



**Title** Independent Visitors Service

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**Internal**  **External**  **Confidential**

**Prepared for** CP Board

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### Independent visitors and provider

1. This report is a follow up report from the one provided by Jivan Sembi in May 2021
2. An Independent Visitor is described as a trained volunteer who is there to “befriend and support children and young people in care” The statutory guidance states that the appointment should be considered as part of the development of the care plan and looked after review process. The child’s wishes and feelings should be ascertained as to whether or not an IV should be appointed.
3. Change Grow Live is the Walsall’s Independent Visitor provider and this is a sub-regional contract in partnership with Dudley, Sandwell and Telford & Wrekin. The contract with Change Grow Live started on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018 and was initially in place for 2 years, this has been extended to April 2022. Dudley is the lead commissioner and has recently started the tender process in readiness for April 2022.
4. Walsall’s contribution has been £10,000 for at least 6 years; this reflects the target number of children for Walsall, which is 10. If necessary, Assistant Directors have always approved additional funds for any children requesting an IV above the target number.
5. The service is reviewed in line with the contractual arrangements and involves commissioners and strategic managers across the 4 Local Authorities. The Programme Manager provides quarterly reports and there is a sub-regional quarterly meeting chaired by the operational lead Alan McFarlane to review take up of the service. Walsall’s strategic lead is the Group Manager for the Safeguarding and Review Service.
6. The CGL service is proactive in recruiting and training volunteers. They currently have 41 volunteers from a range of backgrounds. They also recruit volunteers to match the specific needs or requirements of children. Over the pandemic, the service has operated virtually with some face to face work based on the needs of the children. The service has been creative in developing one to one sessions working virtually.

### Eligibility

1. The provision is for children 8 to 18 years. Some IV’s will continue to befriend a young person beyond 18 years if the young person wants to.
2. Any child or young person who is a child in care in Dudley, Walsall, or Telford & Wrekin Councils or Sandwell Childrens Social Care trust.

## Service take up

1. As of November 2021; 9 children have an IV and 3 are waiting for an IV this is an increase compared to 7 children having an IV in May and 2 waiting to be matched.
2. Generally, Telford and Wrekin and Dudley have higher targets and lower matches. Whilst Sandwell have a higher target and more matches.

## Promoting the provision within Childrens Social Care

1. We continue to promote the use of Independent Visitors via a range of avenues including;
  - CGL have attended team meetings
  - CGL attended a CCIC meeting in April
  - Commissioning have attended the steering meetings and contributed to developing the service as well as ensuring value for money.
  - Advocacy is a prompt when completing a young person's pathway plan but the IV service is not. This could be remedied. The IV service has attended a TLC team meeting in the past, but not recently
  - The EHC assessment team are reminded of the service and do know how to refer; however tend to notify the social worker when a child expresses an interest.
  - IV and Advocacy have been discussed at some unit meetings in Corporate Parenting and Senior Managers have been provided with reports.
  - CWDT are arranging a visit from the IV and Advocacy service.
  - The IV service have attended a unit meeting with the CP Coordinators /IRO's. Advocacy and IV's is on the CP Coordinators /IRO's prompt sheets for child in care reviews and CP conferences.
  - Safeguarding and Family Support Social Workers take leaflets out to children and they intend to invite CGL and The Childrens Society to unit meetings.
  - Due to changes in provision of our Childrens Homes, once recruited, Assistant Home manages will take responsibility for promoting Independent Visitors. Each of the homes have participation meetings and their own nominated in house leads. Advocacy visits take place every month although this has been hugely affected by Covid19 and all visits throughout this period have been conducted by telephone, this has proved to be very challenging to get the children to engage. CGL are discussing this with the manager for Childrens homes
  - A new member of staff will become the representative for Family Placements, as it is important foster carers are fully informed and can support children in accessing an IV and/or advocacy.
  - Materials advertising the service have been sent to service areas.

## 3. Recommendations for Promoting IV and Advocacy in the future

1. The strategic lead and operations lead are keen to improve attendance at Advocacy and IV meetings and have worked together to create this. Attendance at the meeting in November was significantly better. However, this will require ongoing commitment and prioritisation from services.
2. Managers to invite representatives from both the IV and Advocacy service to unit/team meetings this will help staff to understand the difference between IV's and Advocates, know the criteria and referral process and promote the services with children and young people.
3. There is now a named IRO lead, who will attend the operations meeting. This representative will feedback information and ensure IV and Advocacy is kept on the unit meeting agenda. The aim is to remind IRO's to promote IV and Advocacy at a child's looked after review. It will also keep advocacy on the agenda for children with CP plans.

5. Circulation of publicity and materials, including the referral process will be ongoing.
6. It is crucial that those providing a home to children, be that a foster home or children's home know about the IV and Advocacy services and can support children in accessing these services. Hence, it is crucial that those providing a home are well versed in this provision.
7. Information about the IV service and Advocacy service should form part of a child's welcome pack when first becoming looked after.
8. A review of provision, and whether this could meet the demand set out in National Standards.
8. Both CGL and the Childrens Society would welcome the opportunity to provide an annual report and attend the Corporate Parenting board.
9. Feedback from the CICC would be most welcome. Do they know what an IV is? Is this discussed as part of their review? What else do they think would be helpful?

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