



The Young Lives Foundation

# MEDWAY ADVOCACY

# REPORT

2021 - 2022



#makingadifference

# ADVOCACY MISSION....



**EMPOWERING AND PROMOTING THE VOICE OF MEDWAY'S CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS**



**IMPROVING RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**



**IMPROVING EXPERIENCES INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE AND LEAVING CARE**



**INFLUENCING POLICY AND PRACTICE RELATED TO CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS**

# ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



**CHANGES FOR INDIVIDUALS**



**CHANGES TO HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE**



**CHANGES TO WIDER COMMUNITY**



**CHANGES TO THE ADVOCACY SERVICE**

# ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



CHANGES FOR INDIVIDUALS

71 % of children and young people who had advocacy support had positive outcomes regarding their issues.

30 referrals for support at Joint Housing Assessments for homeless 16 & 17 year olds. Having an Advocate to support these young people at such a critical point in their lives allowed them to make informed decisions about their future and the most appropriate support for them.

" It was great having your help cos you asked questions I didn't think of and its all worked out great " Yougn Person

"The young person thanked me for listening to her and explaining her options in simplified terms" Advocate

"Thanks for your help "

34 children and young people were able to have their voice heard at their Family Group Conference meetings.

"Advocacy allowed the Young Person to share their wishes and feelings and their voice to be heard when discussing where they would live"

" Advocacy allowed the Young Person to voice his feelings and wishes and share how it is to live with Mum, from his perspective"

37 Children in Care received support from an Advocate, enabling and empowering them to have important input into their care planning.



CHANGES TO HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

The advocacy team welcome student social workers and aim to give them live cases and ongoing mentoring and support throughout their placement. Over the last academic Year the advocacy service supported four student social workers who will utilise the skills and knowledge gained as an advocate to inform their social work practice in the future.

There have been 34 referrals for FGC's this quarter. The advocate performs a vital role in Family Group Conferences, promoting the wishes and feelings of the child to the group, thus allowing the 'family' to find their own solutions that are in the best interests of the child. This in turn, alleviates the need to bring the child/children into the care of the Local Authority.

An Advocate supported one young person to make a complaint this year. The young person was dissatisfied with the way social workers had conducted themselves during the assessment of her unborn baby. Medway accepted that they could have approached the assessment with greater sensitivity and acknowledged that lessons' had been learned' and issues from the complaint would be feedback to the wider team.(see case study: Millie).

# ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



## CHANGES TO WIDER COMMUNITY

YF Advocacy Service aims to build stronger working relationships with local organisations, including Mental Health Services in Medway, contributing towards the Medway Housing Protocol, becoming more of a presence within 16Plus Services and promoting Advocacy in a positive light via social media and community hubs.

'Advocacy is an important means of raising awareness on mental health and ensuring that mental health is on the National Agenda of Governments. Advocacy can lead to improvements in policy, legislation and service development' (World Health Organisation)

Advocacy can help young people to find a voice when reporting safeguarding concerns. Many young people this year have raised their concerns via their Advocate, thus enabling a higher level of wrap around support to be provided for the young person.

Our approach to Advocacy support aims to enhance social inclusion and reduce risk for those young people in crisis situations.

The Advocacy Service has seen a restructure this year due to the higher demand for support at joint assessments as well as an increase in referrals from Kent and Medway. A Senior Advocacy Coordinator and a Full time Advocate have been employed to add to the strength of the existing sessional team. However, there continue to be relatively low numbers of Care Leavers referred via Medway (only 14 young people this year). The Advocacy Team aim to work cooperatively with the MCYPC and Medway in order to increase awareness of Advocacy and encourage take up to a greater level. Advocates are skilled at working alongside Personal Advisors and this, in turn, adds to the support that the young person receives. The Advocacy Team aim to build stronger relationships with 16 plus over the coming year.



