



**The Children's Society & The
University of Salford
Evaluation of the Virtual Independent
Visitor Pilot Project
Final Report: November 2017**

Dr Helen Scholar & Andrea Pepe

School of Health & Society
University of Salford, Allerton Building, Salford M6 6PU

h.f.scholar@salford.ac.uk

a.pepe@salford.ac.uk

Contents

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary	1
1. Independent Visitors: Overview	3
2. Introduction to the virtual Independent Visitor Pilot	4
3. Literature Review: The use of digital technology in remotely providing 1-2-1 support to vulnerable young people	6
4. Evaluation Methodology	24
5. Findings: The Young People’s Experience and Perspective	26
6. Findings: Views from Independent Visitors	35
7. Discussion	38
8. Points for Consideration	40
9. References	41
10. Appendices	42
Appendix 1: Process Flowchart	43
Appendix 2: Cartoon	44
Appendix 3: Independent Volunteer Online Survey (Blank)	45
Appendix 4: Survey Results	60

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the young people who gave their time to talk to us about their experiences, the Independent Visitors who contributed to the survey, and the staff at The Children's Society Headquarters who commissioned the evaluation. Special thanks go to the staff team at Rochdale and Oldham Children's Rights Service, without whose support and practical assistance this study would have been possible.

Executive Summary

Context & Objectives

This report describes the findings of an evaluation of the Virtual Independent Visitor pilot scheme, on behalf of The Children's Society. The project was piloted in Rochdale and Oldham, and offered a 'virtual' alternative (vIV) to the traditional face to face (tIV) Independent Visitor Service. The Children's Society approached the University of Salford who undertook to carry out the evaluation pro bono. The objectives of the evaluation were as follows:

- To explore and compare young people's experience of the two models for delivering IV service
- To provide information for The Children's Society to support their decision making concerning their provision and development of IV and vIV services.

Unfortunately The Children's Society's contract to provide IV services came to an end part way through the evaluation, and data collection could not be completed as planned. Consequently, the study does not fully address the evaluation questions, although it does add to the currently limited body of research on the role of the IV and the contribution they make to the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

The Virtual Independent Visitor Pilot

The pilot offered a 'virtual' alternative (vIV) to the traditional face to face (tIV) Independent Visitor Service, established to meet the needs of children and young people placed out of their local authority areas, for whom the costs of provision of face to face services is increasingly challenging. Following a matching process, an initial face to face meeting took place between the IV and the young person, after which contact takes place online, using Sharepoint; by letter; or via some combination of these forms of contact.

Findings of the Evaluation

The evaluation found that young people value highly the involvement of Independent Visitors in their lives, whether virtual or traditional. The fact that Independent Visitors are unpaid volunteers is important to young people, as is the personalised 'matching' process that takes place. Direct contact, where it took place, was regarded positively and young people enjoyed spending face-to-face time with their Independent Visitor.

Some benefits of online rather than direct contact were identified, such as control over the pace of conversations and Challenges included the suitability of the Sharepoint platform, which may not be a sufficiently sophisticated and fluid virtual space in which to develop and sustain a long term and exclusively vIV relationship; and there were some institutional and technical barriers reported by the young people. For example, young people were not always able to access a computer and sometimes experienced system failures .

Points for Consideration arising from the Evaluation

- There appears to be potential for incorporating a virtual element into the provision of IV services, and there is scope and value in developing the kinds of ways in which Independent Visitors can be in contact with the young people they are matched to. This could involve some on line activities and virtual contact using service such as SKYPE as well as contact via mobile devices.
- Development of virtual IV services should included with young people about what functionality and support they want /need in an online platform to enable the development and maintenance of a meaningful virtual relationship.
- The findings suggest that virtual IV relationships should complement traditional face to face contact rather than being considered as a satisfactory alternative to this. The balance between direct and virtual contact may vary depending on the circumstances of young person and IV.
- Establishing workable boundaries would be an important part of developing this extended contact , there are currently unresolved issues with regard to confidentiality and privacy in online communications as well as a need to be transparent and open.
- Further research is needed into young people's experiences of the vIV and tIV service, to seek confirmation of the benefits suggested by this report and collect more robust evidence to support the maintenance and development of IV services.
- Such research should include more young people and incorporate the perspectives of IV service staff, carers, local authorities and IVs, including looking at the reasons why IVs find they are sometimes unable to continue in the role.

1: Independent Visitors: Overview

1.1 Independent Visitors (IVs) were introduced by The Children Act 1989, a piece of legislation which included a recognition of the needs of children in the care system, and instigated a number of measures to improve outcomes for this group of young people (Hurst & Peel, 2013). The role of the IV was to 'visit, advise and befriend' children who had infrequent contact with their parent (or person with Parental Responsibility) and had not been visited by that person for 12 months (Paragraph 17, Schedule 2, Children Act 1989). This was extended by s.16 of The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 to all looked after children and young people for whom the appointment of an IV would be in their 'best interests', and who wished such an appointment to be made.

2: Introduction to the virtual Independent Visitor Pilot

2.1 In 2014, The Children's Society (TCS) began a pilot project at their Rochdale & Oldham Children's Rights Services, offering a 'virtual' alternative (vIV) to the traditional face to face (tIV) Independent Visitor Service, established to meet the needs of children and young people placed out of their local authority areas, for whom the costs of provision of face to face services is increasingly challenging. Following a matching process, an initial face to face meeting takes place between the IV and the young person, after which contact takes place online, using Sharepoint; by letter, or some combination of these forms of contact.

2.2 In 2015, The CS developed a proposal for a project exploring the outcomes of the IV and vIV services, and considering how the two models might differ. TCS staff were to carry out interviews with young people using the traditional IV model, as part of their internal service evaluation. Alongside this, they approached The University of Salford to carry out an external evaluation, comparing the 'virtual' pilot scheme with the traditional face-to-face methods of service delivery. The objectives of the study were:

- To explore and compare young people's experience of the two models for delivering IV service
- To provide information for The Children's Society to support their decision making concerning their provision and development of IV and vIV services.

2.3 It was agreed that the University of Salford would undertake this work *pro bono*, and that the evaluation would involve interviews with six children and young people (three with IVs, three with vIVs) as they began to access the service, and then 12 months' later. More details of the evaluation methodology are available in Section 3. It was also agreed that the evaluation team would produce a literature review on the use digital technology in the provision 1-2-1 support for vulnerable young people, which is included as the next section of this report.

2.4 Following the interim report, it was agreed that we would develop an online survey of TCS independent Visitors working with the Rochdale and Oldham Children's Rights Service to inform the final report.

2.5 Unfortunately, during the period following the initial interviews, the contract for provision of Independent Visitor Services in Rochdale and Oldham came up for review, and was awarded to another organisation. Follow-up interviews with the young people were due at the same time as the service was being transferred, and it was not possible to complete these as originally planned. Only two young people attended, one of whom had had no contact with their IV since the first interview. It was decided to exclude these interviews from the evaluation. The online survey was distributed to Independent Visitors during this period, and fewer responses were received than we had hoped. However, these have been included and the findings are reported in Chapter 6.

3: Literature Review: The use of digital technology in remotely providing 1-2-1 support to vulnerable young people

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 The review began with a 'scoping' search of the internet using Google and Google Scholar to establish the range of readily available resources in the academic and grey literature relating to online one to one befriending support for children and young people. The scoping search revealed little relevant material reflecting the particular characteristics of the vIV relationship, and returned websites and references focussing on both physical and mental health information, resources and support, and relating in particular to online counselling services.

Similarly, initial scoping searches of the electronic databases suggested that the term 'befriending' would yield few results, and so the concept was extended to include other terms describing characteristics of supportive relationships with children and young people. The search terms selected are listed in the centre of the three boxes below, and were used in combination with the terms in the other two boxes as the basis for a search of the electronic databases.

Search Terms



3.1.2 Given the specific characteristics of the vIV project, and the large number of results anticipated by broadening the search terms, more detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to identify literature with relevance to the project.

Inclusion criteria

Papers were to be included in the review if they:

- Described, evaluated or analysed a model of on-line one-to-one support provided by a professional or trained volunteer to children and/or young people (up to age 18), or specific aspects of such support
- Included synchronous and/or asynchronous delivery of one-to-one support.
- Considered online services whose aims were the provision of support and advice.
- Explored the perspective of the organisation, professional/volunteer and/or children/young people involved in the online one-to-one support
- Employed any recognised qualitative research method
- Full text available free or via Salford University Library
- Were written in English

Exclusion criteria

Papers were to be excluded if they:

- Considered online services whose aims were to monitor or control aspects of the behaviour of children/young people
- Considered services providing one-to-one support or information relating to the management of specific health conditions
- Considered services providing online peer support or group interventions
- Examined the use of websites designed to provide advice or information
- Used exclusively quantitative methodologies with no qualitative element

3.1.3 Results**Database Search**

Using EBSCO, three databases (CINAHL, ERIC and Child Development and Adolescent studies) were searched using the combination of search terms above, within the date range 2006 – 2016, and limiting results to peer-reviewed papers with abstracts available.

The results were as follows (including duplicates):

CINAHL	977
ERIC	1508
CDAS	267

Titles of the resulting papers were scanned for relevance. Full text versions were acquired for 30 papers whose abstracts suggested that they met the inclusion criteria. When the inclusion criteria were applied, 15 papers were identified for review from the database search.

Two further peer-reviewed papers meeting the inclusion criteria were identified from the Reference Lists of the articles retrieved from the data base search.

3.2 Summary of the peer-reviewed literature

For ease of reference, the table below summarises the focus, methodologies and key findings of the papers included in the review. In the discussion that follow, papers are identified by the numbers used in the table rather than by using citations.

SUMMARY OF THE PEER-REVIEWED LITERATURE

No	Author & Date	Title	Study Focus	Research Design	Findings
1	(Bagley & Shaffer, 2015) (U.S.A.)	Stop talking and type: comparing virtual and face-to-face mentoring in an epistemic game.	This study compared virtual and face-to-face mentoring of 21 young people and 2 mentors working on an epistemic game (to produce land use plans) within a Conservation Leadership Programme.	Pre and post-tests relating to learning outcomes were administered online to both groups. Students' 4 reflection meetings (online or face-to-face) with their mentors were analysed qualitatively. Some quantitative analysis was included but limited value as sample size too small.	Findings suggest that mentoring via chat can be as effective as face- to –face mentoring in structured learning interactions. One difference identified was that more words were used in face-to-face exchanges than online exchanges.
2	(Bambling, King, Reid, & Wegner, 2008) (Australia)	Online counselling: the experience of counsellors providing synchronous single-session counselling to young people.	Explores the experiences of counsellors using online text based communication rather than telephone contact in an Australian youth counselling service (Kids Help Line).	Data collected in two focus groups with 26 counsellor participants, looking at the experience of communicating in the online environment. Analysed using Consensual Qualitative Research method (CQR).	Identified benefits (emotional safety) and disadvantages (lack of non-verbal clues and possible inaccurate assessment of young people).
3	(Callahan & Inckle, 2012) (Ireland)	Cybertherapy or Psychobabble? A Mixed Methods Study of Online Emotional Support.	To examine whether there are differences between how clients use online mental health supports	Mixed methods. Quantitative analysis of online conversations to analyse patterns of	Online conversations were more focussed on emotional issues compared to telephone calls and online/mobile communication

			compared to telephone communication, and at the provider perspective on the provision of support using online and mobile technologies.	communication, and qualitative interviews took place with 9 online mental health providers. A focus group with a young people's consultation group (5 members) was held.	facilitates disclosure and allows greater client control. Some evidence that clients misrepresent themselves online. Counsellors identified need for training and clear guidelines and regulation.
4	(Elf, Skärsäter, & Krevers, 2011)	'The web is not enough, it's a base' – an explorative study of what needs a web-based support system for young carers must meet.	Study aimed to gain knowledge from young carers about what they would need from a hypothetical web-based support system.	Researchers interviewed 12 young people caring for a friend or relative with mental illness about their support needs and how these could be met online. Data were analysed using content analysis techniques.	Three themes identified by the researchers – need for knowledge, communication and outside involvement. Strong message that a website was not enough, some participants wanted direct contact and support to be available.
5	(R. G. Fukkink & J. M. A. Hermanns, 2009) (The Netherlands)	Children's Experiences with Chat Support and Telephone Support.	This study compares the impact of telephone and online one-to-one chat services of Kindertelefoon, a Dutch information, advice and support service for 8 – 18 year olds, provided in a single conversation.	902 children and young people responded to questions immediately before & after their contact with an advisor, 213 of whom participated in a follow-up interview one month later. Standardised instruments (Cantrill ladder and Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire) were included, and satisfaction measures immediately after the conversation.	Children using both services reported an increase in well-being immediately after the contact & a decrease in the perceived burden of their problem. This was largely maintained one month later. Online users reported the most progress. The study suggested that chat support provides a non-threatening type of support, and that being slower may help children to follow the conversations.
6	(R. Fukkink & J.	Counselling Children at a	A paper relating to the	Transcriptions of 42	Chat conversations were longer

	Hermanns, 2009) (The Netherlands)	Helpline: Chatting or Calling?	study above, focussing on the quality of chat and telephone conversations, the results of the support provided and children's motivations for choosing the chat or telephone option.	telephone and 53 online chat support sessions were subjected to quantitative content analysis by adult judges and by the children involved. Standardised instruments were used to measure outcomes.	than telephone conversation but used fewer words. Quality of chat conversations was rated equal to telephone conversations and superior in some variables. Both improved children's well being. Some children preferred one form of communication to the other.
7	(Glasheen & Campbell, 2009) (Australia)	The use of online counselling within an Australian secondary school setting: A practitioner's viewpoint.	Reflections on the development and implementation of a school based online counselling service.	Not a formal research study, but a series of observations based on the authors' experience of running a pilot service, and comparison with existing literature on similar approaches to counselling services for young people.	Authors commented on factors including the benefits of anonymity and privacy for the young people, mentioning benefits for people with disabilities in particular; the development of text conventions to compensate for absence of non verbal cues; value of records of the communication and ethical concerns raised by counsellors including anonymity, and safety in the event of the young person terminating the conversation.
8	(Grant & Dieker, 2011) (U.S.A.)	Listening to Black Male Student Voices Using Web-Based Mentoring.	This study sought to examine the implications of web-based mentoring for Black male students labelled as having an Emotional Disorder. The programme included video clips and a blog	Case study approach based on 2 16-year-old students in high school setting. Standardised scales and observation of classroom behaviour used in assessing impact, and students completed a survey about	The needs of the students identified through the mentoring were socially and emotionally based, and when given the opportunity to share these, a mentoring relationship could be established online. Importance of listening to this

			discussion space, and live interaction with mentor (researcher) via a webcam.	their experiences of the web mentoring.	population highlighted, using web-based mentoring or any resource available.
9	(T. Hanley, 2006) (U.K.)	Developing youth-friendly online counselling services in the United Kingdom: a small scale investigation into the views of practitioners.	This study explores the views of practitioners about the development of online counselling services for young people.	A grounded theory approach was used to analyse an online asynchronous focus group of nine practitioners, who participated over the course of one month.	Five key categories emerged from the analysis, all pivoting around the central category of Regulation. Recommendations for Service Providers are presented.
10	(T. Hanley, 2007) (U.K.)	'R u still there?! Kooth.com is an online counselling and advice service with a regional focus, proactively meeting the needs of young people	Description of an online counselling and advice service ('Kooth') and its place in local service delivery and outline of ongoing evaluation project. Identified some of pitfalls of such a service including technological 'glitches'.	No detail of planned research design provided although indicates that focus will be on examining quality of relationships with counsellors from service users' point of view.	No findings reported, but author comments that ethically, essential to provide carefully developed services given that people have already been caught masquerading as online counsellors.
11	(Terry Hanley, 2012) Hanley (2012) (U.K.)	Understanding the online therapeutic alliance through the eyes of adolescent service users.	Examines the concept of the 'therapeutic alliance' in online counselling services offered to young people.	Based on 15 online interviews with young people. Data analysed using grounded theory techniques. Paper uses a 'composite story' of a typical user, based on the interview data to illustrate key issues.	Initial engagement, developing rapport and establishing control emerged as important in creating good quality relationships. Identifies some nuances specific to online counselling – reasons for choice of online service, communication skills, technical issues and perceived power of the counsellor.

