



The Young Lives Foundation

KENT ADVOCACY REPORT

January - March 2023

'I really appreciate your support, you are by far the quickest and most efficient agency I have worked with and I have been a SW for 16yrs!' Social Worker



#makingadifference

The background of the entire image is a light gray color, populated with several stylized, fluffy clouds in a muted taupe or brownish-gray color. In the center of the image is a large circular graphic. This circle has a thick, vibrant blue outer ring. Inside this ring is a solid, bright orange circle. The number '84' is prominently displayed in the upper half of the orange circle in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below the number, the text 'New referrals were received this quarter.' is written in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font, centered within the orange circle. Underneath this, the text '34 of these were JHA's.' is written in the same bold, black font, followed by 'The other 50 were general referrals.' on the next line, also in the same bold, black font and centered.

84

**New referrals were
received
this quarter.**

**34 of these were JHA's.
The other 50 were
general referrals.**



Quarterly Data

Demographics, Themes & Trends

Referrals

A total of **84** referrals were made this quarter.

CIC = 27

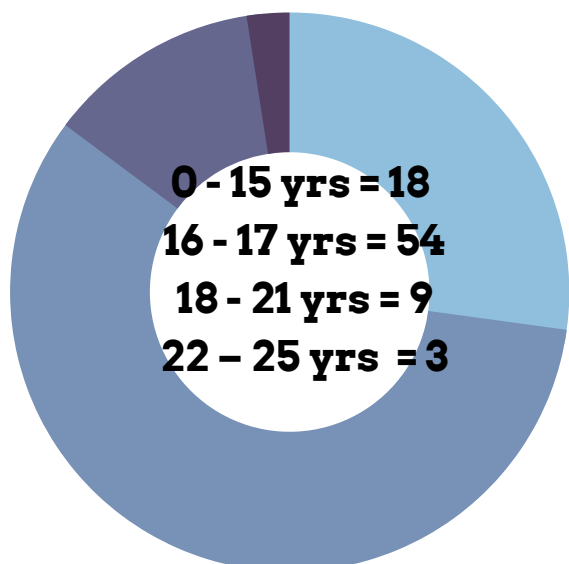
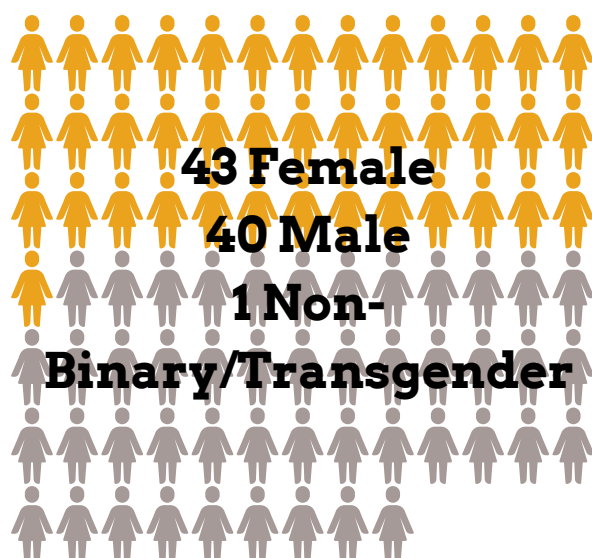
CIN = 9

CP = 1

FGC = 1

JHA = 34

C/L = 12



Closed Cases

A total of **81** cases were closed this quarter.



*The Advocacy Service have addressed this issue by amending the referral form in asking the referrer to ensure that the young person is aware that the referral is being made.

JHA's responded to within 24 hrs = 100%
Advocacy attendance at JHA's = 100%

The Advocacy Service have a multi skilled team of advocates, all trained to support young people during the JHA. This is usually a specific piece of work that ends at the close of the JHA (or shortly after if there are unresolved issues regarding accommodation).

Issues

Housing/Homelessness = 38

Placement Issues = 14

Support at Meetings = 10

Disability = 10

Contact = 5

Court Proceedings = 4

Social Worker = 4

CP meetings = 3

Education = 2

Finance = 2

Immigration/Asylum = 2

PA = 2

FGC = 1



**Every young person has
a "Right to a Safe Home."**

Homelessness and Housing

“Being homeless means not having a safe place to call home. Many young people sleep rough every night and many more are sleeping on sofas, floors or with strangers. Family breakdown is a major cause of youth homelessness with around 6 in 10 young people saying they had to leave home because of arguments, relationship breakdown or being told to leave. The impact of homelessness can have long-term, life changing effects. No home, no bed and no stability for these young people is exhausting. Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and anorexia are easily made worse under these conditions. Many young people don’t have access to affordable food and skip meals because they can’t afford to eat.” Centre Point

Kent Housing Group (KHG)

‘The joint working protocol for homeless 16 & 17 year old young people has been developed in partnership by Kent County Council and the twelve District and Borough Councils across Kent, reflecting the changes in legislation and commissioned services by KCC.’

