

“Every conversation starts with the child”

Independent Visitors and Trusted relationships



This blog comes to you in our very first [Adolescent Practice Week](#) and amongst a great deal of information, training, presentations, challenge sessions and workshops designed to support you in your work with adolescents. This has been a huge effort between partners and I hope that you have been able to make some time to take advantage. We are really interested in your feedback not just from the events but also in thinking about what might have prevented you from taking advantage of the sessions. You can do this by completing the feedback forms or letting us know at the Principal SW email address and don't forget to let us have your ideas for future Practice Weeks.

On Monday I was thrilled to present Dez Holmes when she spoke compellingly, as every about; Adolescence, Risk, Relationships, Resilience and Rights and I know that the impact that this presentation had on me was likely shared by the other 69 colleagues on the call. I was also pleased, having also undertaken my first systemic practice training session at the end of last week, to clearly see the links between what Dez was saying and systemic thinking. It also made me rethink about how we use language and also revisit some of the theories of restorative practice – I would like take the opportunity to discuss this and other relational practice theories in a future blog.

This week's blog has been written by Alison Cammiss Volunteer Lead/Volunteering who will discuss the great resources we have in York for young people in terms of our independent visiting service and the Trusted Relationships project.

Alison.....We talk about the importance of long term relationships and listening to the voice of the child in our everyday work but does the nature of our work hinder this sometimes? For example when a young person has a change of social worker or a young person has so many agencies working with them they 'clam up' and are not able to/choose not to

engage? This is where an Independent Visitor (IV) or Trusted Relationships mentor can make a real difference to a young person.

The two roles have distinct differences, however they are both provided by volunteers, who are subject to thorough processes before they participate in our training including; an interview, 2 references and DBS check.

The difference a volunteer makes to a young person is by definition of volunteer 'a *person who works for an organization without being paid*'. Young people are often slightly sceptical about why someone would want to meet and support them without being paid??



We believe that our success rate is so good because an Independent Visitor or Trusted Relationships Mentors are there because they want to be there.

They are able to provide totally unbiased support to a young person on a 1:1 basis, not having to write reports or feedback, unless there are safeguarding issues or the young person wants them to attend meetings with them. However this does not replace an advocate.

INDEPENDENT VISITORS

The role of the independent visitor was first introduced as a statutory service for children in care in the Children Act 1989, which states that 'every child in care who has little or no contact with birth parents, has at least one person independent of the Authority, with whom they may discuss problems or concerns they may have'.

The Children and Young Person's Act 2008, also states that **ALL** young people in care have a right to an Independent Visitor if they would like one.

The Children Act says that a local authority should appoint an Independent visitor for any child in their care where it is considered that this would be in the child's best interests.

The function of an IV is to be:-

- A long-term positive role model – in a perfect world this would be a life-long relationship providing continuity, however, we initially ask for a minimum commitment of 2 years. Many of our IVs have been with their young person for considerably longer than this.
- The IV and the young person will meet up once a month (more frequently initially, to establish the relationship). The main aim is to have fun, and give the young person time to talk to someone outside of the care system if they want to.
- The IV can attend childcare reviews if the young person wishes them to.
- Where there is a particular issue for a young person, or during unsettled periods (e.g. changes of placement and/or social worker) IV's may offer extra support in agreement with the young person and the IV Coordinator.

IVs need to be consistent and reliable in order that children can build a trusting, positive relationship with them over time.

They will endeavour to become and remain a consistent adult in the child's life who doesn't change when placements or social workers change and will at all times stay child focussed.

The child/young person will have the opportunity to try new activities, and spend time with their IV, away from their placement.

IVs are someone (else) to listen to the child, to promote the empowerment of the child, and to make sure their rights are respected.

It is important to note that IVs are not skilled advocates. If a child is unhappy with their care plan or they feel they're not being listened to, the IV service should make a referral to the Children's Rights Service – 'Speakup'.

The IV service has a relatively low profile with limited recognition and lack of understanding amongst some professionals, children and young people.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner reported that 80% of children who did not have an independent visitor said this was because they were never offered one; *"I have never been given the choice and never heard of them"* said one young person.

However, we now have a National IV Network which is commissioned by the Tudor Trust and funded by Barnardos which challenges Government to increase the profile and works towards getting the IV Service recognised by OFSTED. They have produced the IV National Standards which CYC endorses.

[Independent Visitors\2018.06.26 National IV Standards.pdf](#)



The Independent Visitor's Service has been established within City of York Council since 2008 and at present we have 43 IVs. We also offer the IV Service to care leavers up to the age of 21, not all Local Authorities offer this service but we feel this stage in a young person's life requires as much if not more as they move into independence. We have an exceptional match where an IV began supporting a care leaver whilst she was pregnant and has continued to support her to date, attending reviews and been on hand for 1:1 emotional support and parenting support, even been available Christmas day to check in on her with a phone call.

We are aware that the young people that would benefit the most from an IV are those that are placed out of area and we have are extremely lucky to have 12 out of area matches with IVs travelling many miles. However, it is more difficult to find volunteers who are willing to travel and is a problem across the IV network. We do try to commission IVs from the service in the local authority that the young person is placed however again this has its limitations due to the number of volunteer's available and local coordinators needing volunteers for their own children in care.

