

#### **What do we mean by an Independent Visitor?**

An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who has been carefully matched to befriend children and young people in care. Their key purpose is to contribute to the welfare of the child, help the child build relationships and to feel positive about their future. Independent Visitors are adult volunteers who give up some of their free time to take a special interest in a child or young adult.

#### **What the law requires**

The role of the Independent Visitor role was first introduced as a statutory service, under the Children Act, 1989, which states that a local authority has **a duty** to appoint an Independent Visitor, for any child they are looking after, if they feel it would be in their best interest.

Section 23 B of the C Act 1989 states (1) A local authority looking after a child must appoint an IV to be the child's visitor if – (a) the child falls within a description prescribed in regulations made by the authority or (b) in any other case it appears to them 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".

Their 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 an Independent Visitor is considered, if the child's circumstances change.

#### **What is the purpose of the Independent Visitor role?**

- Promote the child's developmental, social, emotional, educational, religious and cultural needs
- Encourage the child to exercise his/her rights and to participate in decisions which will affect him/her
- Support the care plan for the child and his/her carers aim as far as possible, to compliment the activities of carers

#### **Identifying when an Independent Visitor should be appointed**

- If it appears that communication between the child and a parent or a person who has PR has been infrequent: or
- The child has not been visited (or has not lived with) a parent or any person who has PR during the preceding 12 months

**Decisions about whether to consider appointing an Independent Visitor should be determined according to the needs of the child. The following should be considered:**

- Whether the child is placed at a distance or outside of the borough, which makes it difficult to maintain sufficient contact with friends
- Whether the child is unable to go out independently or experiences difficulties in communicating or building positive relationships
- Whether the child is likely to engage in behaviour which will put him/her at risk of peer pressure or forming inappropriate relationships with people who are older
- Whether a child would benefit from a more individualised relationship
- Whether it would make a positive contribution to promoting the child's education and health

Being independent means that an Independent Visitor must not be a paid employee of Newcastle Council or an elected Member.

**What are the Independent Visitor functions?**

The functions of the Independent visitor are to visit, advise and befriend the child. These will vary according to the needs and wishes of the individual child.

There will be a range of issues which an Independent Visitor might offer the child advice. These may be quite straightforward e.g. where to find or who to ask for particular information.

Befriending involves trying to establish with the child a sense of trust in the relationship.

**The Independent Visitor role and function is not intended to:**

- Be anything but child focussed
- Not be a substitute parent or carer
- Not allow personal prejudices to determine actions
- Not to engage the child in intensive counselling involving complex situations
- Not to take on the role of a skilled advocate in complex situations

**Selecting an Independent visitor**

*Action for Children* provides Independent Visitors to children in Newcastle, who live in residential or foster care. They carefully match the child with an Independent Visitor based on the child's likes and dislikes. A meeting is held between the social worker, Independent visitor and carers to share information and discuss arrangements. If the first meeting goes well with the child, the service is reviewed at each looked after review and can continue for as long as the child wishes.

In matching a child to an Independent Visitor the local authority must take account of the wishes and feelings of the child. This means the child must be part of the process of deciding whether an Independent Visitor should be appointed.

## **Quotes from young people on how the Independent Visitor has helped them:**

*“He helps me get help and support”*

*“school problems – I was getting bullied at school”*

*“I get taken out to get some space and an opportunity to talk to someone”*

*“She helps me with skills to learn lots of new things”*

### **How to make a referral**

You can make a referral by calling 0191-2724990 or emailing [ne.crs@actionforchildren.org.uk](mailto:ne.crs@actionforchildren.org.uk)

### **For further information or advice**

Please contact Stafford Devine on 23644 (2773644) if you wish to discuss the role of IVs or how to access the service.