

# Volunteering with the Young Lives Foundation



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Young Lives Foundation

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## YLF | About Us

The Young Lives Foundation is an independent children's charity dedicated to delivering quality services. These are tailored to ensure we achieve effective outcomes in the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people.

**Our mission** is to be alongside children and young people in need in ways that:

- **Affirm their identity and worth**
- **Champion their rights, needs and interests**
- **Promote their wellbeing and development**

**Our vision** is that every young person in need shall have access to the resources and opportunities needed for them to achieve their potential and lead fulfilled lives.



### What we do:

- Support young people through times of difficulty and distress
- Enable young people's voices to be heard
- Assist young people to achieve their potential

### Who we support:

- Looked after children/care leavers
- Children on the edge of care/children in need
- Young offenders/young people at risk of offending
- NEET young people/young people disengaged in education
- Young people with mental health difficulties
- Families in need of support
- Young parents

### How we do it:

- Mentoring & Befriending
- Positive Activities
- Advocacy & Children's Rights

## YLF | Volunteering With Us

Volunteering for YLF gives you an opportunity to use your skills, experience and enthusiasm to make a difference to children and young people locally across Kent and Medway. You will also have the chance to build on your skills, receive free training while making new friends and having fun.

YLF volunteers are an asset to the team and we rely on them to deliver over 10,000 hours of frontline activity each year. We are proud of our volunteers and know that YLF would not exist without their commitment and dedication.

YLF offer volunteers a full package of informal and formal support with named staff, direct communication with our CEO, ongoing training and full reimbursement of all authorised expenses. We offer support groups, an award giving event each year and the opportunity to take part in other activities like our annual bbq. We also update our team regularly via email, web, social networks and newsletters.

Our volunteering roles are offered across Kent and in Medway, allowing you to help locally to where you live. Volunteer opportunities with YLF include independent visitors, mentors and appropriate adults. A full description of each of these roles can be found on our website - [yfl.org.uk/get-involved/volunteers](http://yfl.org.uk/get-involved/volunteers).

# Being a Volunteer Befriender with the Young Lives Foundation

## Befriending | Introduction to the Role

Young people who are looked after by the local authority often lack a consistent adult role model in their lives. This is particularly the case for those young people who have no contact with their birth families.

The Children Act (1989 & 2004) states a local authority looking after a child must appoint an independent person to be the child's visitor if it appears to them that it would be in the child's interests to do so. These people are called **independent visitors**.

An independent visitor can provide the consistency and stability that these young people are missing out on. It is widely agreed that it is in the child's best interests to have somebody special for them who is independent from the care system.

Independent visitors are trained volunteers who visit, advise and befriend a young person. It is the statutory right of any eligible young person to have an independent visitor, however, it is also their choice.

In order to provide consistency and stability all independent visitors commit to a minimum of two years but many relationships last much longer.

## Befriending | Responsibilities

- **Be able to commit a minimum of two years to the role**
- Visit, advise and befriend the young person
- Arrange visits, activities and outings with the young person and share in quality one-to-one time with them
- Take time to assist with any problems, issues and concerns and empower the young person to problem solve for themselves
- Take an interest in and contribute to the young person's general welfare, including promoting the young person's social, emotional, educational and cultural needs
- Encourage the young person to exercise their rights and to participate fully in the decisions that are made on their behalf
- Advocate for the young person if they request you to, and accompany them to any meetings, appointments, etc
- Be open minded and prepared to raise questions about decisions that are made, in the interests of the young person
- Support the care plan that has been formulated for the young person and their carers, unless it is felt that there is clear evidence to act differently
- Ensure that you maintain good and open communications with YLF and work within the guidelines set

## Befriending | Training and Support

Training and on-going support is provided to help you in the role and the service prides itself on the welcoming and friendly style in which it operates.

YLF delivers a two day training course to all applicants. Session one will focus on the experiences of young people in care, with particular emphasis on the care system; Session two will focus more on the role of the independent visitor and the service's key points of policy and practice.

Formal and informal supervision is made available to all volunteers. Additionally, we also provide an open door policy to volunteers.

YLF reimburses all authorised expenses.

## Befriending | Qualities, Experience and Attributes

Empathy, patience and a friendly non judgemental approach are qualities we seek in our volunteers. YLF believes that volunteers should have a genuine interest in the wellbeing of young people and that they have good communication and motivational skills.

We especially welcome people who bring experience of supporting vulnerable young people or young people with learning difficulties. However, we acknowledge the importance of diversity and our male and female volunteers have a wealth of knowledge that stretches from finance to construction or from retail to education. All these life skills are an enormous benefit to the young people we support as it helps them to develop their own skills when moving towards independence. The use of a car is beneficial.

## Befriending | Expectations

Once appointed it is expected that you maintain regular contact with the young person, visiting a maximum of twice a month for a period of at least two years. You will be required, whilst meeting the individual needs of the young person, to follow YLF policies and procedures, provide monthly records of how the friendship is developing and report any concerns or written reports to enable YLF to support the development of the friendship.