12	(King et al., 2006) King, Bambling, Lloyd, Gomurra, Smith, Reid, & Wegner (2006) (Australia)	Online counselling: the motives and experiences of young people who choose the Internet instead of face to face or telephone counselling.	Examines the motivation of young people using Kids Help Line (Australian counselling service) choosing online counselling rather than telephone or face-to-face approaches; and their experiences of using this method of contact.	Data collected online from groups of young people waiting in 'chatrooms' for contact with a counsellor. 39 young people participated. Discussions focussed on reasons for choice of communication method, experience of this approach and useability of the online environment. Analysed using CQR.	Online counselling provided an emotionally safe environment and text communication had both advantages and disadvantages compared with speech. Waiting times, time limits and hours of operation of the service were seen as needing change.
13	van de Luitgaarden & van der Tier (2016) (The Netherlands)	Establishing working relationships in online social work	Examines the process of social workers establishing a working relationship with young people regarding various types of psychosocial problems in an online social work service, KvH ('Click for Help'), aimed at 10 – 21 year olds.	Qualitative analysis of 10 online chat conversations followed by interviews with the 5 workers involved. Analysis used Cameron & Keenan's (2010) concept of relationship factors as a framework.	Engagement developing a relationship is a marginal issue in the context of this service, perhaps due to the way in which it is accessed. Social workers appeared to focus on the provision of quick advice or referring on.
14	(Waldman & Rafferty, 2006) (U.K)	Evidence from virtual social work practice: implications for education.	This paper draws upon an evaluation (2004) of an on-line social work service for children and young people, There4Me, run by the NSPCC and staffed by qualified and trainee social workers, and including a real-time chat resource. The focus of this paper is on the	The original evaluation included descriptive statistical analyses of project monitoring data; analysis of 747 text conversations, 304 in detail using conversational analysis and an online consultation for young people. This paper also examines the social work	Discussion suggests that a critical approach to the use of tools such as email and online communication should be embedded in social work programmes and in fieldwork placements. Research about virtual social work services and sharing of findings is important.

			implications for the online skills of social workers.	curriculum documentation on communication skills in virtual practice in the light of the There4Me evaluation.	
15	(Wallis, Riddell, Smith, Silvertown, & Pepler, 2015) (Canada)	Investigating Patterns of Participation and Conversation Content in an Online Mentoring Program for Northern Canadian Youth.	Dream Catcher Mentoring is an online programme aiming to increase school engagement by allocating mentors in students' aspired careers, including navigating path to post secondary education. This study looks at association between demographics and programme success.	Student & Mentor demographic profiles examined. Secondary data analysis of records of 79 students and their mentors from Sept 2009-June 2013. Conversations were coded for rapport, academic content and advice & knowledge. Programme success was ascertained by level of participation, ratings of participants' effort and overall success of conversations.	Finds wide range in the ways that programme is used. Identifies features of most successful conversations, in terms of achieving programme goals (combining personal information and career info/advice), and obstacles to programme success.
16	(Wentz, Nydén, & Krevers, 2012) (Sweden)	Development of an internet-based support and coaching model for adolescents and young adults with ADHD and autism spectrum disorders: a pilot study.	Reports on a service user led design of an internet-based service for young people with ADHD/autism. The service was implemented using a purpose designed chat & instant messaging programme (SalutChat) and piloted with 4 young people.	Two focus groups (one of 13 parents & one of 5 young people) discussed views on the need and nature of an internet based support service. 4 young people at a child psychotherapy clinic tested the chatroom based support and coaching model over an 8 week period. The model was modified on the basis of	No significant improvement on the self report questionnaires were seen immediately after the intervention, but had improved significantly after 6 months. Participants were positive about the experience of using the service. The authors conclude that the model can be an important complement to other interventions for this group.

				<p>this to include 2 face to face visits between coach and young person. Standardised instruments were used e.g. to measure changes in self esteem after the intervention and at 6 months follow up.</p>	
17	<p>Williams, Bambling, King, & Abbott (2009) (Australia)</p>	<p>In-session processes in online counselling with young people: an exploratory approach</p>	<p>Aim to identify in-session behaviours and frequency of use, and to examine their immediate effects in text-based online counselling sessions.</p>	<p>Mixed methods approach based on a qualitative investigation of 85 transcripts of single counselling sessions and development of a coding instrument categorising the behaviours & their immediate effects.</p>	<p>Two types of process identified – rapport-building and task-accomplishment. Study found that former used more consistently, with both types having a moderately strong effect on young people. Weaker effects noted when accurate interpretation of verbal and non-verbal clues important. Suggested that therapists may focus more on building rapport than accomplishing tasks.</p>

3.3. Critical Overview

The research literature considered in this review covers a range of different types of online service for children and young people, and varies in terms of the methodologies employed, the approaches to analysis, and the aims and scale of the studies.

The search revealed no examples of other online Independent Visitor services, and no examples of services whose features precisely match the vIV model being piloted by The Children's Society. The closest parallel appears to be the 4 examples of online mentoring and/or coaching services (Papers 1, 8, 15 & 16), which share some of the vIV service features, in particular a 'matching' process prior to the start of the online relationship; continuing rather than one-off online contact with the same person, and in one example, a face-to-face meeting. Most of the research (8 of 16 papers) is concerned with mental health and the delivery of online counselling and support to young people in distress, or else with the provision of more general support and advice via one-off sessions, rather than the development and maintenance of an online 'befriending' relationship. Potential advantages of such services include 'wider geographic reach, low threat, standardisation of services and low service cost' (King, Bambling, Reid & Thomas 2006: 176), and generally these services seek to achieve specific outcomes, as opposed to the more general 'befriending' aims of the Independent Visitor role. The findings from these studies may therefore not be transferable to the vIV service. The authors of one of the two studies focussing on social work services delivered online (Papers 13 & 14) note the same concerns about the relevance of much of the existing counselling and mental health research to their perspective, commenting that social work regards individuals' problems as contextual and psychosocial rather than only psychological (van de Luitgaarden & van der Tier 2016: 3). Other studies comment on the possibility of misrepresentation and identity concealment amongst users of online services (3, 14) an issue not relevant to the vIV service.

The aims of the studies were, singly or in combination: comparing aspects of online, telephone and/or face-to-face services, particularly in respect of communication style; looking at the nature and quality of online therapeutic or supportive relationships; exploring the skills required by staff delivering services in this way; surveying and analysing the experiences of participants (both service users and professionals or trained volunteers providing the service); attempting to understand the reasons for service user choice of one model over another, and the evaluation and measurement of planned outcomes.

Methodologies

The studies used a range of qualitative methods, including surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and a number made use of standardised scales, particularly to measure the impact of interventions, and changes in services users' emotional states, confidence, knowledge etc. (5.) Several studies undertook detailed analysis of the records of online conversations, using different approaches to analysis, including discourse and conversation analysis (6, 14) to examine both the process and content of online exchanges.

Limitations

Typically these studies involved relatively small numbers of participants (8, 9) and in some instances recruitment methods may have resulted in a tendency to favour the involvement of individuals with a more positive attitude to online methods of working (9, 15). Non-treatment groups were not included in any of the studies,

3.4 Findings – Key Points

Characteristics of online communication

Clearly there are a number of differences between face-to-face, telephone and online communication relating to the number of channels available (paralinguistic, visual, verbal and non-verbal). The research identified some of these and considered their implications.

- The pace of pace of communication in online text conversations is slower than in face-to-face or telephone exchanges, which can help children to follow conversations more easily (2, 5, 14, 17). In one study researchers commented that the online counsellors involved found text communication time consuming (17), but in another, counsellors suggested that this allowed them more time to think about their response (2). In another, it was observed that traditional conversational 'turn taking' could be disrupted, when one party was taking time to compose a response, and in the meantime the other posted another comment (14).
- The use of silences, a technique employed by professional counsellors, was problematic in online (synchronous) conversations, and the nature of gaps in responses from young people could be difficult to assess. (2, 10, 14).
- One study of an online mentoring programme (15) which rated high and low engagement based on the number of words exchanged between mentor and mentee, found that breaks in the conversation by the mentee in an asynchronous online relationship (i.e. failure to reply to posts in a timely way) were frequent in the low engagement group. The reasons for the breaks were unclear.
- The quality of online chat rated as equal to quality of face-to-face conversations
- Some concerns about the effects of not having non-verbal cues (3)
- Content of online conversation more focussed on emotional issues compared to face to face or telephone (2, 3); even where people are known, perceived anonymity facilitates disclosure.

Online Relationship Building

The potential for the development of effective working relationships is an important concern for all the services considered in this body of research literature. The quality of the 'therapeutic relationship' is a key issue for counselling services and three studies addressed this (3, 7, 11).

Mentoring and coaching relationships differ in that these are not anonymous exchanges and are likely to be ongoing between the young person and a consistent member of staff or volunteer, even where the parties have not met.

- When opportunities are given to share social and emotional issues, mentoring relationships can be established online (9)
- Developing rapport and establishing levels of control over the conversation important in creating good quality relationships
- Importance of combining programme goals with personal information in chat

Service user perspectives on using online services

Several of the studies explored service user experiences of and responses to online discussion with an adult, concerning personal, sensitive and emotional issues.

- Online chat appears to be seen as non-threatening, and emotionally safe, in comparison with other forms of communication (3, 5)
- In mentoring /coaching services, some face to face contact appears to be important (16)
- More control of processes, sense of power (3, 6, 12)
- Easier to talk about some issues (3, 6)
- Some children/young people expressed a strong preference for one form of communication over another (5, 6). One relevant factor was whether they felt able to conduct the communication privately or not, for example the siting of the computer in the family home (6,). Another concerned how highly they rated anonymity (6), an issue not relevant for the vIV service.

Staff perspectives on the delivery of online services

- Training needed in developing online therapeutic relationships (3,9,) and the application of existing skills to the online world (14)
- Online counsellors welcomed the immediate and easy signposting to sources of information possible via the internet (3)
- Perception that service users felt they had more control over conversations (3,) and more able to talk about emotionally charged issues (2,)
- Some concerns were expressed about the absence of non-verbal cues when trying to make accurate assessment of client problems in online counselling sessions (2, 3, 7).

3.5 Messages from the literature for the vIV project

In summary, little appears to be known about the characteristics, advantages/disadvantages and short or long term effects of online 'befriending' services between professionals or trained volunteers, and children and young people. No examples of research on such services were found in the literature review. The literature reviewed here is concerned with specific personal and emotional support for children and young people relating to an immediate concern raised by the service user (online counselling) or with the provision of help and encouragement in the achievement of particular outcomes, often relating to self-esteem, personal development or educational goals (coaching and mentoring). The vIV might at times find him/herself dealing with similar issues, but the purpose of their involvement is different, as explained earlier, and is about having fun, and the sharing of interests and activities, as well as being a source of emotional support.

Based on the existing research on online support and counselling services, it appears that there are some differences between online chat and face-to-face communication, but that effective online communication is achievable, although it appears that some individuals (both service users and staff/volunteers) are more comfortable with this form of communication than others. Some of this research has examined the nature and content of online mentoring or counselling conversations in considerable detail; no examples of the analysis of online 'befriending' conversations have been found. Indeed, it is not presently clear how such a conversation might be defined, and if particular features of such conversations could be identified.

In longer term online relationships discussed in this research (mentoring, coaching) face-to-face contact was or would be welcomed by users at some point in the process. None of the examples of online relationships examined in the research considered here continued or were planned to continue for more than 13 weeks. The vIV relationships are envisaged as continuing over a longer period, and although they begin with an initial face-to-face meeting, the viability of developing and maintaining strong online relationships over time without further face-to-face contact is not known.

Preferences for type of communication channel vary between individuals, but there is some evidence from this body of research that younger children and young teenagers prefer telephone contact, and older young people prefer computer based, online contact. This may be related to whether young people had private, undisturbed access to computers, or whether their online activities were monitored by parents or carers.

Users across a number of these studies identified a sense of greater emotional safety in discussing sensitive issues online. This was sometimes associated with anonymity, a factor that would not

apply to the vIV service, but was not solely accounted for by this. It appears that users' sense of control over the conversation, due to the absence of non-verbal or paralinguistic markers of distress, the ability to manage the pace of online conversations and to terminate the conversation if they wished, were also significant factors. It may be that these characteristics of online communication prove to be significant in befriending relationships such as that being piloted by the vIV service; at this stage this is yet to be explored. Similarly, it is not currently known whether there are particular skills required of vIVs as online rather than face-to-face befrienders, and if there are, whether and how these might be taught or developed. The research literature suggests that online counselling or mentoring practitioners need time to reflect on the challenges and potential dilemmas of virtual communication, and on the transferability of their existing communication skills, as well as training in the features of the online systems being used. Again, whether vIVs also require similar or different/additional support and training is yet to be established.

4: Evaluation Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The evaluation was planned as a small-scale longitudinal comparative study exploring the experiences of children and young people using traditional Independent Visitor (IV) services and Virtual Independent Visitor (vIV) services, comparing experiences of the two models of delivery, and looking at the children and young people's perceptions of IV and vIV outcomes. The intention was to carry out semi-structured interviews with six children and young people, three using the IV model, and three the vIV. Interviews were to take place within six weeks of their first contact with their IV/vIV (T1), and again 12 months later (T2).

