



Annual Report

Looked After Children Independent Service Independent Visitors Scheme April 2017 to March 2018

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Kirklees Independent Visitor Scheme (IV)

Annual Report – 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018

1.1 Introduction

Kirklees Independent Visitors Scheme, also known as Care2Listen is a Local Authority funded scheme which sits within the Looked After Children Independent Service. The Scheme was established in its current format six years ago and is coordinated by an Independent Service Officer. Day to day administration for the scheme is provided through Business Support within the wider Children Independent Service.

The aim of the scheme is to provide independent adult volunteers to befriend young people in Care; to spend time with them on a one to one basis, undertaking activities and developing a positive relationship with a trusted, responsible adult. The volunteers are someone who the young person can talk to, seek advice, guidance and support from and have fun with, in an informal setting.

Volunteers undergo a rigorous recruitment and selection programme including submitting a formal volunteer's application, adult and young person interview panel and bespoke training package, tailored to equip and inform volunteers for the role of an Independent Visitor. Enhanced DBS checks are undertaken, together with employment checks and two references are sought.

Young People are referred to the Scheme by either their Social Worker or Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO has a duty to discuss the Scheme at a young persons' review. Young people are also encouraged to express an interest themselves in having an Independent Visitor, and can discuss this directly with the Scheme Coordinator, their Social Worker, key worker or carer.

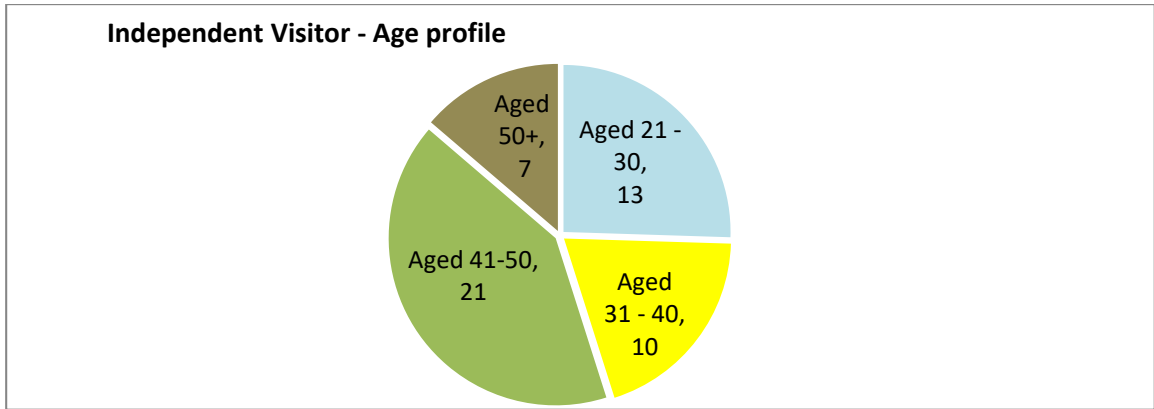
2 Current position

- There are currently 51 trained volunteers, 44 of whom are matched on a one to one basis with a young person. In addition, one volunteer supports two young people who are seen individually.
- Eight volunteers have recently completed training and are in the process of being matched with young people.
- There are 8 young people placed out of Kirklees who are waiting to be matched. To date, attempts to 'spot purchase' Independent visitor services from other authorities have been unsuccessful due to limited volunteers' availability and waiting lists in the host authorities. Continuing attempts are being made to match these young people from the existing pool of Kirklees volunteers.
- There are 9 young people placed within Kirklees waiting to be matched, the majority of whom will be matched shortly from newly trained Independent Visitors. Waiting times for young people to be matched are monitored and have significantly reduced from an average of 4 to 6 months to 8 weeks. Once the existing pool of available volunteers are matched however, the waiting times for young people who remain on the waiting list will inevitably increase as the Scheme does not, at present, have sufficient capacity to sustain additional volunteers.

