



# One minute guide

## Independent Visitors for looked after children

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### What is an Independent Visitor and what do they do?

An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who befriends and visits a child or young person living in the care of the local authority. They provide support and advice, which contributes towards the child's social, emotional and educational development. We have a scheme to recruit Independent Visitors and match them to children and young people.

The scheme generally provides volunteers for children and young people over five years of age. Independent Visitors are also available to care leavers up to the age of 21, and up to age 25 for vulnerable care leavers.

An Independent Visitor will visit the child or young person once a month, with the aim of establishing a consistent, positive adult-child relationship. Activities undertaken whilst together are dependent on the age and needs of the child or young person but can include anything from playing football in the park, seeing the latest films, or trying new experiences the young person shows an interest in.

The Independent Visitor's role is to be a friend to the young person. The most important part of the relationship and time spent together is that the young person and Independent Visitor enjoy each other's company and have fun!

### Who can volunteer to be an Independent Visitor?

The team are continually recruiting Independent Visitors to join the scheme and welcome applications from people from a diverse range of communities and backgrounds in order to fully reflect the diversity of the looked after population.

There are no age limits for who can be an Independent Visitor; applicants simply need to be able to demonstrate experience of being around children, as well as a level of maturity in being able to respond to the needs of a child looked after.

The service employs a rigorous recruitment process in line with safer recruitment practices including interviews, seeking a minimum of two references and conducting an enhanced [DBS check](#). All information gathered on each applicant is presented to an approval panel, where the recruitment process is quality assured, ensuring high levels of safeguarding for our vulnerable young people.

Post -approval, volunteers are provided with a comprehensive induction and training package in order to prepare them. Training includes topics such as roles and responsibilities, maintaining boundaries, safeguarding and child protection. Following the approval and training, volunteers are then matched with a young person based on their mutual interests.

Ongoing support and training is provided to volunteers through the year. Each approved Independent Visitor has an allocated Coordinator who will support them and the young person throughout the duration of their match in order to ensure the relationship is sustained.

## How can I make a referral for a young person I am working with?

If it is felt that having an Independent Visitor would be in the best interest of the child or young person, a referral can be submitted via Mosaic, by a professional with relevant access, usually the social worker. Guidance is available on how to process this through Mosaic Matters bulletin, or can be requested from the scheme.

If the young person is over the age of 18 and a professional other than a social worker wants to refer, a paper copy of the referral can be submitted, copies of which can be requested by contacting the scheme.

Once a referral has been received it will be reviewed to confirm the child or young person meets the scheme's 'Best Interest' criteria, with additional information being requested if required. Coordinators can offer advice to professionals if required to ensure their referral includes all necessary information.

If the referral is accepted, a Coordinator will meet with the child or young person to complete a pen picture with them. This is the information about themselves that the child or young person would like to share with prospective Independent Visitors and is used in our matching processes. The coordinators will endeavour to meet the needs and wants of the young person in matching them with a volunteer, as well as linking common interests to make an appropriate match.

## Key contacts and or more information

If practitioners need to make contact with a young person's Independent Visitor, they should contact the Coordinator to facilitate this. Direct contact is not permitted in order to preserve the volunteer's independence from Children's Social Care and other professionals.

There is a Senior Coordinator and three scheme Coordinators who deliver and administer all aspects of the service including recruitment, support and supervision of the volunteers and ensuring voice and influence of young people in all aspects of service design and delivery.

The team is based at Kernel House in East Leeds, and can be contacted via email at [Independent.visitor1@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:Independent.visitor1@leeds.gov.uk), or by calling tel: 0113 3780016.

You can read more information about the Independent Visitors scheme on the [website](#).