Part way through the evaluation, and based on interim findings from the interviews, the study was extended to include a questionnaire to be completed by Independent Visitors. This was suggested in order to gain an understanding of the factors supporting IVs in continuing in their role, given that three of the five young people interviewed reported disruption or termination of their IV relationships. We also hoped to capture the perspectives of the vIVs on the challenges and benefits of establishing and maintaining a virtual relationship.

4.2 Ethical Approval

Ethical issues, including the processes for obtaining consent from young people and from those with Parental Responsibility for them, were discussed in detail with TCS staff before an application for ethical approval was submitted to the University of Salford College of Health and Social Care Research Ethics Panel. A process flowchart including consent procedures can be found at Appendix 1. The ethical approval included the provision for young people to be given a shopping voucher as a 'thank you' for their participation in the evaluation.

Following the interim report, an amendment to the ethical approval was agreed, to include the IV questionnaire in the project design.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Interviews with the young people

In the event, despite efforts to involve more participants, only five young people (three young women and two young men) were interviewed at T1, and only two of these (one young man, one young woman) were available to be interviewed at T2. At T2, only one of the young people had had any contact with their IV since last talking to us. Therefore we took the decision not to include the T2 interviews in the report.

The children and young people were all interviewed at the CS offices in Oldham. The initial interviews were intended to cover:

- ‘Story-telling’ about how the young person became aware of the IV service
- Reasons for deciding to get an IV
- Expectations of the relationship with an IV
- Discussion of frequency, nature and satisfaction with communication and contact (IV or vIV)
- For vIV, experiences of the Sharepoint site as a means of contact

Follow-up interviews were intended to cover:

- ‘Story-telling’ about contact with IV/vIV since first interview
- Discussion of frequency, nature and satisfaction with communication and contact (IV or vIV)
- For vIV, review experiences of the Sharepoint site over time
- Outcomes – has having an IV helped you, and how?

4.3.2 Details of the five participants interviewed at T1 are provided in Table One below.

Table One:

Participant	vIV/tIV	Length of involvement*	Current situation
1	tIV, then vIV (same IV)	2 -3 years	tIV contact no longer possible, continuing on vIV basis
2	vIV	7 or 8 contacts	vIV withdrawn
3	vIV	3 or 4 visits	Continuing, but virtual contact not yet established
4	tIV	1 year with original tIV 2 months with 2 nd tIV	1st tIV withdrawn, continuing with 2 nd tIV
5	tIV	1 year	Continuing

(*Based on participants' information)

Although three participants have some experience of virtual contact with their IV, only one appears to have engaged with the vIV scheme as it was envisaged in the planning stages.

One participant initially had a traditional IV relationship, but due to reduced availability of the tIV for face to face visits, asked to 'go virtual'. In this case this seems to be limited to communicating via printed-off emails through The Children's Society staff. This young person does not appear to have been introduced to Sharepoint and its facilities.

Another participant was given the choice of using the virtual or traditional IV service, and chose virtual, but in fact contact with the vIV at the time of the interview had been face to face, at 'the office'. This individual does not have use of a computer at the residential home where they live, and the computer at school does not allow access to the vIV Sharepoint service.

The third of these three young people had a virtual relationship with the IV from the beginning, and had experience of using Sharepoint on seven or eight occasions before the vIV had to withdraw.

A summary of the findings from the initial interviews was provided in 'comic' format, and shared with the young people via TCS (See Appendix 2).

4.3.3 IV questionnaires

The questionnaire was designed using an online survey tool, and the link was distributed to IV/vIV volunteers by TCS staff via email during May 2017. The volunteers were told that the questionnaire could be provided in hard copy if required. The questionnaire contained 27 questions (see Appendix 3), most of which required participants to select an answer from a list of options, with some opportunity to comment or provide additional information. In line with the ethical principle of informed consent, respondents could choose to answer as many or as few of the questions as they wished. They were not required to provide names or any identifying information.

Six IVs, all of whom were volunteering as traditional IVs, completed the online survey in full,. We received no responses from individuals using the virtual model of delivery.

4.4 Analysis

The interviews with the young people were digitally recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. The anonymised transcripts were read independently by each of the two researchers who identified themes in the material and allocated a descriptive label or code. Subsequently the researchers met to compare initial analysis, and to arrive at agreed themes emerging from the interviews.

The questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics to describe responses to multiple choice questions, and using content analysis to examine qualitative comments.

4.5 Limitations of the Study

4.5.1 Unfortunately, the study was not completed as planned, due to factors outside the control of TCS and evaluation team, related largely to uncertainties about the future of the Service which persisted throughout the period of the evaluation.

4.5.2 Disappointingly, it proved more difficult than anticipated to recruit young people with vIVs/IVs to the study, despite the best efforts of the CS staff involved. In the event, only

five instead of six young people were interviewed at T1, and this number took longer to achieve than had been hoped. The reasons for this included uncertainties about the future of the service in the months following the beginning of the project; the fact that some expected matches between young people and vIVs/IVs did not go ahead; and the decision of one young person not to take part in the study.

4.5.3 Four interviews were scheduled at T2, but only two young people were available on the date arranged. As these interviews took place just as the CS's contract to provide IV services was coming to an end, it was not possible to make alternative arrangements for the other three young people who were unable to attend. This weakened the longitudinal aspect of the evaluation, and a decision was taken not to include the two interviews in the evaluation, as one of the young people who had attended had not had any contact with their IV in the intervening period, and the other had little to say on this occasion, and their interview provided no new insights.

4.5.4 The IV questionnaire was added to the study design part way through, but unfortunately coincided with the last few weeks of the service. Plans to encourage vIVs/IVs to complete the questionnaire at a training day could not go ahead as the session was cancelled. The questionnaires were distributed by email, but this took place too around the time that the contract was ending, and resulted in only six responses.

4.5.5 As the data collection was not completed as planned, the evaluation does not fully address the evaluation questions, although it does add to the currently limited body of research on the role of the IV and the contribution they make to the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

5: Findings: The Young People's Experience and Perspective

5.1 Introduction

This section present findings relating to the young people's views on and experiences of the IV relationship across both vIV and tIV models, and is based on the T1 interviews only. We have included a separate section considering findings specific to the virtual model. In order to maintain confidentiality, quotations and positions have not been attributed to individual participants, but the perspectives of all of them have been incorporated into the analysis and presentation of findings. To make identification of individuals more difficult, all gender attributions have been removed, and the personal pronouns 'he' and 'she' etc. have been substituted with 'they', 'theirs' etc.

5.2 Emotional Investment in the IV relationship

5.2.1 Hopes and Expectations

"She was like the dream person I expected"

The participants in the study were introduced to the possibility of having an IV either by their carer, social worker, or by staff from The Children's Society. Having had the role of the IV explained to them, four of the young people talked about their high hopes for and expectations of the relationship before meeting their IV. (The fifth decided to take up the opportunity "to see what it was like".)

Of great importance to the young people was the idea that the IV is there for them alone, and had chosen to become involved in their lives.

One of the most important wishes that the young people spoke about was having an adult in their lives who would listen to them. They described repeated experiences of not being listened to and they wanted their IV to listen *attentively* to them. They wanted an adult who would care about their experience, and who would advocate for them.

... I was like, "Yeah because no one listens to me because I'm a child, but if an adult tells them, they'll listen".

So I said to J., "I want someone who I can talk to, who can be like a friend to me".

They also wanted to have fun together and to share similar interests. Someone to do activities with was important for some of the participants.

...when someone first told me about the IV service I was really interested because I noticed that where I live I don't really get any opportunities to come out and you know, do activities with anybody.

5.2.2 The matching process

[We clicked] "...like a jigsaw puzzle..."

The matching of a young person to an IV was something all the respondents talked about. All expressed a profound longing for a relationship where they were cared for, supported, and listened to. A very important part of the process was this sense that someone had been found specifically for them, and that interests were matched. The fact that the IV had to write about and present themselves to the young person held deep significance – the idea that the IV had chosen to be there for them, rather than being required to be there because of their role, was of great importance.

[The IV] had made this booklet thing and showed it to me, with all her interests in it, that [the IV] made voluntarily. And I thought it was really good and I really just liked her.

He came and visited [and brought] like an information book. He was telling me like, who he is, what he's like, sort of and he didn't have to do that. He did it himself.

The importance of choice was highlighted, the matching process was two-way, with the young people being able to look at the information the IV had presented and decide if the person was right for them. This seemed to be a very empowering experience for people who have usually had relationships foisted upon them.

...at first I wasn't sure and I thought, "Well what happens if I want to go walking and she doesn't?"...[then] I thought, "Well, wait a minute, it doesn't really matter does it, she's there to be a friend to talk to you so...."

You can choose who you want, so you're not just put with this person, like, who could be really tight.

5.2.3. Accommodating disappointments

"After a year or so she then said the news that she was going to have to leave."

For three of the five participants, the relationship with their IV was ended or disrupted, which caused upset and disappointment to the young people. Given the history of loss and separation characteristic of many looked after young people, and the hope they invest in the relationship with the IV, premature ending of the relationship was upsetting and disruptive.

It's been a bit down because I really enjoyed the time I spent with [the IV] face to face.

I got really upset that she was leaving because I could talk to her and everything, she was like...It sounds weird but I felt she was like one of my mums or something.

They were very accommodating and understanding of the IV's situation, which is to be expected of young people who have been required to adapt to disruption in important relationships. (This sense of resignation and sometimes responsibility for the success of the relationship was an underlying thread within the interviews, not explored directly but of interest for the next phase of the evaluation).

I understand the situation what she is in, and you just think about it and you think, "Yeah, well fair do's, she's in the situation". Then all you have to do is leave it and she'll come back to me whenever she is free.

I think [the IV] sort of started having family problems and at that moment in time [the IV] then said..."I might come back to it and I might not".

One of these young people was matched with a new tIV. For another, the end of face to face contact triggered a relationship via email letter writing. . A third young person was in a vIV relationship to begin with. This participant was offered a new match but preferred to wait to see if the vIV would be able to return.

5.3 Experiences of the IV relationship

5.3.1. Friendship

“You feel like you’ve got a best friend there all the time with you.”

IVs are befrienders offering the young person a relationship outside of services. They may be the only person to have contact with the young person who isn’t paid to do so. In this respect, the participants in this research suggest that it is a highly significant relationship for them. One young person talked about feeling ‘normal’ when out with their IV as opposed to being out with ‘staff’:

When I’m with [the IV] I just feel normal, like it’s a normal day out. But when you’re out with other people like social services it feels like you’re monitored and you’re actually looked at all the time.

Feeling cared about, feeling that the IV was genuinely interested in them, and the development of trust built on the reliability and openness on the part of the IV were all highly valued.

...we just really connected, and she’s a really kind-hearted girl, and she just gets me in ways that others might not.

It’s just the best thing that’s happened to me.

5.3.2. Being Heard

“It’s an adult actually listening to you for a change....A wonderful change.”

Some of the young people talked powerfully about the importance of having an adult who was willing to listen to them and really hear what they had to say, which they suggested was a new experience for them, despite the many adults who had been involved in their lives.

She understood what I was saying; she’d listen to my thoughts and feelings.

It’s amazing to have someone there you know that you can actually talk to and hear and listen to your opinions.

One of the young people spoke about the way in which the tIV had helped them to resolve anxieties and make plans relating to their post-16 education.

It was just like [the IV] just has some magical powers to just lift that weight off me.

5.3.3. Activities

“It just feels like you’re just two friends just organising an event, and then you’re just going to it.”

It was a source of great pleasure to the young people involved in traditional IV relationships that they had someone who wanted to do things with them, and who shared their interests and enthusiasms. Sharing activities in tandem with meaningful and respectful communication (listening) deepened their relationships and invested the young people’s lives with a sense of joy which can be lacking in their institutionalised environments. One talked enthusiastically about the range of activities they enjoyed together, including go-karting, dog-walking, bowling and eating out. Another had an exciting night out at the theatre, and a third participant visited the cinema, and Chill Factore. This young person talked about the way in which involvement in activities could help them talk naturally and informally about things that might be bothering them:

Whenever we was out somewhere I would, like, if it just popped into my mind, I would just go and sit down with her and start talking, and then go back off and play.

One participant commented that funding for activities had been reduced to £10 per visit, and that they were struggling to find things to do with limited resources.

Only one participant had experience of trying some of the games and other activities provided on Sharepoint for the virtual IV service, but these did not appear to support his relationship with the vIV, partly because they were aimed at a younger age group:

There was games that were involved. Like sort of that he could play on his end, like interactive games, but the games are really child-based and because I’m 16, I don’t want to play a game where you paint a pirate.

5.3.4 Boundaries

The young people appeared to understand and respect the boundaries between themselves and their IVS, so that although they described their IVs as providing friendship, at the same time they accepted that there were restrictions on their relationships.

Looked after young people are well versed in these matters and, more than other children, fully appreciate the expectations placed on them and the limitations of the IV's role. For example, one young person talked about posting news about her trip to a theatre with her IV on social media:

...the caption was "In Manchester theatre, had a really good night", but like I didn't mention her because I don't think you can put her in pictures.

Several of the participants in this study seemed to have experience of, for example, contributing to evaluations and representing their own and other young people's views to service providers, and used terminology and turns of phrase familiar to 'care-experienced' young people. One participant had been involved in interviewing prospective IVs:

Participant: ...we're not allowed to touch each other. We can hold hands if we're going across a busy road, but we're not allowed to touch each other really...

Interviewer: What do you think about that?

Participant: I think that's alright, because something could happen. It's putting our risk and their risk.

Contact was always mediated by a professional carer, which is important in terms of safe practice. However thought should be given to when this boundary can be reviewed. Freer and more direct contact would be empowering to the young people and would further normalise the relationship.

5.4 Virtual IV Relationships

5.4.1. Reasons for choosing vIV model

I'm not very good at talking face to face

Amongst the young people interviewed, only one had been given a choice between a virtual or traditional IV, as discussed on p.3 above. Her reason for choosing the vIV service was because she thought she would find it easier to communicate in this way.

but when someone is behind a screen or something, like I find it better, and I can find the words in my head to communicate and put it down.

In the event, at the time of the interview their only contact had been face to face and so this young person was not able to talk about whether the virtual experience was as expected.

Another participant had apparently only been offered the vIV option. This individual was able to talk about the potential advantages of online communication (text being better than talking on the telephone because “you can take your time”) but said that it had been difficult to convey personality in a text message:

I was talking, but I didn't really find a connection.

One young person with a vIV was uneasy about whether a record of any text conversations would be retained somewhere and would remain accessible to be read. This might affect what they would feel able to discuss with the vIV. This issue had apparently never been discussed, and the young person did not remember being given anything in writing relating to this. Meeting up with the vIV would have been more beneficial:

...if you're in person and you're doing something, you don't have to keep thinking of stuff to talk about. You can sort of relax.

