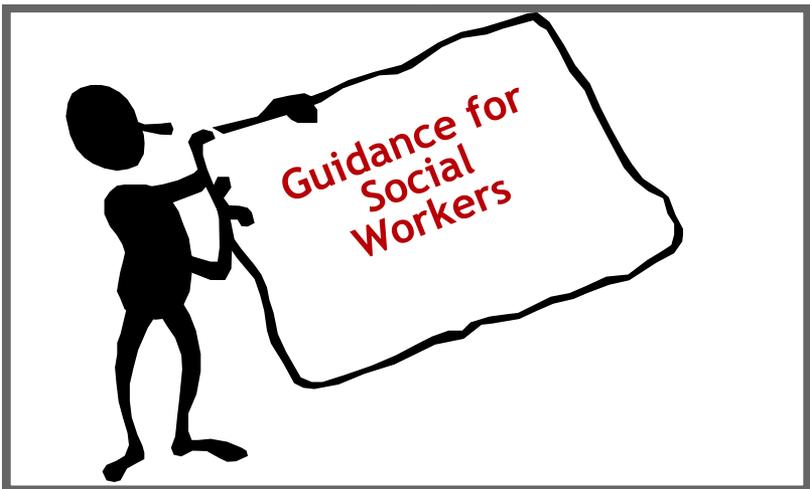




## INDEPENDENT VISITORS SERVICE Hillingdon



**Independent Visitors are a statutory provision  
under the Children Act(1989) and Children and Young  
Person's Act (2008)**

They are appointed to children and young people looked after by the local authority who would benefit from having an independent adult in their lives.

Once appointed they will continue to visit a child or young person until their 18th birthday (or 24th birthday if they are a child with a disability) unless the child no longer wishes them to do so.

Independent Visitors are unpaid volunteers who are recruited, and supervised by Coram Voice, a national children's charity.

They undergo rigorous assessment and training to ensure they are safe people to have unsupervised access to children.

***An Independent Visitor is a reliable, consistent, constant and independent friend to a looked after child.***

Children looked after by the local authority have many people involved in their lives. Most of the people involved with them are paid professionals and for many children they experience several changes of social worker and foster or residential placement during their time in care. When a child changes placement or social worker leaves, the Independent Visitor remains constant and continues to visit regardless of other changes taking place in their lives. Independent Visitors are independent from the local authority caring for the child and are unpaid volunteers. An Independent Visitor is only matched to one child and will continue to visit the child for as long as the child wants them to. This is usually until the child's 18th birthday or 24th birthday for a child with a disability.

The appointment of an Independent Visitor is only terminated if this is the express wish of the child. Coram Voice have a responsibility to ensure that in this event the wishes and feelings of the child have been sought and listened to.

**The role of the Independent Visitor**

The 1989 Act states that the Independent Visitor should:

- *visit, advise and befriend the child and should seek to bring a lay perspective to a child's life.*
- *seek to promote the welfare of the child by promoting the child's developmental, social, emotional, educational, religious and cultural needs.*
- *encourage the child to exercise his rights and to participate in decisions which will affect him.*
- *not be anything other than child-focussed.*

**What do Independent Visitors do**

The Independent Visitor will visit the child regularly and will take him/her out to pursue leisure and social activities that are appropriate to the child's age and interests and promotes their development.

The length of visits will vary and on some occasions may be for a couple of hours and on other occasions, depending on the planned activity, a longer visit or whole day out may be appropriate. Visits will take place at the weekend or in the evening.

### **Arranging visits**

*The Independent Visitor will need to make arrangements in advance about visiting with the carer and the child. If in exceptional circumstances, where difficulties have arisen in the relationship between the Independent Visitor and carer, visit arrangements can be made via the Coram Voice Office and the social worker. It is important that the child always has a date when they will next see their Independent Visitor. We seek co-operation from carers in making this possible.*

### **Regular and reliable**

It is important that the child's contact with their visitor is regular, reliable and planned. Please ensure that we are informed as soon as possible of any planned or unexpected changes to a child's placement. The Independent Visitor should at all times have up to date contact details for the child. This is particularly important as the visitor may have a visit planned with the child.

If a new placement is planned for a child, the social worker should ensure that the new carers are aware that the child has an Independent Visitor and the statutory nature of this relationship. Carers should be informed that visits will take place monthly. Children are often anxious at the time of changing placement that they will still be able to see their visitor in their new placement so it is important that plans can be made for the Independent Visitor to visit them in their new placement as soon as possible.

Leaflets explaining the role of an Independent Visitor for Foster or Residential Carers are available.

### **Cancelling visits**

Carers **must not** cancel or threaten to cancel visits with Independent Visitors as a sanction for a child's challenging behaviour. Please reinforce this with carers.

### **Change of social worker**

If a child is to change to a new social worker it is important that we are informed of this as soon as possible so that we are able to contact the correct social worker when necessary.

