

BEFRIENDEES WHO GO ON TO BECOME BEFRIENDERS

Azuka Befriending Scheme are a Nottingham-based project providing one-to-one emotional/practical support to young people from African, Caribbean and Asian backgrounds (aged 16-25) who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Chivonne Henry, Azuka's first befriender

"I was clueless at the time I came to Azuka, I was a very scared young lady. My first befriender, Bettina, taught me to look at myself, to question what it was I wanted, not what others wanted for me. Not to do things to satisfy other people but to do it for yourself. I learnt to be happy with myself ... to value myself. All this was because of the teamwork from people at Azuka.

I had an opportunity to give back when I worked with Azuka, recruiting befrienders for the service. What better person to advertise the service than me! When I met some people, I would say to myself, these people can be so ignorant. People feel a failure when they have to ask for help – it's very hard.

I have also acted as a befriender. I wanted to

repay the service because they made me happy. I wanted to give back. I wanted to do something that changes people's lives. A service like Azuka should be in every town, city and the whole country."

Bettina Wallace, Azuka's first active befriender and befriender to Chivonne

"I enjoyed my work at Azuka which is why I stayed so long. There was no obligation as a befriender but when you see a young person doing something with their life it's very fulfilling. I had three years as a befriender which is a long time. However, it was totally enjoyable. I felt a special bond with my first befriender (Chivonne) and was happy to have been the first befriender to be paired. Working with Azuka gave me opportunities that I would never have had or experienced, meeting people I would otherwise not have met."

BEFRIENDING QUESTION AND ANSWER

"Although my befriending project runs fantastic training and refresher training for its befrienders, it doesn't seem to run a similar programme for its befriendees. It's becoming apparent that my befriender hasn't been told very much about what to expect from befriending and I'm starting feel like I'm always the one that has to bring up awkward things like when or whether to swap presents. It would be so much easier if the project did this for its befrienders as they're the ones wearing the professional hat."

Every befriending project is different and befriending in one client group will be very different to befriending in another. Some client groups will be given written information about what to expect, some might even be given a simple contract to sign. Other, more vulnerable clients, will not be given any written information as anything this

'formal' will only worry or confuse them.

Either way, all befriendees will have met with a project worker before a match takes place. After all, your project worker is also your befriender's. In these introductory meetings, a lot of verbal information is passed on. Why don't you have a word with your

project worker to see if awkward issues e.g. present swapping were mentioned.

It might be worth making a list of all the more awkward things that have cropped up recently so that your project worker can run through them with your befriender in a support meeting.