This Quarter the YLF advocacy team have been active participants in supporting the further development of policies to the joint housing assessment process, ensuring that young people’s voices are at the forefront of the policy.

‘The purpose of the joint working protocol is to guide each relevant organisation on the approach to supporting young people aged 16 & 17 yrs, in an agreed and transparent way. This includes promoting the responsibility of all professionals to ensure that the young people who are being assisted can have access to inclusive independent advice that will enable them to make informed decisions and choices across all elements of their life’.

This Quarter YLF received 34 referrals asking for independent support for homeless 16 & 17 year olds at their Joint Housing Assessment. The wishes and feelings of a young person are paramount in decision making about their lives. This support assisted and enabled the young person to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of the options presented to them in order for them to make informed choices and decisions regarding where they would want to live.

JHA Case Studies:

Faith (17 years)

Faith had been sofa surfing with different friends since being kicked out of her father's home 6 months previously. Faith had stated that she had a difficult relationship with her parents, who separated when she was 7 years old. She went to live with her dad after falling out with her mum. Some months later, Faith shared that, after numerous disagreements, her dad had kicked her out and she had been staying with different friends ever since. Faith was a very vulnerable young person who suffered from depression, Irlens Syndrome and a form of ADHD.

Faith had disclosed that her dad had been physically abusive towards her, her mum, and her sister. Faith had shared that, since leaving her dad's, she had slept rough for a couple of days, walking the streets until she found a bench to sleep on. Faith's relationship with both parents had irretrievably broken down and she felt she could not return to either of their homes. Faith was just 17yrs and still in college when she finally came to the attention of children's services.

A referral was made to YLF, by a Duty social worker, but it took some time for a JHA to be arranged. When the advocate spoke to Faith she discovered that she hadn't been told her options and didn't understand what a joint housing assessment was. The advocate explained the process of the JHA and went over potential options, quoting relevant sections of housing legislation (The Housing Act 1996) as well as explaining the route into Care (s.20), including all the longer term benefits and connected rights and entitlements. During the joint housing assessment, Faith's situation was assessed. There was professional recognition that there was no prospect of reconciliation with her family and Faith herself recognised that she needed support with more than just accommodation. She acknowledged that she needed support with education and life skills, having had no responsible adult in her life. Faith asked to be able to sign herself into care and this was agreed. She asked for supported lodgings (KSH), which was agreed via the s20. Faith has now had her initial child in care review and is flourishing and enjoying having all her belongings in one place and not living out of her handbag.

Note:

During the meeting the social worker gave some mis- leading and inaccurate information that needed to be challenged by the advocate. She stated that Faith would need consent from her parents, that they would need to sign her s20 and that they would lose PR. Young people over the age of 16yrs do not need parental consent to sign themselves into Care. Parents do not lose parental control, this is shared between the parents and the Local Authority, with young people able to have a say in what happens to them, providing there are no safeguarding concerns around their decisions.

Feedback from Faith:

"You have been 100% brilliant and you were so sweet to me. Nothing really happened until you came along. I have been waiting for housing for so long. Oh my god, you've been so helpful and made such a difference."



JHA Case Studies:

Dylan (17yrs)

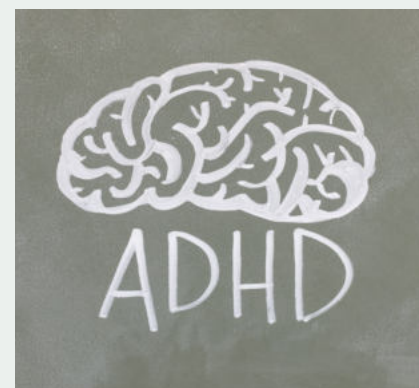
Dylan was living with his dad, but the relationship had broken down. Children's services were working with Dylan and his family to identify a plan of support and suitable accommodation. A joint housing assessment was arranged, and a referral was made to YLF, in order for Dylan to be supported and to be able to make informed decisions about suitable housing. Dylan had SEN. He had traits of ASD and ADHD and suffered with Tourettes (tics).

