

One minute guide



Independent Visitors Scheme

What is an Independent Visitor?

An Independent Visitor (IV) is a volunteer who can provide a long-term, consistent, reliable and appropriate adult-child relationship to all children in care, which is independent of social services. The volunteers commit to visiting a young person at least once a month with the aim to befriend the young person and take a genuine interest in their life, interests and hobbies. IVs come from a range of backgrounds, the main criteria being that they enjoy and are skilled with developing appropriate supportive relationships with young people. IVs go through a careful recruitment process including appropriate background checks. They are trained and supported in their role and are aware of responsibilities in areas such as safeguarding, safe practice and confidentiality.

How has the service changed?

North Yorkshire County Council has its own Independent Visitors scheme in partnership with North Yorkshire Youth (NYY), enabling young people to more easily request and access an Independent Visitor. NYY is an organisation which provides development and training opportunities for young people in our communities, primarily through activities held in Carlton Lodge and youth centres across the county. The scheme has recruited volunteers from our communities who can offer invaluable one-to-one support and friendship to North Yorkshire's looked after children.

How can referrals be made to request an Independent Visitor?

The young person's social worker can make a referral to the scheme's coordinator who will facilitate the matching process and can provide further information and guidance to social workers, carers and other professionals regarding the role of the IV. A referral can be made at any time, the referral forms are available from the scheme's coordinator or can be found on SharePoint. Referrals should be made with the involvement and agreement of the young person. Resources containing further information for young people and carers are also available via SharePoint.

The offer of an Independent Visitor should be considered on a regular basis raised in each looked children's review. If the young person already has an allocated IV the looked after children's review should be used to collate and consider feedback from the young person, professionals and carers.

Who is eligible?

Decisions about whether to consider appointing an Independent Visitor will be determined according to the needs of the young person and their individual circumstances. To be eligible for the scheme young people must be in the care of North Yorkshire County Council. If a young person is placed in North Yorkshire by another Local Authority, it remains the responsibility of the placing authority to uphold their right to access an IV.

Independent Visitors are available to all children in care if this is in their interest. A referral should be considered especially when;

- Communication between the young person and parent (or individual with parental responsibility) has been infrequent or problematic ; or
- The young person has not been visited (or has not lived with) a parent or any person who has parental responsibility for the child, during the preceding 12 months.

A referral may also be appropriate in the following scenarios;

- a young person is placed at a distance from home, particularly where the placement is out-of-authority, which makes it difficult to maintain sufficient contact with their network
- a young person is unable to go out independently or experiences difficulties in communicating and/or building positive relationships
- a young person is likely to engage in behaviours which will put them at risk, as a result of peer pressure or forming inappropriate relationships with people who are significantly older
- a young person is placed in a residential setting and would benefit from a more individualised relationship
- a young person is an unaccompanied asylum seeker
- it would make a positive contribution to promoting the young person's education and health.

There may be other instances not covered above where the appointment on an IV is in the interests of the young person. If you are unsure about whether the scheme will be right for a young person please contact the IV coordinator to discuss the circumstances further.

IV support for young people can continue beyond 18 and up to the age of 21 if required. Referrals should normally be made before the young person reaches the age of 18.

For more information about the scheme or to make a referral please contact Stef Benson (Independent Visitor Coordinator) at stef@nyy.org.uk 07398149496.