We have many quotes from young people about their IV and examples of good practice which can be found in our 2019 IV evaluation and I would like to highlight a relationship that has been going for 10 years. The young person has just reached 21 therefore funding will no

Within **Attachment Theory**, the word "**attachment**" refers to the relationship between two people which endures and joins them emotionally. ... It also gives them greater emotional **resilience** to with-stand stressful or adverse experiences later in adult life

longer be available. However, due to the success of the relationship the IV has said they will remain friends and he will continue to offer support.

I've pulled together that list of everything we've done, and it is really nostalgic reading for me, especially to see all the films we've watched and how his choice of films has changed through the years (46 films, 7 bike rides, 17 games of pool/snooker and 4 times at the golf driving range).

I think (the young person) will enjoy looking through the list when I see him next month, and it will bring back a few memories, such as the time we tried to play snooker and I managed to slice my tyre open on the curb in the Car Park - was a 'different' visit! I'm also looking back at the list and I'm wondering how I didn't realise that we've been to the Coal Mining Museum twice apparently, once in 2012 and again in 2014 - I'm not sure how that happened!

[Guildhall\GROUP\YSSVolunteers\IV's\10 years an IV.docx](#)

The statistics in the report don't tell the whole story, the IV is a Professional man, and this young person has had an extremely troubled and disrupted childhood, with many changes of placement and social workers/professionals. The one constant in his life was his IV, who has been an amazing role model and support.

If you would like further information about the IV role and how to refer please contact Jean Harris jean.harris@york.gov.uk

TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS

The Trusted Relationships Fund was launched by the Home Office in spring 2018 and



provided an opportunity for local authorities to apply for funding to deliver and evaluate initiatives to improve support to young people at risk of exploitation and abuse. In total, 11 Trusted Relationships projects in England have been funded by the Home Office.

The **successful bid** made by North Yorkshire and York, centres on the implementation of a multi-agency collaborative approach to identification and support for children and

young people (principally aged 10 – 17) who are at risk of or subject to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), Sexual Exploitation (CSE) including County Lines, and Modern Slavery.

The North Yorkshire and York Trusted Relationships project went live in January 2019 and at the heart of the delivery model is the ambition to foster positive, persistent and long-term relationships and develop protective factors that build resilience in this highly vulnerable population. To do this, there are 2 strands to the project:

Strand 1 – Specialist trained volunteer mentors who provide long term 1:1 support to a young person.

Strand 2 – Family Group Conference facilitator who will work restoratively towards building positive relationships within the family.

It was recognised in Professor Alexis Jay's Independent Inquiry that long term relationships enable a young person to develop trust and resilience enabling them to have someone to talk to about their experiences. Professor Jay also recognised the difference a volunteer relationship makes to a young person and stated that it is:

“Not just the Council, Social Workers or Police responsibility to protect children and young people the whole community including volunteers have a part to play”.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 states

'Everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play, everyone including volunteers are subject to the same safeguarding responsibilities.'

Since the beginning of the project we have **successfully linked 28** young people who are either vulnerable to exploitation or being exploited either sexually or criminally with volunteer mentors. In some cases the referral comes from a strand 2 case that is open however most come from a professional who is working with a young person.

A referral form O:\Guildhall\GROUP\YSS_Volunteers\SphereTrusted Relationships\TR - Nomination Form FINAL.docx needs to be completed along with a risk assessment that can then be presented at our **weekly exploitation and missing meetings** with multi agencies,

Once a referral is accepted the Volunteer Service will make the matches and link up a young person with a mentor, we will supervise and support the mentor throughout the relationship keeping the referrer informed of any concerns.

For strand 2 referrals the same referral process applies however this focuses on young people where we believe that long term 'trusted relationship' can be embedded within the young person's own family/network. This approach therefore focuses on restoring and building on existing relationships and in some cases re-establishing links with significant others.

More recently strand 2 has also utilised a community conference approach to work with 3 young people and their families together as the 3 YP were connected by friendship but also known as a 'collective' in terms of concerns regarding exploitation. ASB and missing from home.

Strand 2 referrals to be sent to sue.blogg@york.gov.uk, for further information about strand 2 please contact Sue or Kate Dunne kate.dunne@york.gov.uk

The following link gives 2 examples of how strand 1 and 2 have been successful and the most recent evaluation undertaken by our independent evaluation partner, the Behavioural Insights Team. I believe this is a hugely positive report and demonstrates the impact of the project across both local authority areas.

O:\Guildhall\GROUP\YSS_Volunteers\SphereTrusted Relationships\Case Studies\Stand 1 case study.docx O:\Guildhall\GROUP\YSS_Volunteers\SphereTrusted Relationships\Case Studies\Stand 2 case study.docx O:\Guildhall\GROUP\YSS_Volunteers\SphereTrusted Relationships\Trusted Relationships Programme NYCYCfinal Report V2.pdf

If you are unable to cut and paste these links please contact Alison for further information.

Finally, some information for you regarding early years support. Nicola Sawyer (early years and childcare sufficiency manager) has just completed an information sheet on the funded entitlement for 2, 3 and 4 year olds detailing what it is, who is eligible, the application process, additional fees which may be payable etc. to help colleagues who are supporting children and families who may be eligible for the entitlements. As the criteria and application processes are slightly different in some cases, Nicola has produced 2 separate summary sheets, a general one and one specifically for Children Looked After which I have attached to this email.

Dallas

Principal Social Worker prinicpalsocialworker@york.gov.uk

Alison Cammiss alison.cammiss@york.gov.uk

