

The Young Lives Foundation

KENT ADVOCACY REPORT 2022-2023



#makingadifference



children and young people in Kent were supported by our Advocacy Service this past year. Out of these 144 were for a JHA.





81 Children and Young People 0-15yrs THEMES AND TRENDS

PLACEMENT

16 children between the ages of 0 -15 years asked for support with issues related to their placement. (move wanted, move not wanted, other) "stability means ensuring that every child in care is found the right placement as soon as possible. Careful matching is the first step in achieving stability. Too many Looked After Children are experiencing multiple moves and placement instability" Fostering Network

There has been a recent increase in referrals for children rising 16 years who are being told that that they need to move out of their residential placements (sometimes out of county), to move into semi independent accommodation in Kent when they turn 16 years.

TOP 10 ISSUES

SUPPORT AT MEETINGS = 34 PLACEMENT = 16 CONTACT = 15 CP MEETINGS = 12 DISABILITY = 10 SOCIAL WORKER = 6 EDUCATION = 5 COURT PROCEEDINGS = 2 IMMIGRATION/ASYLUM = 2 HOUSING = 1

CONTACT

15 children between the ages of 0 -15 years were supported in gaining their wishes and feelings regarding contact with their birth families. Children are often torn between what their families want and what they want for themselves. Children find it easier to please their families rather than considering their own needs.

Advocacy can give the young person an opportunity to express their own wishes and feelings in a safe, nonconfrontational environment where they do not have to please either their social worker or their family. Their advocate can express the child's views on their behalf, thus avoiding conflict and upset with family members.











SUPPORT AT MEETINGS

34 children between the ages of 015 years requested support at meeting.

Research shows that the majority of children in care are unaware of their entitlement to an advocate and may be left to fend for themselves in meetings with professionals. Children in care need to understand the decisions being made about them and to express their own views so that they can be involved in these decisions. Advocacy gives vulnerable children a voice. An advocate can help children and young people voice their opinions in environments that they may find challenging. An advocate ensures that the child or young person's rights are respected, and their voice is heard. Last uear 18 children were referred for support at meetings. This year, 34 children were referred for support at meetings, a massive increase of 89%.

0-15yrs THEMES AND TRENDS CONTINUED

DISABILITY

10 children with disabilities were referred to the advocacy service this past year.

Some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Kent are those who have complex communication and learning difficulties. Many have additional mental health issues related to their disabilities. Advocacy helps these young people to express themselves in an independent way. Advocates at YLF are skilled in liaising with professionals on behalf of these young people and representing their rights and entitlements where they are not able to do this for themselves.









Children and Young People 0-15yrs CASE STUDIES

Kyle (15 years) Support at Meetings

Kyle was initially referred to the advocacy service as he had raised concerns about his social worker and wanted to make a formal complaint. The advocate supported Kyle to talk through his issues regarding the social worker and helped him to put his thoughts and feelings forward in a letter of concern. The social worker responded in a positive way and agreed to have more contact with Kyle. Kyle had a history of absconding from his placements and was easily drawn into negative behaviours that raised concerns with the Local Authority. He was eventually placed in a secure unit for his own safety. Kyle's advocate supported him in numerous meetings, including CIC reviews, and advocated for him regarding family contact and being moved from the secure placement. Kyle felt that he had someone on his 'side' and he was eventually moved to a placement that was close to his birth family. Kyle learnt to advocate for himself in his meetings and eventually said that he " was ok now and didn't need anymore help". He thanked his advocate for her support over a very difficult period in his life.

Elsie (12 years) Placement Issue

Elsie was subject to a child protection plan after being assaulted by her mother and removed from the home via police protection. She was living with her paternal grandmother and wanted this arrangement to continue. Children's services were keen for her to try and restore her relationship with her mother, which Elsie didn't want to do. The Grandmother wished to apply for an SGO to care for Elsie and to be able to make decisions around her care and to be in receipt of financial support. The advocate supported this to happen and facilitated conversations with the social worker, who Elsie said wasn't listening to her. Elsie was stepped down to a CIN plan, and the SGO was granted.

Elsie said:

"You are so easy to talk to, thanks for getting social to listen and believe what I said."



