



London Borough of

Redbridge



No: 015
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One Minute Guide:

Independent Visitors

What is it?

Independent Visitors are volunteers, aged over 18, who don't work for social services and who are there to visit and to 'befriend and advise' the child (up to the age of 18) who are looked after and have little or no contact with their families, or where it has been assessed that an Independent Visitor would contribute to the welfare of the child.

The Independent Visitor volunteers to spend some time every month with a child, befriending, supporting and encouraging them in their interests and the development of their identity.

All volunteers undergo thorough vetting, assessment and training and receive on-going supervision and support.

Why are we doing it?

Some children living in care have little or no contact with their family of origin. As a result the adults in their lives tend to be paid professionals. The Independent Visitor Scheme was set up to offer young people a supportive, long-term and stable relationship with an adult outside of the care system.

Local authorities provide children and young people in care with an Independent Visitor if they think they benefit from having somebody to visit them, advise them and befriend them.

A recent report by the Children's Rights Director for England on Independent Visitors (2012) outlines clearly some of the positive views and feedback of children and young people who have had an Independent Visitor including the following quotes:

"helped me through the bad times"

"takes me out, spends a lot of time with me"

"sees how I am doing at school and at home"

"visits and speaks to my carers"

"she made me forget about being in care and brought me up on my down days"

This report also highlighted that by far the main reason for children or young people not having an Independent Visitor was that they had never been offered one.

The report is available at www.rights4me.org

When is it happening?

Now! The Children Act 1989 requires all local authorities to consider the appointment of an Independent Visitor for any child they look after where it would be in the child's interest to do so.

Government guidelines say a child should usually be offered an Independent Visitor if they don't have much contact with their parents, or if they haven't been visited in the last year.

The guidelines also say that someone placed a long way from home might not have much contact with their family and friends, and so might need to be considered for an independent visitor.

Where is it happening?

In every social work team that has responsibility for looked after children. Consideration should be given to providing children and young people in care with an independent visitor if they think they will benefit from one. Every attempt will be made to match children to Independent Visitors, whether they are located in or out of borough. The child has the right not to have a particular person as their independent visitor, or not to have an Independent Visitor if they choose not to have one.

Who are the key players?

Redbridge contracts Action for Children to operate our Independent Visitor Service. You can make a direct referral or ask Action for Children to attend your Team Meeting by contacting:

Gavin Davies, Volunteer Co-ordinator: gavin.davies@actionforchildren.org.uk
Vera Beining, Service Manager: vera.beining@actionforchildren.org.uk

Action for Children Independent Visitor telephone number: 020 7254 9804

Posters and brochures have been circulated to all relevant teams. If you require further copies please contact Action for Children via the contact details above.