

The Right Friend Campaign



my right friend

Championing every care-experienced child's right to an Independent Visitor

“Having an Independent Visitor has been the only stable thing in my life recently.”

Covid-19 places the most vulnerable children and young people in society at high risk of harm and is a significant challenge to Children's Services across the country. Calls to helplines have risen sharply; social distancing has removed children's access to friends, teachers and trusted adults and emergency legislation threatens to dilute essential safeguards that protect the rights of care-experienced children and young people. Independent Visitors are continuing to stay in contact with children and young people, listen to them and provide vital care and stability to those who feel lonely, isolated and anxious. The global crisis highlights more than ever the need for The Right Friend Campaign to protect and promote the voice and well-being of care-experienced children and young people.

What we are campaigning for:

1.

All local authorities in England that currently have no Independent Visitor Service must take immediate action to meet their legal obligations.

2.

At least 10% of looked after children per local authority in England must be matched with an Independent Visitor by 2022.

3.

Ofsted inspectors must assess Independent Visitor services against the National Standards, to ensure children and young people have access to consistently high quality Independent Visitors.

4.

To make available to care leavers up to the age of 25 a statutory extension of Independent Visitor services, to reduce social isolation and build a positive pathway to independent adulthood.

Why we are campaigning:

“It’s great, he makes me feel comfortable, sometimes we talk about things that worry me, but most of the time we do fun things together and have a good laugh”.

“Having an Independent Visitor has been the only stable thing in my life recently.”

We are campaigning because we believe that no child or young person should enter adulthood alone. Care-experienced children and young people need stability and continuity of care, yet they enter a system that often struggles to provide this. Frequent changes of home, school and social worker only add to this instability.

An Independent Visitor (IV) is a trained volunteer who is uniquely placed to provide care-experienced children and young people with emotional support and stability.¹ IVs offer the chance for children to build a “trusting, positive relationship with them over time”.²

The idea “Independent Visitors” originated from government reports into safeguards for vulnerable children living away from home, which stressed the importance of providing an ongoing relationship with an adult who was independent from the Local Authority. An IV is someone the young person can have fun with, but as a trusted adult they also safeguard children.

The role of the IV was introduced as a statutory service for looked after children in the Children Act 1989. In 2007, the government set a clear recommendation that “all children in care who

need and want them have access to independent visitors”.³ In spite of this, just 3.5% of looked after children across England have an IV and eight local authorities currently provide no service at all.⁴ Access rates vary considerably and children and young people are subject to a postcode lottery. Some of the most socially isolated children living out of their local authority area face disproportionately long waiting times.

Many young people leaving care say that they are ill prepared for adulthood, feel isolated and want to maintain contact with key adults with whom they have had a strong relationship. In the ‘Keep on Caring’ Government Report 2016, care leavers highlighted strong relationships with key adults as being of vital importance to them.⁵ “Where they had developed a good relationship with an adult – a former foster carer, a member of staff at a residential home, **an Independent Visitor** or social worker – they wanted support to maintain those relationships once they left care, on an informal basis.” An Independent Visitor can provide the practical and emotional support to young people so they can enter adulthood with the confidence to achieve their potential.



What we will do:

We will work closely with all local authorities in England that do not have an Independent Visitor service, to ensure that by the end of 2020 there is no longer a postcode lottery denying looked after children their legal entitlements.

We will work with the Department for Education to endorse the National IV Standards, to ensure that all Independent Visitor services are developed, commissioned and delivered in line with them.

We will work with Ofsted to ensure that official inspections assess IV services against the National IV Standards.⁶

We will work with local authorities to make sure that sufficient resources are allocated to IV services so that every eligible child and young person can be matched if they so choose. As a minimum, we are proposing that this means budgeting for 10% of looked after children in England to be matched with an IV.

We will work with the Office of the Children's Commissioner to raise the profile, reach and quality of Independent Visitor services. We will also seek the Commissioner's support in making sure that local authorities carry out their statutory duties and secure children's rights to an adequate Independent Visitor.

We will produce a Good Practice Guide and work with local authority commissioners to ensure that IV services are effectively resourced, and commissioned in line with National IV Standards in England.

We will work with Government Ministers, the Department for Education, the Children's Commissioner and NIVN members to extend the provision of IV services as a statutory right for care leavers.

This campaign has been developed in partnership with:



1. Department for Education and Skills (2007) Care Matters: Time for Change. HM Government, p.104. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-matters-time-for-change> [Accessed 12 May 2020].
2. National Independent Visitor Network (2016) National Standards for the Provision of Independent Visitor Services, p.3. Available online: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-02/National%20IV%20Standards.pdf> [Accessed 12 May 2020].
3. Department for Education and Skills (2007) Care Matters: Time for Change. HM Government, p.12. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-matters-time-for-change> [Accessed 12 May 2020].
4. National Independent Visitor Network et al. (2019) The National Independent Visitor Data Report 2019. p.9 and p.26. Available at: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/National%20Independent%20Visitor%20Data%20Report%20-%202019.pdf> [Accessed 12 May 2020].
5. HM Government (2016) Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence. p.17. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-on-caring-supporting-young-people-from-care-to-independence [Accessed 12 May 2020].

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