The advocate spoke with Dylan ahead of the joint housing assessment, to explain the process and to go through potential options that would be spoken about. The advocate supported Dylan during the meeting and helped him to understand legal 'jargon' and what was being discussed, breaking information down into 'common language'. Dylan considered all his options and chose to sign himself into care, under s.20, as he felt he had a need for support that extended beyond housing. At Dylan's request, the advocate extended his support beyond the JHA, until a search for a suitable 'Kent Supported Homes (KSH)' was concluded. A placement was found for Dylan and the advocate attended the initial CIC meeting. Dylan said he was happy and settled in his new home and his host was very supportive. Dylan said that he no longer required an advocate, but 'thanked his advocate for all his help'

Ali (17yrs)

Ali had been sofa surfing for 3 month's, since his dad kicked him out. He said he had nowhere to stay as he had exhausted all his options regarding sofa surfing. He had been staying with his girlfriend and her Grandparents, but had overstayed his welcome. Ali was studying for A levels at College. He was placed in an emergency bed by children's services. A JHA was scheduled for the day following the urgent referral to YLF.

The advocate spoke to Ali prior to the Joint Housing Assessment to reassure him of independent support and to guide him through the process of the meeting. With support from his advocate, Ali was allowed time to consider his options and to ask more questions about signing himself into care under s.20. Ali recognised that he wanted to finish his A level's and felt that he needed more support than housing could offer. He was given a chance to consider his options and supported accommodation was discussed. However, Ali was concerned that he may be placed in an environment where other young people were using drugs. He opted for an opportunity to be referred to Kent Supported Homes as he felt he would do better in a family environment. He was subsequently housed with a host who had one other young person in placement. Ali was happy with the outcome and 'thanked the advocate for his support'.



Placement Issues

Stability means that every child in care and young person leaving care is found the right placement as soon as possible. Although some placement moves may be in the best interests of the child, too many looked after children are experiencing placement moves and instability. At the heart of improving outcomes for children and young people is ensuring they have a strong voice in all decisions that affect their care. YLF are passionate in their belief that young people need to have a voice and this Quarter the advocacy team supported 14 children and young people to have a say in the planning of their placements.

JONATHON

Jonathon is a Child in Care and has a history of multiple placement moves. He is perceived to be vulnerable to County Lines and was placed on a DOLS whilst in a specialist residential placement which was Out of County. He asked his advocate to try and negotiate a move for him as he felt unhappy and isolated, far away from friends and family. After intervention and an emergency meeting, it was agreed, by professionals supporting Jonathon, that he did not need to be on the DOLS and the current placement was not meeting his needs. He was moved to a placement closer to home. Jonathon continues to work with his advocate.

Jonathon said:

"Oh my god, I'm so happy S, I can't believe I am out of that horrible place and not locked up anymore. Ok this place isn't perfect but I can actually see people again and call my friends. Thank you so much. We did it yay"



Bethany (16yrs)

Bethany referred herself to YLF in a state of crisis. She desperately wanted her voice to be heard in relation to a plan to return her home to the care of her mother and step- father. 6 months previously, Bethany and her siblings had been removed from the care of their parents due to the state of the property the family lived in. Bethany's mother had reported her missing when she failed to return home after a visit to a friend. The police found Bethany at her friend's house and took her home. When they arrived at the house, they were so horrified by the home conditions (no functioning kitchen, no hot water, no functioning bathroom, significant hygiene issues) that they alerted children's services and the children were removed under a Police Protection Order. Bethany was placed in foster care. The plan was for the children to return home once the council had made significant repairs to the house. The children were scheduled to visit the home and have overnight stays prior to their return. Bethany did not feel happy about the visits. Her parents continued to argue and fight and despite the renovation work, Bethany did not feel that cleanliness at home would be maintained. Furthermore, Bethany told a story of her and her sister being left to care for their much younger sibling as their mother was unwell much of the time and their step father lacked the capacity to look after the children. Bethany said she spent her childhood either in her room or caring for her younger sibling. She did not go to school and was afraid to go out in the community. Bethany talked about how she felt 'invisible' at home and how she 'could see no future' for herself.



Bethany's advocate supported Bethany in talking to her social worker about her concerns and anxieties. The advocate supported Bethany in saying that, despite her love for her parents, she did not want to return home. She said that she felt she now had a life and could see a future for herself. She did not believe things would change at home and she did not feel she had the resilience to manage in the home environment. Bethany struggled to articulate herself, keeping her face covered the entire time she told her story to her advocate, who, in turn, helped her to tell her story to her social worker.



The social worker took note of everything Bethany said and spoke to the parents about Bethany's wishes and feelings around the planned return home. Bethany's mother said that she just wanted Bethany to be happy. Following an emergency meeting, Bethany was allowed to make a choice in remaining accommodated and said that 'being in care was the best experience and the first time she had felt like a human being'.