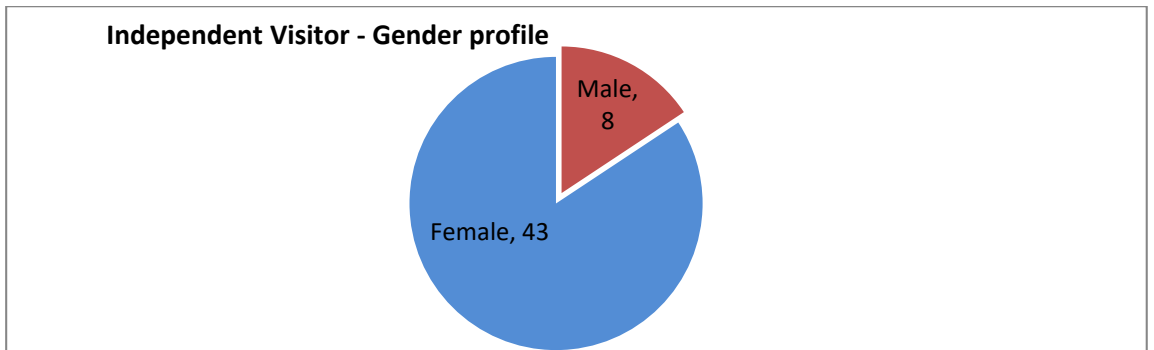
3 Volunteers and Young Person Profile

3.1 Volunteer profile

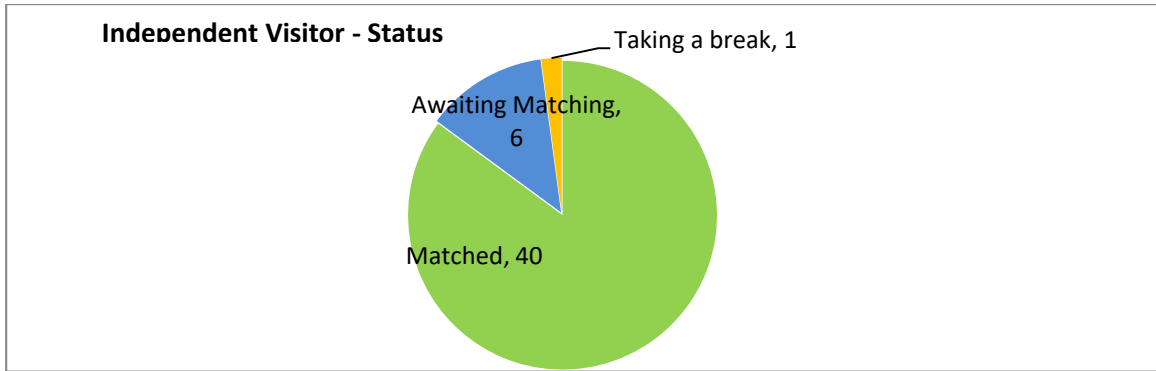
The Independent Visitors Scheme has a diverse range of volunteers. Volunteers have to be at least 18 years old and there has to be at least a 5 year age gap between the adult and young person. Volunteers in the youngest age range are only accepted by the scheme if they are able to demonstrate an appropriate degree of maturity.



Currently 85% of the volunteers involved with the scheme are female; this is broadly the same as seen in other regional schemes. Attempts have been made to specifically identify and recruit more male volunteers, such as advertisements being placed in traditionally male dominated work and leisure places, however this has not been overly successful. In practice, although some young people have specified that they would like a male volunteer, many have accepted a female volunteer and these relationships have been successfully sustained.



