

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 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 even have been disowned by 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, usually someone who will visit the family in their home on a regular basis.

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 been police-checked. PFFS asks for people who are sympathetic, friendly and reliable. All our befrienders are female. As the vast majority of people who need this service are female partners and mothers of prisoners, and many have dependent children, we only recruit women for this work. They may be any age, but will be over 18. PFFS also does its best to recruit

volunteers from a variety of racial backgrounds. Occasionally, members of PFFS staff may carry out home visits.

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 the office. Others don't actually meet, but speak on the phone regularly.

Is this service only offered to people in London?

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

How long will it take for PFFS to allocate someone to me?

Usually a few days. Staff will need to contact a suitable volunteer and make sure they are available to take on a family. Then, with your permission, they will give the befriender your telephone number so they can get in touch with you.

How are befrienders allocated?

The first criteria PFFS considers is location – they 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 racial 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 or inform you, but nothing will go further without your permission. The only exception is if there is reason to suspect that a member of the family is at risk of serious harm. This would not be undertaken lightly and a strict procedure would be followed.

Can a befriender help me in practical ways?

The primary function of befrienders is to offer emotional support and companionship. They will listen, sympathise and give you as much information as they can, but they are not trained counsellors. 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, so befrienders are not able to look after your children while you go out or escort them on visits.

Prisoners Families and Friends Service
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Helpline: 0808 808 3444
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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 – so 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 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.

While PFFS would not send a female volunteer to befriend a man, and does not recruit male befrienders because not many men ask for this kind of help, it has been possible on occasion to arrange a visit or visits from a male volunteer. So please ask, and we will arrange it if we possibly can.

I'm interested – what do I do now?

If you think you would like a befriender, please call us on 0808 808 3444. We will answer any questions you have and take your details. After a few days a befriender will get in touch with you to arrange your first meeting.