



MLRC Befriending Programme

Dated: 8th June 2012

The Befriending programme is an invaluable asset to MLRC as we recognise that the legal system can be alienating to our clients and difficult and frustrating to negotiate. We aim to provide our clients with a service that is friendly and easy to access. Volunteers are available to befriend clients in order to accompany them and provide them with emotional support as they go through the difficult process of trying to assert their rights.

We also recognise that our clients may have a range of legal and other underlying problems which need to be addressed holistically. We are committed to helping clients identify these issues and to link in with other legal and support services as needed. Appropriate referrals are key to the service we provide.

The role of befriender may entail such activities as helping the individual to fill in forms, accompanying her/him to court, helping her/him to turn up to appointments, etc.

Training is provided to all volunteers who also have the support of regular group meetings where peer support is provided. MLRC provides on-going training and periodic reviews and supervision takes place with the Volunteer Coordinator.

At present, MLRC has twelve clients who are befriended, 10 women and 2 men and we currently have 10 active Befrienders.

Caitriona O'Hara is Co-ordinator of the befriending programme and she gives some examples of the volunteering work carried out by our existing befrienders and how they have helped our clients deal with many aspects of their lives.

One client has been helped by her Befriender to find less expensive accommodation and has also enabled a family member to get a proper psychiatric assessment with a view to suitable treatment. She is also being helped to get further qualifications which will enable her to secure employment and more financial security in the future.

Another client has been supported in her decision to leave an abusive family situation. She has now been enabled to have her social welfare entitlements reinstated, has been granted rent supplement and has set up a home for herself and some of her children. She has enrolled on a course of further education and is receiving on-going support from her befriender to boost her confidence and enable her to begin a new life for herself.

Caitriona recognises that most of the present clients need emotional as well as practical supports. Befrienders provide them with this encouragement and support as they move forward with their lives.