Another young person had virtual contact via letter rather than online, after his IV became unavailable for direct contact. It appears that this was not the choice of the young person concerned but the only alternative that was offered.

5.4.2 Access to suitable IT equipment

“The computer box thing sort of like exploded!”

One of the interviewees was living in a residential home, and did not have access to a computer, so had been unable to progress the vIV relationship. The computer for use by the young people living there had ‘exploded’, and the only other was in the staff office:

You’ve no idea how many times I’ve begged to go on the house computer, like, “Please, just let me go on it for one minute, I have things to discuss with A”. And they’re like, “No, you’re not meant to be in the office’.

Other participants appeared to have access to a computer, tablet or Smartphone.

5.4.3 Technical Issues

“It just says ‘Access Denied’”

The young person who had no computer at home attempted to use the Sharepoint system at school, but without success. As a temporary measure one of the Children’s Society workers had suggested providing the IV with a phone (presumably so that the young person would not have access to her personal number).

Another participant described some of the sessions with the vIV as unsuccessful because the messages “started becoming really corrupt”. The young person thought this might have been due to a problem with the internet connection, but said there did not seem to be a helpline or any form of technical support available to help resolve the problem.

5.4.4 Suitability of Platform

Most of the young people interviewed appeared to be familiar with various social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and with the functionality built in to these services; for example easy image sharing, instant messaging services which indicate when people are online and when they are typing messages, and systems that allow notifications and reminders to go direct to a Smartphone. One said he sometimes forgot appointments to meet the vIV on Sharepoint (notifications would have helped) and seemed

frustrated with the numerous steps involved in signing in to Sharepoint, with its limitations in respect of sharing images, and with the quality of the messaging service:

Like I had to plug my phone in and access it [the image], download onto the computer, then upload onto Sharepoint. There wasn't like a Click-Send. So that was quite complicated...

It's not like instant messaging....like do you remember trying to talk to someone sending emails?I would say improve the messaging service. It needs to be fluid to really have a conversation with someone...And also have options like you know if the message has been seen, and also when they are replying as well..

Another participant, who was asked whether a messaging service would be useful for contact with the IV, made a similar point –

Yeah, I hope it tells them when they're active or not though.

One person's tIV had become unavailable for face to face contact, and there was an agreement that they would "go virtual" during this period. However, although this young person is in their words, "a big social network person", virtual contact with his IV, is effectively taking place through letter writing:

Because [the IV] is my IV and she's not actually a friend I'm not allowed to know her address...and her email address.

Basically, I have to write it up on a computer, like on a Word document, and I pass it on to [Children's Society worker].. Then she gets her address and sends it off to her. Then [Children's Society worker] comes and meets me at my house when she has got the letter off [IV] and basically she'll give it to me and I read it in that way.

Although letter/postal correspondence is one of the alternative forms of communication envisaged as part of a 'virtual' IV arrangement, this young person's account suggested that this process lacked spontaneity and that an online method might have been easier and more rewarding for him.

6: Findings: Views from Independent Visitors

6.1 Findings from the IV questionnaire are limited by the low number of responses to the survey, and by the fact that all six respondents have experience only of the traditional IV model. No responses were received from virtual Independent Visitors. An analysis of the responses downloaded from Bristol Online Surveys is reproduced at Appendix 4.

6.2 Points of interest from the questionnaire

6.2.1 *Experience and Commitment:* These respondents were experienced as IVs, in that five of the six had volunteered as an IV for more than two years, and four had worked with at least two young people during that time. Five had volunteered with a specific young person for two years or more. All appeared committed to the role, stating an intention to continue as an IV for “as long as possible”. The survey provided no information about the reasons why some IVs might not be able to continue in the role, as reported by some of the young people we interviewed.

6.2.2 *Frequency of Contact:* Respondents were asked how often they had/expected to have contact with the young person. Two said they had contact at least once per fortnight, four at least once per month. There were no responses to an open question inviting comments about frequency of contact, but later in the survey when asked directly, two respondents said that they had felt that their young person needed contact to be more frequent, and had experienced this as a difficulty. None of the respondents had ever felt that contact should be less frequent.

6.2.3 *Type of Contact:* All respondents described themselves as ‘traditional’ IVs. Asked to indicate all the ways in which they had face-to-face contact from a list of options, three said they visited young people at their homes, five spent time in low cost activities (e.g. walks, meeting for coffee) and four in higher cost activities (e.g. cinema, go-karting). Some also had indirect contact via telephone calls or text messages. Two people made additional comments, one stating they had no indirect contact, and another expressing the view that text messaging would be a good way of having contact, but that they were not allowed to swap phone details. The questionnaire unfortunately provided no

information about IVs' experience of virtual contact as the main method of communication and relationship building.

6.2.4 *Challenges:* The questionnaire (q.20) asked respondents to comment on any challenges they experienced in the role using a Likert scale from 1 (never experienced) to 5 (major difficulty). There were three areas in which one or more of the respondents scored the level of challenge at 4 or 5. These were

- Feeling that the young person needs contact to be more frequent (2 respondents)
- Experiencing tensions with the young person's full-time carers (1 respondent)
- Feeling that there is insufficient funding available for trips, activities (2 respondents)

The issue of insufficient funding for activities was mentioned in the free text question relating to challenges, and by three respondents in the final question about changes that IVs would like to see to the service. Again, given the low number of responses, the questionnaire did not help in understanding the nature and extent of challenges experienced by vIVs, and whether there are different or additional challenges arising from a relationship based on virtual contact only.

6.2.5. *Benefits to Young People:* Respondents were asked to consider how their volunteer work as an IV had benefited the young person/people they had worked with (q.21). The list of ten potential benefits was developed from the interviews with the young people and from the literature on IVs. Respondents scored each on a scale from 1 (not important for my young person) to 5 (extremely important for my young person). All ten benefits were scored at 4 or 5 by at least one respondent. Points of interest among the responses were:

- All six scored "being a good listener" as 5.
- Five respondents scored "enjoying one-to-one activities together" as 5.
- The two questions with the greatest degree of variation in responses (between 2 and 5) were, "helping young people understand what has happened in their lives" and "helping them deal with stress and anxiety".

A final free text question invited respondents to add any benefits not included in the questionnaire, but no comments were made.

6.2.5 *What IV volunteers valued*

The questionnaire asked volunteers what they had gained from volunteering (q.22), and about the factors that supported them in their role (q.23). For these respondents, satisfaction with the impact of their involvement on the lives of the young people (forming a meaningful relationship with a young person, seeing positive change and making a difference to a young person's life) appeared more important than the impact on themselves (gaining new skills and understanding, being challenged).

In terms of support, initial and ongoing training, and especially supervision with TCS staff were rated as most helpful. Views about the helpfulness of peer support and independent reading and research were more mixed.

7: Discussion

- 7.1 There is a poignancy in the findings of this study, in that they suggest that young people invest so much in having a 'friendship' with their IV, but simultaneously accept boundaries that would not normally exist between friends, and accommodate the reasons given for IVs having to withdraw from their lives.
- 7.2 The matching process is very powerful and empowering to the young people giving them both choice and opportunities to participate in the process.. Young people consistently commented on the matching process prior to getting an Independent Visitor, the process involved young people expressing what kind of a person they would like for their IV and appreciated that they were being specifically matched to an adult who would share some of their interests and have some of the personality characteristics that they highlighted. It was empowering for the young people to also see the efforts that prospective IVs made to share information about themselves through completing the forms devised by the project. The efforts of the IV in preparing portfolios or booklets about themselves are greatly appreciated and need to be acknowledged and encouraged
- 7.3 The voluntary unpaid nature of the relationship was also of significance with a sense of destiny and excitement at the formulation of a different kind of relationship from any formal carers / parents / 'staff' .
- 7.4 Three out of five participants experienced their IVs withdrawing from the relationship, including IVs whose only contact with the young person was virtual contact. This would benefit from closer analysis to determine if this rate of attrition is typical. The New Economics Foundation's report *Relationships for Children in Care* (2014) highlighted that one of the biggest challenges of the care system is achieving continuity and permanence. It was noted that a significant number of Independent Visitors in our research could not continue the relationship with their young person. The young people were very accommodating of changes in the relationship but it was also evident that there was a sense of loss where IVs had temporarily or permanently withdrawn from the commitment. It would be useful to have more information of the frequency of these

relationships being terminated and also the reasons why this may occur. It may be that some IVs had not fully understood the significance of the relationship to the young people and so had not felt this something that they needed to prioritise when facing changed personal circumstances. Alternatively, it may be that they found the emotional content of the work more difficult than they anticipated.

7.5 Where young people had virtual contact, this took place online via Sharepoint, with the exception of one young person, who maintained contact with their IV by letter. The young people appear to be experienced in using commercial social media platforms, but based on one participant's account, it seems that as it stands, Sharepoint may not be experienced as a sufficiently sophisticated and fluid virtual space in which to develop and sustain a long term and exclusively vIV relationship.

7.6 There were some institutional and technical barriers reported by the young people. Young people were not always able to access a computer when they wanted to and participants experienced difficulties in accessing the site at the right time in the right way. System failures were reported.

7.7 There is a risk that the quality and benefits of a face to face IV relationship are unlikely to be achieved in a solely virtual one. The importance of shared activity and the value of unstructured time (say) driving together to a venue should not be underestimated.

8: Points for Consideration/Recommendations:

As already indicated, the findings in this report are based on a small number of research participants, only one of whom fully engaged with the vIV model, and as such must be regarded as tentative.

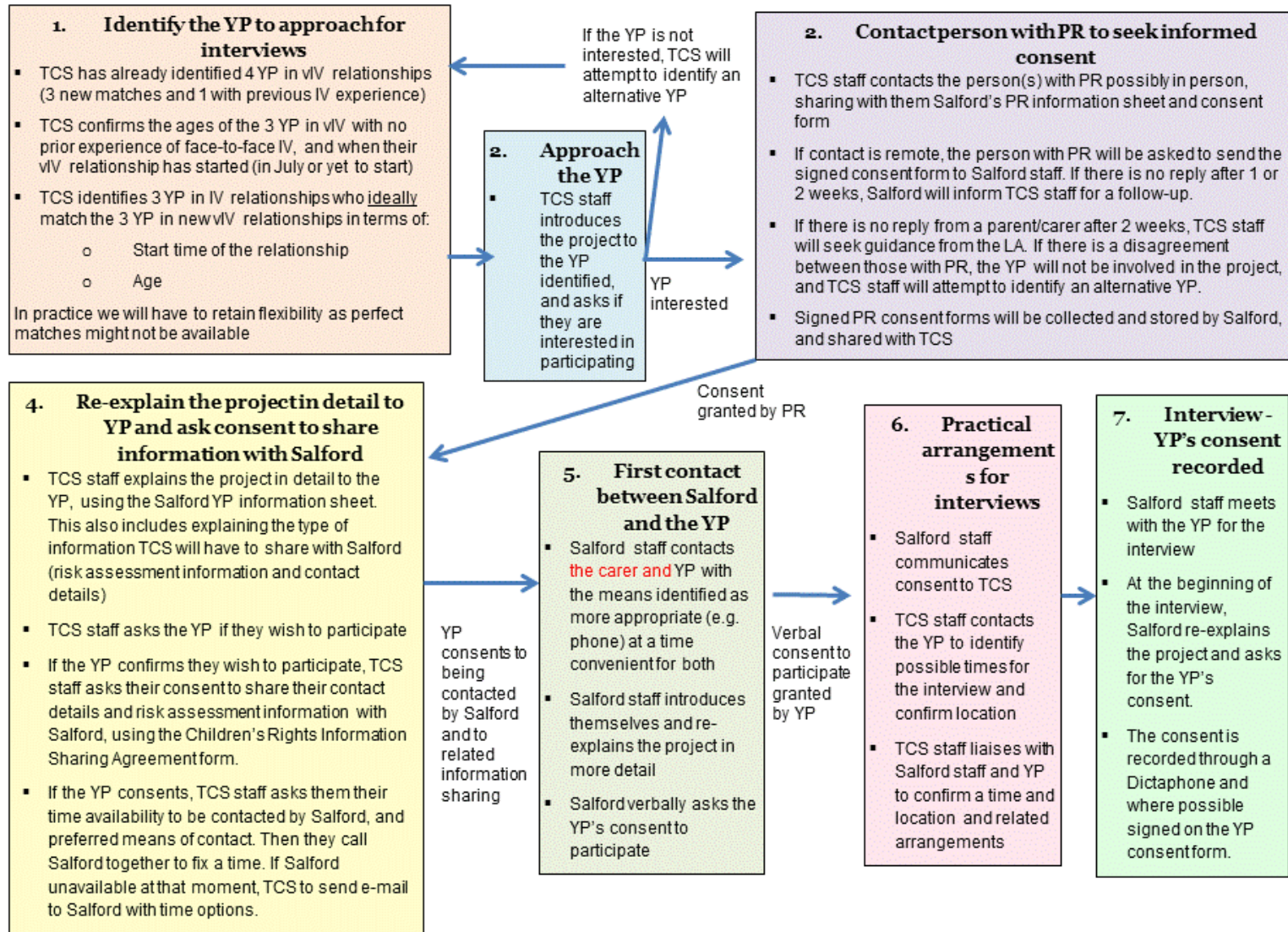
- There appears to be potential for incorporating a virtual element into the provision of IV services, and there is scope and value in developing the kinds of ways in which Independent Visitors can be in contact with the young people they are matched to. This could involve some on line activities and virtual contact using services such as SKYPE as well as contact via mobile devices.
- Development of virtual IV services should be included with young people about what functionality and support they want /need in an online platform to enable the development and maintenance of a meaningful virtual relationship.
- The findings suggest that virtual IV relationships should complement traditional face to face contact rather than being considered as a satisfactory alternative to this. The balance between direct and virtual contact may vary depending on the circumstances of young person and IV.
- Establishing workable boundaries would be an important part of developing this extended contact , there are currently unresolved issues with regard to confidentiality and privacy in online communications as well as a need to be transparent and open.
- Further research is needed into young people's experiences of the vIV and tIV service, to seek confirmation of the benefits suggested by this report and collect more robust evidence to support the maintenance and development of IV services.
- Such research should include more young people and incorporate the perspectives of IV service staff, carers, local authorities and IVs, including looking at the reasons why IVs find they are sometimes unable to continue in the role.

