



One minute guide

Independent Visitors for children looked after

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What is an Independent Visitor and what do they do?

An Independent Visitor (IV) is a volunteer who befriends and meets a child or young person living in the care of the local authority. They provide support and advice, which contributes towards the child's social, emotional and educational development. Leeds City Council have an Independent Visitor Scheme, which recruits and trains Independent Visitors and matches them with children and young people.

Independent Visitors are also available to care leavers up to the age of 21, and up to age 25 for young people with additional needs.

An Independent Visitor will visit the child or young person once a month, with the aim of establishing a consistent, positive adult-child relationship. What they will do together depends on the age, needs and wishes of the child or young person but can include activities like playing football in the park, seeing the latest films, or trying new experiences the young person is interested in.

The Independent Visitor's role is to be a friend to the young person. The most important part of the relationship and time spent together is that the young person and Independent Visitor enjoy each other's company and have fun!

Who can volunteer to be an Independent Visitor?

The Scheme continually recruit Independent Visitors, and welcome applications from people from a diverse range of communities and backgrounds in order to fully reflect the diversity of the looked after population.

Anyone over the age of 18 can be an Independent Visitor; applicants need to be able to relate well to children and young people, as well as have a level of maturity in being able to respond to their needs.

The Scheme employs a rigorous recruitment process in line with safer recruitment practices. This involves an application, interviews, references and an enhanced [DBS \(Disclosure and Barring Service\) check](#). Applicants receive comprehensive training to prepare them for the role. This includes topics such as roles and responsibilities, maintaining boundaries, safeguarding and child protection.

Information gathered is overseen and quality-assured by an approval panel, ensuring Independent Visitors are safe and committed to the role. Following approval, IVs are matched with a young person based on their mutual interests.

Ongoing support and training is provided to volunteer Independent Visitors throughout their involvement with the scheme. Each approved Independent Visitor has an allocated Coordinator who supports them and the young person throughout their match in order to ensure the relationship is sustained.

How can I make a referral for a young person I am working with?

If it is felt that having an Independent Visitor would be in the best interest of the child or young person, a referral can be submitted via Mosaic, by a professional with relevant access; this would usually be their social worker or personal advisor. Guidance is available on how to process this through the Mosaic Matters bulletin, or can be requested from the scheme.

Young people can also self-refer, and other professionals are welcome to contact the scheme about alternative referral routes.

Once a referral is received, it will be reviewed to ensure the child or young person meets the scheme's 'Best Interest' criteria, which includes both core and additional criteria. The referral will only be considered if young people: are subject to a long term care plan; have consented to the referral; and have carers who are willing to support the relationship (core criteria). Young people should also meet some of the additional criteria, which include: social isolation; having experienced instability in placements; having no contact with family; children placed in single parent placements; and/ or children who have difficulty forming positive relationships.

Coordinators can offer advice to professionals if required to ensure their referral includes all necessary information.

If the referral is accepted, a Coordinator will meet with the child or young person to complete a 'matching profile' with them, asking them about themselves, their interests, and what they would like their IV to be like. This is used to identify a good Independent Visitor match.

Key contacts and further information

Professionals should not contact Independent Visitors directly, in order to preserve the volunteer's independence from Children's Social Care. If practitioners need to make contact with a young person's Independent Visitor, this should be done through the IV Scheme Coordinator.

The Scheme comprises a Senior Coordinator and three Coordinators who deliver and administer all aspects of the service including recruitment, support and supervision of the volunteers and ensuring voice and influence of young people in all aspects of service design and delivery.

Leaflets (digital and paper) for young people, explaining what an Independent Visitor is and how to get one, can be requested from the scheme.

The scheme can be contacted by email at independent.visitor1@leeds.gov.uk, or by telephoning: 0113 378 0016.

You can read more information about the Independent Visitors scheme on the [website](#).