



## INTRODUCTION

The role of the Independent Visitor (Befriender) was first introduced as a statutory service for looked after children in The Children Act 1989 and revised in the Children and Young Person's Act 2008. The Children's Act says a local authority has to appoint an Independent Visitor for any child they are looking after, if they feel it would be in the child's best interests. Section 23ZB of the Children's Act 1989 states '(1) A local authority looking after a child must appoint an independent person to be the child's visitor if – (a) the child falls within a description prescribed in regulations made by the appropriate national authority; or (b) in any other case, it appears to them that it would be in the child's interests to do so. (2) A person appointed under this section must visit, befriend and advise the child'.

Independent Visitor services should follow the Department for Education's guidance found in Volume 2 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations which states: 'the appointment should be considered as part of the development of the care plan for the child or as part of a review of the child's case. Any decision not to appoint an independent visitor should be kept under review to make sure that the opportunity to appoint such a person is considered if the child's circumstances change. The child's wishes and feelings should be ascertained and the responsible authority may not appoint an independent visitor if the young person objects and the authority are satisfied that the child has sufficient understanding to make an informed decision.'

## YLF'S INDEPENDENT VISITORS SERVICE

YLF provides the Independent Visitor Service on behalf of Kent County Council under the Representation, Rights and Advocacy Contract. YLF recruits, trains, supports and retains volunteers to act as Independent Visitors (IVs) and currently has over 70 accredited IVs in Kent.

The role of the IV is to visit, advise and befriend young people, aged 8-18, in Kent's care, taking a long term and independent interest in their welfare and development. **YLF are commissioned to evidence 60 arrangements a year.**

Using a Volunteer Recruitment Strategy, YLF ensures capacity is met by increasing the number of IVs in the appropriate districts. Volunteer recruitment is monitored to ensure diversity of volunteers in line with YLF's Equal Opportunities Policy. YLF successfully recruits from a variety of local sources ensuring volunteers are diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, experience, location and those with disabilities, therefore meeting the needs of a wide range of young people.

In 2016/17 IVs gave over **10,000** voluntary hours across Kent.

Young people are crucial in the training and recruitment of staff and IVs, and are actively involved in IV induction training, selection and assessments.

***"Having the chance to talk with the young people on the training course was most helpful as it put all that we learnt into context and made it real. They were also the reminder of why I wanted to volunteer for YLF."*** Trainee IV

IVs will also be offered on-going training and support groups in their district, providing an opportunity to meet with other IVs, staff/managers and guests from partner agencies.

YLF asks all IVs to make a minimum commitment of two years to the young person they will be visiting. An important aspect of the role is to provide a long term relationship, something that young people in care can often miss out on when they only have contact with professionals. Currently over 50% of IV arrangements have been in place for over two years with 20% having lasted for four years or more offering added consistency and stability over and above expected requirements. Quite often IVs are the only consistent adult in a young person's life.

***“Adults come and go like buses, it’s not like that with my Independent Visitor, every time I need them I know they will be there to offer help and advice.”*** N, Aged 17

The IV Service ensures young people's welfare, development and wishes are paramount in all arrangements. IVs will work with carers, social workers and practitioners to complement care plans whilst maintaining their independence.

IVs are given a small budget to allow quality time with young people in community settings and offer informal support and activities. They will visit the young person once or twice a month, depending on the care plan, and maintain contact as appropriate in-between visits.

Young people achieve outcomes in respect of:

- learning new skills,
- developing communication skills and learning to trust
- building self-confidence and raising their self-esteem,
- broadening horizons,
- encouraging existing hobbies/ trying new things,
- offering informal education/training opportunities in social and life skills, i.e. budgeting, travel arrangements, homework and ASDAN qualifications,
- experiencing consistency and continuity from an adult who is reliable, independent and there for them.

***“I’ve done so much with my IV over the years, things I wouldn’t have done before. She’s encouraged me to do well at school. Life seems bigger now.”*** C, Aged 16

Arrangements conclude for varying reasons, regardless, an ending will always be managed to ensure the young person receives a positive 'Good Goodbye'. Quite often when a young person reaches 18 the IV relationship will continue voluntarily.

***‘Claire has been my Independent Visitor for three years now. We have had so much fun in those years and I’ve got so many good memories of my time I am never going to forget.’*** S, Aged,17

YLF continues to retain volunteers and many stay with the organisation to act as Independent Visitors for new referrals, once their existing arrangement is concluded.

*“I would like to thank you, and all the staff at YLF, for giving me the opportunity to have K in my life. For myself the relationship has been enriching and joyous and seeing her develop and mature into a kind, considerate, intelligent adult makes me so proud of what she has overcome and achieved entirely all on her own merits.”* Mary | Volunteer Independent Visitor

## OUTPUTS 2016/17

Number of arrangements 2016/17 | **66**

Number of active referrals awaiting match | **32**

YLF have met and surpassed the commissioning target of 60 matches each year. 66 young people have received the service in 2016/17.