9. References

- Bagley, E. A., & Shaffer, D. W. (2015). Stop talking and type: comparing virtual and face-to-face mentoring in an epistemic game. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 31*(6), 606-622. doi:10.1111/jcal.12092
- Bambling, M., King, R., Reid, W., & Wegner, K. (2008). Online counselling: the experience of counsellors providing synchronous single-session counselling to young people. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research, 8*(2), 110-116.
- Callahan, A., & Inckle, K. (2012). Cybertherapy or Psychobabble? A Mixed Methods Study of Online Emotional Support. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 40*(3), 261-278.
- Elf, M., Skärsäter, I., & Krevers, B. (2011). 'The web is not enough, it's a base' - an explorative study of what needs a web-based support system for young carers must meet. *Informatics for Health & Social Care, 36*(4), 206-219.
- Fukkink, R., & Hermanns, J. (2009). Counseling Children at a Helpline: Chatting or Calling? *Journal of Community Psychology, 37*(8), 939-948.
- Fukkink, R. G., & Hermanns, J. M. A. (2009). Children's Experiences with Chat Support and Telephone Support. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 50*(6), 759-766.
- Glasheen, K., & Campbell, M. (2009). The use of online counselling within an Australian secondary school setting: A practitioner's viewpoint. *Counselling Psychology Review, 24*(2), 9.
- Grant, D. G., & Dieker, L. A. (2011). Listening to Black Male Student Voices Using Web-Based Mentoring. *Remedial & Special Education, 32*(4), 322-333. doi:10.1177/0741932510362203
- Hanley, T. (2006). Developing youth-friendly online counselling services in the United Kingdom: a small scale investigation into the views of practitioners. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research, 6*(3), 182-185.
- Hanley, T. (2007). R u still there?! Kooth.com is an online counselling and advice service with a regional focus, proactively meeting the needs of young people. *Therapy Today, 18*(4), 37-38.
- Hanley, T. (2012). Understanding the online therapeutic alliance through the eyes of adolescent service users. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research, 12*(1), 35-43. doi:10.1080/14733145.2011.560273
- Hurst, C., & Peel, M. (2013). What does the Independent Visitor role offer looked after children? *Adoption & Fostering, 37*(4), 11.
- King, R., Bambling, M., Lloyd, C., Gomurra, R., Smith, S., Reid, W., & Wegner, K. (2006). Online counselling: the motives and experiences of young people who choose the Internet instead of face to face or telephone counselling. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research, 6*(3), 169-174.
- New Economics Foundation. (2014). *Relationships for Children in Care: the value of mentoring and befriending*. London. New Economics Foundation.
- Waldman, J., & Rafferty, J. (2006). Evidence from virtual social work practice: implications for education. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 3*(3/4), 127-148.
- Wallis, J. A. M., Riddell, J. K., Smith, C., Silvertown, J., & Pepler, D. J. (2015). Investigating Patterns of Participation and Conversation Content in an Online Mentoring Program for Northern Canadian Youth. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 23*(3), 228-247. doi:10.1080/13611267.2015.1072395
- Wentz, E., Nydén, A., & Krevers, B. (2012). Development of an internet-based support and coaching model for adolescents and young adults with ADHD and autism spectrum disorders: a pilot study. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 21*(11), 611-622. doi:10.1007/s00787-012-0297-2

APPENDICES

Salford's Interviews – Process Flowchart



What you told us about IVs & vIVs

by Helen Scholar

INDEPENDENT VISITORS



We talked to some fantastic young people about what they liked about Independent Visitors and virtual Independent Visitors. Here's what you told us.

You thought IVs would be adults who would listen to you and who would share activities with you



I want someone who I can talk to and who will be like a friend to me

You liked the way some IVs brought books with information about themselves so that you could find out what they were like



You said it was good to be able to choose an IV who shared your interests, and you liked the chance to do activities together and go on trips out



We clicked, like a jigsaw puzzle!

It's amazing to have someone there you know that you can actually talk to and will listen to your opinions



Sometimes IVs had to do other things that meant they had to say goodbye



This was sad, but you might be able to stay in touch by letter or online, although this didn't always work!



The computer box thing just sort of exploded!

Most of you thought it was better to meet face to face and spend time together



Nearly everyone said they would tell other young people that getting an independent visitor was a good idea.



My IV was like the dream person I expected!

(Virtual) Independent Visitor Evaluation

Page 1: Evaluation of the Virtual Independent Visitor Project: IV Volunteer Questionnaire

The Children's Society is a charity that aims to help children and young people in the UK have better lives: www.childrenssociety.org.uk. As part of this provision, Rochdale & Oldham Children's Rights Service offers an Independent Visitor (IV) service to children and young people who are looked after by the Rochdale and Oldham local authorities. IVs provide young people with a long term, stable, voluntary, trusting relationship with an adult. Alongside its traditional Independent Visitor service, The Children's Society is piloting a new virtual Independent Visitor service for children and young people placed outside their home area, and for children and young people who would prefer online rather than face-to-face contact with their Independent Visitor.

We have designed a short questionnaire to be sent to current and former Independent Visitors, and we would be grateful if you would complete this for us. The questionnaire can be completed online or in hard copy.

Page 2: Introduction to the Survey

This questionnaire is about your experiences of and views on the Independent Visitor Service provided by The Children's Society.

It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

None of the questions are compulsory but we hope you will complete it as fully as you can.

By completing this questionnaire **you are giving consent** for the information provided to be included in the evaluation of the service and in the report to The Children's Society. The evaluation team may also include the information in presentations and academic articles.

You are not required to include your name in this questionnaire, and information cannot be traced back to individuals.

For information on how to contact the evaluation team, please see the Information Sheet given to you with the invitation to complete the questionnaire.

Page 3: About You

1. Before beginning the questionnaire, please tick to confirm that you have read the Information Sheet about the study (version 2). * *Required*

Yes, I have read the Information Sheet

2. Please tell us your gender

Male

Female

Other

2.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

3. Please tell us your age group

18 - 24

25 - 39

40 - 54

55 - 64

65 +

4. How would you describe your occupation? (Tick all that apply)

Carer

Parent

Student

Unemployed

Part time work

Full time work

Retired

Other

4.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

5. If you feel you have any formal qualifications relevant to this role (e.g. NVQ, Health & Social Care qualifications) please provide details.

Page 4: Your Independent Visitor History

6. Are you an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society?

- Yes No, but I have been in the past

7. If you are currently or have ever been an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society, how long have you been/were you involved?

- Less than 12 months 12 months - 2 years More than 2 years

8. Are you an Independent Visitor with another organisation?

- Yes No, never have been No, but I have been in the past

9. If you are currently or ever have been an Independent Visitor with another organisation, how long have you been/were you involved?

- Please select no more than 1 answer(s).
- Less than 12 months 12 months - 2 years More than 2 years
 Not applicable

10. If you are currently or have ever been an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society, what is your current status?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiting to begin training | <input type="checkbox"/> Currently on the training programme | <input type="checkbox"/> Completed training and waiting to be matched with a young person |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Currently matched and working with a young person | <input type="checkbox"/> No longer an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking a break from the role but intending to return |

10.a. If you are no longer an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society, please explain your reasons for leaving.

11. How many young people have you volunteered with as an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society?

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Not yet been matched with a young person | <input type="radio"/> One | <input type="radio"/> Two |
| <input type="radio"/> Three or more | | |

12. What is the longest period of time that you have volunteered with a specific young person as an Independent Visitor

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Not yet been matched with a young person | <input type="radio"/> Less than 6 months | <input type="radio"/> Between 6 and 12 months |
| <input type="radio"/> 12 months to 2 years | <input type="radio"/> More than 2 years | |

Page 5: Volunteering with Young People as an Independent Visitor

13. Please tell us the gender of the young person you are matched with (if already matched)

14. Please tell us the age of the young person you are matched with (if already matched).

15. How often do you have or expect to have contact with the young person?

- At least once a week At least once a fortnight At least once a month
- At least once every three months At least once every six months Other

15.a. If you selected Other, or have comments about frequency of contact, please explain:

16. Are you volunteering (or expecting to volunteer) as a 'traditional' or 'virtual'

independent visitor? Please select from the drop-down list.

[+ More info](#)

17. What type of face-to-face contact have you had or do you expect to have with the young person/people? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting them at their home | <input type="checkbox"/> Low cost activities e.g. walks, meeting for a coffee | <input type="checkbox"/> Higher cost activities e.g. cinema, go-karting etc |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attending celebratory events (e.g. birthdays; awards ceremonies) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

17.a. If you selected Other, or have comments about face-to-face contact, please specify:

18. What type of indirect (non face-to-face) contact have you had or do you expect to have with the young person/people? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone calls | <input type="checkbox"/> Text messages | <input type="checkbox"/> Emails |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online chat | <input type="checkbox"/> Online games and activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Letters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | | |

18.a. If you selected Other, or have comments about indirect contact, please specify:

19. Are you satisfied with the type of contact that you currently have with your young person?

Yes

No

Not yet matched

19.a. Please use this box to add any further information.

20. Have you experienced any of the following challenges in your role as an Independent Visitor? Please rate from 1 (I have never experienced this) to 5 (this has been a major difficulty for me). **Please omit this question if not yet matched with a young person**

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	1 (Never experienced)	2	3	4	5 (A major difficulty)
Difficulties in your relationship with the young person?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Difficulties finding sufficient time for the role?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finding the role more emotionally demanding than you expected?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling that the young person needs contact to be more frequent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling that the young person needs contact to be less frequent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not feeling you have the skills to support the young person appropriately?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiencing tensions with the young person's full-time carers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in personal circumstances making it difficult for you to continue?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulties dealing with the young person's behaviour?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Feeling that there is insufficient funding available for activities, trips etc?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please explain below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20.a. If you ticked 'Other', or have any further comments relating to this question, please explain here.

21. How do you think your volunteer work as an Independent Visitor has benefited the young person? Please score each item from 1 (not important for my young person) to 5 (extremely important for my young person) **Please omit this question if you are not yet matched with a young person**

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	1 (not important)	2	3	4	5 (extremely important)
By being a good listener	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Through enjoying one-to-one activities together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Through sharing interests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Through being a friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

By helping them understand what has happened in their lives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By helping them to deal with stress and anxiety (e.g. exams; other relationships)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By supporting them to speak up for themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By speaking up for them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Through helping them deal with strong emotions (e.g. anger, sadness, distress)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Through helping them develop life skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21.a. If you ticked 'Other' or have other comments relating to this question, please explain here.

Page 6: Your Experience of Being an Independent Visitor

22. What do you feel you have gained so far from volunteering as an Independent Visitor? (Tick all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> I have been able to form a meaningful relationship with a young person	<input type="checkbox"/> I have seen positive changes in a young person	<input type="checkbox"/> Felt that I have been able to make a difference to a young person's life
<input type="checkbox"/> I have learnt new skills	<input type="checkbox"/> I have been challenged	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a better understanding of the challenges faced by some young people
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

22.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

23. What has helped support you in your role as an Independent Visitor? Please rate the following from 1 (not at all helpful) to 5 (essential)

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	1 (Not at all helpful)	2	3	4	5 (Essential)
Initial training programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On-going training events and updates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Supervision with staff at The Children's Society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer support/supervision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent reading and research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23.a. If you ticked 'Other' or have comments about this question, please explain here.

24. Do you anticipate continuing in your role as Independent Visitor?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Yes, I anticipate continuing for as long as possible | <input type="radio"/> I anticipate continuing until my young person is 18 | <input type="radio"/> I anticipate continuing until I have completed 2 years in the role |
| <input type="radio"/> I anticipate having to leave before completing 2 years in the role | <input type="radio"/> I am currently taking a break but intend to return | <input type="radio"/> I have left and do not intend to return |

24.a. If you are taking a break, have left or are considering leaving, please outline the reasons for this.

25. What are the best aspects of volunteering as an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society?

26. What would you like to change about volunteering as an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society?

27. If you have further comments or suggestions please add these here:

Thank you for completing this survey

Appendix: Survey Results



(Virtual) Independent Visitor Evaluation

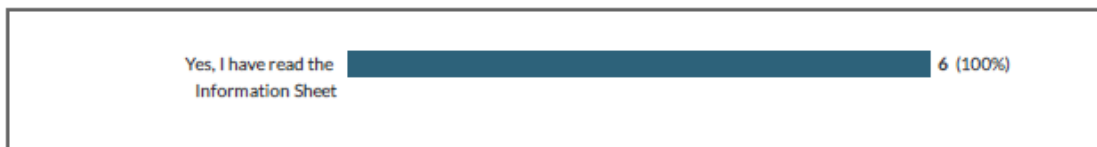
Showing 6 of 6 responses

Showing **all** responses

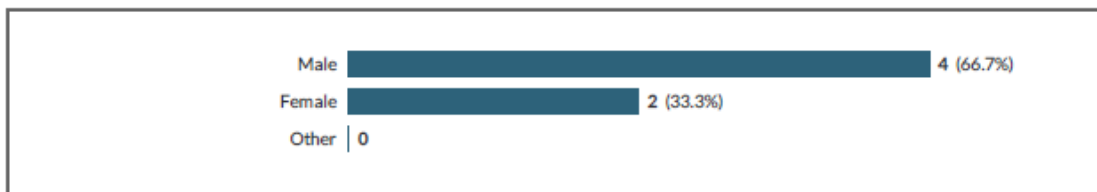
Showing **all** questions

Response rate: 17%

- 1** Before beginning the questionnaire, please tick to confirm that you have read the Information Sheet about the study (version 2).



