

## Introduction from the Chairman

When we started in 1986 our aim was to support individual 'disadvantaged children', in the County of Warwickshire, by finding a reliable older person to be, quite simply, that child's friend. We believed that through this the child could be helped to develop skills, interests, and self-confidence.

Experience over the past eighteen years has fully justified our belief, and for this the Older Friends, past and present, must take the credit.

As Chairman I'd like to use our first Newsletter to say a warm and deeply felt thank you to them.

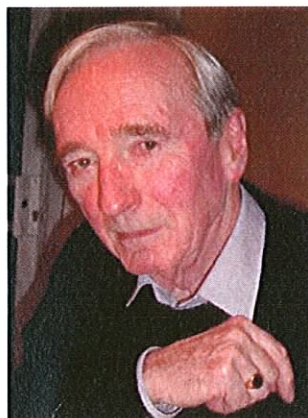
Recently the Trustees have been thinking a lot about the Project's future. We can remain a small enterprise with usually around 80-100 friendships, as in the past. Or we can

grow, if we can find more money, and many more Older Friends. We are certain that there are plenty of children who would welcome our help and benefit from it. Our considered wish is to respond to this need, but to do so needs clear thinking, wise management, a higher public profile and a strong sense of purpose.

Already we have recruited new people to help get things moving, and we are beginning to see the results of this, with expansion in north, south and east Warwickshire. We were particularly pleased by the re-establishment of our branch at the University of Warwick: even though this has taken somewhat longer than we had hoped, all now looks

very promising.

This Newsletter is one small element in achieving the hoped for expansion. I hope you will find it interesting and helpful. I also hope you will use future issues as a forum for registering your views and suggestions about how best to go forward.



**Michael Ridger  
Chairman**

### EDITOR'S WELCOME

*"Welcome to our first Newsletter! We hope that you find the following pages both interesting and useful.*

*In this first edition we will be aiming to share with you some items of news and general information concerning the Friendship Project.*

*We'd like to introduce you to some of the people who help keep the Friendship Project up and running; our Trustees and our coordinators.*

*Most importantly, we'll be hearing from some of our Volunteer Older Friends as they talk about their experiences.*

*We begin with an Introduction from our Chairman Michael Ridger."*

**Gina Worrall Editor**

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**"The Friendship Project provides very valuable support to Social Services and, more importantly, to our children "** Martin Cliff

Assistant Head of Children's Services,  
Social Services Department, Warwickshire County Council

"I have been aware of, and have helped and supported the Friendship Project for about 10 years.

In arranging Older Friends for our disadvantaged children the Project is able to provide opportunities for children to broaden their outlook on life, improve their social skills, and very

importantly, enjoy themselves.

The fact the Older Friend is a volunteer, I see as a positive factor. It means they are dedicated to the Friendship and often bring with them a broad sweep of skills and experience. In addition, the Friendship is often long term and concentrates on the child.

This type of commitment would be difficult for us to find.

The Friendship Project provides very valuable support to Social Services and, more importantly, to our children, I just wish the Project could find more Older Friends! "

**Martin Cliff**

## An Introduction to some of the Trustees of The FRIENDSHIP PROJECT

There are 11 Trustees currently involved with our Charity; we would like to take this opportunity of introducing you to a few of our longer standing members and to one of our newest 'recruits'.

**Michael Ridger** has been our Chairman for the last 2 years, but his involvement with the Charity goes back 16 years. Prior to his retirement he was Chief Education Officer for Warwickshire County Council. Michael has at various times been involved with Age Concern, Victim Support and Crossroads. His Education background and management experience is of great value.

**Roy Edwards** is our Treasurer, and somehow does a splendid job for us considering his other

Treasurer roles. He has been working for the Project for 12 years and prior to his 'retirement!' was Deputy Secretary and Accountant to a Diocesan Board. He is also Treasurer for the Warwickshire St. John's Ambulance, and for his local Church.

**John Vallis** was involved in setting up the Friendship Project in 1986, was our Chairman from 1997-2000 and is currently our Vice Chairman. Prior to retirement he was the County Engineer. Recently he has mainly concentrated on assisting with the vital area of Fund Raising, though his great experience of the Project means he is involved in most activities. John is also an active member of Rotary, having been their President.

**Cheryll Rawbone** was also involved in the early stages of setting up the Charity so has a wealth of knowledge about the Project. During the history of the Project she has always been our Secretary. Cheryll, works full time, has 2 young children, and is a founding Director of an independent insurance broker which handles Corporate Insurance & Risk Management for clients in the UK and Internationally.

**Ann Blakeman** joined the Friendship Project a year ago and has experience of working with children at various levels, including young offenders; she has recently been involved in an extensive research project aimed at reducing crime levels in town and city centres. Ann is currently

collecting information and views from a wide variety of people involved with the Friendship Project whilst also talking to best practice mentoring organisations in the UK. Ann aims to incorporate her findings into a strategic plan that will support the future growth of the Friendship Project.