## CHANGES TO THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

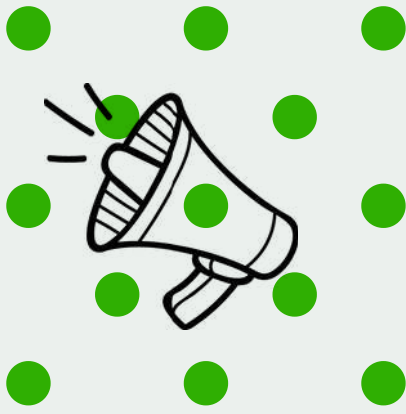


**136**

**new referrals for children and  
young people this year**

# New Referrals

## THEMES AND TRENDS



### NEW REFERRALS -SERVICE USER BREAKDOWN

Care Leavers - 14  
 CIC - 37  
 CIN - 8  
 FGC - 34  
 CP - 13  
 JHA - 30

### ISSUES

- 1) Housing homelessness - 34
- 2) Family Group Conference - 32
- 3) Support at meetings - 28
- 4) Placement - 17
- 5) Court proceedings - 11
- 6) Contact - 11
- 7) Child protection meetings - 10
- 8) PA - 6
- 9) Disability - 6
- 10) Education - 4
- 11) Social Worker - 4
- 12) Finance - 3
- 13) Immigration - 2
- 14) Complaint - 1

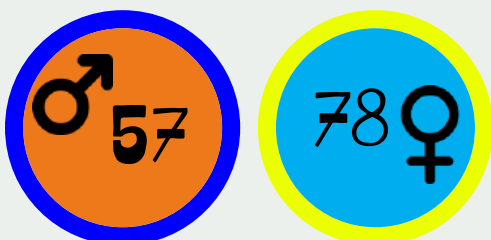


Of the 136 children and young people referred this year...

27 were 0-10 yrs  
 47 were 11-15 yrs  
 48 were 16 & 17yrs  
 14 were 18 - 25yrs



1 YOUNG PERSON REFERRED TO THE SERVICES  
 THIS YEAR IDENTIFIED AS TRANSGENDER



The majority of referrals were via email and mostly from Social Workers and FGC coordinators although there were some referrals from Residential Home Care Managers.

# Two Predominant Themes this year were:-



## Joint Housing Assessments:

The service continues to receive an increasing number of referrals for support at joint housing assessments, putting additional pressure on the advocacy service due to the short turnaround of these meetings. Despite this, 100% attendance was achieved by the Advocacy Service.

“Without adequate support homelessness can significantly affect young people’s lives. Young people who are homeless are more likely to become homeless again when they are older and also face greater difficulties finding work. Preventing homelessness is key and there is increasing recognition that young people who are supported to remain with their immediate family or friends have better outcomes than young people who are homeless. For many young people, the response they need is some time and space away from immediate family pressures followed by advice and mediation to support a return home” (The Young people and Homeless Report 2014).

Southwark Judgement dictates that:

“The powers of local authorities to provide accommodation under s.17 cannot be used as a substitute for their duty to provide accommodation under s.20 of the Children Act 1989 to homeless 16 & 17 year olds. Children’s Services do not have the option of choosing under which provision they should provide accommodation for homeless 16 & 17 year olds. Section 20 involves an evaluative judgement on some matters but not discretion.”

“The welfare of the child is paramount and a 16 & 17 year old must not be placed at risk whilst waiting for a full assessment of their needs. A child in need of emergency accommodation should be accommodated under s.20 whilst their needs are further assessed”

All homeless 16 & 17 year old Young People should have access to independent advocacy and support to assist them in weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of coming into Care. This will help the young person to come to a balanced decision and increase their understanding of how to navigate the housing system. Independent advocacy plays a key role in supporting 16 & 17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The wishes and feelings of a Young person are paramount in decision making about their lives. Advocacy is a crucial source of support for the young person within the Joint Assessments and has become a statutory role.

**“The young person was kicked out of her boyfriend’s house due to arguments and overcrowding. She was unable to return home and had a 4-month old baby to care for. A Joint Assessment was held and the young person was supported by an Advocate to understand her Rights and Entitlements. Although the young person wanted to be housed with her boyfriend, she accepted supported accommodation in a Mother and Child resource in Medway. Homelessness was prevented and it was acknowledged that the young person could provide good care for her child and did not need further social services intervention.”**





# Family Group Conference

34 referrals came in this year, via Family Group Conference Coordinators. This demonstrates recognition of the importance that the contribution of a child or young person's wishes and feelings can make in family care planning.

**“Advocacy support allowed a young person to share her wishes and feelings at the Family Group Conference, and her voice to be listened to when discussing where she should live. The young person was happy with the plan that was made by the family which took into account her wishes and feelings. The process successfully prevented the young person from coming into Care and allowed family resources to be drawn on, rather than Local Authority intervention”.**



# Complaint - Case Study

Millie (16 years)

Medway Children's Services were assessing significant risks around Millie's unborn baby. Millie asked for support from an Advocate regarding the process. However, at the end of the process, Millie wanted to proceed with a complaint against Children's Services as she was dissatisfied with the way the social workers conducted themselves, both throughout the initial assessment process and following the completion of a CIN plan for the unborn baby (and a further assessment of need). The Advocate supported Millie to make a complaint against Children's Services.

