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**BEFRIEND A CHILD**

**REFERRAL POLICY AND PROCEDURE (BEFRIENDING)**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this policy is to outline eligibility criteria and referral procedures for our befriending programme. It ensures a clear, consistent and transparent approach to identifying and supporting children who would benefit most from our befriending programme. This policy is primarily for referral partners and staff, but it may also be of interest to parents / carers and volunteers.

**2.0 BEFRIENDING PROGRAMME**

Befriend a Child’s befriending programme supports children and young people aged 5 to 16 years old who are living in challenging life circumstances across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. Befriending offers children an opportunity to build a trusting relationship with a volunteer befriender while enjoying social and recreational activities together. Befrienders will meet up with their young person twice a month for a minimum of 12 months. The aim of the programme for young people is to achieve the following:

* Reduce social isolation
* Build confidence and self-esteem
* Improve social skills
* Improve wellbeing

Befriending is a free service to referral partners and parents.

**3.0 REFERRAL PARTNERS**

Referrals will be accepted from the following professional agencies in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire:

* Social Work – social work departments that work with children and young people
* Education – primary and secondary schools
* Health – GP surgeries, health visitors, hospitals. mental health services
* Third Sector – charities, community groups and voluntary organisations

Self-referrals will not be accepted.

**4.0 REFERRAL CRITERIA**

**4.1 Essential Eligibility Criteria**

**All** the criteria in the table below must be met for a referral to be considered for our befriending programme.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Age** | The child must be 5-15 years old at point of referral |
| **Location** | The child must live within a 25-mile radius of Aberdeen City Centre |
| **Personal Care** | The child must be able to attend to their own personal care eg independent toileting |
| **Family Agreement** | Parent(s) / carer(s) of the child must be in agreement for their child to be referred and have signed parental consent prior to a referral being made. The child must also agree to the referral |
| **Referrer** | The referrer must agree to keep Befriend a Child up to date with information, and provide feedback for reviews |
| **Paperwork** | The referrer must send through the following information for a referral to be considered   * Referral Form including parental consent * Child’s Plan, Chronology, Education IEP or other (see section 4.2 for more details) |

**4.2 Additional Eligibility Criteria**

Children/young people must meet **at least one** of the criteria set out in the table below to be considered for our befriending programme

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reason for Referral** | **Criteria** |
| **Social Isolation** | The child does not have the opportunity to take part in activities and they are socially isolated due to their home circumstances |
| **Low Self Confidence / Self-Esteem** | The child struggles with their self confidence / self-esteem due to their current or past circumstances |
| **Lack of Positive Adult Role Model** | The child is lacking a positive adult role model in their lives |
| **Child Mental Health** | The child is suffering due to poor mental health |
| **Parental Mental Health** | The child is living in difficult life circumstances due to parental mental health |
| **Parental Substance Use** | The child is living in difficult life circumstances due to parental alcohol or substance use |
| **Abuse and/or Neglect** | The child is living in difficult life circumstances due to abuse and / or neglect |
| **Affected by Disability or Long Term Illness** | The child is affected by disability, either they have a mild disability or the child has a parent or sibling who has a disability or long-term illness.  Please note if personal care, or high-level medical care, is required this is not something that our volunteers are trained to deal with. |
| **Affected by Bereavement** | The child is affected by a bereavement in the family |
| **Mild Behavioural Problems** | The child displays mild behavioural problems which can include:   * Occasional tantrums or mood swings * Difficulty following instructions or staying focused * Impulsive and occasionally defiant * Mild social difficulties * Disruptive but are responsive to guidance * Difficulties coping with change or stressful situations |
| **Financial Hardship** | The child’s family struggles with financial hardship and this in turn affects the child |

**4.3 Non-Eligible Children**

As our befriending programme is delivered by volunteers, who although trained are not professionals, we are not able to consider a referral where there are any of the following

* Any indication of **violence and/or aggression** from the child/young person
* The child/young person is deemed to be a **flight risk**
* The child / young person has **risk-taking behaviours** eg putting themselves or others in danger while in the community
* Parent or child has **not agreed to the service**

**5.0 REFERRAL PROCEDURE**

5.1 Upon request, Befriend a Child will provide referrers with a Referral Pack which contains the following:

Referral Policy and Procedure (Befriending)

Referral Form (Befriending)

Information for Referrers Leaflet (Befriending)

Information for Parents / Carers (Befriending)

Information for Children (Befriending)

5.2 The referrer may contact the Befriending Manager at Befriend a Child for an informal discussion prior to making a referral, contact details are in section 6.0.

