



Walsall Independent Visitors Service

Annual Report

April 2021– March 2022

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Section 1 – Introduction to the project

The Black Country Independent Visitors Service is run in partnership between Change Grow Live and the local authorities for Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell, Telford and Wrekin. The project supports looked after children living in the Black Country Telford, Wrekin and the surrounding areas as well as those living out of county.

The project is funded on a payment by results arrangement by the 4 local authorities and allows them to meet their statutory independent visiting obligations to children and young people looked after. The project works with children and young people aged 8 - 18.5 years old who are 'Looked After' by the Local Authority and who choose to have an Independent Visitor.

The young people are effectively "matched" with an adult volunteer when one has been recruited for them specifically, to become their Volunteer Independent Visitor. The volunteer and young person relationship is expected to be maintained for a minimum period of two years. This can be extended with agreement between both parties. As in previous years of delivery, the Volunteer Independent Visitors see their young person for a one to one, community-based visit once a month. The main aim is to provide the young person the opportunity to develop a relationship with a trusted adult outside of the paid, formal network of professionals. The young people are encouraged and supported by their Volunteer Independent Visitor to choose an activity they would like to do during their monthly sessions.

Independent Visitors continue to be recruited in the areas where the young people are waiting for an IV. The recruitment process is comprehensive and integrates a variety of methods within which an applicant is tested and trained. All IV's volunteers once "matched" with a young person, are encouraged to provide written or verbal feedback on how they see the relationship going, any positive changes they would like to see in their young person's life and to share any concerns with project staff. A short session report is provided by the volunteer to project staff, alongside their expenses claim for the activity. Young people can also add their comments after each visit and are encouraged to do so as this provides project staff with some service feedback. The sessions are regulated and delivered in accordance with key policies and procedures including safeguarding, data protection, health and safety and volunteer boundaries.

Section 2 – Young People

Section 2.1 – Young People's facts and figures

Service users supported 2021-2022	19
Service users referred	19
IV direct mentoring sessions delivered	125.0
Caseload on 31/03/2021	16

Section 2.2 – Young People's Support Hours

	TOTAL	Hours	
Independent Visitors (direct session hours)	375	Per visit	3.0
Independent Visitors (indirect hours, research, admin, phone calls)	63.0	Per visit	0.50
Total	438.0	Per visit	3.50

As of the 31st March 2021 we had 16 Walsall children and young people attached to the project receiving service:

Of these 10 are Male and 6 are female

	Males	Females	Total
5-10	3	1	4
11-15	2	2	4
16+	5	3	8
Total	10	6	16

6 (37.0 %) live within their local authority area whilst 10 (63.0 %) live out of county

Length of matches

Length of relationship / %	
<i>Under 6 months</i>	20
<i>6 months to 1 year</i>	40
<i>1- 2 years</i>	30
<i>2-3 years</i>	
<i>3-4 years</i>	10
<i>4-5 years</i>	
<i>Over 5 years</i>	
<i>Total</i>	100

It's worth noting that the longest relationship is 41.25 months and the shortest is 24 days to March 2022

Accommodation status

Accommodation	
<i>Lac Fostering</i>	12
<i>Lac Residential</i>	2
<i>Lac Disability Residential</i>	0
<i>16+ Accommodation</i>	2
<i>Total</i>	16

Section 2.2 – Young People's information

In this period, the split between male and female was not equal, with 62.5% male which is slightly less than last year, and 37.5% female matches which is slightly higher than last year. The majority of referrals this year were within the 16+ age bracket which is different to last year.

The process for staff to meet young people has remained largely the same with a staff member making an initial assessment visit to the young person to meet them and find out more about what their interests are and to make sure they understand what it means to have an IV. Where possible and in line with the young persons' preference, the staff visits have largely been face to face in light of more relaxed Covid restrictions.

The current young peoples' marketing leaflet is based on their feedback, it is however likely to be changed again due to some rebranding taking place within the project.

proceed with. If it isn't then both parties are advised as to the next steps and the process for matching both will begin again.

Why use the Independent Visitor Service? It helps to integrate children and young people into their local community and reduces isolation. Drawing volunteers from their local area helps build relationships, encourages compassion and in turn improves community cohesion.

Section 3 – Walsall Volunteers

Volunteer Profile: DN, Independent Visitor

"I decided to volunteer when I retired from the police. During my career I had often worked with young people and wanted to continue this in a voluntary capacity.

I don't really feel that I have faced any challenges, the young person has at times had challenging behaviour, but I have felt that I have managed this well. I recognised early on that my role was not to problem solve but to be a friend to him, playing sports etc. In doing this it supported his foster family by giving them some respite.

The best thing about volunteering is seeing the young person excel in different sporting activities and growing in confidence and self-esteem. I have enjoyed these activities as well as I am very sporty. We have a lot of fun together and even though at times he has misbehaved, he always listens and responds positively when I've needed him to be. Also I have learnt from him; I am a bit of a dinosaur in regards to technology and the young person has explained how gadgets in the car work.

What has surprised me is how much he enjoys the visits. It was initially a couple of hours but this has now increased to a full day. It was lovely to hear that he didn't want me stop visiting, even when given the choice of having a younger volunteer and when I was unable to visit for a while due to an accident I was involved in. He wanted to wait for me to come back.

I enjoy the visits and it is very rewarding seeing how much he has improved in various skills and abilities. I am proud that he knows that I am there for him and that he has been able to vocalise this. He comes across that he is confident and secure in the friendship that has developed."