As you will see, most Trustees assume responsibilities for specific areas. We are always looking for people who can help us in our valuable work. We would particularly like help with our Funding Applications.

If you feel you could help in any way please contact:

**John Hancock on 01926 513065, or Barry Aust on 01926 430471**

## Mentoring and Befriending — a way to reduce crime? by Ann Blakeman

During recent studies involving crime patterns and criminal behaviour, it has become apparent that a few persistent offenders commit much of the low level crime.

Based on interviews with offenders it would appear that many of the choices made to follow a criminal path are made at a young and vulnerable age, often starting with youngsters 'bunking off from school', hanging around shopping areas, being tempted to "just take what you want and you just get away with it", and so it begins.

Mentoring provides a valuable support network that is formally recognised by many authorities. A mentor provides a shoulder to lean on, and a friendly listening ear when there is sometimes no one else for a child to turn to.

Mentoring or befriending can provide a 'life changing' experience for some children, and in a subtle, understated way, could contribute to reducing future crime levels, as well as the obvious benefit of improving the quality of life for not just the child involved, but their parents, the local community and often the older friends.

**Ann Blakeman**

*"I can't say a big enough 'Thank You' to our volunteers for their commitment, hard work and their patience."*

*"What they do for the children is beyond price."*

**Maureen Quinn**  
Nuneaton Branch

## The role of the Branch Coordinator

The Friendship Project has 5 branches located within Social Services buildings throughout Warwickshire, and a 6<sup>th</sup> branch that operates on campus at the University of Warwick.

All the branches are run by 'Coordinators' each of whom has committed to give 4 hours of their time each week to the charity. It is the coordinators job to recruit volunteers to the project, progress references, Police and Social Services checks.

The Coordinator must also visit the volunteer in their own home and familiarise them with the Projects operational guidelines. Once a volunteer is 'cleared' the coordinator then works with Social Services to match the volunteer to an underprivileged child in the area.

A good working relationship is essential, and we appreciate the support and encouragement given to us by all in the Social Services Department.

Our Coordinators are also available to provide ongoing support to volunteers as necessary.

Most of our coordinators have 'day jobs' as well as family commitments, and in reality the '4 hours' a week will stretch to much longer, so we are very grateful for their commitment and dedication to the Project.

Details of our branch coordinators can be found on the back page of this Newsletter along with contact numbers and details of office hours.

## Re-launch of the Friendship Project at the University of Warwick

The Friendship Project has a long and valued association with Warwick University.

For many years students from the University have been active with the Friendship Project and have befriended children from Coventry and the surrounding areas.

We were therefore, very pleased to be able to re-launch the University branch in September last year and would like to say Thank you to our 2 new coordinators for all the hard work they put in, in order to get the branch up and running. They

are **Kelly Pollitt**, who was involved with the Project when she herself was a student, and **Rachel Douce**.

Says **Rachel** .....

"We are delighted to be the Coordinators at the University as we both believe that the Project meets a very real need. The University branch is different to others in that all our volunteers arrive in a large batch at the beginning of the Autumn Term, once we have recruited them we then spend the rest of the term obtaining references and processing the police and

social services checks. At the beginning of this term we were in the happy position of having 25 volunteers 'ready', and since then we have been busy matching them to children from Coventry and Leamington. We are now delighted to say that we have 13 friendships in place."

"Our thanks go to all the university students, their enthusiasm is inspiring and thanks also to the staff of 'Warwick Volunteers' at the university for all their help and support".

### Friendship Facts

- In the past year, 99 children have been referred to the project in need of an older friend.
- The Project is desperately short of male volunteers to befriend boys in need of positive male role models.
- 47 new friendships have been started in the past year.

## Volunteers share some of their experiences

"I got involved with the Friendship Project because I wanted to help less fortunate children to find their way through difficult circumstances. Over the years I have befriended a total of 5 children. My current friend is 15 and I aim to make sure that she has a good time when we go out and can leave any problems behind her. I'm teaching her to cook, and we enjoy going to the theatre. Her hope is that she will eventually be re-united with her family, in the meantime I try to give her some direction and encourage her with her schooling".  
**Jill.**

"My husband and I have befriended 2 little girls (sisters) who are in foster care. We have had some super times with them, taking them out and we well remember their delight at going into a toy store for the very first time. My husband was the only male role model in their life and they really took to him. We have enjoyed watching them develop over the years but sadly for us have had to say goodbye to them as they have recently been adopted. We are so pleased to see them so happy and already calling their new parents 'Mum' and 'Dad'".  
**Pat.**

"I was one of 7 children and enjoyed a really good family life and felt I wanted to put something back, so I volunteered for the Friendship Project. Befriending a child is not something you can do lightly, you can't just drop it, it's a real commitment. I would say my younger friend and I have a mutual friendship, I really enjoy his company and vice versa. In the couple of years that we have been friends I have seen his confidence grow, he's in foster care at the moment, but confides in me that he hopes to go back to his mum eventually.  
**Pam.**

"My younger friend and I really enjoy going fishing! I've sorted out some fishing tackle for him and he is really enthusiastic about his new hobby, we also enjoy bike rides. We have been friends for about 8 months and he has met the rest of my family and joined us on a few family outings. He gets on very well with my daughter and is always polite and well behaved. I get the impression that he looks forward to our outings each week, and enjoys our time together, he knows he can talk to me and is quite open during any discussions."  
**Brian.**

**One Mum is happy to say that.....** "My son is noticeably a much happier and more relaxed boy since having Brian as a friend.

