

Independent Visitors

*for young people
in care*

Guidance



Guidance

For Independent Visitors CONTENTS

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Being an Independent Visitor (IV)

Main Tasks:

1. To visit a child or young person who is looked after by Leicester City Council, Children & Young People & Families Service on a regular basis as mutually agreed.
2. To provide sound advice to the child or young person.
3. To befriend the child or young person by taking an interest and by working at developing a beneficial relationship with him or her.
4. In general, to undertake these roles from a lay perspective.
5. To assess how activities with an individual child might best be focused.
6. To contribute to the welfare of the child by promoting the child's developmental, social, emotional, educational, religious and cultural needs.
7. To encourage the child to exercise his/her rights and to participate in decisions which will affect him or her.
8. To keep in touch with others who have responsibility for the child or young person – e.g. the child's social worker and carers.
9. To attend 'Looked-After Children' reviews for the individual child or young person visited on their request.
10. To make use of support mechanisms and training provided.
11. To abide by the Independent Visitors Scheme's confidentiality and other policies.
12. To embrace Leicester City Council's Equalities Policy.
13. To adhere to Leicester City Council's Health and Safety policies.
14. To liaise regularly with the Independent Visitor Co-ordinator for support, guidance and advice.
15. To provide a quality written record of the visit to the young person.
16. **The Hardest Part of the Independent Visiting Role** 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.

Attributes Needed to Become an Independent Visitor

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

Recruitment Procedure for Independent Visitors

1. Initial telephone conversation with potential volunteer
2. Information and application form sent to prospective volunteer
3. Initial visit and interview with prospective volunteer. IV co-ordinator to advise prospective volunteer if proceeding or not.
4. If proceeding, assessment commences – DBS, statutory checks and references completed.
5. Assessment completed, with the provision of police clearance and suitable references.
6. Assessment signed off by Team Manager and Service Manager.
7. Potential volunteer informed of decision by letter, with certificate of IV approval.

Expectations of Volunteers

- Independent Visitors must not consume alcoholic drinks while working with children or young people. Similarly, volunteers should not smoke in front of any child or young person they are visiting.
- Independent Visitors should not provide or administer medication, including aspirin, etc. to the young person. Individual medical needs will be discussed and agreed at the introduction meeting.
- Independent Visitors will treat the children and young people they visit with respect at all times. Independent Visitors must NEVER hit or otherwise mistreat the child or young person they are matched with.
- Independent Visitors will visit their child or young person regularly and will let the child know as soon as possible if a visit must be cancelled.
- Independent Visitors should not give their child or young person money or gifts without first consulting the carers of the child/young person and IV Co-ordinator.
- Independent Visitors will understand the roles of other important people in the child's life and will strive to complement already-existing relationships. Volunteers will liaise with the carers of the child or young person they visit.
- Independent Visitors will not let children down by making promises they are unable to keep.
- Independent Visitors are expected to make use of the individual, group support and training provided. They will normally be expected to attend unless there are any exceptional reasons. These should be discussed and agreed by the IV Co-ordinator.
- Independent Visitors must abide by other policy documents relevant to their role with particular attention paid to confidentiality and equal opportunities policies.

Contact Between Independent Visitors & Young People

Introduction Meeting

The introduction meeting between an Independent Visitor and a young person takes place at the child's place of residence. This is particularly important because, while the Independent Visitor is focused on the needs of the child or young person at all times, it will also be necessary to form a positive relationship with the carers. The first visit will include the IV Co-ordinator, the IV, the young person and the foster carer(s) where relevant.

Subsequent Meetings

The Independent Visitor and the child or young person will undergo a 'trial period' of four to five visits to ascertain if the match is right for them. Initial visits can continue in the child or young person's home if necessary, but will usually take place outside of this environment

Frequency of Meetings

There is an expectation that Independent Visitors will meet with their young person once a month, however this can be flexible, dependent on the amount of time each party has to offer and also on what feels comfortable. It is advisable to take things slowly at first. The IV Co-ordinator will contact the IV and the young person at regular intervals to ensure that there are no concerns on either part. Also, a closure review will take place when a match ends.

Contact at an Independent Visitor's Home

Contact between an Independent Visitor and a child does not take place at an Independent Visitor's home. Home visits might unrealistically raise a child or young person's expectations.

We would strongly advise that Independent Visitors do not give out their phone number or home address.

Confidentiality

The Independent Visiting Scheme is committed to empowering children and young people by recognising their right to control information held and shared about them. The service respects children's and young people's right to privacy and encourages young people to make decisions for themselves so long as they are able to understand the outcomes of the decisions they make. Confidentiality is therefore only breached in exceptional circumstances when:

- A child or young person is in **danger of immediate significant harm** or a life-threatening situation;
- Not acting might place someone else in danger of **immediate significant harm** or a life-threatening situation;
- A child or young person is being physically, sexually or otherwise abused and not acting places them at risk of continued harm;
- Not acting will violate the rights of other children or young people who are being harmed and cannot be consulted;
- Another person is at risk and acting could prevent them from being harmed.

Independent Visitors must inform children and young people they visit of the boundaries of confidentiality at the beginning of the visiting relationship and must ensure that these are understood.

Before confidentiality is breached the Independent Visitor must first discuss their intended actions and reasons for passing information on with the child or young person they are visiting **unless it is impossible to do so**. Ideally, the Independent Visitor will encourage and support the child or young person to pass the information on him/herself.