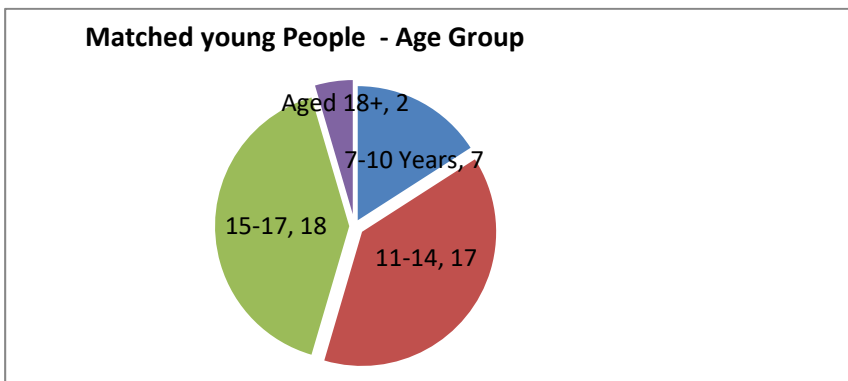
Once training and necessary checks have been completed, the Scheme seeks to match volunteers within 8 weeks with a young person who meets their preference in terms of placement location, age and gender.



3.2 Young Person Profile

- There are currently 44 young people matched with an Independent Visitor, of these:
- Slightly more girls (59%) than boys (41%) benefit from the scheme.
- 18 are older teenagers (15-17 years old)
- 17 are young people aged 11-14 years old
- 7 children under the age of 11 have an Independent Visitor and;
- 2 young adults over 18 are currently being supported.

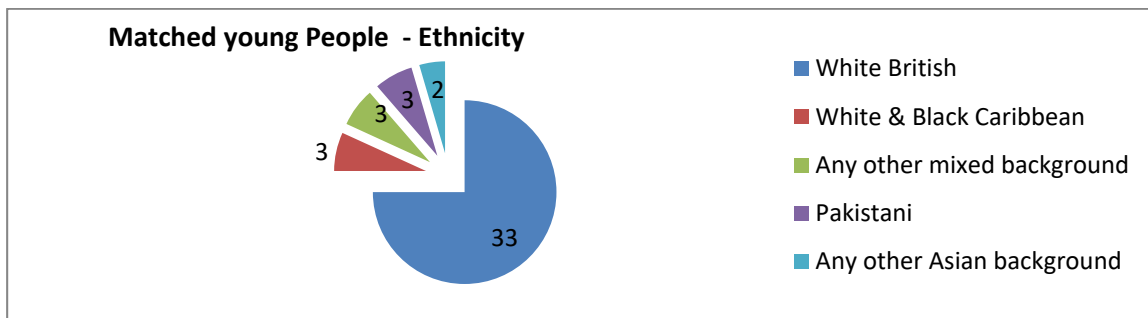
Whilst some Volunteer / Young person relationships have ended shortly after the young persons' 18th birthday, the 2 young adults over 18s shown in the chart below have each had their Independent Visitor for a number of years and continue to benefit from the relationship and the support and guidance offered within this.



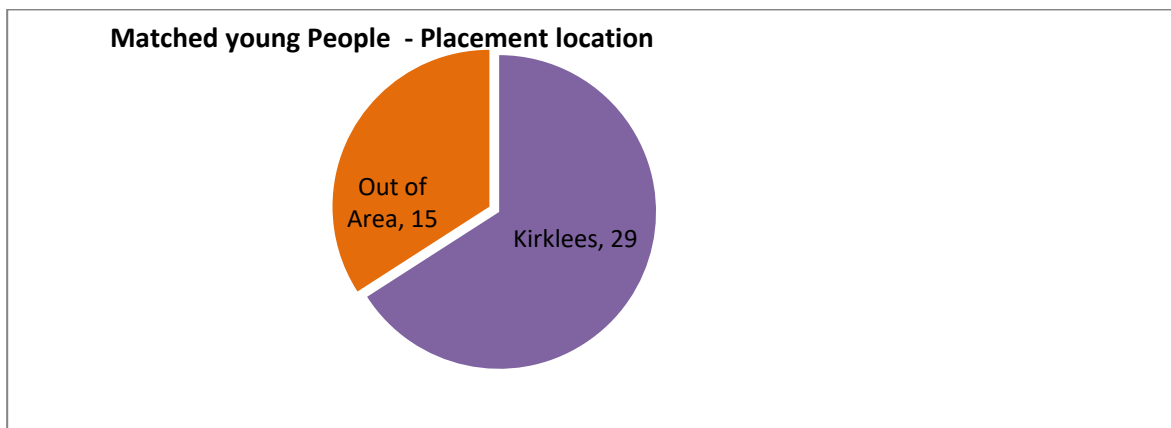
44 young people matched

- 59% Female
- 41% Male
- 18 aged 15-17
- 17 aged 11-14
- under age of 11
- over 18 years old