Children and Young People 0-15yrs CASE STUDIES

Gracie, 13 years Contact

Gracie lived with with long term foster carers. She was referred due to difficulties around contact with her parents. The parents believed it was the LA who were stopping contact with them, but it was Gracie who had said she did not want contact. Acting independently, the advocate was able to gain Gracie's wishes and feelings about contact prior to her Child in Care reviews, and she represented her voice at these meetings. In this way, Gracie was able to be honest without having to face her parents and upset them with her views. Gracie also experienced some difficulties with peer relationships in school and the advocate suggested a referral to the 'Sense of Belonging Service', who devised some positive strategies for Gracie to implement. Contact with family is now three times a year which Gracie feels is manageable.

Gracie said: "Thank you for helping me" The foster carers said: "thank you so much for being there for Gracie, and us, because what helps Gracie, helps us."



Jamie (14 years) Disability

Jamie was referred to the advocacy service for support at his Child in Care reviews. Jamie was unable to contribute to meetings or decision making due to his complex additional needs. His mother was very supportive, but the social worker felt it would be beneficial for Jamie to have an independent person focused on ensuring his views, feelings and wishes were heard.

Jamie was placed at a specialist boarding school for children with complex difficulties. The advocate carried out face to face meetings over a couple of years and built a positive relationship with Jamie, whereby he felt confident in presenting Jamie's views to professionals at his CIC review meetings. The advocate continued to support Jamie until he was advised by the social worker that advocacy was no longer needed as Jamie was settled and staff were able to represent his views appropriately.



226 Children and Young People 16-17yrs THEMES AND TRENDS

JOINT ASSESMENT

There were 226 referrals this past year for young people aged 16 & 17 years. 62 % of young people in this age group were referred for support at a Joint Housing Assessment (142referrals). Each one of these young people were represented by an advocate at their JHA, with some positive feedback from both young people and professionals.

"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 or face greater difficulties in finding work. Preventing homelessness is key and there is increasing recognition that young people who are supported to remain with their family or friends have better outcomes than young people who are homeless." The Young Person and Homeless Report 2014

This past year there have been more referrals for support at Joint Housing Assessments than ever before (142). This has put increased pressure on the advocacy service, particularly as the response time for JHA's is within 24 hours. Most housing districts within Kent will not go ahead with a JHA unless there is support from an independent advocate. This has been evidenced where housing officers have asked social workers to re - present the young person to a follow up JHA with instruction to include an advocate, who can give independent support and information to the young person. The advocacy service has represented 100 % of young people at these vital and time sensitive assessments. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain with pressures on time and resources across the service.



HOMELESSNESS = 145 PLACEMENT = 27 SUPPORT AT MEETINGS = 19 DISABILITY = 14 SOCIAL WORKER = 9 HOUSING = 6 CP MEETINGS = 5 CONTACT = 4 EDUCATION = 4 FGC = 3 COURT PROCEDDINGS = 2 IMMIGRATION/ASYLUM = 2 PA = 2 FINANCE = 1









16-17yrs THEMES AND TRENDS CONTINUED

JOINT ASSESMENT (CONTINUED)

Thoughts of a Homeless Teen

"You was out on the streets at such a young age, Because of what you went through, you felt so ashamed. You ask yourself, 'was it something that I done? Did I hurt someone? Why was I abused at such a young age? Is that an adult stage? So many questions going through your mind, Keep you thinking all the time.



Who can I turn to? Where can I go, will it ever change, I don't know? My heart and mind are bursting to be free, and it is something I do forsee! Living in the streets with predators all around-no safe place can be found. Pimps and human traffickers are waiting on the streets, Offering them shelter and something to eat. Taking advantage of the situation they're in And knowing fully that they will win. Hunger and fear rule their minds, to the point they become blind.

This is the advantage point that these predators need,

- And on their weakness they do feed.
- You ran away from home because of the abuse and pain,
- To find out on the streets it's still the same.
- Thoughts and realisation are in your mind,
- And to be free will take time.
- But with determination you move ahead,
- And your fears can be put to bed,
- You must now help others by showing them the way,
- Cause on the streets they cannot stay.