5.3 Prior to making a referral, the referrer is to meet with parent(s) / carer(s) and child to ensure the following:

1. the child meets the eligibility criteria of the befriending programme
2. the parent / carer and child are given information about the befriending programme
3. both parent / carer and child agree be referred for a befriender
4. child registration form including child befriending journey and parental consent form are completed and signed

5.4 In order to submit a referral, the following information is to be completed by the referrer and returned to Befriend a Child.

1. Befriend a Child **Referral Form (Befriending) including Parental Consent Form.**
2. **Children’s Plan, Chronology, or Education IEP**. If none of these are available an additional A4 page detailing as much information regarding the home situation to enable Befriend a Child staff to assess the referral for the child/young person’s suitability to our befriending programme. We can also accept minutes of recent relevant meetings.

Referrals will **not** be accepted without all the information above.

Referrals are to be submitted to Befriend a Child by email at [referral@befriendachild.org.uk](mailto:referral@befriendachild.org.uk).

5.5 On receipt of a full referral Befriend a Child will confirm receipt within 7 days.

5.6 The befriending team will review the referral against eligibility criteria.

1. If a **child meets the criteria** outlined in this policy, the child will be accepted onto Befriend a Child’s befriending programme and will be placed on a waiting list until a suitable volunteer becomes available for matching.

Befriend a Child will confirm acceptance of the referral in writing to a) the referrer and b) the primary parent / carer stated on the referral form.

1. If a **child does not meet the criteria** outlined in this policy, the referrer will be informed in writing as to the reason the child has not been accepted. **This decision is final.**

It is the responsibility of the referrer to inform the family that the referral has not been accepted.

5.7 The befriending programme waiting list is reviewed every 3 months and referrers will be contacted for any updates on the child’s circumstances if this is required. Failure to provide an update will result in the child being removed from the waiting list.

5.8 Befriend a Child will endeavour to match the child with a suitable volunteer, who has been recruited, trained and PVG checked by the charity, based on their interests, needs and geographic location. Volunteers are asked to commit to befriending for a minimum of 12-months.

5.9 Once a suitable match has been found it is the responsibility of Befriend a Child to:

1. Contact the referrer to inform them that a suitable match has been found, the referrer will have a named member of staff in the befriending team who will be their contact for the befriending case
2. Arrange and attend a match meeting with referrer and volunteer, this will be online via TEAMs
3. Arrange and attend a home visit with volunteer, parent / carer and child to introduce the volunteer to the child, this will be in person and may be either at the child’s home or in another location if requested
4. Manage and provide support to the volunteer who is befriending the child, including monthly check-ins and regular reviews
5. Provide feedback to the referrer on progress of the befriending relationship, including the first meeting and at the 6 and 10-month review stages in the first year of befriending
6. Evaluate the befriending cases and provide feedback to referrer

Once a match has been made it is the responsibility of the referrer to:

1. Attend a match meeting with the volunteer and Befriend a Child, this will be online via TEAMs
2. After the match meeting (not before), inform the family that a suitable match has been found and that Befriend a Child will be in touch with the primary parent / carer to progress the match. The family have the right to refuse the match should it be deemed unsuitable
3. Supply relevant information regarding the child’s progress to Befriend a Child before the befriending 6 month and 10 month reviews take place
4. Invite Befriend a Child to relevant meetings relating to the child, eg multiagency meetings
5. Keep Befriend a Child up to date with information on the child or family and to inform them of any changes in circumstance including contact details / address
6. Inform Befriend a Child if the original referrer leaves and hands the case over to a colleague or another agency, providing them with contact details of the new referral contact

5.10 Befriend a Child has the right to remove any child/young person from the waiting list if they have not been matched with a volunteer after a period of one year. The referrer will be contacted and informed of this decision, and it is their responsibility to notify the parent / carer. If the referrer believes the child would still benefit from a befriender they can re-refer the child.

5.11 Any child who has not received the full year of befriending will be placed back on the waiting list for re-matching if they still require a befriender.

5.12 Children who receive the full commitment of a year of befriending cannot be re-referred to the organisation for a period of 6 months after the relationship ends.

**6.0 CONTACT**

For any questions regarding the criteria or suitability of a child, please do not hesitate to contact:

Nicola Milne

Befriending Manager

Befriend a Child, 9 Bon Accord Square, Aberdeen, AB11 6DJ

Tel 01224 210060

[nicola@befriendachild.org.uk](mailto:nicola@befriendachild.org.uk)

Please send all referrals to [referral@befriendachild.org.uk](mailto:referral@befriendachild.org.uk)