**Independent Visitors**

**Volunteer 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 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’. They are often able to provide a sense of ‘normal’ life to a young person who is living in a children’s home, who have moved among numerous foster placements or are in a kinship care arrangement. Young people regard Independent Visitors as ‘adult friends’ who are able to take them on activities, support them through difficult times, provide a listening ear, and, in many cases, offer a long-term relationship.

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 must 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 you become an Independent Visitor?

Prospective volunteers are asked to complete an application form and to provide two referees. Given the obvious vulnerabilities of children and young people in care, the recruitment process includes a DBS/Police check. Volunteers undergo a comprehensive induction training package, and an interview before an appointment is offered.

**Role Description**

**Role: Independent Visitor**

**Reports to: Independent Visitor Coordinator**

**Main Tasks**

1. To visit a child or young person who is in the ‘care’ of Durham County Council on a regular basis as mutually agreed.

1. To provide sound advice to the child or young person.

1. To befriend the child or young person by taking an interest and by working at developing a beneficial relationship with him or her.

1. To contribute to the welfare of the child by promoting the child’s developmental, social, emotional, educational, religious and cultural needs.

1. To encourage the child to exercise his/her rights and to participate in decisions which will affect him or her.

1. To support the care plan for the child and his/her carers, unless there are clear reasons not to.

1. 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.

1. To attend ‘Looked-After Children’ reviews for the individual child or young person (if appropriate); possibly also to attend relevant representations procedures, meetings, etc.

1. To make use of support mechanisms provided.

1. To abide by the independent visiting scheme’s confidentiality and other policies.

1. To embrace Durham County Council’s Equalities Policy.

1. To adhere to Durham County Council’s Health and Safety policy

**Person Specification**

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|  | **Essential** | **Desirable** |
| **Skills/Knowledge** | * Able to relate to children and young people and have fun with them
* Patient and willing to focus on the needs of the young person
* Able to listen in a non-judgemental way
* Ready to support the young person to voice their views
* Keen to participate in activities with the young person
* Consistent, reliable, and trustworthy
* Maintain appropriate levels of confidentiality
* The ability to form positive working relationships with a variety of people who are involved with the young person
* The ability to work on your own initiative but also know when to ask for advice or support
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| **Experience** | * An appreciation of the issues relevant to looked after young people and how being looked after might affect them
* Some experience of working with young people whether on a professional, personal or voluntary capacity
* Self- Awareness
 | * Knowledge of the issues impacting children who are looked after by the Local Authority
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| **Personal Qualities** | * Commitment to children and young people
* Flexibility to build a relationship with a young person at their pace
* Sensitivity to the needs of young people and to those who are involved in their care
* Reliability
* Resilience
* Empathetic
* An active interest in the welfare of young people
* Ability to promote equal opportunities and a non-judgemental attitude
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| **Other** | * Be able to commit to a young person for at least 1 year
* Be able to commit to initial and ongoing training and supervision
* Be able to commit to at least one visit with a young person every month
 | * Drive and have access to a car
* Live in or close to County Durham
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