Bethany's foster carer told the advocate:

"I wanted to thank you for your support for Bethany during this difficult time, it has really helped her to feel that she is being heard and we appreciate the time that you have given her. Without your support, Bethany would have been returning this week. She actually managed to complete her assignment this week, something she has been unable to do due to her worries" Foster Carer

SUPPORT AT MEETINGS

"I want everyone who's involved in a vulnerable child's life; teachers, social workers, foster carers, health professionals, counselors, to have a real sense of parental responsibility for their prospects. To not just focus on their narrow area, but look at the overall welfare. To ask themselves, before they make a decision or fill in a form, "would this be good enough for my own child". - *Children's Minister 2015*

Children's Services want the very best for the children and Young People they look after. However, Children and Young people often feel that they are not listened to and feel unable to speak up at meetings due to the number of professionals around the table:

"Having an Advocate has really helped me. They help me when I struggle to talk in my CIC reviews. They don't judge me or how I feel"

"Advocates don't tell you what to do, like a Social Worker does. They help to guide you through stuff"

This Quarter YLF received 10 referrals for children and young people to be supported to have their voice heard at their review meetings.



Support at Meetings continued...



Jasmine (12 yrs)

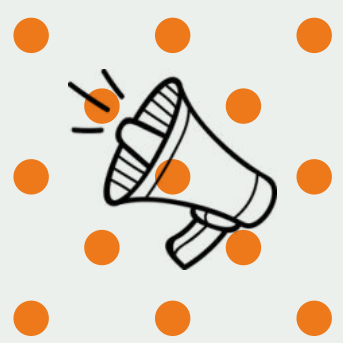
Jasmine came into foster care after her mother was deemed to lack mental capacity to exercise PR for Jasmine. Jasmine's father died of covid in 2021. The social worker believed that Jasmine was struggling to process her grief and missed her mother. Jasmine was subject to a care order, with a plan to support her relationship with her mother and eventually return home. However, her mother suffered from fluctuating mental ill health and self-medicated with alcohol. During an unsupervised contact an incident led to a s47 investigation, due to physical and emotional abuse.

The social worker believed that Jasmine felt torn between her loyalties with her current foster carers and her mother, and this was causing her emotional distress. The social worker referred Jasmine to YLF for advocacy support to hear her wishes and feelings and support her in meetings.

After making contact with Jasmine, via text messages and a phone call, the advocate met with her at school. She was able to discuss with her the concerns that the social worker had raised, regarding contact with Mum and her desire to be back living with her, as well as the pressure that the foster carers appeared to be putting on her to remain with them. The advocate gathered Jasmine's wishes and feelings around her concerns relating to these issues and was able to portray them to the social worker and IRO ahead of the CIC review. The advocate supported Jasmine in her CIC review and subsequent meetings, being careful not to discuss Jasmine's true feelings (to return home to mum) in front of the foster carers. Jasmine was happy that her wishes and feelings had been shared with her social worker and IRO but that these were dealt with in a sensitive way in front of her foster carers. She was happy that she could attend her meetings, with support from her advocate, without upsetting anyone during the meeting. Jasmine felt listened to and understood, and in time felt able to manage her meetings without support from her advocate.



Disabilities



YLF enables and equips vulnerable children and young people to actively participate in shaping their own lives. YLF have advocates who are skilled in supporting children and young people with disabilities and complex additional needs. We aim to ensure that our service is accessible to every child and young person who is eligible for our support.

Even children and young people who are unable to communicate instruction have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Young people with disabilities should not be treated less favourably or unfairly disadvantaged and for those that cannot self-advocate it is essential that support is given to safeguard their rights.

Case Study...

Ben (19yrs)

Ben has been a long-term, non-instructed case. He is a 19-year-old young man who is subject to a DOLS order (2 to 1) and is finally living in his own home, fully supported by staff through The Home Group. After many meetings with the social care team, managers and SEN, Ben's advocate contacted commissioning, who agreed that Ben needed a bespoke provision. Ben has been in his placement for 12 months and has made good progress in his independent living skills. As Ben is on a 2-to-1 support, whenever he wishes to go out, he needs to pay for transport for both his carers and himself, as well as for community based activities. Ben's 2 to 1 was required by law, and the order was applied for by the LA. Ben was happy with the level of support he had but was struggling to pay for travel and activities out of his disability benefits. He had a companion bus pass which helped, however, his location was not close to bus routes and trains and taxis were often required. Ben's parents bought him a rail card which gave Ben and his support workers 30% off travel costs. However, Ben still needed to meet the costs of tickets to the cinema, football matches, or other activities. Ben's advocate appealed his benefits on his behalf, and he is now eligible for a Motability car. Ben is taking delivery of the car in the next 2 weeks. He will lose the mobility part of his DLA but will be more than compensated by his ability to travel anywhere he chooses with his support workers. Ben continues to work closely with his advocate who continues to ensure that his needs are met and his voice is heard.





Advocacy for a young person with complex needs and disabilities can often last for months, if not years. It takes a long time for advocates to build relationships with children and young people who struggle to communicate and are often left confused and frustrated by changes in social workers and staff.

