives in your immediate neighbourhood. Where possible, they will try to find someone of a

similar age and ethnic and cultural background as you, but this cannot always be guaranteed.

Is the service confidential?

PFFS has a confidentiality policy which states that no information about a family will be passed on to anyone outside of the organisation. Both befrienders and staff are subject to this. It may sometimes be necessary for a befriender to mention aspects of your situation to the PFFS staff if she needs advice on how best to help you, but nothing will go further without your permission. The only time when we might disclose information about you is if there is reason to suspect that a member of the family is at risk of serious harm. This step would never be undertaken lightly. A strict procedure would be followed, and you would be told in advance of any disclosure.

Can a befriender help me in practical ways?

The main role of befrienders is to offer emotional support. They will listen, empathise and give you as much information as they can. They will be able to help you with filling in forms, such as claims for assisted prison visits or housing and benefit forms. They keep in regular touch with the office and if they do not know the answer to a question will be able to find out for you from the PFFS staff.

PFFS has a child protection policy which does not allow any of its volunteers or staff to be alone with the children of any of the families and so befrienders are not able to

look after your children while you go out or escort them on visits. While befrienders will be willing to support you in many ways, please bear in mind that they are volunteers. Many also work full time or have families of their own. There is a limit to what they can be expected to do!

Can I have the befriender's telephone number and address?

It is not PFFS's policy to give out personal contact details of befrienders – but if you need to make contact with your befriender urgently or to get a message to her, you can call PFFS's freephone helpline (0808 808 3444) and the staff will pass the message on.

I have a male relative/friend who I really think would benefit from a befriender or a one off visit.

In our experience this is not a service that men ask for but where they do our policy is to offer telephone befriending.

I'm interested – what do I do now?

If you think you would like a befriender, please call us on 0808 808 3444 and ask to speak to the Befriending Service Manager.