The ethnic background of young people who have an independent visitor is broadly representative of the wider Kirklees community.¹



34% of matched young people are in placement in a host authority, with a high proportion of young people living in neighbouring authorities' i.e. Leeds, Calderdale and Bradford. There are three young people placed further afield who also benefit from regular outings and activities with their chosen Independent Visitor.



4 Making a difference.

The scheme Co-ordinator speaks with children and young people who have an Independent Visitor at least every twelve months and more regularly if needed, for example, if issues are identified with the relationship. A questionnaire regarding their Independent Visitor experience is sent out to children and young people on an annual basis. Some of the positive feedback received includes:

¹ <http://observatory.kirklees.gov.uk/profiles/ethnicorigin>

- *'He is very supportive and kind'* (Boy, aged 8)
- *'Because it's nice to have someone to talk to'* (Girl, aged 10)
- *'I'm able to get out and about more now'* (Boy , aged 12)
- *'My Independent Visitor has helped me gain confidence in interacting with people socially'* (Girl, aged 16)
- *'I have a friend that I can trust and spend time with'* (Girl, aged 13)
- *'My Independent visitor has helped me to do things and become more independent'* (Boy, aged 15)
- *'I really like my IV, we have fun together, we've been to the theatre, swimming and played football in the park.'* (Boy aged 11)

Following each visit or activity with a child /young person, Independent Visitors are requested to submit a short feedback form. Below are some extracts from these which highlight some examples of the positive difference /experiences volunteers believe have been achieved with children and young people.

- *'Had a full day out with my dogs at Bolton Abbey. We enjoyed a picnic and walking the paths of the estate. B said that she really enjoyed it all and she had never had a picnic so this was a first'.* (IV for a girl aged 13)
- *'Visited the National Coal Mining Museum, took the underground tour and visited the pit ponies which C said she really enjoyed.'* (IV for a girl aged 17)
- *A day of sport in Greenhead Park. **Football** after the World Cup, J was keen to demonstrate some of his skills and tell me about being selected for a team at his new school. **Basketball** J introduced me to the 'slow-mo' video feature on my phone and we took a great video of a basket being scored. **Tennis** after Wimbledon, he'd obviously been practicing his backhand, given the number that whizzed past me. Also did a World Cup Quiz for J to identify players and their country. I thought it was quite difficult but he quickly reeled off 10 correct answers! Covered 8 miles with all the running about. So some aching muscles for me. J seemed fine!* (IV for a boy aged 11)

Key Priorities for 2018 / 2019

- **Create a 'pool' of volunteers either living within the Kirklees area or elsewhere who are willing to travel regularly to meet with young people placed Out of Authority.**

The need for flexibility of volunteers to travel out of area and meet young people more frequently is being discussed with applicants at an early stage. A number of volunteers are prepared to travel greater distances and this has helped in matching some young people living in host Authorities.

- **18+ Care Leaver offer**

In line with recent legislation relating to support for care leavers up to the age of 25 the Independent Visitor Scheme will be evaluated and consideration given as to whether it currently meets the needs of children who are looked after and care leavers. Currently the continuation of the Independent Visitor relationship post 18 is offered only to those who are the most vulnerable. It will be explored as to whether this should be offered more widely. Alongside this consideration will also be given as to whether an Independent Visitor should be offered to young people who are already 18 plus. If this were to be the case there would need to be clarity about what the role would entail and any differences between the volunteer role and that of the Personal Advisor who is currently appointed to all care leavers by the Leaving Care Team.