Section 3.1 – Volunteer Facts and Figures

New Registered volunteers 2021-2022	19
In Recruitment March 2022	2
Registered volunteer pool on 31/03/2022	19

As of the 31st of March, we had 16 active Walsall volunteers supporting children and young people. We are routinely advertising for prospective volunteers using a range of recruitment platforms such as on the Change Grow Live web site; Facebook Jobs (paid and free) [Do.it.org.uk](https://www.doit.org.uk); Charity Jobs UK, word of mouth, Indeed and on social media. We are always looking for opportunity to raise awareness of the volunteer role and more recently, have agreement with a supermarket chain to display our information on their community boards.

All potential volunteers are required to be over 18 years of age, and all go through the same robust recruitment process. This begins with an initial interview which will ascertain the volunteer's skills, knowledge, and motivation for volunteering; this will be followed by 9 hours of virtual training over 4 x2 hour sessions and followed up with a 2nd interview.

We continue to reward and recognise the contributions made by volunteers. We run a programme of celebration events throughout the year, this includes events to tie in with National Volunteer Week in June. We also send out a thank you gift and card to volunteers and this year we also had a group volunteer trip to Dudley Canals for independent visitor as a small way to say thank you for their support.

Challenges facing the Independent Visitor Service: 2021-2022 continued to be another challenging year for the project: maintaining contacts for the existing matches, and recruiting, training and matching volunteers.

Positive outcomes from the pandemic: Volunteer recruitment and training has become more agile; everyone having to quickly adapt to working remotely and getting to grips with new technology. Appreciation of the service, certainly by carers and by the young people we support has risen.

Volunteer feedback:

"I wasn't sure about the role but then I was told that I could change my mind after the training if I didn't think I wanted to be an IV. I am very glad I attended the training as it was exactly what I needed! To think I

nearly changed my mind! The support from staff has been excellent and I am matched with a young person who liked my profile and wanted to meet me. So far everything is going well, we have fun on our activities and I look forward to the relationship continuing for many years! LS, Walsall.

“The young person I am matched with has moved homes a lot through no fault of his own. I am just fortunate that he hasn’t gone too far away as I know this happened to other young people. I can still meet him once a month and it really helps as he has a familiar face and some consistency with my visits” WH, Walsall.

Section 4 – Communication

Change Grow Live has been providing a service in partnership with the four commissioning local authorities since March 2018, in which time we have been able to build strong positive relationships with professionals in a variety of different roles and teams.

We continue to have quarterly contract meetings, discussing project updates including young people matched, waiting, staffing updates and volunteer recruitment. We discuss good news stories and up and coming events as well as any issues or concerns that we have dealt with in the quarter along with any opportunities for future development within the service.

There are also regular IV guests at contract reviews so that commissioners can hear directly about the IV experience from volunteers themselves. IV's are encouraged to be honest about their journey to volunteering as well as sharing how they have observed their yp to benefit from the IV sessions. Equally important is the need to ensure the volunteer feels heard and is able to share with Project staff what they do not feel works well.

The 2-project staff team are continuing to liaise with partners to raise awareness of the IV service. Throughout this period, we have attended 7 Walsall Council unit meetings and 23 referrer meetings. This sits alongside other awareness raising activities including local campaigns promoting the IV role and the service to young people.

Section 5 – Best Practice

Staff have benefited from being embedded within CGL's wider Children's Rights Services (CRSs) governance/resources structures. This brings with it an automatic membership to the Midlands recruitment Hub and collaboration with other IV services within the organisation.

CGL invest in staff and volunteer wellbeing via:

- Out of hours young people and volunteer support phone line
- Office hours – online chat and support
- Online Wellbeing Hub.
- Supportive family/leave policies.
- 24/7 Employee and Volunteer Assistance Programme
- Connect Skills – training portal.
- Discount schemes e.g., Blue Light Card Scheme

The Project has applied to Cash4Kids within the period 2021-22 for help with funding for a group event for young people and their volunteers. The outcome is as yet unknown however it is hoped that at least 25 young people and their volunteer will be able to benefit from this opportunity if funding is granted.

We have recently taken part in the National Independent Visitor Network Survey 2021 and completed a Freedom of Information activity as part of the survey. The survey results will be made available later in the year, the focus is firmly placed on raising awareness within the sector and further afield, of the challenges that children and young people looked after face and how these challenges be addressed by everyone supporting children and young people.

Section 6 – Young Person and Volunteer Feedback

“My IV is friendly, catering and funny” LC, young person.

“I enjoy my visits with my IV and don’t think anything can be done to make them better” NK, young person

“I always decide where we go for my visit and my IV is always very helpful” LW, young person

“A good question to ask when you are interviewing a new volunteer ; do you think an independent visitor will benefit them (young people)?” PM, young person

“I always ask my young person to mark the visit out of 10. She wrote down 100 out of 10!” JL, Independent Visitor

“The young person loved the visit and was excitedly telling the foster carer all about it when her dropped her home” BD, Independent Visitor

“The young person loved the bowling; she was very encouraging when I was bowling too. She was also gracious in defeat when I won the first game. She won the second game and she was very happy. I always give my young person the opportunity to make all the decisions but do steer he back if there is something she wants that we cannot do and she is very understanding in these situations! KL, Independent Visitor

Section 7 Acknowledgements

There are two project staff on the service with one of these part time, to cover the 4 local authority areas including Walsall. Staff have worked hard to raise the service profile with social workers in Walsall and with local people in Walsall. This is reflected in the increased number of children and young people being referred for an Independent Visitor. Of the 4 local authorities, Walsall has the highest number of referrals and requests for young people to be matched with a volunteer.

We face our challenges head on, the demand for the IV service increases as does the need for more local volunteers. Volunteers are the bread and butter of this service, their generosity, kindness and compassion is greatly valued. We will continue to look ahead and plan to support more children and young people in Walsall and equally, look to increase our volunteer numbers to meet this growing demand.