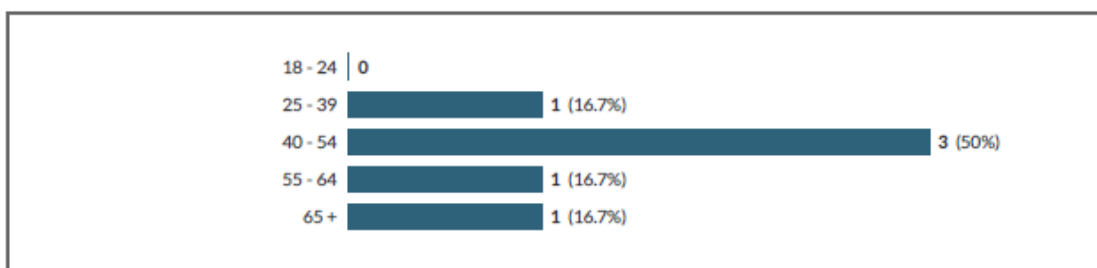
- 2** Please tell us your gender



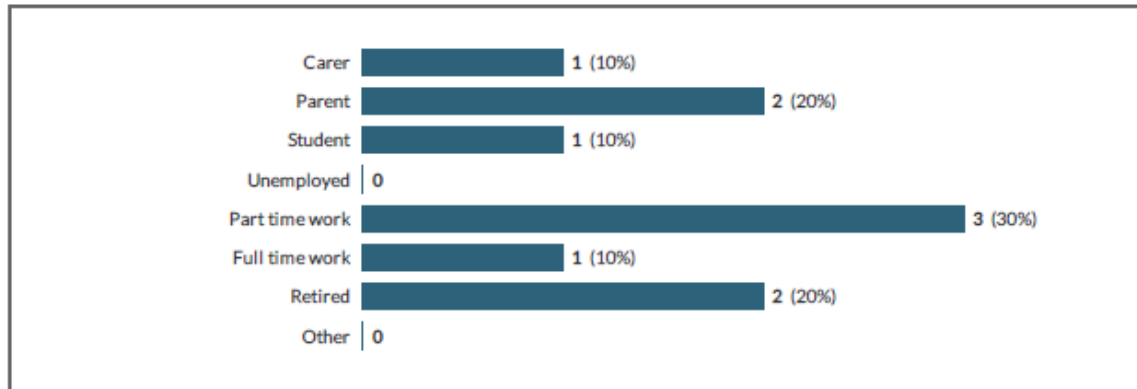
- 2.a** If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

- 3** Please tell us your age group



4 How would you describe your occupation? (Tick all that apply)



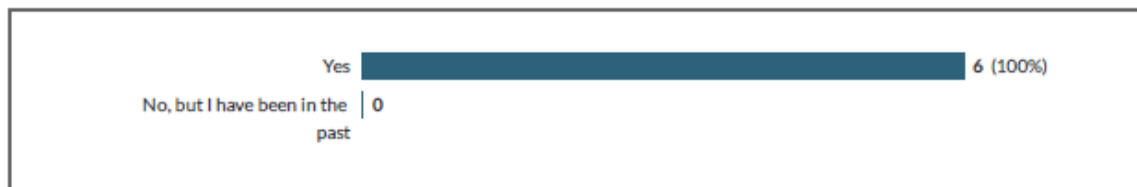
4.a If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

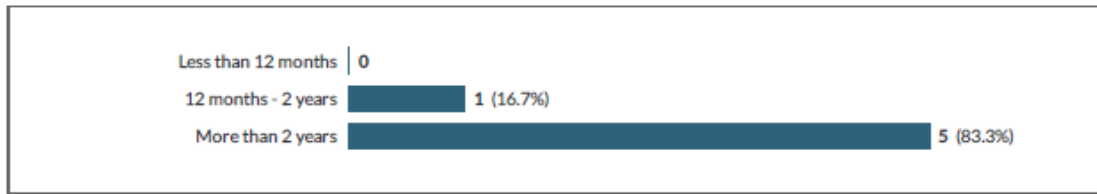
5 If you feel you have any formal qualifications relevant to this role (e.g. NVQ, Health & Social Care qualifications) please provide details.

Showing all 2 responses	
Community Mental Health level 2	266624-266616-23279264
CQSW	266624-266616-23307673

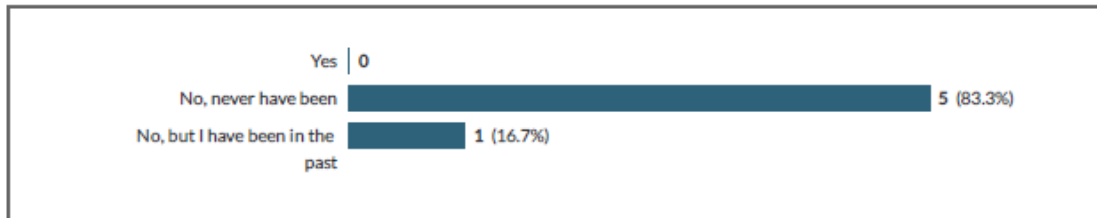
6 Are you an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society?



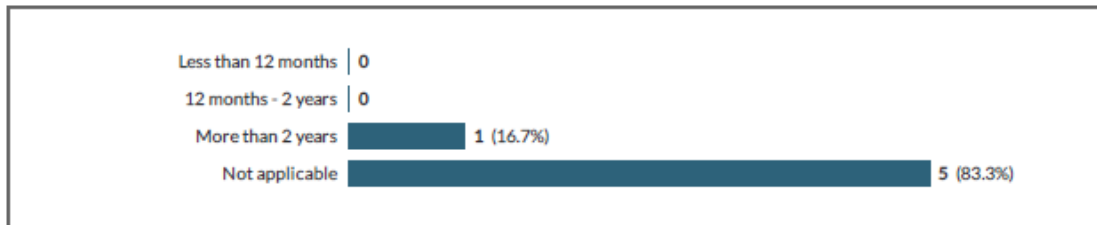
7 If you are currently or have ever been an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society, how long have you been/were you involved?



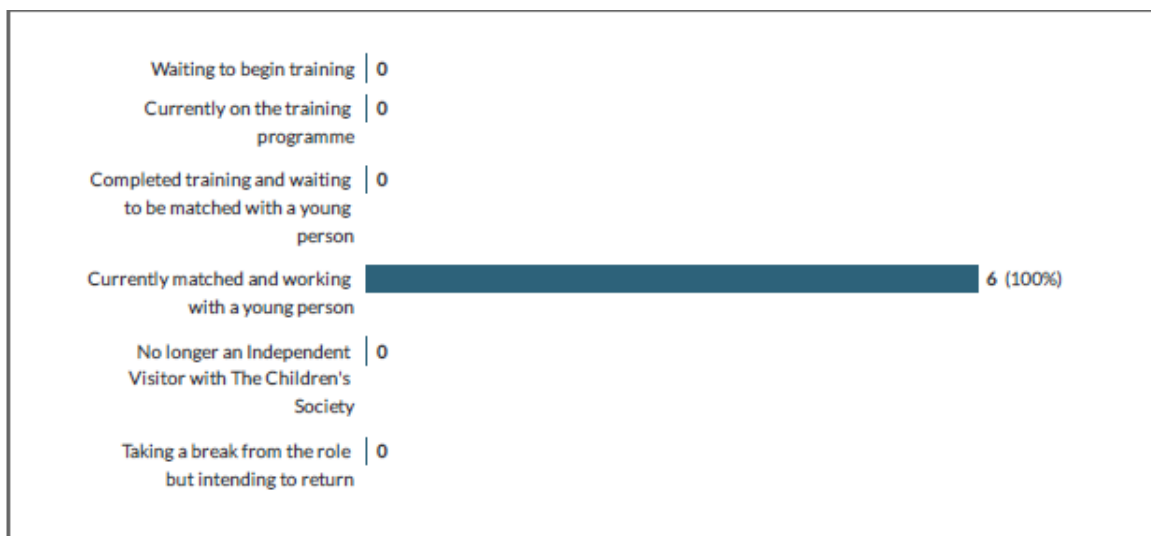
8 Are you an Independent Visitor with another organisation?



9 If you are currently or ever have been an Independent Visitor with another organisation, how long have you been/were you involved?



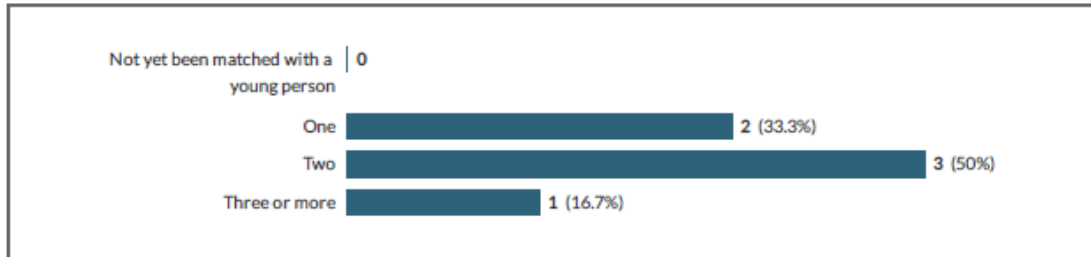
10 If you are currently or have ever been an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society, what is your current status?



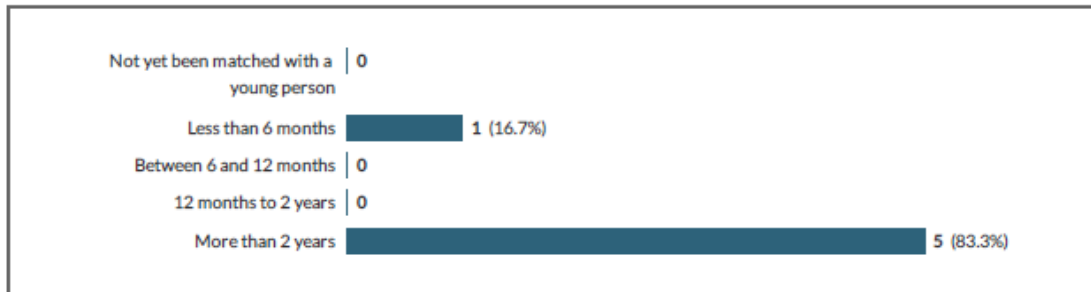
10.a If you are no longer an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society, please explain your reasons for leaving.

No responses

11 How many young people have you volunteered with as an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society?



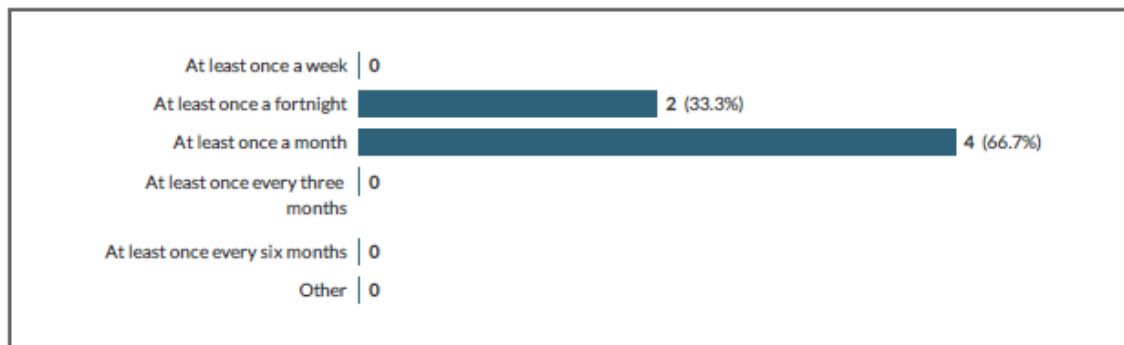
12 What is the longest period of time that you have volunteered with a specific young person as an Independent Visitor



13 Please tell us the gender of the young person you are matched with (if already matched)

Showing 5 of 6 responses	
Male	266624-266616-23193627
Male	266624-266616-23204546
male	266624-266616-23279264
Male	266624-266616-23288014
Male	266624-266616-23307673

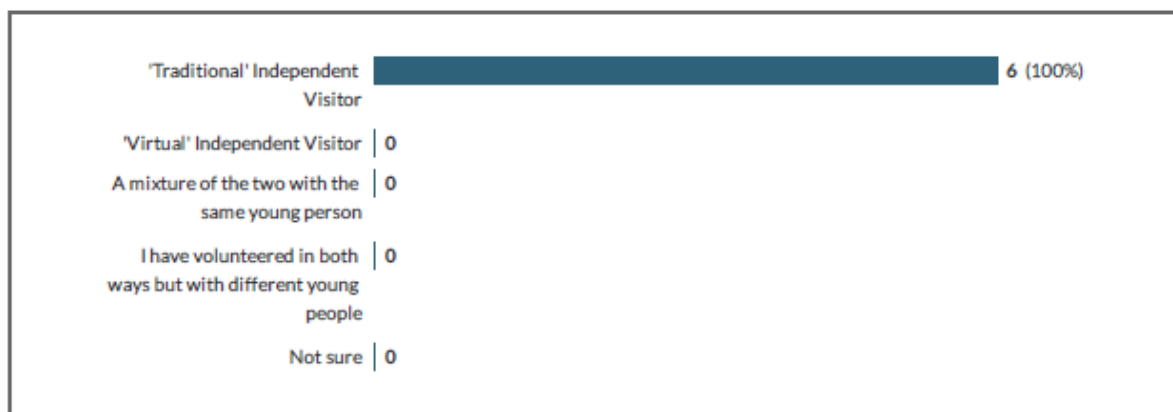
15 How often do you have or expect to have contact with the young person?



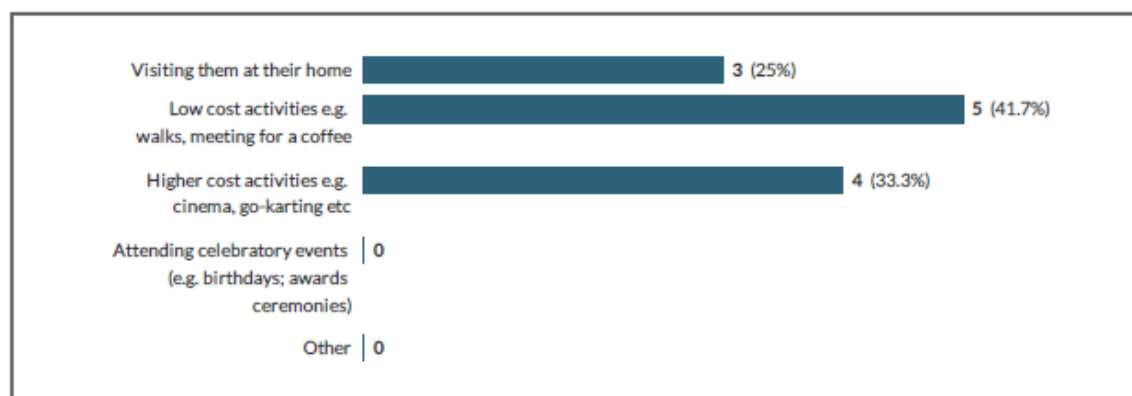
15.a If you selected Other, or have comments about frequency of contact, please explain:

No responses

16 Are you volunteering (or expecting to volunteer) as a 'traditional' or 'virtual' independent visitor? Please select from the drop-down list.