- Independent Visitors must consult with the IV Co-ordinator at the earliest opportunity if confidentiality is to be breached.
- If the Independent Visitor is in any doubt with regard to confidentiality in their relationship with the child or young person, s/he must consult with the IV Co-ordinator or contact the out of hours team for advice.

All information gained through the course of a visiting relationship must be regarded as confidential and may not be shared or divulged other than to an authorised person, other than in the exceptional circumstances outlined above. Failure of any Independent Visitor to abide by this policy of confidentiality will result in disciplinary action and probable dismissal from the Independent Visitor Scheme.

Equal Opportunities

The Independent Visitors Scheme values and celebrates the diversity of our community. Volunteers are actively recruited from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and the scheme seeks to recruit male and female volunteers, volunteers from all sexual orientations, religious faiths, and socio-economic backgrounds and volunteers of all ages. Independent Visitors with disabilities are welcome to apply.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to LCC policies on Diversity, Equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practices, but also to actively promote equal opportunities in their work with children and young people. This may mean that Independent Visitor need to challenge (wherever possible) discriminatory comments made by the young people they visit or made by others they encounter in the course of their visiting relationship.

Equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice will feature in training, and in individual and group support sessions.

Health and Safety

The Independent Visitors Scheme is committed to enabling children, young people, and Independent Visitors to feel safe at all times. Recognising the particular behavioural difficulties of some children and young people eligible for the scheme, volunteers are provided with support, advice and training in dealing with attachment-based behaviour where this is appropriate. While it is the responsibility of the IV Co-ordinator to ensure that safety issues are adequately addressed, volunteers have a statutory duty to safeguard their own health and safety, children and young people, and members of the public.

It is the responsibility of Independent Visitors to notify the IV Co-ordinator without delay, of any health and/or safety issues that come to their attention.

Volunteers are obliged to report any accidents or incidents which could have given rise to an accident promptly to the IV Co-ordinator who is responsible for keeping a relevant record of all incidents/accidents reported by Independent Visitors. In these cases, volunteers will be required to complete an incident/accident report form, which will be provided by the IV Co-ordinator. Foster carers will be informed of any incident/accident by the IV when returning a young person. The IV Co-ordinator will inform SSW and child's SW of any incident/accident ASAP.

In the event of a medical emergency – the IV should get help immediately. Tell the doctor that the child is fostered and what your role is. Advise the foster carer as soon as possible.

If your visiting young person goes missing whilst in your care, it is your duty to notify the young person's foster carer. They will be able to work with you and take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate action is taken.

Lone Working

Independent Visitors should ensure that a named person is aware of when they are going to meet with a child or young person and where the visit is going to take place. Independent Visitors should also inform the named person when they have returned from the visit. Independent Visitors will be expected to contact the IV Co-ordinator with details of the visit; afterwards it is recommended that volunteers use their peer network for the purpose of a named person.

Ongoing Support and Personal Development

While the Guidance to the Children Act 1989 stipulates that Independent Visitors should remain as 'independent' as practicable from Children, Young People & Families Service and that they should not be 'managed' on a day-to-day basis, it is also recognised that volunteers will need continued support and advice, and that they would benefit from continued access to training. A number of mechanisms are therefore in place to assist Independent Visitors in the fulfilment of their roles:

Contact with the IV will be made by the IV Co-ordinator after their initial visit to check out the experience was ok for the IV.

There will be group support sessions and training events throughout the year. These are semi-structured events where the agenda is set by the Independent Visitors and the IV co-ordinator.

Newly-appointed Independent Visitors or those who are experiencing particular difficulties in their visiting relationships can receive additional support.

The IV Co-ordinator is available for support and advice and is able to speak or meet with Independent Visitors who have areas of concern to share.

Reclaiming Expenses

Independent Visitors will be entitled to reclaim monies spent in one-to-one sessions with the children and young people they visit. Expenses include refreshment costs while out with a child or young person, transportation costs, and reasonable entrance fees for activities. Budgetary confinements necessitate an upper limit on what may be reclaimed per session and per month; these limits will be discussed with Independent Visitors before they begin visiting a child or young person. Any costs that fall outside of these boundaries must be authorised in advance by the IV Co-ordinator

Independent Visitors who expect to use their own cars for transporting children and young people are responsible for arranging beforehand appropriate business insurance cover. Otherwise a letter from the insurance company stating that the young person would be insured while in the car is needed. Expenses must be reclaimed using relevant claim forms available from the IV Co-ordinator. Claims must be accompanied by receipts.

Complaints Procedure

Firstly, your co-ordinator is expected to be available to you, to try to resolve any of the problems that may arise as a result of the job you are doing for the service. If this fails to satisfy you, you may raise this as a formal complaint. Anyone in Children, Young People and Families Service can take details from you – so you don't have to do this through the IV co-ordinator. (See your **Right to Complain** leaflet).

Stage One of the formal process for either you or the child is for the responsible Line Manager to investigate and report back to you. If you cannot accept the first report, the complaint then goes to:

Stage Two – A complaints Officer from the Performance Management Unit and an independent lay person will investigate in detail again, interviewing anyone concerned. You will be given their report, which if still not satisfactory will become:

Stage Three – A panel of elected members receives reports and hears submissions from all parties, then makes decisions and recommendations.

If volunteers wish to make a complaint about the IV Co-ordinator, this should be made in writing to the Complaints Manager, who will be responsible for taking the appropriate action. All actions will be dealt with under Children, Young People & Families Services Complaints Procedure. See **your Right to Complain** leaflet.

CONTACT

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