

# Independent Visitor Volunteers Information Sheet



Independent visitors are volunteers who are matched with children and young people who are 'in care' and who would benefit from having someone in their life who is not connected with social services. The 2008 Children & Young Persons Act says that children and young people in care, aged from around 8 to 18, who would benefit, **must** be offered the opportunity of having an ordinary adult in their lives.

Independent Visitors are 'normal people' from all walks of life who have some time to offer a child or young person. They are unpaid, but can recover expenses, including transport and some money for activities. The guidance to The Children Act defines the Independent Visitor's role as 'visiting, advising and befriending'. While Independent Visitors do not take on a parenting role, they are often able to provide a sense of 'normal' life to a young person who is living in a children's home, may have been placed out of their local area, may have had frequent changes of social worker and/or foster placement. Independent Visitors are asked to commit for at least a 2 year period to provide consistency and continuity for children who may have experienced many broken relationships.

Young people regard Independent Visitors as 'an adult friend' who is able to take them on activities, support them through difficult times, provide a listening ear, and offer a long-term (two year commitment) relationship in the hope that it will turn into a life-long friendship.

## **Who can become an Independent Visitor?**

Independent Visitors must be over 18 years of age, and may either be individuals or married/cohabiting couples.

Independent Visitors must be as independent as possible from Social Services, and for this reason they may not work for Children & Families Social Services, live with a partner who does, or be an elected member of the local council.

Children and young people who are eligible for independent visitors have a vast diversity of needs, and Independent Visitors from a wide range of racial and cultural backgrounds, as well as those with disabilities, are therefore encouraged to apply.

No formal education or qualifications are needed to be an Independent Visitor, although some personal qualities are pre-requisite to the role. Independent Visitors need to have an active interest in the welfare of children and must be flexible, and resilient. Above all, Independent Visitors need to be reliable and committed to visiting their child or young person regularly.

## **Are there benefits to volunteering as an independent visitor?**

Both volunteers and the children and young people they visit have reported that they find the experience tremendously rewarding. Independent Visitors relate that they find abilities within themselves they did not previously recognise they had. The volunteering experience provides the opportunity to become more involved with the community, to develop skills relevant to career ambitions, and above all to have fun!

## **How do people become Independent Visitors?**

Prospective volunteers are asked to complete an application form and to provide four referees. Given the obvious vulnerabilities of children and young people in care, the recruitment process includes Police and other statutory checks. Volunteers undergo induction training, and a final assessment interview before an appointment is offered.

Independent Visitors are carefully matched with young people who are eligible, and consideration is given to hobbies and interests, racial and cultural backgrounds, and preferences regarding age, gender, etc. of both the child and potential visitor. When a match is made, there is a trial period of five or six visits before a definite commitment to the visitor-child relationship is made. Independent Visitors are provided with opportunities for individual and group support, as well as further training and social events.

We usually recruit and train new Independent Visitors once a year.

If you would like to become an Independent Visitor you can find out more, including recruitment and training dates at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/independent-visitors](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/independent-visitors)

Or you can contact our Independent Visitor Coordinator on 01273 295510, for an informal discussion.