Louis Rams



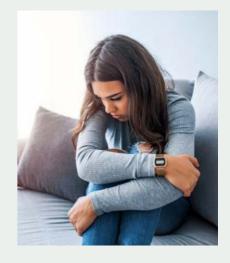


Children and Young People 16-17yrs CASE STUDIES

Co Operative working:

Millie (17yrs)

Millie had significant mental health issues with complex diagnosis. She was from Medway but wanted to live in Kent, close to her support networks. She had no family support and was sofa surfing with her boyfriend's family in Kent. This was a toxic relationship with a partner who kept 'throwing her out'. The advocate helped Millie to understand her rights and entitlements and encouraged co operative working between Kent and Medway services (children's services in Kent were supporting Millie, who was presented to Medway Council for a JHA). "Millie also said that she is grateful for all the support that has been offered by everyone involved and can't thank us all enough. " (The above email was sent by a new housing officer who was extremely appreciative of the knowledge and support given by the advocate, who helped the young person to navigate between Kent Children's Services and Medway housing department).



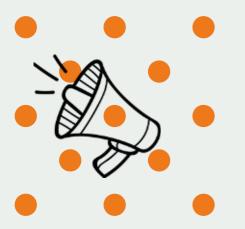
Millie said **"Thank you so much, it all makes sense to me now"** The social worker said: **"Thankyou for speaking with Millie and giving Millie clear information to what her options are in respect of housing."** Millie was placed in supported accommodation in Kent. The KCC social worker made the referral to the accommodation but Medway Housing accepted responsibility for Millie.



Joseph (17 years)

Joseph had significant drug and alcohol issues. He admitted to drinking vodka daily and smoked cannabis to alleviate his mental health issues. He was unable to return home due to the risks he posed to his younger siblings. The advocate helped Joseph to understand his rights and entitlement in terms of the Children Act 1989 and the Housing Act 1996. The housing officer was inexperienced and gave Joseph inaccurate information about his options. This was challenged by the advocate and the social worker, who asked that the housing officer was clear and honest in the information they were giving Joseph. With all the information presented to him, Joseph was able to identify that he needed a high level of support and somewhere safe to live. He opted for s.20 which was agreed by children's services.

The social worker said: "I Just wanted to pop you a quick message to say thank you for your support in the joint assessment today. I thought you were so clear, and really helped us explain the different options, whilst focusing on J's needs and what was important to him. Thanks again ©"



Children and Young People 16-17yrs CASE STUDIES

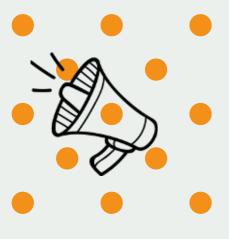
Placement Issues

27 young people aged 16 & 17 years asked for support with placement issues this past year. As reported by the senior advocacy coordinator, who is often the first point of contact for the referrer and the young person, there have been some conversations of concern regarding children in care via KCC, who are saying they are settled in their current residential or independent foster placements, who are being told that they have to move into either independent (Ready Homes) or semi- independent placements within Kent. Some of these children are 16 years and others are 17 years. The children are aware that they will need to move before their 18th Birthday but are saying they would have expected to have more time in the placements that they are settled in and have been in for some time. Trends show that transitions within Kent can sometimes appear to be very quick, with very little planning time, making it difficult to challenge decisions.

Jack (17years)

Jack was given 28 days notice on his placement. He told his advocate that he "didn't know that this had happened" and that "he liked his placement and felt settled for the first time in years". Jack did not feel ready to move. He had spent many years struggling with his mental health and had had numerous foster placements that had broken down. Staff at his current placement had worked hard to support him and had finally helped Jack to achieve some stability in his life. Jack's relationship with his social worker had become fractious following the news of his move. He felt that his voice was not listened to, and he had no say in the proposed move. Jack asked for support from an independent advocate to help to have his voice heard. The advocate learnt, from the social worker, that Jack was spending less time in the placement and not utilising the extra hours of support available to him. However, With the advocate's support, children's services agreed to delay the move to allow Jack more time to prepare for his transition to semi- independence.

Jack thanked the advocate for her support. He acknowledged that he was becoming more independent and spending less time in the placement, but still needed time to adjust to the idea of another move.



44 Care Leavers 18-25yrs

THEMES AND Trends

Housing & Placement Issues

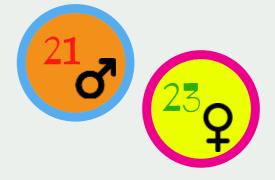
During this last year, there have been several referrals from Care Leavers raising concerns about their housing situation. Issues range from the poor condition of Ready Homes properties, being placed in Ready Homes that are far away from their preferred areas and struggling to get housing via the council, despite 'Duty to Refer' referrals being made by their PA's.

