

Volunteering with the Young Lives Foundation



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Young Lives Foundation

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The Young Lives Foundation is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. Registered in England & Wales Company No 5999166. Registered Charity No 1119528

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
- Families in need of support/young parents
- Vulnerable adults
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

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 17,000 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.

Being a Volunteer Accompanying Adult with the Young Lives Foundation

Accompanying Adults | Introduction to the Role

Unaccompanied children in the immigration system often have their age disputed by either the Home Office or a local authority. When a local authority does not accept what a child says about their age, two social workers undertake an age assessment, usually in the form of an interview or series of interviews, at which an independent adult – referred to as an ‘accompanying adult’ – should be present.

There is no statutory guidance or procedural rules on how the age assessment should be conducted, and what can be done to assist social services to carry out a fair and just assessment, however there are a number of court judgements (known as case law) that set guidance on how the assessment should be carried out. The local authority has to conduct an assessment that is ‘Merton Compliant’ (B v Merton [2003] EWHC 1689).

An accompanying adult is not simply there to act as an observer, but to make representations and to offer advice and support to ensure the child understands the process. Accompanying adults are volunteers independent from the local authority.

Accompanying Adults | Responsibilities

- Advise and assist the unaccompanied child during their local authority age assessment interview(s).
- Ensure the child has adequate breaks to consult with the Accompanying Adult, seek legal advice or if the child is tired, distressed or ill.
- Observe whether the social workers are acting properly and fairly and to intervene if they are not.
- Assist with communication between the child and the social workers.
- Ensure that the child understands their rights, including the right to seek legal advice before continuing further with the interview.
- Meet the child prior to the interview to explain the role (when possible).
- Ensure the child understands that the interview is being conducted for the primary purpose of assessing how old they are.
- Take notes of the questions and the child’s (interpreted) answers. In particular, make accurate notes of anything that appears to be contentious or any questions you feel are inappropriate.
- Maintain regular communication with the service coordinator.
- Attend seminars/training.
- Follow the policies and procedures laid down by the service.
- Keep such records as may be required.
- Report any safeguarding concerns to the service coordinator.

Accompanying Adults | Training and Support Package

Full 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 training and an induction to all applicants that include:

- An initial interview
- An induction training day
- A study of the Merton Judgement
- An accreditation interview
- An enhanced DBS
- An annual seminar and continuous briefing updates on legislation, policy and practice
- All expenses reimbursed
- Full and up-to-date service handbook containing YLF's policies and procedures
- Continuous communication from the service coordinator
- Out of hours facility to ensure adequate support
- Formal and informal supervision to all volunteers (open door policy)

Accompanying Adults | Qualities, Experience and Attributes

Good inter-personal and communication skills are necessary as the accompanying adult will be required to interact with social services, social workers, solicitors and interpreters as well as with the child. The accompanying adult will be required to ensure that the child understands his/her rights and the meaning of the procedures taking place and must be able to facilitate communication between all parties. The accompanying adult should have a non-judgemental approach and be able to exercise discernment and objectivity.

The accompanying adult must be a person of high integrity, able to maintain confidentiality within agreed boundaries and be thoroughly trustworthy in dealing with asylum-seeking young people.

Accompanying Adults | Expectations

Once appointed it is expected that you will:

- Maintain regular communication with the service coordinator
- Attend seminars/training
- Follow the policies and procedures laid down by the service and YLF
- Keep such records as may be required

Accompanying Adults | Frequently Asked Questions

What is an accompanying adult?

An accompanying adult is a volunteer, 18 years of age or over, who assists and advises a child during their age assessment interview. They act independently from the local authority and ensure that all the necessary processes are being conducted properly and fairly.

What is the purpose and why are accompanying adults needed?

An 'age assessment' is the process where the local authority make an assessment of a child in order to establish their age. A key part of this process is an interview, or series of interviews, with the child and the assessing social worker and this is where the accompanying adult is required to be present. There must be two qualified social workers conducting the assessment. Most often an interpreter will also be present.

What does an accompanying adult do?

The role of the accompanying adult is to:

- Advise and assist the child being interviewed
- Observe whether or not the interview is being conducted properly and fairly
- Facilitate communication between the social workers and the child

A report/monitoring form is completed in respect of each interview and submitted to YLF as soon after as possible. Any points or issues of concern will then be followed up with the relevant agency and/or volunteer.

Matters requiring urgent attention (e.g. safeguarding concerns) should be reported as soon as possible to YLF.

What sort of people do we help?

Accompanying adults are called to help children who have their age disputed by the local authority.

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

Volunteers will be notified one week in advance of the interview date, time and venue. The service operates Monday to Friday 0900 - 1700.

How much will it cost me?

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

How will I know what to do and what not to do?

All volunteers undertake full training comprising:

- Seminars/briefing sessions on legislation, policy and practice
- A study of the Merton Judgement

There is a handbook provided and ongoing training opportunities throughout the time as an accompanying adult.

What if I need help?

Telephone back-up is available during office hours and out of hours. We are also available by email and phone to answer any queries you might have.

Do I get to meet other accompanying adults?

You will meet a number of accompanying adults at our support groups throughout the year.

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 current employer and two others (whom you have known for over 5 years).

How do I apply?

To apply you will need to complete the application and safeguarding 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. These forms are all available to download from our website. If you require hard copies, these are available on request.



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