Millie felt supported and said she felt that there was somebody 'in her corner'. The process of assessment was stressful for Millie and she felt that the Advocate had listened and was there for her.

Medway Children's Services accepted that they could have approached the assessment with greater sensitivity as Millie was only 16yrs and fearful that her baby would be taken from her. The complaint was dealt with as a concern and the outcome was one of 'lessons learned' to take forward to other young people in a similar situation.

The advocacy intervention ensured that Millie's voice was heard and Children's Services were satisfied that Millie was engaging with all other necessary services so they closed the case, thus preventing the need for unnecessary and costly social work involvement once the baby was born.



# Family Contact - Case Study

## Adele (14 years)

Adele was confused about family contact. She loved her family but felt pressurised to agree to a greater amount of contact than she actually wanted. The Advocate supported Adele to form her own independent feelings about her family network and her own situation. Adele's wishes and feelings in turn informed professionals concerned with Adele's Care Planning, especially around contact arrangements. Adele had had several changes of placement and had long-standing issues around the welfare of her parents and numerous siblings. It took some time for her to understand the different procedures around her siblings regarding their respective care situations. It also took some time for Adele to feel less responsibility for her parent's welfare and to manage the pressures each of them placed on her. Given time and with support from her Advocate, Adele was able to identify what she wanted for herself.

Adele said she felt she could express her thoughts, views and feelings to someone who was independent of both her family, the foster family, and the professionals, without pressures or feelings of conflicting responsibilities and loyalties. She was able to use this space to develop her own voice and feel heard.

### Adele said:

**“It was good to have someone outside of the professionals and family and placement to talk over these things. I like meeting with you to talk things through for my meetings, it has really helped to have someone there for me for myself.”**



# CP Court Proceedings & Foster Care - Case Study

Joseph, Louie, Taylor & Esme

Referral:

*The children were subject to a CP plan. However, Mum died in the Spring of 2021. The children were in the house at the time, and found her. There was a history of DV, alcohol abuse and neglect. The Court ordered an Advocate to support with the process of coming into Care. The current foster carers for two of the children (Taylor and Esme) had given notice but this was not an emotionally warm environment for the children and they were not happy in placement. The other two children (Joseph and Louie) were happy in their foster placement. The children had a positive relationship with their Maternal Grandmother and Maternal Uncle but neither were able to care for the children. Visits, however, were frequent and positive.*

Two separate Advocates were allocated to the children, one to Joseph and Louie, and the other to Taylor and Esme. Following notice given by their foster carers, Taylor and Esme moved to the same foster placement as their siblings and all four children were seen to thrive in this environment. The Advocate for Joseph and Louie (the older siblings) visited the children on regular occasions. She also spoke to them via video call and What's App and supported them in their CIC meetings. During ongoing Court Proceedings, the Advocate liaised with the Guardian on the children's behalf.

The Advocate regularly spoke to the children to update their wishes and feelings and sent these to the Social Worker as part of the report for the Court Hearing. Both Joseph and Taylor said they were happy in their foster placement and wanted to remain there with their siblings. The children did not wish to live with their estranged Father, but agreed to contact.

Esme had a different Father to her siblings. Initially the plan was for her to live with a Maternal Aunt whom she had never met but who had expressed a desire to care for her. The Advocate worked with Esme to gather her wishes and feelings, via drawings and conversation. Esme wanted to remain with her siblings in the foster placement she had grown to love. Esme's wishes and feelings were presented to the Guardian and to the Court and it was finally agreed that all four children could remain together in their foster placement. The plan will be for permanency for the children.

Esme was only 7 yrs old and the youngest of the sibling group. Advocates are skilled in working with young children and taking an indirect approach to their work.