**20** new young people received the service.

## OUTCOMES

### Case Study One

S is an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person that YLF’s accompanying adult service supported during his age assessment. S was very distressed during the age assessment process and YLF’s volunteer accompanying adult suggested to the social worker that he may benefit from a referral to the Independent Visitor service. S had a YLF advocate who helped him in his new accommodation and applied for a hardship fund which was granted. The Independent Visitor service matched him with a Pashtu speaking volunteer. The volunteer was keen to support S so travels more than an hour to see him. The joint working between YLF’s services and a successful funding bid enabled the Independent Visitor to obtain a bike, laptop and English CDs. The Independent Visitor has also encouraged S to join a local karate club which he loves and wants to continue next term. He and his volunteer are continuing to explore the local area and learn about Kent’s heritage.

### Case Study Two

T is 16 years old and under the disabilities team. T will be moving into supported living when she is 18 and it is recognised that she will need a lot of support with this. The Independent Visitor has been helping T prepare for this by accompanying her on public transport, looking at timetables and costs, and assisting her to develop independent skills. The foster carer reports that she is now more confident and will actually meet her Independent Visitor at the train station. They have had many adventures whilst travelling on public transport, including coping with rail replacement buses and not having enough cash for the bus! All good life experiences for T.

### Case Study Three

G and Jane have been matched for the last three years. G has experienced some turbulent times recently which has involved him moving placements. Jane has been there for him during this time and has had several telephone calls from G when he has been in difficult situations. Most recently, G had an issue concerning a new relationship and he had been upset about a

decision the foster carers and social worker had made regarding an overnight stay. Jane was able to talk it through with G and returned him to the foster carers a lot calmer. G later phoned Jane to say that he had apologised to his foster carers and felt happier about decisions that had been made.

#### Case Study Four

A and Marion are a new arrangement. A is very keen on fishing and so their first visit was to the fishing lake. When they arrived A said to Marion that they couldn't speak as it would scare the fish. This did not last long as A was soon chatting away. They were there for five hours and caught nothing, but had a fantastic time! Marion and his foster carer feel that fishing is some kind of safety net for A as this seemed to be all that he wanted to do. Marion is gradually helping A to experience new activities. They attended the Brighton trip arranged by YLF and have since experienced various activities. Marion reports that A is very quiet at first but once he gets to the activity he is fine and enjoys it.

#### Case Study Five

C had been having difficulties with school so her Independent Visitor Nicola made this a focus point on her next visit. C was able to talk about these difficulties and appreciated an alternative point of view. They discussed the situation and how she might be able to handle it better should the incident arise again. In this more relaxed situation C was able to see other people's views. Nicola has also taken C horse riding which she really enjoyed. Her social worker has now confirmed that she has put regular riding lessons in place for her.

### FEEDBACK| YOUNG PEOPLE, CARERS, VOLUNTEERS

#### Young People

'My Independent Visitor is there when I need to talk about my problems, they treat me fairly and like an individual. I can open up to them and they listen without judgement.'

'My Independent Visitor is fun to be with, we do lots of great things together and they are my best friend in the whole world.'

'Nicky always makes me smile and laugh. She is there to listen and give advice.'

'My IV is like family and I'm so lucky she takes me out to so many places and gives up her time for me.'

'Thanks for all he has done and helping to get where I am today.'

'She is an amazing IV and also my close friend, we keep our memories in a scrap book.'

'My IV never lets me down and takes an interest in me.'

'My IV is always there for me I love having her as my special friend, we will be friends forever.'

‘They are fun and take me to lots of different places.’

## Volunteers

‘On our trip to London C announced that she was very happy that she was with me.’

‘I will continue to support G when she turns 18, she will find this a difficult time.’

‘I can see S growing in confidence and now able to say no to things and make decisions about where she would like to go.’

‘I can’t believe that we have been matched for three years the time has just flown by.’

‘Our first outing was a great success, R didn’t stop talking and we are already planning our next activity.’

## Foster Carers

‘A always looks forward to his visits, I think he looks on Peter and Meryl as grandparents.’

## EXCELLENCE IN VOLUNTEERING

YLF successfully renewed the NCVO Mentoring and Befriending Approved Provider Standard Award. This is awarded to YLF until 2020. This is a fantastic achievement and one YLF is very proud of. The award provides an external accreditation highlighting the excellent support YLF gives to its volunteers, young people and staff.

*“YLF is offering an excellent service which is constantly evolving to meet the changing needs to the young people it supports. Based on the evidence provided, interviews with staff, volunteers and service users, the assessor has no hesitation in recommending the IVs, schools and community mentoring schemes for re-accreditation.” NCVO Assessor*

*“YLF is able to offer several areas of added value to the mentoring and befriending it provides. It is an ASDAN accredited provider, meaning that young people can receive a qualification for accessing the mentoring and befriending services. For young people who have been out of education, this can be a particularly significant achievement. It also offers group activities; both of the service users interviewed had also participated in the group activities offered by YLF and had really valued these opportunities.” NCVO Assessor*