On closing a young person's case when he turned 25yrs, the young person said to his advocate: 'You've been like a proper dad to me'

Sometimes advocates get copied into notification of a young person's achievements and can feel proud that they have supported the voice of the young person in their journey:

Try Angle Award

Just to confirm T has been awarded a Try Angle Award for Personal Development.

'T is an ambassador for the Cool Crew and always tells young people" just because they haven't achieved it yet, give it time, they will get there." His best joke is "knock knock whose there?, Doctor, Doctor Who." T has been regularly attending the Cool Crew additional needs group, and has been very supportive of other young people. He regularly shows new young people around and enables them to enjoy and engage within the group. If T sees someone upset, he will always ask what the matter is and get a member of staff to assist the young person. T is very positive and makes activities exciting by just being around. T is a pleasure to have in session. T does have additional needs which he is overcoming with his positive attitude to life. T will try anything and have a go. He is completing his gold Duke of Edinburgh this year in Finland and there's no stopping T.'



Contact

This Quarter 5 children and young people asked for support around contact with their birth families:

Rosie (14 yrs)

Rosie was referred to the advocacy service as the relationship between social services and her father was difficult and there was a lot of blame and accusations of coercion directed at the Local Authority. There were ongoing concerns around contact with Rosie's father, in terms of the father's challenging behaviour. Children's services felt that it would be beneficial for Rosie to have impartial support, in order to allow her to make her own decisions around contact with her father.

The advocate spoke to Rosie, who made it very clear that she did not want contact with her father. The advocate fed Rosie's wishes and feelings back to the social worker and the IRO. Rosie asked the advocate if she could continue to support her in her CIC reviews as she had recently moved placement following a history of multiple placement breakdowns. The advocate was able to attend regular reviews with Rosie and enabled Rosie to express herself at her meetings regarding many issues, including contact, school, and placement permanency. As Rosie matured, she was able to advocate for herself and no longer needed the support of her advocate.

Feedback from professionals – 'Your involvement has made such a difference. Thank you.'

OTHER THEMES

Court Proceedings (4), Social Worker (4), CP meetings (3), Education (2), PA (2), Finance (2), Immigration/Asylum (1), FGC (1),



Kent Care Leavers



Number of Referrals = 12
Number of UASC young people = 3

Placement Issues	5
Support at Meetings	5
Court Proceedings	3
Finance	2
Housing	1
Disability	1
PA	1
Immigration/Asylum	1

Source of Referral;
Self-Referral = 6
KRAN = 1
YLF = 1
PA = 3
Become Charity = 1



Case Studies



UASC: Axmed (18yrs)

The Referral:

The referral was made by Axmed's mentor at KRAN.

"There hasn't been contact between Axmed and social services for some time. Axmed blocked his PA on WhatsApp after some frustrations. Axmed's mentor at KRAN informed his PA, a number of months ago, that Axmed was unhappy with his PA but there was no follow up. Axmed would like to re-engage - preferably with a new PA. There may be concerns about expectations from Axmed. His mentor has been supporting him with hospital appointments and is concerned that a volunteer is fulfilling a role that would more appropriate for social services to take."

Following the referral to YLF, Axmed was initially supported by a student social worker within the advocacy service, with line manager support. Axmed said he was unhappy with his PA and felt that the relationship had broken down. He felt he was not being listened to and said that he wanted to live in London. The advocate supported Axmed in an appeal to change his PA and this was submitted to the PA's manager but rejected. A subsequent meeting was held, which included Axmed, his PA, the PA's manager, the advocate and her manager. A plan of action was devised. This was followed up at a later date by the advocates manager (the student SW/advocate had left the service). The new advocate met with Axmed, who continued to say he was unsupported, although communication had improved between him and his PA. The advocate subsequently arranged a meeting with the PA, at Axmed's placement, and clear goals and targets were set. Axmed disclosed that he struggled to progress in his learning and development, despite a good grasp of English. He said that this was something that he had struggled with in his own Country. He also wanted to move to independence but was willing to remain in Kent in order to continue with his studies. Realistic and achievable goals were set for both Axmed and his PA to follow. The PA agreed to offer a higher level of support to Axmed and promised to guide him through his difficulties when searching for independent accommodation.



Staying Put



Staying Put: Harry (17.5 yrs)

The Referral:

The referral was made by Harry's foster carer;

"Harry is highly anxious as he is approaching 18yrs and does not know what the plan for accommodation will be when he leaves care. He has had a change of social worker and little contact from her regarding his care plan. Harry has ASD and does not like change."

