

# Here4me

## Independent Visitor, Mentoring & Advocacy Scheme



The Action for Children Here4me project based in Thatcham provides, manages and trains Independent Visitors, Mentors and Advocates throughout Berkshire and Bracknell Forest. We hope that the questions and answers below give you an idea of the work that we do and help you understand how valuable our volunteers are to the young people we support.

If you are interested in training to becoming an Independent Visitor, Mentor or Advocate, please complete the online application form and call us on **01635 873739** for more information.

### **What type of organisation is Action for Children?**

Action for Children is a leading children's charity which has been supporting vulnerable children and young people for over 130 years.

### **What is an Independent Visitor?**

An Independent Visitor (an IV) is a volunteer, independent of social services, whose role is to befriend a young person in residential care or a foster home. As an 'adult friend' you will visit and provide friendly advice to someone who has had little or no contact with members of their own family. Reliability and consistency are a huge part of this role, as many young people have already experienced many changes and been let down many times in their lives already. As with any friendship, this relationship may last for a number of years, so needs building over time and isn't a short-term commitment. It is a statutory right that all young people in care are offered an IV.

### **What is a Mentor?**

A Mentor is similar to an IV in that an adult volunteer is matched with a young person. However this service is for young people who are not in care. Some young people due to their circumstances have a need for an independent adult to befriend them to help them cope during a particular crisis in the family, or resolve a specific issue. This role is a medium-term role, typically around 9 months, and is often more task or outcome focused.

The frequency in which a volunteer IV or Mentor meets with a young person is mutually agreed at the outset of the relationship. Generally, a volunteer will meet with a young person for anything from a couple of hours to a day (plus travelling time) every month. We also ask you to write up a brief contact report for your visit, and from time to time you may need to give a little more of your time to support your young person with a specific situation.

### **As an IV/Mentor what sort of activities would I do with my young person?**

You may choose to visit the cinema, go bowling, just hang out in the park or go for a bite to eat; or your young person may have a hobby they want to share with you (or you with them). The most important element of the visit is the time and attention you spend with your young person, not necessarily the activity you undertake. Your next visit is generally agreed at the end of your last one, so that both of you know when you'll next meet up and have something to look forward to.

### **As an IV or Mentor, how many young people will I be matched with?**

You will usually only be matched with one young person at a time. The matching process is two-way, with both you and the young person deciding whether you think you are suitable for one another from information provided. If you are keen to proceed, then a Matching meeting is set up, and if that goes well and both sides want to go ahead, you are paired with your young person.

### **What is an Advocate?**

Our Advocates are volunteers who are independent of both social services and of a young person's parents, foster parents or residential unit. Advocates help to ensure that the voices of some of the most vulnerable young people in society are heard, particularly when life changing decisions are being made about them. Advocates also help to ensure that the Rights of young people who are in care are respected and that where things have gone wrong a young person is able to make an effective complaint. In this role volunteers listen to what a young person has to say and then supports them during meetings such as Looked after Children's reviews and Child Protection Conferences either by attending with a young person or on their behalf. As these meetings take place during the working day volunteers need to have some daytime availability. The same advocate will work with a young person throughout, this might involve only a couple of meetings or more usually a couple of meetings every 6 months. Although all the work which advocates undertake is on a 1:1 basis with each individual child it is possible for an advocate to be working with several separate children at the same time.

### **As an Advocate where would I meet with my young person?**

Many of the pre meetings with young people take place at school, however if this is inappropriate for any reason advocates can meet with they young person at home or can take them to a suitable venue e.g. a coffee shop.

### **Can I be an IV/Mentor and an Advocate at the same time?**

Yes, but you would have to complete all the relevant training modules for each role.

### **Training**

All of the roles within the Here4me project require volunteers to undertake the core training and safeguarding modules and then IV/Mentoring and/or advocacy training. All volunteers are subject to enhanced DBS and local authority checks as well as having appropriate references. You should put aside a couple of days a year for training too.

### **What sort of person is Action for Children looking for?**

We are looking for people who are genuinely interested in the welfare of children, who will focus on meeting their needs and who can develop a good working relationship with them. Common sense is a vital element as you will be advising young people on situations when they seek your counsel. You should be a good communicator, able to listen, maintain confidentiality, take direction when necessary and remain within the boundaries of the role. You must also ensure your young person's safety while out together. You will often come across professionals and carers involved with these young people, so you must be able to form respectful, sometimes working relationships with them. You do not need any formal qualifications, but we strongly encourage volunteers to attend further training courses which we think will help them in their roles. The minimum age for a volunteer is 21.

### **How long does the application process take?**

The assessment and training process takes 3 - 5 months, this starts with an informal initial interview, followed by a training and assessment weekend and then a panel interview. Training courses are held 3 times a year.

As we work with vulnerable young people it is essential that our recruitment process is rigorous and this does take time.

### **What information will I need to provide to support my application?**

You will be asked to provide references.

You will also need an enhanced police check (DBS).

### **If I undertake the training will I definitely be taken on?**

Not everyone is suited to these particular roles, but we hope you will gain anyway from the training and assessment process and we will give feedback on how we feel your particular skills might best be used in other roles or settings.

### **How far will I have to travel?**

The work carried out by Here4me is primarily for children and young people within the Berkshire and Bracknell Forest area. We try to match volunteers with a young person who are within reasonable travelling distance, of their home or work, as this makes seeing each other easier.

### **What sort of training will I receive?**

You will receive a comprehensive initial training which will take 2 or 3 days depending on which role/s you wish to be considered for. It is possible to train as an IV/Mentor and/or an advocate either at the same time (3 days) or separately (2 days).

All our volunteers are required to attend safeguarding training every year.

You will also be invited to attend training courses / volunteer support groups throughout the year, which will explore relevant topics such as self-harm, drugs awareness and aspects of the care system. We are always keen to hear about what particular topics our volunteers want or need to know about and will try to provide or find appropriate training.

### **What costs will I incur?**

The IV/Mentoring and Advocacy roles are voluntary roles, ie Action for Children does not provide payment for your time. However, you will be reimbursed for any mileage associated with training or visiting your young person, and other out of pocket expenses such as outing costs, eg cinema, or a child's car seat for your car if this is necessary within a budget.

### **What support will I receive?**

We make you aware upfront of any particular needs or behavioural traits that your young person has, and always work out a plan of action with you so that you know how to best respond. Once you are paired with your young person, you receive supervision every few visits. We are also on the end of the phone (or in the office) to help you when you have something you would like to discuss. We are keen to see your relationship with your matched young person develop into one which benefits the young person and yourself, and we will support you throughout.

### **What happens if I want to stop volunteering?**

We appreciate that your own circumstances may change and occasionally it may not be possible to sustain your relationship with a young person. In this case, we ask for as much notice and information about the circumstances as possible so that we can understand the impact it may have on the young person and help you plan a positive ending with your young person. These young people have often been let down in the

past, and we want to avoid the relationship breaking up unsatisfactorily wherever possible.

In many cases, these relationships come to a natural end, and at this point some of our volunteers ask for a break before being matched with another young person. But many ask to be matched again as soon as they can.

We hope you've found this insight into being an IV/Mentor or Advocate informative and look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Action for Children

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