



# Becoming an Independent Visitor

Can you spare a few hours each  
month to befriend a child in care?



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# What is an Independent Visitor?

## Overview of the role

An Independent Visitor (IV) is **a volunteer who visits and befriends a child or young person living in care**. Children and young people in care have often experienced trauma and a lack of consistent adult relationships. The IV may be the one constant adult they have in their life.

The unique role of an IV **enables children and young people to have at least one consistent, trusting relationship that is built over time**. The IV will endeavour to become and remain a stable adult in the child's life who doesn't change when homes or social workers change and will at all times stay child focused.

IVs take an interest into the lives, hopes and concerns of a child or young person, and are there to listen and most of all have fun. Children and young people report that **the role can make a huge difference to their lives**; it improves confidence, they feel valued and they get to create happy memories with their IV.

## Why are IVs important? What do they do?

Most IV's **meet with the child or young person once or twice a month for a few hours.** This provides consistency and enables trust to be built.

Times and frequency of visits are agreed between the IV and the child or young person. There will also be an IV Coordinator who will support with this. Visits may be short at the beginning of the relationship, so that you can get to know each other at a pace suited to the child or young person's needs.

Above all, **IVs have fun with the child or young person they are matched with.** They will spend time together doing activities they enjoy, such as:

- Cinema
- Sporting activities
- Museums/exhibitions
- Theatre
- Walks in the park
- Theme parks/fun fairs
- Go out for dinner
- Sight seeing

They also play an important part in the child or young person's social, emotional and educational development by **offering them support and advice, listening to them and broadening horizons.**

## How long do IVs volunteer for?

Being an IV requires commitment. **National guidance recommends that an IV should volunteer for a minimum of a year.** Some local IV Services may ask for a longer commitment. This is because the children and young people have all been through very difficult times, so building a trusting relationship may take time. Some IV relationships with children or young people have lasted for years, even after the child or young person leaves the care system.

## Where did the term 'Independent Visitor' come from?

The **1989 Children Act and 2008 Children and Young Persons Act** established the right for every looked after child to have an Independent Visitor to 'visit, befriend and advise the child', if it would be in their best interests.

Despite the huge benefits the role can bring and the statutory nature of the role, only **a tiny proportion of children and young people living in care have an IV** - 3.3% in 2022.

The **National Independent Visitor Network** are campaigning to increase the number of IVs nationally, so that more children and young people in care benefit from this valuable opportunity. IVs report getting **immense value, experience and satisfaction** from the role personally. They come from all walks of life, with lots of different interests and experiences.

# How do I become an IV?

## Who can become an IV?

You can volunteer as an IV if you:

- are over 18 years old
- happy to complete a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Services) check, arranged and paid for by the IV service
- wish to befriend, listen to and support a child or young person growing up in care
- can commit to supporting a young person for a few hours every month, for at least a year - but ideally longer

Many services are particularly keen to recruit **male volunteers and people from under-represented communities.**

**You do not need any specific qualifications, experience, or background to apply.**

## What is the process of becoming an IV like?

When someone applies to be an IV they will complete a **thorough training process** and receive on-going support to give them the skills and knowledge to confidently fulfil their role.

**Building a relationship with a child or young person does not happen overnight.** You will need to show commitment and patience and will be supported by your local IV Coordinator.

Volunteers will always undergo enhanced DBS checks and referencing.

## What support do IVs get?

Volunteers are provided with **ongoing support** from the IV team, including thorough training and continuous support to develop the skills necessary to carry out the role. **You will receive a budget to cover agreed travel and activity expenses.**

Some examples of training topics include:

- Role, rights and responsibilities of the IV
- Safeguarding training
- Communicating with children and young people in care
- Listening and participating skills
- Equality and diversity
- Health and safety
- Boundaries and confidentiality

## How are children and young people involved?

An IV Coordinator will visit the young person to find out what their interests are and the type of person they would like to be matched with.

Children and young people will be consulted throughout the process and wherever possible be given a choice of IVs. Once a child or young person is matched with an IV they will keep **continually reviewing the match**, to make sure everyone is happy and enjoying their time together.

# Becoming an IV

## An overview of the process, step-by-step

01

### **Find and contact your local service**

Use [NIVN's local service finder](#) to find your nearest service to ask for more information, then submit a volunteer application form.

02

### **Reference and background checks**

IV services will perform a DBS check and contact the references supplied on your application form.

03

### **Interview stage\***

You will have an interview or video call to assess your experience, motivation to volunteer and suitability for the role.

04

### **Attend training\***

You will attend comprehensive training covering all aspects of the role. The length and delivery of this varies from service to service.

05

### **Matching process**

Finally, you will be matched with a young person based on your mutual interests. You will continue to receive ongoing support.

\*Please note that every service is different: some interview prior to training, some interview after, and some do both! For the most accurate information, contact your local service directly.