Harry was allocated an advocate as soon as the referral came in. The advocate went out to meet Harry and his foster carer at the placement. Harry was becoming extremely anxious as he was 6 months away from his 18th Birthday and did not know what the post 18 plan was. He had received no guidance from the social worker and had no idea about the 18plus care leaving service. The advocate explained about the staying put process, as this is what Harry said he wanted as he had ASD and was fearful of a move to a potentially new placement at 18yrs. The advocate spoke to Harry and his foster carer about the staying put process. The foster carer raised her anxieties about being able to afford to keep Harry post 18. The advocate explained how the payments were broken into 'support fee', rent element from Universal Credit and Harry's contribution to food and utilities. She explained that Harry should qualify for enhanced support rate due to his ASD and additional support needs and explained that the additional support given to Harry would need to be evidenced. The advocate raised Harry's case to both the social worker and 18plus and requested some early intervention and discussions as Harry needed to be prepared for his transition at 18yrs. Both Harry and his foster carer were extremely appreciative of the information and support given.

The advocate made a follow up call close to Harry's 18th Birthday. The case had been taken to panel and the enhanced rate for KSH (Staying Put) had been agreed. A PA had been allocated. The PA had been out to meet with Harry. Both Harry and the foster carer were happy that things had moved in the right direction. Harry and his foster carer said that they were grateful for the information and support provided by the advocate and that this had helped them to make a plan and Harry had felt a lot less stressed about the pending transition to Adulthood.



Case Studies:

Child in Care to Care leaver, Complex Case



Daniel (16 yrs)

Daniel's advocate had supported him previously regarding a move of placement from Out of County back into Kent. Daniel asked for the same advocate when he was referred back to YLF at a later date. The reason for the referral was due to a number of concerns being raised about the suitability and professionalism of the placement in Kent. Additionally, Daniel was absconding from the placement and being permitted excessive internet usage despite restrictions in place.

Daniel asked his advocate to support him in meetings so that he could have some input into how he was feeling about plans to move him to a new placement. Daniel was moved several times due to anti-social activities and inappropriate behaviour with other residents. Eventually Daniel was transferred to another out of county placement in Essex and following some initial difficulties, began to settle well, with 1-1 support. He continued to receive support from his advocate despite the numerous moves and was able to report to his advocate that he was settled in his placement in Essex and was attending College. The advocate had also supported Daniel in voicing that he would like to continue to have contact with his sister who lived in Kent. The advocate was able to observe that Daniel had turned a corner. He was enjoying positive relationships with staff and fellow residents. Daniel told his advocate:

'Thank you loads for helping and supporting me. I am very happy in my placement and am doing well at College. This placement is much better than my last ones. I have a girlfriend too. I am seeing my sister for contact. This wouldn't have happened with you and my PA'



Case Studies:

Complaint

Freddie (12 yrs)

The Referral:

"Freddie had contacted his social worker via email as he was upset that she had not responded to his request to have contact with his siblings during the forthcoming half term holiday. He had been asking for this for some time prior to the referral being made. The social worker had responded to say that she had been busy and that Freddie's email was rude and had upset her. Freddie wanted support to request a change of social worker."

Freddie shared with his advocate that he did not feel his email was rude. He said that he felt that he had wanted to contact his social worker as he was sad about not seeing his siblings and this was important to him. He felt his social worker should support him. Freddie said that he wanted a change of social worker as he wanted to have a social worker he felt comfortable with and able to talk to without judgement. Freddie showed a copy of his email to his advocate who confirmed that the email was not rude, rather it was forthright and raised his concern regarding the lack of response to his request. Freddie asked his advocate to support him in requesting a change of social worker. The advocate raised a formal concern, on Freddie's behalf, to the social worker's manager. The manager supported Freddie's request and apologised for the way in which his email had been received. Freddie was happy with his new social worker and thanked the advocate for her support.



Case Studies:

Education SEN multiple issues

Alex (15 yrs)

The Referral:

"Alex's presenting issue involved advocacy support to change his education provision. He was in a PRU, with sporadic attendance but wanted to attend mainstream school."

Alex was allocated an advocate and it soon became apparent that there were numerous issues with which he required urgent support. He deservedly wanted a stable home after his parents no longer wished to accommodate him due to his challenging behaviours. At the time of referral Alex was on a CP plan under the category of emotional abuse. Alex was sofa surfing when his advocate first met with him. He then went to live with an adult cousin, recently released from prison on a lifetime licence. The cousin was considered by the local authority to be an unsuitable carer, and therefore, the LA felt they could not endorse these living arrangements. The LA raised repeated safeguarding issues, including recruitment from county-line gang members, risk of pregnancy for his 13-year-old girlfriend, and smoking cannabis. Complicating factors included a number of close family members prematurely dying and to compound matters, Alex had just discovered that his father was not his biological father, but instead, his uncle was his father. He was emotionally dysregulated due to lived experiences and had a low cognitive function.