### **Communicating and confidentiality**

What the child talks to their visitor about is confidential and can not be disclosed without the child's consent. Independent Visitors submit visit reports to the Coram Voice office. These are used as a tool for to monitor the match and guide and advise the Independent Visitor as appropriate. If matters arise that the IV staff feel are safeguarding concerns this information will be passed to social workers.

### **Meetings and Reviews**

*The Independent Visitor should have the opportunity to provide contributions to the child's review either in writing or at meetings. The Independent Visitor may wish to put views to the meeting as a friend of the child. At reviews or*

*other meetings the child may wish the Independent Visitor to speak as a friend on his behalf in order to help resolve a particular issue or difficulty. The Children Act also offers the opportunity for an Independent Visitor to contribute views outside the formal review procedure.*

Following all reviews of children who have Independent Visitors a copy of the review minutes should be sent to the Coram Voice office. It is important that the visitor is given the opportunity to understand a child's care plan.

### **Advocacy**

*The Independent Visitor is not expected to play the role of skilled advocate. The independent visitor, in circumstances where a child is in need of skilled advocacy, should recognise the needs of the child and in such serious situations, with the child's agreement, draw their concerns to the attention of the child's social worker or a more senior officer or if appropriate refer the matter to a specialist advocacy service.*

### **Telephone contact between visitors and children**

Initially the Visitor's home telephone number and address will not be given to the child but the Visitor may give the child their mobile number or email address. Once visiting is established this may change. If the child wishes to contact their Visitor by phone, text, email or in writing, they should be afforded privacy to do this. The child must be allowed to communicate with their visitor in a confidential way.

Please reinforce this with foster carers and residential workers.

### **Risk assessment**

The social worker must fully inform us at referral and during the relationship if there is any significant danger that the young person's behaviour may present a risk to an Independent Visitor. Independent Visitors interact with young people on a one on one basis in situations where there is no back up of other colleagues to alert and assist if the child becomes aggressive. If a young person has a history of aggressive behaviour and there is a significant risk to the visitor we may not be able to make a match or the visitor may only be able to visit the child in their home setting. It is the social worker's responsibility to risk assess the behaviour of the young person as we would not have the background information on the child that would enable us to do this assessment.

### **Independent**

*Independent Visitors are independent of children's services. They are not to be anything other than child-focused, however sympathetic they may be to other points of view. They are not expected to accept unquestioningly what those responsible for the child tell them is in his/her interests, but should remain open-minded and even sceptical.*

*Independent Visitors will seek to support a child's care plan unless they feel there is clear evidence to act differently.*

### **Any concerns**

If any concerns are brought to your attention about the Independent Visitor, the Coram Voice manager should be informed as soon as possible and the nature of the concern explained. If a social worker wishes to invite an IV to a meeting to discuss a concern that has arisen about their role or conduct, this should be arranged via the Coram Voice office and the Coram Voice manager will arrange to accompany the IV to the meeting.

### **Assessment**

Independent Visitors are subject to rigorous assessment which includes enhanced DBS check. This process can take several months and therefore Independent Visitors have to demonstrate their commitment to the role before they are matched to a child or young person.

### **Who can have an Independent Visitor**

Independent Visitors are for looked after children who would benefit from having an independent adult in their lives.

Matching to independent visitors is normally between the ages of **8 and 18**. Matches with older teenagers can be more difficult to establish so the younger children are referred the better. Once made the match can continue until the child is 18 or 24 if a child with a disability.

Although the match formally ends at 18 many children continue to have contact informally with their visitors beyond their 18th birthday. For a referral form and copy of the referral criteria contact the Coram Voice office. If a child meets the criteria but all places are currently full they will be placed on a waiting list. For children on the waiting list it is important that you keep us updated with placement changes as this may affect who we can match them to. Please contact us to check on the progress of a referral.

### **Referral and Matching**

Once a referral is received for an Independent Visitor we will arrange to meet with the child and complete an initial questionnaire and or pen picture with the child identifying the personal attributes and qualities they would like their IV to have. For example, whether they would have a preference of gender, ethnicity, age and the interests the child would like them to have. This information, and the referral information from the social worker, will be used to inform the IV sought and assist in the matching process to ensure the IV will be able to undertake a positive role for the child.

### **Sharing information**

It is vitally important that social workers pass on any information that the Independent Visitor may need to be aware of when taking a child out, e.g. are there any places a child should not visit because of past associations, anybody they should not be allowed to contact, anything that is restricted by their religion or culture. It is also important that visitors are given up to date medical information relating to allergies/phobias/fears, restricted diet or other medical conditions.

### **Photography**

Visitors may wish to take photographs of the child on the visit for the child to have as a memory of the visit. Please contact the Coram Voice office for a copy of our photography policy and inform us if for any reason photographs should not be taken.



**For further information and referral forms, please  
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