

## My experiences of befriending....

"What can I give him poor as I am"... the words of the Christmas Carol ran through my head as I stood on the chilly doorstep of a crumbly looking house on the 'other side' of town the December afternoon I was visiting my befriended for the first time. I had been matched to Eisher, a single mother from West Africa with another child on the way very shortly. The time it took her to open the door seemed like an eternity whilst my mind raced with 'logic' as to why I really was the least suitable person for the job. When she eventually came to the door I understood why she perhaps wasn't operating at the same pace as me - the huge bump of her eight month pregnancy and the one year old at her ankles were the first clues.

Upon entering the house I was welcomed into Eisher's world. We chatted easily mainly about Rachel her nearly toddling daughter and the anticipation of the child to come. She was concerned about what would happen to Rachel when she went into hospital for the birth and I was struck by how alone this mother was with the absence of the usual networks of friends and relatives. The 'fix it' instinct in me began to feel that I ought to solve all of her problems, notions of birthing partner to stand in mum began to swamp me until I realised this was not my role. So what was my role, what could I give this woman who seemed so in need? Hope, warmth, friendship, encouragement...a drop in the ocean? A start.

So, I have been visiting Eisher regularly, she has given birth to a beautiful second child. I have been struck by her resilience and her strength despite adverse circumstances. Our interactions are nothing out of the ordinary, we chat lightly and watch the children. I have found a local mother and toddlers group for her and located a nearby drop in for asylum seekers which hopefully she will start attending soon. I am also able to bring gifts occasionally from Restore of children's clothes and toys. I've considered the issue of boundaries as this is an organised friendship and she is aware of that too. We have our regular meeting time. I have found the relationship mutually helpful as through visiting Eisher I gain a fresh perspective, entering into a completely different world to my own. Three months on and I reflect on that carol again remembering the next few lines... "what can I give him poor as I am" the answer isn't solutions or material goods, but simply "give my heart". And so I hope I have...

Kirsten Bradbury