Esme's Advocate said:

"I first met with Esme shortly after she had moved to her new placement. On our first meeting, I spent some time chatting and playing in the garden with her. We discussed the reasons why she had an Advocate and my role in getting her wishes and feelings heard. The next time we met, I played a fun colouring game with Esme, in order to try and get her wishes and feelings in a more child-centred way. She told me a bit about herself, and her wish to remain living with her siblings. Even though she had only been in the new placement for a short time she was very happy and wanted to remain there. I visited Esme again a few months later, to get her wishes and feelings updated as I had been advised that there had been a positive parenting assessment completed on her Paternal Aunt. At this point Esme had been shown the photo of her Aunt, but had no memory of meeting her. The foster carers asked if I'd be happy to introduce the photo to Esme again and explain who she was, as they felt it would be better if an independent person did this. After playing and chatting for a while the conversation actually flowed very smoothly. Esme was able to explain her wishes and feelings, that said that, although she would like to meet up with her Aunt, she did not want to live with her. She wished to remain living with her brothers and her foster carers. I returned to visit Esme the following week, and together we had an Arts and Crafts evening, each drawing up the house where we would like to live, and whom we'd like living with us. We then did a child-friendly "plan", which covered many aspects of Esme's life, both present and in the future. Esme was able to personalise this plan with drawings and simple sentences, with added scribing from me to ensure all her words were documented. These two pieces of work were forwarded to both the social worker and Esme's Guardian, to be included in the paperwork that was being presented to the judge at the court hearing. "

The foster carers said that they were happy with the care and consideration that both the Advocates had given to the children and noted how dedicated they had been to see a positive outcome for the children. Esme said she would miss her Advocate!



# Residential Care - Case Study

## Karl (16 years)

Karl was placed outside his usual family area in a swift move following a placement disruption. He settled quickly into his residential placement, which he found calm and supportive. The plan was to move Karl back to his familial area. However, he did not want this. The Advocate worked hard to support Karl and to promote his rights to maintain a level of stability and security to enable him to progress. Medway agreed that Karl could remain in the residential placement. Karl was appreciative of the agreement that he could remain in his placement and thanked the Advocate for her support with the situation. Initially, Karl presented as quiet and reserved. However, after support in a specialist school and with steady support of his care environment, he began to achieve more confidence and develop a good chance of reaching his potential. Karl has aims for employment that is suited to his needs and he has a clear focus on returning nearer to family at transition to 18yrs. The relationship with family is now stronger and more stable than ever.



# Closed Cases

## THEMES AND TRENDS

120 CASES CLOSED - 71% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEEDING ADVOCACY SUPPORT HAD THEIR ISSUES FULLY RESOLVED



80

Advocacy complete - All Issues resolved

11

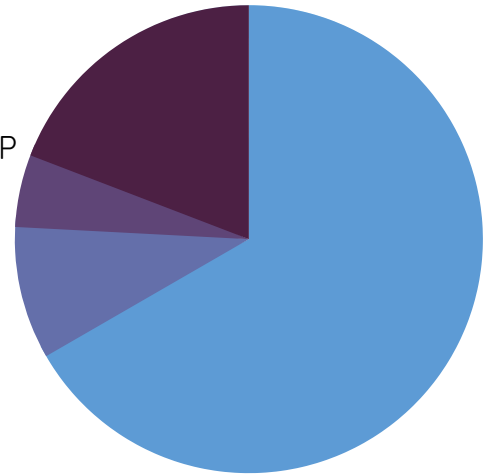
Advocacy support complete - Outstanding issue for YP

6

Advocacy complete - Outcome unknown / young person lost contact

23

Young Person chose not to take up Advocacy



## NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Who knew we would spend so much time this year in meetings on Zoom or Teams? Turns out some young people quite like speaking from the comfort of their own home without the pressure of being in an unfamiliar space and surrounded by people wearing lanyards. Some young people have reported that it is really helpful to be able to text their Advocate discretely during a meeting to raise issues and get help to share their views.

# FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

When we end our work with young people, we ask them to reflect on their experiences and provide us with feedback regarding the advocacy service. Young People are always given information about how to make a complaint about the service and how to access the service again, if they need to in the future.



0808 164 0096

**"IT'S GOOD TO HAVE SOMEONE OUTSIDE OF THE PROFESSIONALS AND FAMILY AND PLACEMENT TO TALK OVER THESE THINGS. I LIKE MEETING WITH YOU TO TALK THINGS THROUGH FOR MY MEETINGS, IT HAS REALLY HELPED TO HAVE SOMEONE THERE FOR ME FOR MYSELF."**



**THE CHILD SAID HE THOUGHT THE INDEPENDENT ADVOCATE HAD LISTENED TO HIM AND HEARD HIS VIEWS ABOUT HIS SITUATION AND SHARED THEM ACCURATELY AND AS HE HAD EXPRESSED THEM. "YOU TOLD THEM WHAT I SAID."**

