

LINK Adolescent Befriending Project

LINK works with 12 – 18 year olds in East Fife and Levenmouth with mental health issues who have a Statutory or Voluntary Sector Key Worker. The vast majority of referrals come from Playfield House, Stratheden. Playfield receive on average **35** new referrals a month. To date 64 young people have been befriended from the 68 referrals received. Three young people have been re-referred.

We currently have 16 volunteers; 13 are befriending, 3 will be matched very soon. So far 67 befrienders have been trained. Eight new volunteers completed their volunteer preparation course in October 2009.

We have had 3 befrienders who were previously befriendees. They found their time with LINK so positive that they trained to be volunteers when they were old enough and their personal situations had improved, so they could give other young people the same chance.

The young people currently in the Project have a variety of mental health issues, including; - suicide attempts/thoughts, self-harm, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, Aspergers, ADHD, Autism, Tourettes etc. These are often combined with other problems in their lives, such as alcohol, drugs, sexual and physical abuse/assault, school refusal, dyslexia, bullying, family breakdown, homelessness and pregnancy.

Research suggests that statutory help is often too formal and clinical and could be complimented by the social setting support of befriending. A relationship that is independent of a young person's social network of family and peers has been shown to be beneficial when it offers the individual the opportunity to confide in and talk with someone they can trust

We aim to assist young people to build up their resilience and self esteem through the support of a consistent and reliable befriender. Our volunteers provide practical, social and emotional support and aim to help young people access social and community activities and resources which they may find difficult or impossible to achieve on their own.

Befriending is seen as having the potential to benefit the mental health of vulnerable young people by reducing the social isolation they often feel. This is of particular value for young people living in the socially and rurally isolated areas that we cover.

The support and companionship gained from a befriending relationship can also assist young people to move away from a hospital identity thus preventing the development of enduring mental health problems. Similarly, if initiated early, could prevent further statutory service involvement

LINK also helps to reduce suicide; anti-social behaviour; offending; drug and alcohol problems; keeping young people in or helping them to return to education; get training and gain employment.

Around 50% of our volunteers have had, or have, mental health issues of their own and volunteering can form part of their recovery and support.

The local community also benefits from our trained volunteers transferring their knowledge and experience of mental health issues in to the wider community. Awareness raised for both the Project and mental health in general will aim to reduce stigma and social exclusion.