



Independent Visiting Service  
67 Centre  
Hodshrove Lane  
Brighton  
East Sussex BN2 4SE

## **Independent Visitor Volunteers – information sheet**

### **Who are independent visitors and what do they do?**

Independent visitors are volunteers who are matched with children and young people who are 'in care' and who have little or no contact with their families. The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Vol 2 (issued in March 2010) states that all children and young people in care, aged from around 6 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 they recover expenses, including transportation and some money for activities. The Guidance to The Children Act 1989 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 or who has moved among numerous foster placements. Young people regard Independent Visitors as 'special adult friends' who are able to take them on activities, support them through difficult times, provide a listening ear, and offer a long-term (2 year commitment) relationship in the hope that it will turn into a life-long friendship.

### **Who can be 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.

## **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.

## **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!

## ROLE DESCRIPTION

Role title - Independent Visitor

Reports to - Independent Visitor Manager

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### 1. Main Tasks:

- i) To visit a child or young person who is in the care of Brighton and Hove Social Services on a regular basis as mutually agreed.
- ii) To provide sound advice to the child or young person.
- iii) To befriend the child or young person by taking an interest and by working at developing a beneficial relationship with him or her.
- iv) To contribute to the welfare of the child by promoting the child's developmental, social, emotional, educational, religious and cultural needs.
- v) To encourage the child to exercise his/her rights and to participate in decisions which will affect him or her.
- vi) To support the care plan for the child and his/her carers, unless there are clear reasons not to.
- vii) To keep in touch with others who have responsibility for the child or young person – e.g. the child's social worker and carers - and to strive to 'complement' their roles.
- viii) To attend 'Looked-After Children' reviews for the individual child or young person (if appropriate); possibly also to attend relevant representations procedures, meetings, etc.
- ix) To make use of support mechanisms provided.
- x) To abide by the independent visiting scheme's confidentiality and other policies.
- xi) To embrace Brighton and Hove Council's Equalities Policy.
- xii) To adhere to Brighton and Hove Council's and the Social Services Department's Health and Safety policy.

### 2. Hardest Part of the Job:

The most difficult part of being an independent visitor will probably be establishing a relationship with a child or young person who is likely to find relationship-building problematic, and who, because of his/her life experiences, is likely to be distrustful of others, and of adults in particular.

## **PERSON SPECIFICATION**

Job Title: Independent Visitor

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### **Essential Criteria**

#### **Skills and abilities:**

1. An ability to relate to children and young people
2. An ability to focus on a young person's individual needs
3. The ability to form positive working relationships with a variety of other people who are involved with the child or young person and to understand their roles and responsibilities
4. The ability to work on your own initiative, but also to know when to ask others for advice or support

#### **Experience and knowledge:**

1. An appreciation of the issues relevant to looked after children and young people, including how being looked after might affect them
2. Some experience of working with children or young people, whether in a professional, personal, or voluntary capacity
3. Self-awareness

#### **Personal Attributes:**

1. The flexibility required to build relationships at a child or young person's pace
2. Commitment to children and young people
3. Sensitivity to the needs of children and young people, as well as to the feelings of others who are involved in a young person's care
4. Reliability
5. Resilience
6. An active interest in the welfare of children and young people

**Equal Opportunities:**

1. A commitment to treating each person as an individual of intrinsic value and worth
2. A preparedness to challenge all forms of discrimination