Young People say that they 'do not feel safe, do not feel listened to and feel they have no say in where they have to live'.

In addition to current concerns, the advocacy service are starting to see referrals for young people who are homeless, having been asked to leave their Ready Homes placements due to their age. Local Housing Authorities are not viewing these young people as having priority need and vulnerable young people are having to sofa surf and rely on the goodwill of friends to support them

ISSUES

PLACEMENT - 11 HOUSING - 10 DISABILITY - 9 PA - 8 SUPPORT AT MEETINGS - 7 EDUCATION - 5 COURT PROCEEDINGS - 5 CP MEETINGS - 4 FINANCE - 3 CONTACT - 2 IMMIGRATION/ASYLUM - 1 SOCIAL WORKER - 1



Karim, aged 21 years, was referred by his employer. He was a UASC care leaver who had successfully gained an apprenticeship with Kent Highways. He had been evicted from a Ready Homes property due to his age and was sofa surfing with a friend, outside of Kent. He was unable to start his job as he had nowhere to live and could not afford to travel back to Kent. His PA had submitted a duty to refer but the local housing authority did not view him as priority need for emergency housing, as they said he was not vulnerable, although they accepted a Duty to support him. The advocate challenged the housing authority and quoted relevant legislation pertaining to vulnerable care leavers, particularly those who are seeking asylum.

The advocacy service predicts an increase in referrals such as Karim's, particularly as the recommendations cited below begin to impact on young people and housing resources across Kent become increasingly stretched.

"Ofsted introduced regulations for current unregulated accommodation from 28th October 2023. KCC commissioners undertook a full review of the Shared Accommodation Service, Young Person's Supported Accommodation Service and Floating Support Services and recommended that the services be aligned, categorised into levels of need, and expanded to reduce the reliance on independent accommodation providers. The revised supported accommodation structure within Kent suggests that all 16/17 year old young people will receive support to ensure that they have the ability to live independently by 19yrs."



Care Leavers 18-25yrs CASE STUDIES

Housing

Amir (18 years)

As a minor (under 18 years) Amir lived in a Ready Homes in an area that was close to his college, mosque and friendship group. His placement was terminated when he reached 18 years and he was told he had to move to a different Ready Homes property that was in a different town, a considerable distance away from the area he had become familiar with. He knew nobody in the new Town, and was not able to access work or education. He had no buss pass and was unable to afford travel back to his familiar area. At the point of referral (via KRAN), Amir was sofa surfing with friends. The social worker had made no contact with Amir in several weeks and he did not know who his PA was.

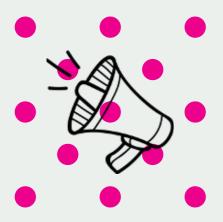
The advocate engaged with Amir via Language Line (and through his friend). He contacted the social worker on Amir's behalf, and arranged an introduction meeting with the new PA. Although there were no available Ready Homes in Amir's preferred area, the PA agreed to submit a referral for a search for a placement closer to Amir's preferred area, and applied for a bus pass on his behalf. The PA organised travel support to college via the college bursary. Amir was not happy to be so far away from his friends, but accepted that the LA were trying to resolve his issues.

Akeem (19 years)

Akeem referred himself to the advocacy service. He had been living in a Kent Supported Homes since he was 17 years but he felt that the relationship with his host had broken down and that his PA was not taking him seriously and not helping to facilitate a move to independent accommodation (Ready Homes). He had become hostile towards his PA because he felt that his voice was not being heard. The advocate liaised with the PA on Akeem's behalf. The PA confirmed that a referral had been made to Ready Homes, however, she agreed to escalate this as a matter of urgency. Within a short space of time, Akeem was offered a placement in a Ready Homes property that was close to college and to his place of work. He was extremely appreciative of his advocate and said:

"Thank God I have got you on my side"

Akeem had lost trust in his PA and just needed some support to re-establish his relationship with her. Referrals demonstrate that this is quite a common theme with many Care Leavers, who struggle to understand processes and find it difficult to appreciate the general lack of resources and housing across the County. Advocates often find themselves in the position of mediation between the Care Leaver and the PA, helping to facilitate communication and resolve issues in a cooperative way.



