

ROLE DESCRIPTION OF A BEFRIENDER

The befriender's role is to provide friendship to a woman who is a wife, partner, mother or other relative of a prisoner. The purpose of the friendship is to reduce the woman's social isolation and to empower her to take increasing control of her life. In undertaking the role, the befriender operates in compliance with the policies and procedures of Prisoners' Families and Friends Service.

The befriender, either by home visiting or through telephone contact, provides the woman with one to one emotional support in an empathetic, non-judgmental manner. The befriender acts as a listening ear to the woman who frequently has nobody else in whom she can confide. The befriender scrupulously observes the confidentiality of any exchanges between the woman and herself.

The befriender works with the woman to build up her confidence and self esteem so that she becomes increasingly competent to determine the direction that her life will take.

With input as necessary from the Volunteer Support Worker, the befriender searches out information which the woman might need concerning the judicial, prison and state benefit systems. Where matters are outside the befriender's own competence, she researches the area and signposts the woman to other agencies which have the expertise to help the woman.

The befriender helps the woman to identify the various courses of action open to her when she is confronting difficulties and assists the woman to weigh the pros and cons of each course and to reach a decision on what she should do.

The befriender, within the limits of her competence and the availability of her time, acts as an advocate for the woman in her

dealings with official bodies. She also supports the woman to become a more effective self advocate.

The befriender provides regular reports to the Volunteer Support Worker on the progress of the befriending relationship, notifies her of any difficulties in the relationship and seeks her advice on how they can be resolved.

The befriender attends regular support meetings, continuing development sessions and other training opportunities arranged for befrienders. She participates in the befriender annual review procedure.