

Independent Visitors Scheme Update April 2024

1. Overview

Kirklees Independent Visitors Scheme is also known as Care2Listen.

The scheme provides independent adult volunteers who befriend children / young people in the care of the local authority; to spend time with them on a one-to-one basis, undertaking activities to support the development of a positive relationship with a trusted, responsible independent adult.

The volunteers provide children / young people with new experiences and the opportunity to talk to and spend time with someone independent, who they can seek advice, guidance, and support from and to have fun with, in an informal setting.

The Independent Visitors Scheme has a diverse range of volunteers. Volunteers must be aged 18 or over, with a minimum 5-year age gap between the adult volunteer and the young person they are matched to.

Children and young people are referred to the scheme by either their Social Worker or Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). A child's IRO has a duty to discuss the scheme at their Looked After Review meeting(s).

Independent Visitors are expected to spend time with the young person who they are matched with on a regular basis, approximately 4-10 hours per month, although this might be more frequent at the start of the match, as the volunteer and young person are getting to know each other.

Once matched with a child /young person the relationship may be for a short period of time or for many years, this will depend on both the Independent Visitor and child /young person being happy and able to maintain the relationship. However, there is an expectation that volunteers to commit a minimum of one year to the scheme.

Independent Visitors undertake a range of activities with the children/young people they are matched with including, eating out visits to the cinema and museums, park walks, picnic's, shopping, outdoor activities, and creative activities such as crafts/arts, baking and sewing.

2. Independent Visitors

Currently there are 22 active volunteers, of which 3 have availability for new matches, and there are 5 volunteer applicants in the recruitment process.

18 of the Independent Visitors are female and 4 are male. This is a similar cohort as seen in other regional schemes.

Their age range is between 31 and 70 years old. Of the 22 Independent Visitors, 2 live outside of Kirklees in neighbouring Local Authorities and they are matched with young people.

3. Children and young people matched with an Independent Visitor

The young people currently matched with an Independent Visitor are aged between 12 and 20 years old, and the majority are female, with only 4 being male. 7 of the young people are recorded as living outside of Kirklees, of these 6 live in neighbouring local authorities.

The large majority (19/21) of children and young people matched have been matched successfully with their Independent Visitor for over a year and many of the children and young people who benefit from having an Independent Volunteer have had the same volunteer for significantly longer.

4. Children waiting to be matched.

There are currently 23 children and young people who have been referred to the scheme and are waiting to be matched with a Volunteer.

13 are male, and they are aged between 9 and 16 years old, of which only 6 live in Kirklees. The 10 females are of a similar age range (9 and 17 years old), and 6 are recorded as residing in Kirklees.

Of the 11 children and young people who live out of area, the majority reside in neighbouring local authorities, such as Wakefield, Leeds, Calderdale, and Bradford, however others live a significant distance away, which is a complicating factor when seeking to match them with an Independent Visitor.

8 of the 22 children and young people on the waiting list have additional needs such as ADHD, Autism, communication difficulties, and /or a physical disability, and for some of these children and young people it is noted that they would benefit from being matched with a volunteer with knowledge of their specialist needs. For other children /young people waiting to be matched it is recognised that they would benefit from a cultural match with their Independent Visitor.

A small number of children /young people have also shared a preference with regards to the age or gender (male) of the Independent Visitor who they want to be matched with; this is a further complexity when considering the cohort of volunteers.

5. Summary

In January 2024, the Volunteer Service supported recruitment by promoting the Independent Visitor Role as their featured role. The scheme has also been promoted via the council intranet. As a result, we have 5 volunteer applicants in the recruitment process.

The Independent Visitors scheme seeks to match a volunteer with a child/young person who meets their preference in terms of placement, location, age, and gender as quickly as possible, however the process can be complex due to matching the volunteer's preference with an individual child /young person's needs or request. It is important that full consideration is given to the matching to ensure that a match is appropriate and successful.

As a service, we are continuing to review how we can develop the scheme and explore avenues to improve the current service model, taking into account the demographics of the children/young people on our waiting list. Moving forward, between April- June 2024 we are looking at building capacity in the service to progress recruitment and matches, and in the longer term from July 2024 review our advertising and marketing strategies in order to recruit volunteers who are able to meet the specific needs of our children/young people and reduce our waiting list.