Care Leavers 18-25yrs CASE STUDIES

Pre Court Proceedings

Josie, 22 years

Josie's PA referred her for independent support with pre-court proceedings for her unborn baby. Josie was 8 months pregnant and had been advised by her unborn baby's social worker that the LA was entering into a PLO for her and the unborn baby. Josie had been advised to get a solicitor to represent her at the initial PLO meeting. Josie was terrified. She was in a relationship where there were concerns about domestic violence and her partner's use of drugs. Josie was also facing homelessness as her and her partner had been evicted from their flat.

The advocate signposted Josie to an excellent solicitor who had a specific team that supported Care Leavers and children in care with pre-court proceedings. Josie instantly engaged with her solicitor and asked the advocate to also continue to support her in her PLO meetings. Soon after the baby was born, Josie split up with her partner and was placed in a Mother and Baby foster placement. She thrived in the placement and grew in confidence. She asked her advocate to continue to support her, when needed, but found the confidence to advocate for herself at meetings. Josie asked for support in a meeting with a Family Group Conference officer as she had, by this time, established that she did not want her ex-partner to have contact with her daughter due to his ongoing drug issues.

Josie is waiting for housing via the council and is anticipating the baby's status to be changed from Child Protection to Child in Need.



FEEDBACK FROM CARE LEAVERS 18-25YRS

When we end our work with young people we always ask them to reflect on their experience and give us feedback about the advocacy service and any suggestions as to how we could improve the service. Young people are always given information about how to access our service again if they need our support. and our freephone number



0808 164 0096

Most young people send their Advocates text messages to give their feedback and say "Thank you"





"THANK YOU MISS ADVOCATE , You always call me and Ask how things are going, You are the only one who Cares about me. Thank you"





"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR HELPING ME, YOU REALLY ARE A GOOD PERSON, YOU HELP ME A LOT" "THANK YOU, I HAVE

RESPECT AND Appreciation for you"

"THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR EVERYTHING YOU STAND FOR ME" "THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP, I AM VERY HAPPY , THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND AGAIN THANK YOU SO MUCH"



IMPACT OF ADVOCACY



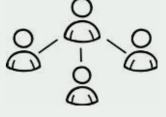






357 CASES CLOSED

Advocacy Complete - All Issues Resolved = 238 Advocacy Complete - Issues Outstanding = 35 Advocacy Complete - Outcome Unknown = 22 Lost Contact = 17 Did not take up Advocacy = 45





ADVOCACY SUPPORT AT A JHA

Despite a significant increase in referrals for support for homeless 16 & 17 year olds, 100% of young people referred for support at their joint housing assessment were supported by an advocate. The advocate helped the young person to understand their rights and entitlements in relation to the Law, and all these young people were able to make informed decisions about their future, thus reducing homelessness and empowering young people to take control of their life choices.



ADVOCACY AND CHILD PROTECTION

The presence and support of an advocate enables vulnerable children and young people who are living in critical situations to have their wishes and feelings represented and respected, with their voices playing a crucial part in the shaping of their futures. When children are listened to, they feel that they are taken seriously and included in plans for their futures. 76.50% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAD THEIR ADVOCACY RELATED ISSUES RESOLVED BY THEIR ADVOCATE !





IMPACT OF ADVOCACY











ADVOCACY & COMMUNICATION



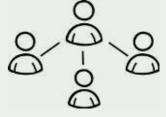
https://www

Advocacy can play an important role in the facilitation of communication between the young person and the professional who is supporting them (social worker/PA). Many referrals relate to poor communication or breakdown in communication between the young person and their social worker/PA. The advocate can play an important part in helping to resolve issues and improve communication, thus enhancing the efficacy of social work interventions.

THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

The high demand for advocacy support over the last year has placed considerable strain on the service, with advocates working at case capacity and beyond to meet the needs of children and young people, some facing time critical issues and life changing situations. In order to meet demand and continue to provide a high quality service, YLF has recruited two new sessional advocates to join the team. In addition to this, the advocacy service continues to offer 70 day placements to social work students. This last year, 6 students have benefitted from their time within the service (2 students are still in placement). All of the students said that advocacy was the 'best experience they had ever had and feel they will be better social workers because of it"

In consultation with young people, there have been significant improvements to the YLF website this last year, with some amendments to policies, leaflets and the introduction of postcards for children and young people that explain each service in a concise and comprehensible way.



76.50% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAD THEIR ADVOCACY RELATED ISSUES RESOLVED BY THEIR ADVOCATE !

FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

New, electronic and easy to use feedback forms have been designed in order to encourage young people to share their views about their advocate. To date, advocates are consistently scoring between 4 and 5 stars (out of 5).

"THANK YOU FOR HELPING THEM TO LISTEN TO US, YOU ARE Really easy to talk to and it's much better Now that they are Listening"

"WHEN S STARTED WORKING WITH ME, I FELT FOR THE FIRST TIME I HAD SOMEONE WHO WAS ON MY SIDE. I CAN'T FAULT HER, SHE IS AMAZING AND HAS LISTENED TO ME AND GIVEN ME THIS KIND OF POWER INSIDE TO HAVE A VOICE AND FIGHT FOR MY RIGHTS"

"THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR The support and help you have given me, I wasn't expecting such good news so quickly and I am very grateful" "Th " THANK YOU SO MUCH For everything you Helped me with, you're A star"

"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"

"THANK YOU FOR ALL THE Help you have given me, i Really appreciate it. You Work hard"

"YOU LISTENED AND CARED About what I wanted to Say. You got stuff done!"



"MY ADVOCATE LISTENED TO ME AND TOOK THE TIME TO SIT DOWN WITH ME. I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANYTHING THEY COULD HAVE IMPROVED. I FOUND THE YLF ADVOCACY SERVICE VERY USEFUL AND HELPFUL AND WOULD RECOMMEND THEM TO ANYONE WHO NEEDS LISTENING TO."

YOUNG PERSON THANKED THE ADVOCATE FOR ALL THE SUPPORT AND COMMENTED THAT SHE HAD FELT WELL SUPPORTED AND HER VIEWS AND INFORMATION RESPECTED.

"I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK You, I FEEL REASSURED. THANK God I have got you on my Side!"

"OH MY GOD, YOU HAVE BEEN Amazing, you were the only one who listened to me. Thank you so much"



ADVOCACY Professional SERVICE Feedback

We will use this feedback to develop the service in the coming year. This is some of what they told us....

"Thank you for your help, you are a superstar" - Teacher

"You have been amazing, you have a real affinity for young people, we are forever grateful for your intervention" - Parent

"You are so good, a real natural with young people, there is nothing false about you" - Mother

"I Just wanted to pop you a quick message to say thank you for your support in the joint assessment today. I thought you were so clear, and really helped us explain the different options, whilst focusing on J's needs and what was important to him. - Thanks again ©" Social Worker

"I Just wanted to say that it was an absolute pleasure everytime our paths crossed and that you have done amazing work and changed outcomes for so many children." - Social Worker

"Thank you for your support and advice in getting this positive outcome for this young person" Social Worker

Recommendations for the Advocacy Service......

More

leaflets

I am not sure how easy it is for teenagers to access the service in a way that they feel comfortable

100%

They would

recommend the

Advocacy Service to others

100%

Of those who had made a referral

said theu found

the process easy

Helping young people to have realistic expectations and working in partnership with their Social Worker. Raise the profile of Advocacy



CHALLENGES AND Development



During October 2022 and September 2023 the Advocacy Service worked hard to meet an ever increasing demand on the service. Referrals for support at JHA's escalated considerably, making up around 68% of all referrals. The advocacy team became multi skilled and were able to meet these new challenges, with 100% of young people represented at their JHA meetings.

This past year (October 2022 to September 2023) the advocacy service has supported and mentored 6 student social workers, who, in turn, have represented the voices and helped to resolve issues for a total of 75 + children and young people.

Due to the significant increase in demand on the service and staff turnover, this last year the advocacy service introduced a triage system, whereby those children and young people with significant and time critical issues and needs were allocated an advocate immediately and other young people were assured that they would be allocated an advocate within 2 – 4 weeks of referral. 100% allocation success was achieved using this system and all young people who were asked, expressed satisfaction with the service. With the recruitment of two new advocates, it is hoped that waiting times will be further reduced or eliminated altogether.

Advocates continue to develop new and innovative ways to communicate with young people. Google translate via What's App has helped advocates to build relationships with UASC young people, young people and advocates have become more adept at using What's App video calls and TEAMS, as well as face time, and many young people do not always feel the need for face to face meetings as they are used to communicating via text and What's App. Advocates continue to offer face to face contact where needed but are able to work more effectively, with higher case- loads, where virtual contact is agreed and appropriate.