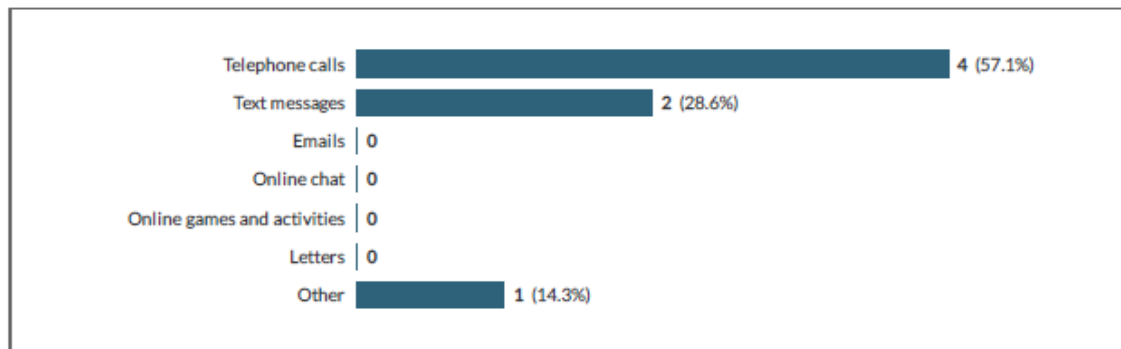
17 What type of face-to-face contact have you had or do you expect to have with the young person/people? (Please tick all that apply)



17.a If you selected Other, or have comments about face-to-face contact, please specify:

No responses

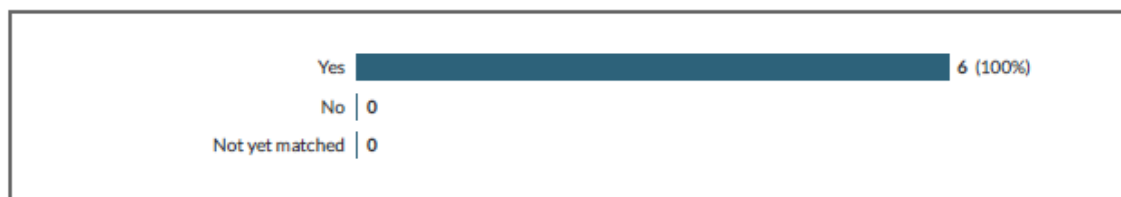
18 What type of indirect (non face-to-face) contact have you had or do you expect to have with the young person/people? (Please tick all that apply)



18.a If you selected Other, or have comments about indirect contact, please specify:

Showing all 2 responses	
I feel it would be good to be able to text my young person but we are not allowed to swap phone details. It's a shame as this is the most common way we all communicate these days. I don't think it would be harmful if boundaries were in place.	266624-266616-23288014
none	266624-266616-23513434

19 Are you satisfied with the type of contact that you currently have with your young person?

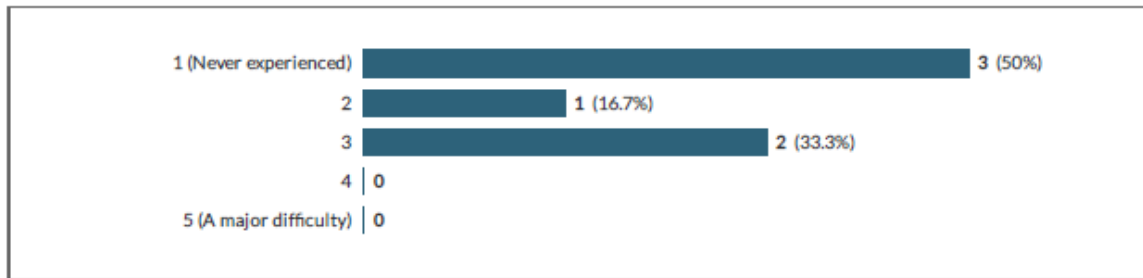


19.a Please use this box to add any further information.

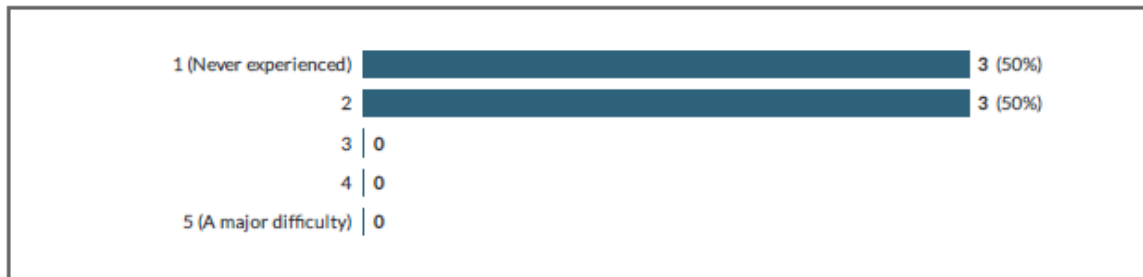
Showing 1 response	
As above, would like to be able to send/receive texts.	266624-266616-23288014

20 Have you experienced any of the following challenges in your role as an Independent Visitor? Please rate from 1 (I have never experienced this) to 5 (this has been a major difficulty for me). Please omit this question if not yet matched with a young person

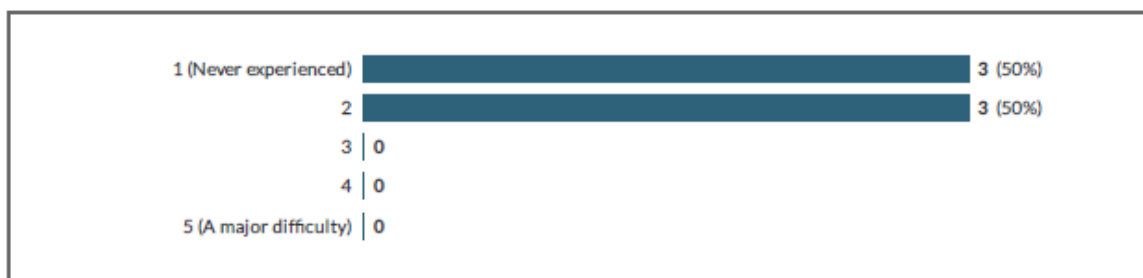
20.1 Difficulties in your relationship with the young person?



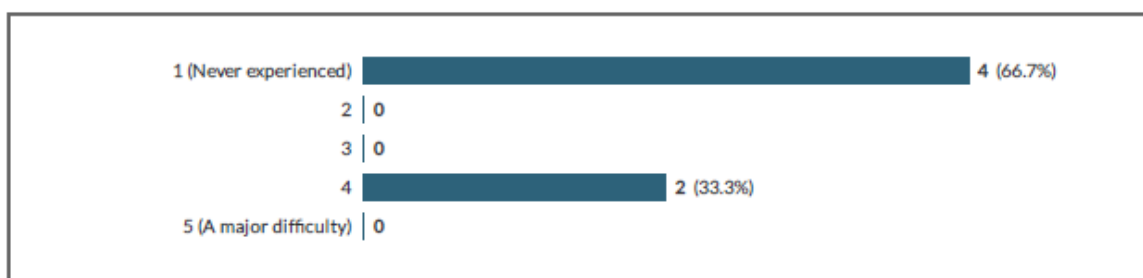
0.2 Difficulties finding sufficient time for the role?

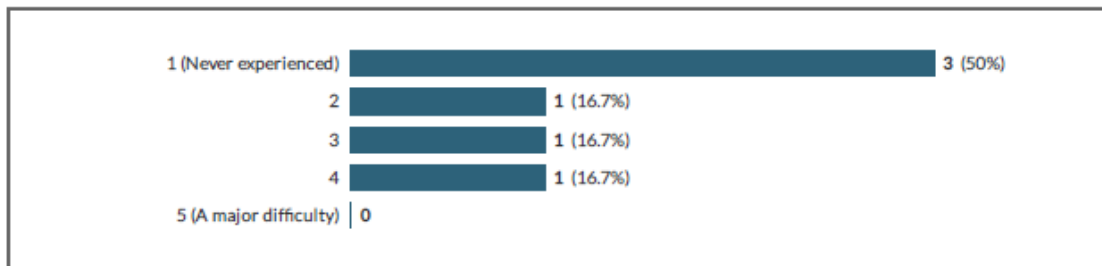
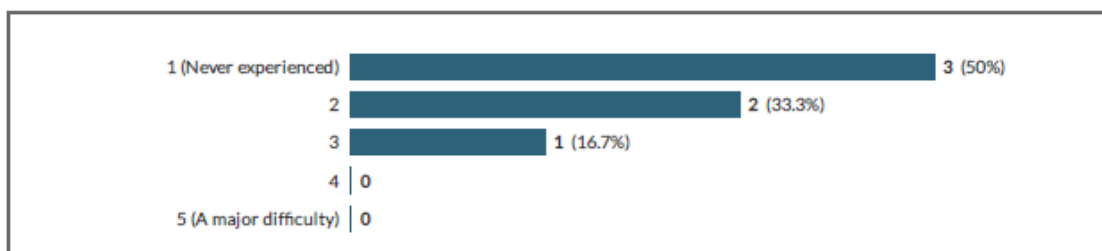


0.3 Finding the role more emotionally demanding than you expected?

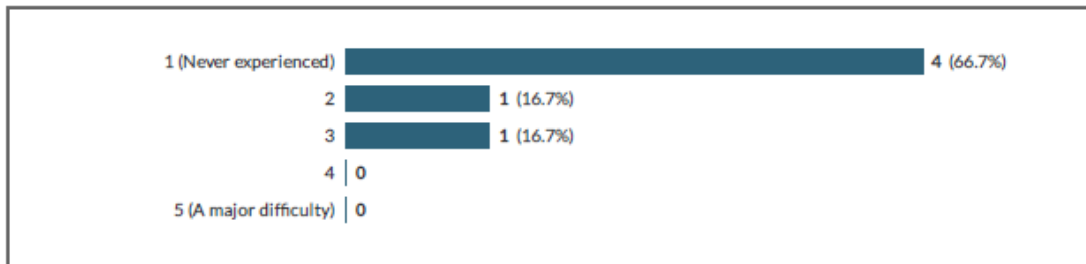


0.4 Feeling that the young person needs contact to be more frequent?

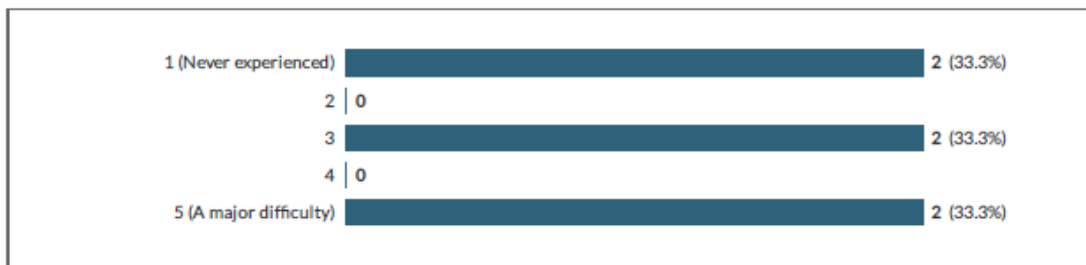


20.5 Feeling that the young person needs contact to be less frequent?**20.6** Not feeling you have the skills to support the young person appropriately?**20.7** Experiencing tensions with the young person's full-time carers?**20.8** Changes in personal circumstances making it difficult for you to continue?

20.9 Difficulties dealing with the young person's behaviour?



20.10 Feeling that there is insufficient funding available for activities, trips etc?



20.11 Other (please explain below)



20.a If you ticked 'Other', or have any further comments relating to this question, please explain here.

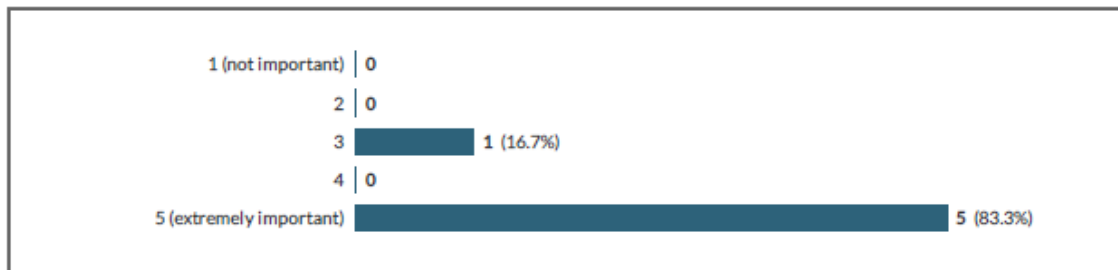
Showing 1 response	
Over the past 2-3 years the funding has been cut drastically & cheaper activities have been harder to access.	266624-266616-23307673

21 How do you think your volunteer work as an Independent Visitor has benefited the young person? Please score each item from 1 (not important for my young person) to 5 (extremely important for my young person) Please omit this question if you are not yet matched with a young person

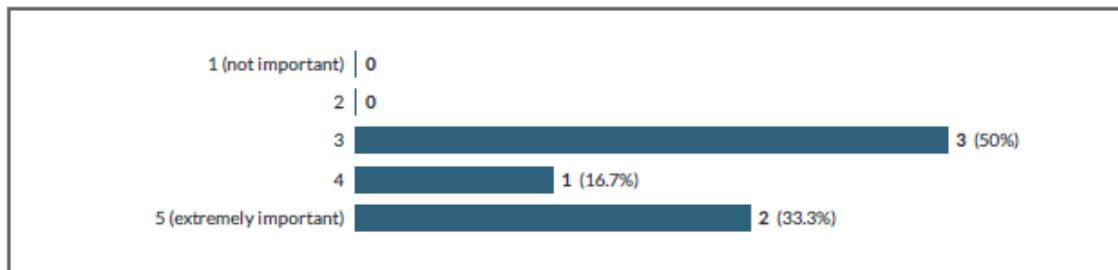
21.1 By being a good listener



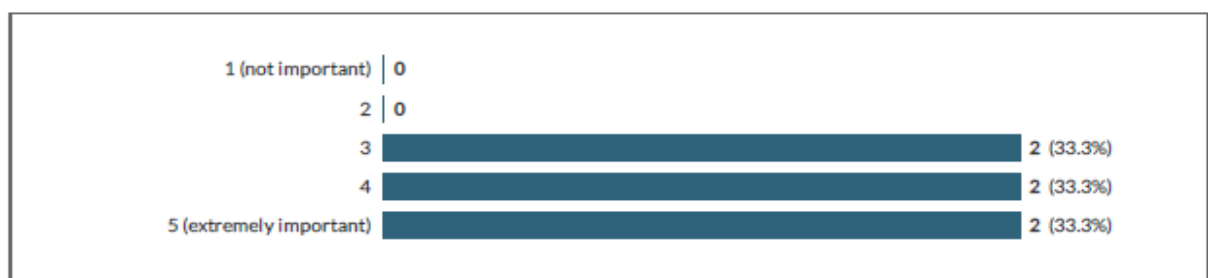
21.2 Through enjoying one-to-one activities together