Alex was repeatedly offered the opportunity to become a looked-after child but this was not what he wanted and he had previously absconded from foster care when this was forced upon him. Due to his low cognitive capacity, the advocate's support bordered on non-instructed advocacy. However, Alex had very clear wishes around what he wanted to do, even although they were often unsafe choices. Alex's family were continually unwilling to accommodate Alex, so the local authority had no choice but to support his cousin to look after him adequately. With intervention from the advocate, children's services agreed to provide Alex's cousin with a social work assistant to support, which was to a degree, partially successful. Alex remained on a CP plan during this time. The advocate contacted the CP chair frequently and kept alongside Alex throughout this difficult time.

Alex's cousin was eventually evicted from his property, leaving them both homeless. However, the advocate did a lot of research into eviction laws post lockdown and managed to facilitate alternative housing via the council. Alex's cousin was receiving no financial support for him during this time and the advocate supported in challenging this. The advocate also successfully secured funding for a laptop from VSK. Some months later, Alex's cousin was served a 28 day notice of prohibition (by children's services) stating that he could no longer adequately care for Alex, but giving no justifiable reason for this. The advocate challenged this decision on Alex's behalf, particularly as Alex continued to refuse foster care and had nowhere else to go. A few months later Alex fell out with his cousin, and their relationship broke down irretrievably. He went to live with his cousin's former girlfriend. Once again, the local authority voiced concerns about their suitability as she had an extensive police record, and her application to be a connected carer was unsuccessful. Alex, however, flourished in her care, and he started a new PRU school which he began to enjoy, and his attendance increased. After challenging the local authority countless times and evidencing the progress that Alex was making, it was eventually agreed that she could care for him formally, and a supervision order was put in place for one year.

Alex said: "You helped me to live with xxxxxx when they would send me back. You know I would have run and gotten into bother. Thanks for making them listen. Everything is now cushty"

Case Studies:

Placement plans and transitions

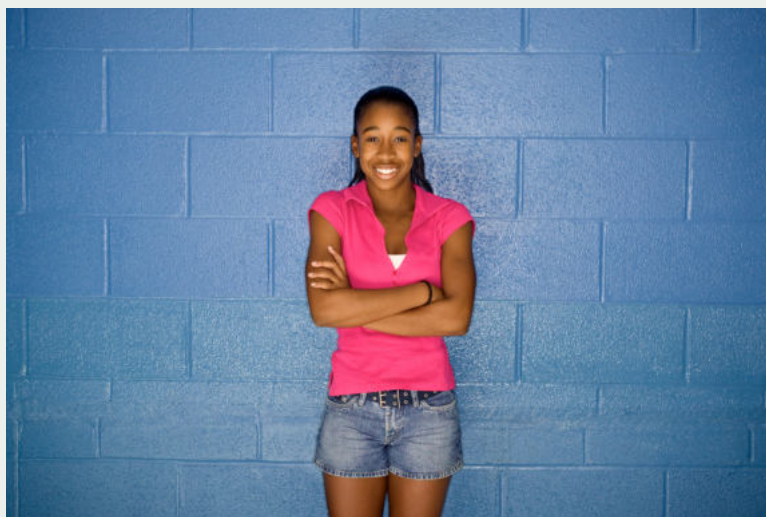
Lacey (15 yrs)

The referral:

"Lacey is currently in a residential unit and it has been agreed she will stay there until after her GCSE's in June 2023, and then we can look at supporting her to move to alternate accommodation. The plan is for Kent Supported Homes, but we have discussed other options such as Semi Independent. Lacey would like support in relation to her accommodation options as she feels the LA are trying to put her somewhere she doesn't want to go."

The advocate arranged a face to face meeting with Lacey at her placement. Lacey asked for staff to support her in the meeting. Lacey explained to the advocate that she felt stressed and under pressure to move from her placement once she had finished her GCSE exams. She said that she found it hard to focus on her exams and said that 'at a time when she should enjoy being turning 16 yrs she felt she was being forced to move'. Lacey explained that she liked her placement. It had taken a long time for her to get used to the residential placement following numerous foster placement breakdowns and she was anxious about another move. She said she didn't want to live in someone's house again and didn't think she was ready for semi-independent supported accommodation. Lacey told her advocate that she aspired to go to university. She advised her advocate to write to her social worker asking to delay a move until the following year, when she felt she would be more ready to move and would be closer to going to university the following year. The advocate put forward Lacey's wishes and feelings in a letter to the social worker. She also asked for a placement meeting to discuss the transition plan, giving consideration to Lacey's wishes and feelings.