He really looks forward to their weekly outings and loves to go fishing and kite flying. It is so good for Adam to have a stable male influence in his life, and Brian definitely provides this. Adam has never been one to trust people, but he trusts Brian, and I think that has been an important step for Adam. You couldn't have found a more honest or kinder person to befriend Adam".  
**Christine.**

**We need more Volunteers!**  
Our biggest need is for more volunteers to become Older Friends. If you know of someone, who might be interested please help spread the word by passing on our details. Any of our branch coordinators will be happy to hear from prospective volunteers, their telephone numbers can be found at the end of this newsletter (all offices have ansaphones).

**SOME THINGS COMING UP IN THE NEAR FUTURE**

**Mentoring and Befriending  
Best Practice**

During the coming weeks and months we will be learning more about how other organisations work, in particular we will be investigating a mentoring program in the North East of England who are recognised as leaders in the field.

By looking at other organisations operational procedures, training and support program's, and through the sharing of positive experiences, we aim to work towards growing and developing in ways that ensure that the appropriate support is offered at all levels and that we enhance the overall quality of the Friendship Project and the concept of mentoring.

**Ann Blakeman**

**Annual General Meeting**

Our AGM will be held on  
Tuesday 18th May at 7.30 p.m.

The School Hall  
Coventry Preparatory School  
Kenilworth Road  
Coventry

The School entrance is located in the side road 'The Firs' off the Kenilworth Road. There is parking on the road, in the Firs, or if the school gates are open, on the playground.

Besides the formal part of the meeting we expect to have some Older Friends speaking about their experiences. All are welcome and we would be delighted to see you. Following the meeting there will be light refreshments, and the opportunity to meet with others involved in The Friendship Project.

**Branch Details**

**CLIVE BARNES**

Arden Hill, 55 South Street,  
ATHERSTONE, CV9 1DZ  
01926 413513  
Tuesday 10:15—12:15  
Thursday 10:15—12:15

**MAUREEN QUINN**

Warwick House, Wheat Street  
NUNEATON CV11 4AJ  
01926 413076  
Tuesday 10:00—12:00  
Friday 10:00—12:00

**VEE DRAGE**

Myton Park, Myton Lane,  
WARWICK, CV34 6PX  
01926 414826  
Monday 10:00—12:00  
Thursday 10:00—12:00

**JULIE RAMEZANI**

Oakfield Park, 32 Bilton Road,  
RUGBY, CV22 7AL  
01926 413226  
Monday 10:15—12:15  
Friday 10:15—12:15

**GINA WORRALL**

185a Drayton Avenue,  
STRATFORD UPON AVON  
CV37 9PS  
01789 552382  
Monday 09:00—11:00  
Thursday 09:00—11:00

**RACHEL DOUCE and  
KELLY POLLIT**

Warwick Volunteers  
University of Warwick,  
Coventry, CV4 7AL

*"I have used the Friendship Project with 2 families, both have been very pleased with the support, friendship and the level of service provided by the Friendship Project"*

*"I have spoken to the children who have been taken out by the Volunteers and they really look forward to the sessions and enjoy the shared activities"*

*"The Friendship Project has certainly made an impact on the families involved"*

**Jill White**  
Team Leader  
Children with Disabilities  
North Warwickshire

**Friendship Facts**

- Since the Friendship Project began in 1986 over 800 children have been befriended.
- Over the last year our coordinators 'cleared' a total of 80 volunteers to help on the project.
- The Project's longest running friendship has been going for 7 years.

The Friendship Project for Children  
is grateful for recent support from the following organisations:  
LLOYDS TSB                      WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL  
BBC CHILDREN IN NEED        STRATFORD TOWN TRUST  
RAGDOLL                          KING HENRY VIII CHARITY  
HEART OF ENGLAND COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
C.A.ROOKES CHARITABLE TRUST

**Readers Feedback:** We would be grateful for any comments you may have about this Newsletter. We would particularly welcome any suggestions from you our readers about any issues or items you would like to see covered in the next Newsletter. Already planned for the next newsletter will be details of the Annual report as covered at the AGM, hopefully we will have more volunteers sharing some of their experiences, and a report from our Operations Manager Barry Aust. The editor can be contacted on 01789 552382.

**Gina Worrall**