



Working to protect children

FOUNDER: The Baroness Faithfull of Wolvercote OBE D Litt MA.

Circles of Support and Accountability

PRESS RELEASE

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Volunteers wanted to help protect children

London residents considering volunteering in 2010 are being given the opportunity to donate their time to helping protect children from sexual abuse.

Child protection charity, The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, is currently looking for volunteers to help run 4 Circles of Support and Accountability projects within the London area. The Circles are run by foundation staff and are aimed at reducing the risk posed by sex offenders, who may, for example, be returning to a community following completion of a prison sentence.

Organised around a known sex offender – referred to as the “core member” – each Circle is made up of 4-6 volunteers from the community who work alongside the offender to help him or her reintegrate into the community. Volunteers are supported by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, police officers, probation staff and treatment experts.

“The safety of the community lies at the heart of each Circle and there is good communication with and support from agencies such as the Police and Probation Services,” said Circles Development Officer, Blair Parrott. “Research has shown that isolation and emotional loneliness are linked to an increased risk of re-offending in sex offenders. That’s why the Circles, which offer practical and emotional support to the core member, are so very important.”

Originating from Canada, Circles projects have been running in the UK since 2002 and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation has operated 35 successful Circles across the country to date.

“There is a lot to be gained from volunteering as a Circle member, not least knowing that you are sharing responsibility for addressing concerns within your own community,” said Mr Parrott. “Volunteers routinely tell us they experience enormous satisfaction through

helping a past offender to lead a better life and through knowing they are contributing to the protection of children.”

The core member himself must be committed to leading an offence-free lifestyle and is accountable to the Circle for his behaviour and actions. One London based core member, who has been part of a Circle since November 2007, states that his Circle has been invaluable. “When I came out of prison, I had lost contact with my friends and family due to the nature of my offences. If it wasn’t for the Circle, I would have ended up totally isolated,” he said. “Now, if I have worrying thoughts or was at risk of re-offending, I can ask for help. There is help available. Circles can be life changing and at the end of the day children are being protected, that’s what’s important.”

Mr Parrott said: “Volunteers are told about the core member’s past pattern of offending and alongside helping to settle him into the community, they look to help him recognise and manage risky thoughts and behaviours. Each Circle is unique because it is built around the needs of the core member. Circles last for between 12 months and two years, as long as there is a need to support the individual and monitor risk. Obviously, volunteer involvement will diminish over time.”

Mr Parrott said anyone over the age of 21 can volunteer for the scheme as long as they are prepared to give up some free time each week for up to a year.

“Our volunteers need to have a mature outlook on life,” said Mr Parrott. “They will be required to undergo a thorough selection process, including a Criminal Records Bureau check, after which they will attend a training programme which will give them the information and skills they will need to support the core member.”

Mr Parrott added that volunteers would have access to support from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation for the life of the Circle.

Anyone wishing to volunteer for the Circle of Support and Accountability project or wanting to know more about the Circles projects can call Blair Parrott on 01372 847160 or email bparrott@lucyfaithfull.org.uk.

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Notes to editors:

1. Named after its founder, Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation is a child protection charity operating UK-wide and specialising in safeguarding children from sexual abuse. To this end, staff assess and treat people perpetrating and affected by child sexual abuse and contribute to research into developing effective interventions. The Foundation’s policy is to collaborate with individuals and agencies internationally to develop a more child sensitive and offender aware culture in our societies. The Foundation contributes to legislation and to policy and procedure reviews concerned with safeguarding children in faith communities, in schools, in leisure facilities, on the Internet and living away from home.

2. For further information on Circles of Support and Accountability or The Lucy Faithfull Foundation please contact Deborah Denis on 01372 847160.