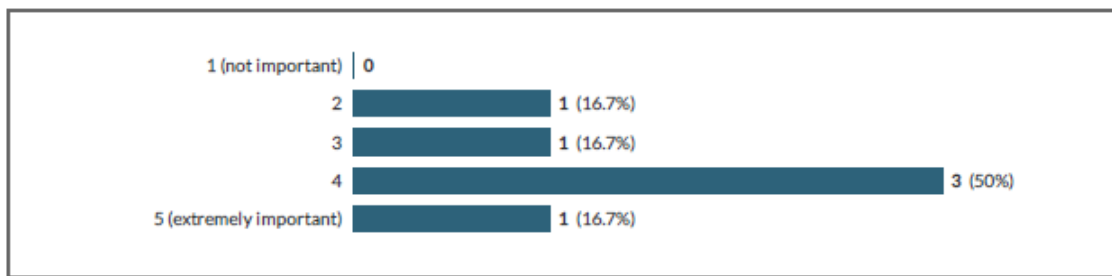
21.3 Through sharing interests



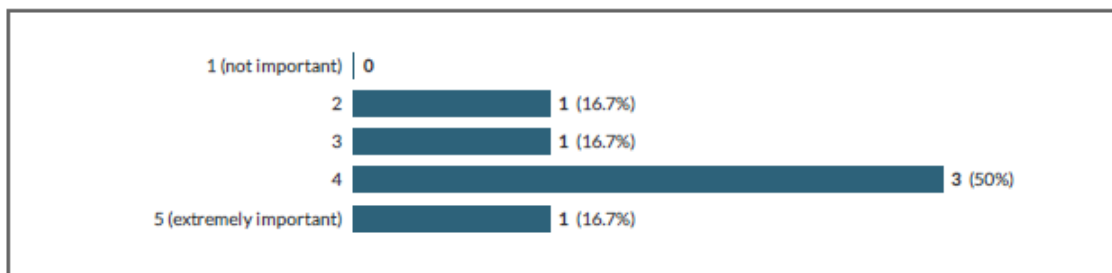
21.4 Through being a friend



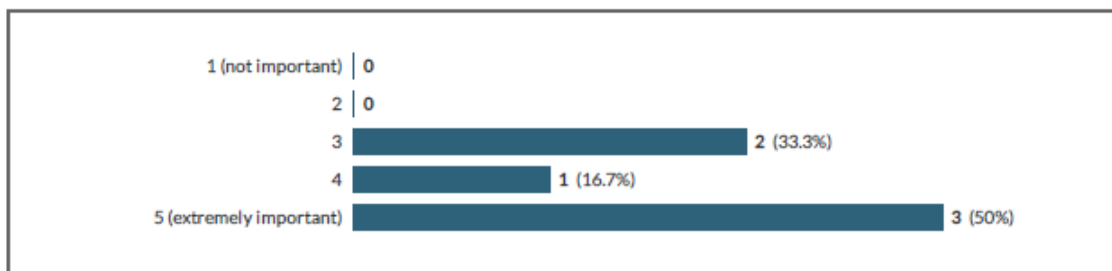
21.5 By helping them understand what has happened in their lives



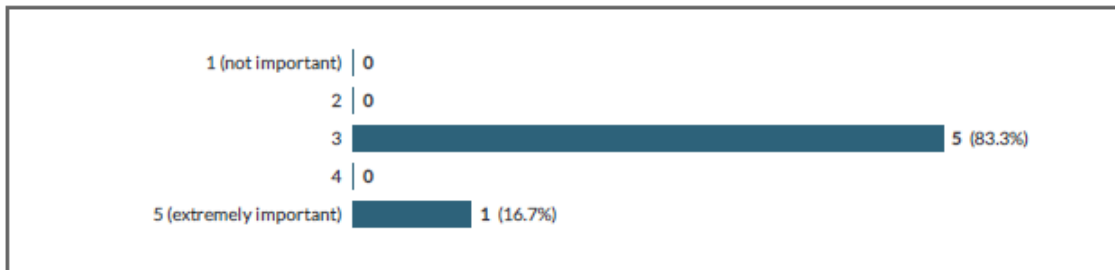
21.6 By helping them to deal with stress and anxiety (e.g. exams; other relationships)



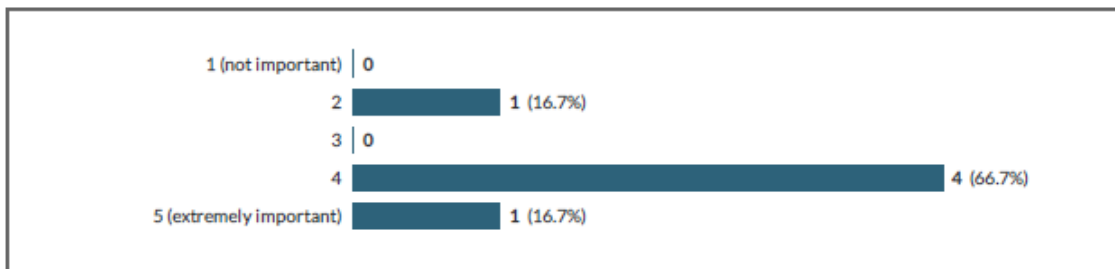
21.7 By supporting them to speak up for themselves



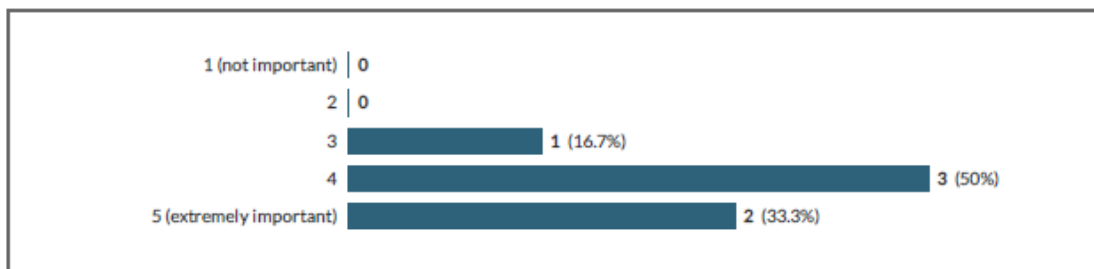
21.8 By speaking up for them



21.9 Through helping them deal with strong emotions (e.g. anger, sadness, distress)



21.10 Through helping them develop life skills



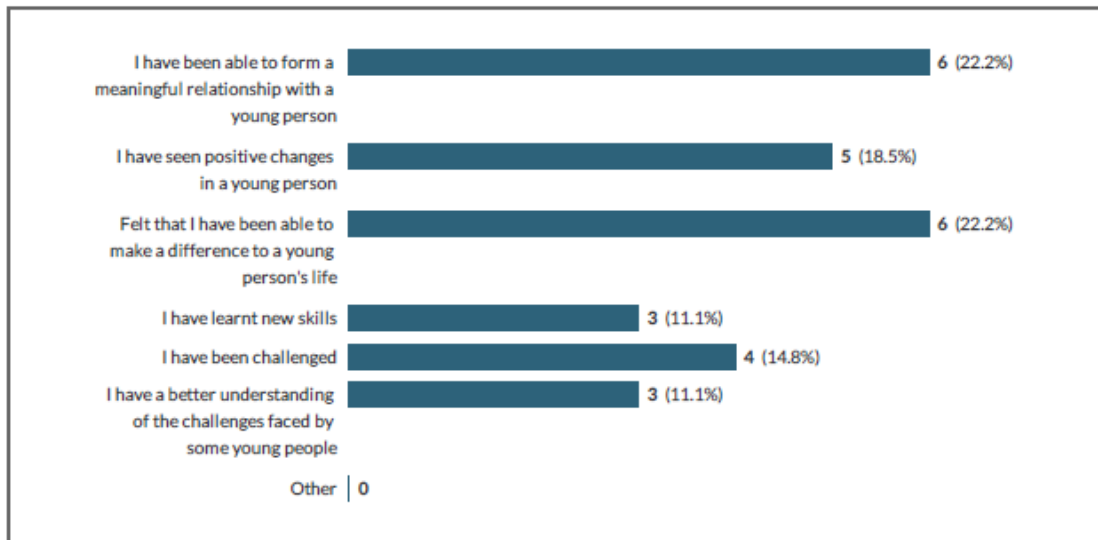
21.11 Other



21.a If you ticked 'Other' or have other comments relating to this question, please explain here.

No responses

22 What do you feel you have gained so far from volunteering as an Independent Visitor? (Tick all that apply)

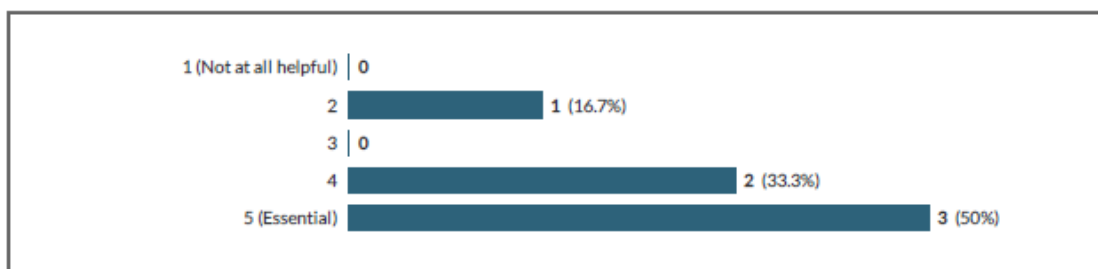


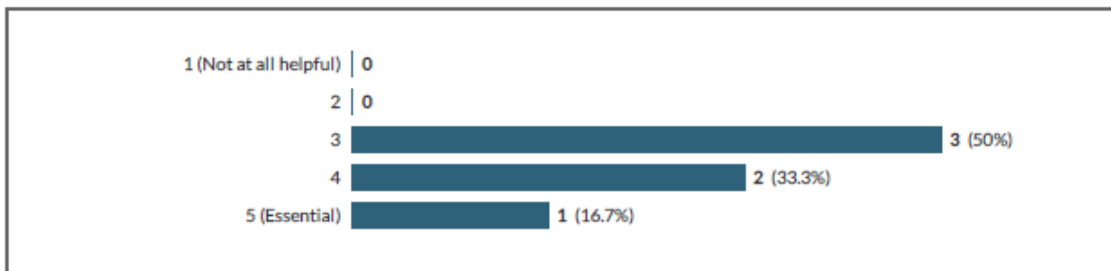
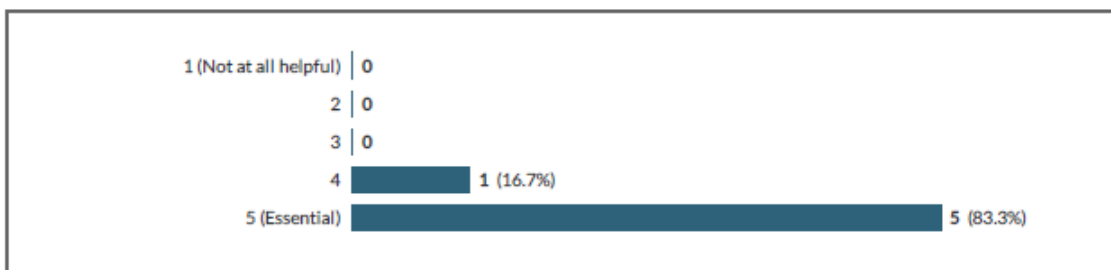
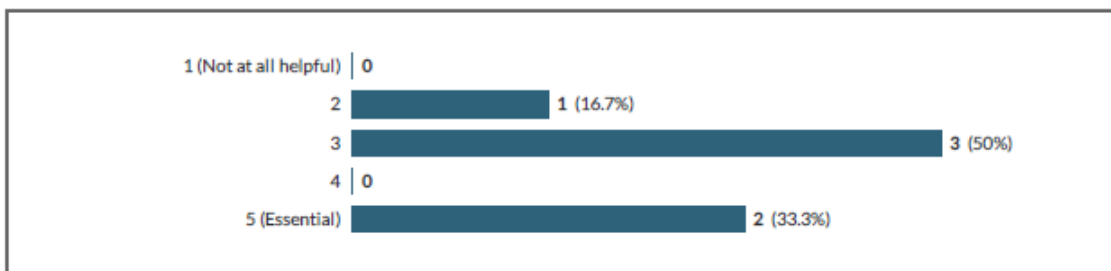
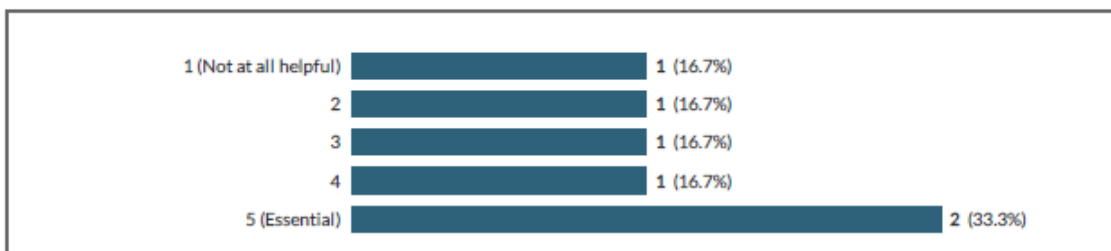
22.a If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

23 What has helped support you in your role as an Independent Visitor? Please rate the following from 1 (not at all helpful) to 5 (essential)

23.1 Initial training programme



23.2 On-going training events and updates**23.3** Supervision with staff at The Children's Society**23.4** Peer support/supervision**23.5** Independent reading and research

23.6 Other

1 (Not at all helpful)	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
5 (Essential)	0

23.a If you ticked 'Other' or have comments about this question, please explain here.

No responses

24 Do you anticipate continuing in your role as Independent Visitor?

Yes, I anticipate continuing for as long as possible	6 (100%)
I anticipate continuing until my young person is 18	0
I anticipate continuing until I have completed 2 years in the role	0
I anticipate having to leave before completing 2 years in the role	0
I am currently taking a break but intend to return	0
I have left and do not intend to return	0

24.a If you are taking a break, have left or are considering leaving, please outline the reasons for this.

No responses

25 What are the best aspects of volunteering as an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society?

Showing 5 of 6 responses	
Forming unique relationships with young people who struggle to establish meaningful relationships with adults	266624-266616-23193627
Helping to make a difference to a young persons life	266624-266616-23204546
to support the young person in his best interest	266624-266616-23279264
Meeting amazing young people	266624-266616-23288014
Regular CS supervision & support. Regular meets with staff & other IVs Quick turnaround of expenses claims.	266624-266616-23307673

26 What would you like to change about volunteering as an Independent Visitor with The Children's Society?

Showing all 5 responses	
increased allowance for visits	266624-266616-23204546
not change but may providing some courses which can lead independent visitor to higher qualification in this type of job in future.	266624-266616-23279264
Possibly more accessible events to get the young people together so they buil a network and ability for volunteers to be able to text young people if they wish	266624-266616-23288014
An increase in the funding enabling a wider range of local activities.	266624-266616-23307673
It's great but I wish the monthly budget was bigger.	266624-266616-23513434

27 If you have further comments or suggestions please add these here:

Showing 1 response	
As I have observed during last few years, The Children's Society have worked hard to support the vulnerable young person and children. It was my honour to work as an IV with this lovely organisation.	266624-266616-23279264