

# Could you support a child in care in Somerset?

## Route1 Advocacy in need of new volunteers

More volunteers are needed to help children in care and act as a significant someone in their lives.

For many children in care, everyone who features in their day-to-day lives is part of the care system. Somerset County Council's Route1 Advocacy service is seeking Advocates and Independent Visitors in both short and long term roles to spend quality time with them and transform their lives.

The independent visitor role involves taking a long-term interest in the life of a young person in care – something which many of them have never experienced. Trained volunteers are matched with a child in care and provide an invaluable service, one which is potentially life-changing for the young person involved, and even for the volunteer themselves.

### **Kate, currently a Route1 independent visitor, said:**

"I love being an independent visitor. My young person and I both get to try new activities and visit new places. Being a consistent someone in a young person's life is so important, even if it is just once a fortnight for a few hours. Now my own children are grown up, I have the time to try something new which is both rewarding and good fun."

**Cllr Tessa Munt, Executive Lead Member for Children and Families, said:** "Before coming into care, a child or young person's experience of relationships will have often been a negative one. Being in care provides an opportunity for them to experience safety, stability and a chance to build meaningful relationships and trust.

"Having the support of a trained volunteer, whether to act as a voice for them or to become a longer term figure in their lives is such a valuable thing to these young people; and often leads to better long term outcomes that extend beyond the care system."

### **Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Executive Lead Member for Communities, said:**

"Voluntary positions with Route1 Advocacy are so rewarding; you are quite literally having a potentially life-changing impact on a vulnerable young person's life – so we are looking for the best people we possibly can.

“For some, they simply want to give their spare time and make a difference to young people who have faced a challenging start in life; for others, they may also want to gain experience in working in children’s services, and these roles give incredible insight into the realities of being a child in care.”

Volunteers are asked to commit to visiting their young person in care twice a month for two years. Visits are intended to be fun, supportive and to allow the child in question time to spend with someone they look forward to seeing and trust.

Those who are unable to commit to a long-term role may be interested in becoming a Route1 volunteer advocate instead. This opportunity is about assisting children and young people with having a voice at meetings about their wellbeing, where their own wishes and feelings are made clear.

Advocacy is a short-term commitment, in which new advocates attend an additional 2 days of training before being added to a ‘bank’ of volunteer advocates, to be contacted when needed.

Full training is provided by Route 1 Advocacy. To find out more about the roles and apply, please visit: <https://volunteering.somerset.gov.uk/route1>

You can also visit the Facebook page at:

[www.facebook.com/volunteeringatsomersetcountycouncil](https://www.facebook.com/volunteeringatsomersetcountycouncil)

Alternatively, email [Volunteers@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Volunteers@somerset.gov.uk) or call 01823 359200 to make a difference to young people in your community.