## Befriending | What People Say

'I TAKE MY HAT OFF TO HER INDEPENDENT VISITOR. IT GIVES ME A BREAK KNOWING THAT SHE'S HAPPY ELSEWHERE. IT EXTENDS HER WORLD, HER RELATIONSHIPS AND HER NETWORK OF SUPPORT.'

Brenda | Foster Carer

'I AM HER FRIEND, I LISTEN TO HER, SHE BRINGS HER PROBLEMS TO RESOLVE AND I'VE BEEN TO MEETINGS AT HER REQUEST. I'M LIKE AN AUNTIE OR GRANDMA. I AM REGULARLY AND CONSISTENTLY THERE FOR HER, AND I ALWAYS DO WHAT I SAY I AM GOING TO DO.'

Jenny | Independent Visitor

'ADULTS COME AND GO LIKE BUSES BUT IT'S NOT LIKE THAT WITH MY INDEPENDENT VISITOR. EVERY TIME I NEED HER I KNOW SHE WILL BE THERE TO OFFER HELP AND ADVICE.'

Nicola | Young Person

## Befriending | Case Studies

*Gavin was struggling at school and was excluded twice in the first term. He used the visits with his IV to offload his frustrations appropriately. The IV was able to support him and they discussed the importance of education. Gavin voiced he wanted to go to university and he and his IV found that Cambridge University do taster days. The IV discussed this with the young person and although he was nervous they agreed to go. Gavin found the whole experience enlightening and thoroughly enjoyed learning about Egyptology and was keen to go again.*

*Danny has learning difficulties but had a passion for motor mechanics and was keen to learn more about cars. The IV approached the local skills for life centre that run a weekly motorbike mechanics course. The IV accompanied Danny on the first day and supported him to engage and participate in the day. With this support, Danny really enjoyed his first day and is keen to go back.*

*Rachel has learning difficulties and was moving foster placements. The IV was able to offer continuity whilst the transition was taking place. The social worker asked if the IV could offer more support during this period which she was able to do; the young person has settled in really well with the new family.*

## Befriending | Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is a Befriender?**

A befriender, or independent visitor, is an adult volunteer who befriends and supports a young person in care who has little or no contact with his/her family.

- **What is the purpose and why are Befrienders needed?**

There are many aspects to this role. In addition to being a truly 'independent' contact outside the care system, the befriender gives continuity, something not always possible with changing carers and social workers. This enables the young person to develop social skills and the ability to work at long term relationships. It also helps build their self-esteem, giving them confidence to try new hobbies, to take on board new ideas and to learn from other people's more settled lives.

- **What does a Befriender do?**

Every young person has different needs but is matched so that they have something in common with the befriender, perhaps a shared hobby. This allows a friendship with common interests to develop and become trusting. You may want to do activities together such as the cinema, visit the library, bowling, swimming, walking the dog or just having a cuppa and a chat. It would be similar to the sort of relationship you may have with nieces, nephews or grandchildren.

- **What sort of young people do we help?**

The young people will be as varied as the befrienders and can be in care for a variety of reasons including the loss of one or both parents, abuse, neglect or special needs. The one thing they all have in common is that they have had an unsettled childhood and need continuity as well as the need to feel valued. This is why we ask for a minimum two year commitment.

- **How much time do I need to give and when will I be required?**

The minimum requirement is a weekly phone call, letter or text plus two visits per month, generally at weekends or in the early evening but always at a convenient time for yourself and the young person. We ask for a minimum two year commitment.

- **How much will it cost me?**

Nothing, other than your time. All authorised expenses are reimbursed including travel.

- **How do you match me to a young person and what is the process?**

We discuss with all volunteers during their accreditation interview any preferences they may have regarding a young person. We also take into consideration your hobbies and interests, geography and the young person's wishes as well.

- **What if I don't get on with the young person or one of us has to move?**

Don't worry; this rarely happens. There is a careful matching process that takes account of your own preferences and wishes as well as those of the young person. If it really doesn't work out on either side, we would organise a new arrangement. If either the independent visitor or the young person moves away from the area, the formal befriending arrangement would end – but you could always stay in touch by letter, phone or email, if you both wanted to. If you were still within reasonable travelling distance, we would explore how the arrangement might continue.

- **What if I need help?**

The Independent Visitors handbook provides you with a vast amount of information and is a useful tool and point of reference for all our active volunteers. The content covers the role of an IV, policies and procedure, YLF safeguarding policy, as well as useful information about how to carry out your role productively. All volunteers receive formal supervision after their first three months, then 6 monthly then, annual. We also offer informal support via phone and email on a regular basis.

- **Do I need to have a DBS check or any other references or background checks?**

All volunteers are required to complete an enhanced DBS form; we also seek a reference from your doctor, your current employer and two others (whom you have known for over 5 years).

- **How do I apply?**

To apply you will need to complete application, safeguarding and doctor's check forms (there is also an optional equal opportunities form) and return these by post to YLF Volunteering, 71 College Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6SX or by email to [volunteering@ylf.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@ylf.org.uk). These forms are all available to download from our website. If you require hard copies, these are available on request.

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