At the placement meeting the following week the social worker acknowledged that she had spoken to Lacey and had given consideration to Lacey's wishes and feelings. However, Lacey had changed her mind and had said that she would agree to a move and was looking forward to this. She thanked the advocate for her support and said that she had felt 'listened to'. She said that she was happy with her change of mind but would contact the advocacy service if she needed support in the future.



Case Studies

Disability and transitions

David (17.5 yrs)

The Referral:

'David is 18 in November, at which point he will need to move to an 18+ provision. David has very complex needs and this transition will need to be well planned and carefully managed to ensure that he has an appropriate placement to move on to and all necessary steps are taken to facilitate a positive move. David is unable to read and write and has significant learning needs which affect every aspect of his life, he functions cognitively at a much younger age than 17. He is unable to manage money, has a very poor understanding of how to keep himself safe, has little understanding of the many facets of looking after himself and will not be able to live independently. However David does understand that he is 17 and is of the opinion that he will be able to do what he wants when he is 18. We have been chasing up the local authority for several months regarding his DOLS application which is necessary due to his lack of capacity to make decisions around many aspects of his care, because David is not in agreement that he needs it this application will have to be processed through the courts. We are also still awaiting the placement planning meeting to look at the next steps, this was supposed to have taken place by February. David has had 3 social workers over the last 3 months with one leaving in December and the replacement leaving in January. The new social worker is aware of the issues and has expressed that she will be moving on these issues imminently, our concern is that we only have 7 months before he is 18 and with his complex needs it will be challenging to find an appropriate placement and the search cannot seriously start until the DOLS is in place and the placement planning meeting has taken place.'

When speaking to our monthly inspector about this issue they suggested we get an advocate involved to assist us in ensuring all necessary steps are taken to put things in place for a successful transition.'

The advocate arranged a face to face meeting with David and the manager of the residential placement, to get a feel for David and his needs. The advocate met with David regularly following the initial meeting and ensured that she attended all CIC meetings and transition planning meetings on David's behalf. The advocate, alongside the manager of the placement, did a lot of chasing within different departments within KCC and eventually a suitable placement was found that David was happy with. The advocate visited David in his new placement and ascertained that he was happy, and his needs were being met.





Feedback

From Young People & Professionals

'You have been amazing, always there to help and nothing too much trouble. I got to see my daughter cos of you.'

'Thanks S, I now don't have to hand my phone in at night anymore just like everyone else here. '

'Thank you so much for your help'



" your's is the only service amongst social services care that is any good. You are my voice at all my meetings and because of that my voice is heard. Thank you so much for that"

"You helped me to live with xxxxxx when they would send me back. You know I would have run and gotten into bother. Thanks for making them listen. Everything is now cushty"

"I appreciate you



'Thank you very much A, you have been an amazing help'

" you were a star, thank you so much for helping"



"I would like to thank you for all your support and advice during these very testing times." **Father**

"I wanted to thank you for your support for A during this difficult time, it has really helped her to feel that she is being heard and we appreciate the time that you have given her" **Foster Carer**

"I would like to thank you for the support you gave us in one of our darkest times. It's given us confidence to advocate for each other. You would have been so proud to hear L at the latest CAMHS meeting when he stopped the doctor from being rude to me!" **Mother**

"Thank you for your ongoing work it's making a real difference." **Refugee Council**

"I want to thank you so much for all you have done for the girls" **Grandfather**

NEWS AND SERVICE UPDATES

Easter Egg Challenge

In the lead up to Easter, YLF collected eggs for children and young people to enjoy an 'egg-stra' special Easter!! YLF received over 1,700 chocolate eggs donated by local supporters of the charity. A massive thank you goes out to everyone who kindly donated, all services within YLF, including advocacy, benefited from this generosity and there were many happy 'bunnies' this Easter!!



NEW MODEL OF WORKING AND A FULLY STAFFED ADVOCACY TEAM:

YLF are proud to announce that the advocacy team are now fully staffed, with 1 Senior Advocacy Coordinator (Marcya Farmer), two full time advocates (Shelly Allen and Abbie Wright) and 4 sessional advocates (Carole Whittaker, Andrew Moon, David Thirlaway and Jo Vickery). Due to the continued high volume of referrals, the advocacy team remain 'issue based'. This allows our team to support every young person referred to the service and allows a quicker turn around of cases.

Over the last Quarter the advocacy team have supported 3 social work students within their 70 day placements. Between them these students have supported total of 34 young people. Two of these students have recently finished their placement but have come back to volunteer within the YLF service and the third student finishes his placement in April.

Feedback from the students was excellent:

"This has been the best and most amazing experience and I have learnt so much. I feel like I can be a real social worker now" Moyo
"Thank you so much for mentoring us and sharing your knowledge. You are an amazing team and the young people are so lucky to have you" Lauren and Vikki