The YLF website has been re designed and updated, with new style referral forms for the advocacy service. Postcards are being designed to explain the advocacy service in a more young person friendly way. Policies have been updated and a new electronic feedback form has been created for young people to be able to express their views in an anonymous and confidential way.



Black Belt Advocacy Award Nomination 2023:

Advocacy is one of the best things in the World when it is done well. The Black Belt Advocacy Awards celebrate outstanding practice, people and organisations.

This is a response from a foster carer who has nominated David Thirlaway, one of our longest serving advocates who typically supports children and young people with significant learning difficulties, many of whom are non- verbal:

"Our nomination" - I would like to nominate David Thirlaway advocate at the YLF - For 'Outstanding Advocate'

I spoke to my young man about David and how he felt about him being his advocate, he told me "He's nice, he's a good detective, kind and he sometimes helps me out with my problems, he is amazing. He deserves this award because he is the best"

David, an advocate, has made a significant impact by supporting a young man with autism and disabilities from the disabled fostering team during his transition from foster care to the young people's team 16-25 at KCC into Shared lives. Despite the many challenges the young man faces due to communication and understanding difficulties, David has been a constant source of support and comfort. Whenever the young man feels troubled, David is there to spend time with him, providing much needed reassurance and support.

When he was younger the only way we could explain an advocate role was similar to a detective and he adopted David by that name, David was so kind and went along with this until he eventually grasped David's role.

ADVOCACY TEAM NEWS



David's dedication and genuine concern have brought about positive changes in the young man's life. His continuous support has helped the young man feel more secure and confident during his transitional journey, promoting a sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing. David's advocacy has ensured that the young man's needs and rights were effectively communicated and represented throughout the process. He has been a strong voice, standing up for this young man's rights and ensuring that his unique challenges are understood and addressed.

In the face of adversity, David's dedication has brought a sense of hope and positivity. He has shown that, despite changes and obstacles, there are still caring and committed individuals advocating for the well-being of vulnerable young people in care

Overall, David's support as an advocate has been invaluable, providing stability, representation, and emotional support during a critical time in this young man's life and making a positive impact on our journey from foster carers to shared lives. David's commitment to making a difference is having a profound impact on this young man's life, making David an exceptional advocate."

Foster Carer

We wish David good luck and even if he doesn't win a Black Belt Award in November, he is certainly a winner for us!!







Student Social Workers

Over this last year, 6 social work students have joined the advocacy team in order to gain vital experience for their Degree in social work and all six students said that the knowledge and learning gained will enhance their practice as future social workers.

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"

"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"

The Team

This year saw the departure of our much-loved advocate, Carole Whittaker. But this year also saw the recruitment of two new advocates, Colin Field and Dawn Robertson.

And finally, a massive Thank You to:

Kristy Tidey (Director of Statutory Services), Marcya Farmer (Senior Advocacy Coordinator), Shelly Allen (Full time Advocate), Abbie Wright (Full time Advocate), David Thirlaway (Advocate), Andrew Moon (Advocate), Jo Vickery (Advocate), Hazel Leah (Temporary Advocate) and our social work students for helping to keep the voices of children and young people at the centre of social work practice and at the heart of everything we do.





Raising Funds for YLF

Our very own Advocate, Shelly Allen, joined forces with 4 other colleagues in YLF to undertake an amazing challenge to raise funds for the charity. She put on her walking boots and braved the wind and rain to travel to Wales and climb Mount Snowden. The 'Famous Five' (as described on Local Radio) raised a whopping £1345 For the charity.





Changes to the Advocacy Team

This Quarter has seen an increased demand on the Advocacy Service, with a rise in the number of referrals submitted coinciding with the departure of a valued member of the Team. For the first time in a long while we have had to create a short waiting list, that will be managed by triaging referrals according to need.

At the end of August, the Advocacy Team said goodbye to our outstanding advocate, Carole Whittaker. Carole was sad to say goodbye but excited to embark on a new venture within the NHS. We wished her well and thanked her for all her hard work over the last 5 years.

The Advocacy Service are pleased to announce the successful recruitment of two new Sessional Advocates, Dawn and Colin, who are excited to start their new role in October.





"When S started working with me, I felt for the first time I had someone who was on my side. I can't fault her, she is amazing and has listened to me and given me this kind of power inside to have a voice and fight for my rights"

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