**"I'M GOING TO PLAN FOR MY FUTURE AND MAKE THE MOST OF MY LIFE. KIND REGARDS AND BEST WISHES." B**

**"THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP AND I WILL LET YOU KNOW WHEN BABY IS HERE"**

**"WHEN I SAY SOMETHING, YOU'VE MADE SURE YOU DO IT, AND ALWAYS FOLLOW UP WHAT I ASKED ABOUT. YOU'VE BEEN CONSIDERATE TOO, ASKING ME WHAT I WANT TO SHARE FIRST, CHECKING THAT'S WHAT I MEANT FOR OTHERS TO HEAR"... (COMMENTS ON LEARNING THEIR ADVOCATE CL WAS RETIRING)**

"Apologies for taking up your time but I would like to express my greatest gratitude to one of your incredible members of staff. I've been in the care system since I was 16 and due to the tiresome battle I was facing with social services, I was referred to your advocacy service. I was allocated the brilliant CW, who has felt like a guardian angel throughout my care experience. There were times where I became exhausted from challenging social services whilst balancing my personal life and if it wasn't for CW continuously fighting for my voice to be heard, despite the bumps in the road, I wouldn't be where I am now. Not just for myself but CW has gone above and beyond what I can imagine her job description to be, in tirelessly helping and giving my younger sister, S, a voice in her challenges with social services. From countless emails, to calls, to staying awake in hours past 12 just to ensure my sister's safety, CW has shown to be an incredible advocate and her work should be recognised.

I couldn't express how grateful I am for CW's evident passion in helping children in care when situations feel hopeless.

Thank you for your time and I hope this has given an insight into the great work CW does. "





# FEEDBACK FROM PROFESSIONALS



## Care Manager

“Thank you for all you have done. Without your letter and your support, I’m sure we would be no further down the line with this matter.”

## IRO

“CL has been a consistent advocate for N. CL supported N in expressing her views. N has grown in confidence because of the work that CL did with her, knowing that her views will be expressed and efficiently too.

N engaged well with CL, and both were able to build a trusting relationship throughout the period that they worked together. CL was professional throughout visiting N, obtaining her wishes and feelings and relating this in meetings and to professionals. CL also attended meetings, and supported N and other young people she worked with. She has been a source of strength to many young people as well. It is sad to see CL leave, she will be dearly missed. I wish CL all the very best for the future.”

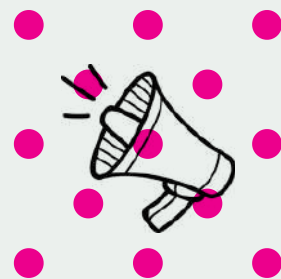
## Grandparents

“Your support has helped to get a lot of issues resolved, we are grateful of your help and wouldn’t be where we are without it” - Grandmother (FGC)

“Hi J, I just wanted to say thank you so much or all you have done in the few days since we met you. You are moving mountains!! L is very reassured by you being his voice. Thanks again.” - Grandmother



# CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENTS



During March 2021 - April 2022 the demand on the Advocacy Service grew considerably. An increasing number of referrals for Advocacy support at joint assessments added to the overall numbers of referrals received. Because of the increased demand, positive changes were made to the re structure of the Advocacy Service. In July 2021 YLF recruited a full time Senior Advocacy Coordinator and in February 2022 a full time Advocate joined the Team.

The Advocacy team welcomed four student social workers over the last year and gave them all live cases and ongoing mentoring and support throughout their placement. The skills and knowledge gained via Advocacy will undoubtedly inform their social work practice in the future. Two of the students were so impressed with the service that they stayed on as sessional advocates!

Although the Country eased out of lockdown over the last year, Covid 19 has continued to impact on the health and well-being of young people. Despite the challenges facing the team, YLF were able to ensure no young people were kept on a waiting list. The Team have been dynamic and innovative finding creative ways to meet the needs of children and young people via What's App, text, email, TEAMS & Zoom if not face to face.

The Advocacy Team aim to have a presence at the Medway Homelssness Forum (14th June 2022). The Team are looking to raise the profile of Advocacy via the YLF MYPC and the 16Plus Leaving Care Team.

The Aadvocacy service will also be aiming to create stronger links with IMHA Services, as many young people have significant mental health issues and need specific and tailored support with their issues.



# ADVOCACY TEAM NEWS



Our 'Advocacy YLF' page has been refreshed and updated ..... visit Advocacy YLF on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for news and updates.



This year saw many changes to the Advocacy Team. The Advocacy Team now has a full time Senior Advocacy Coordinator Marcya Farmer (photo 1) as well as a full time Advocate Shelly Allen. (photo 2)



Our student social worker, who is with us until the end of June, is Charlotte Dissanayake.

