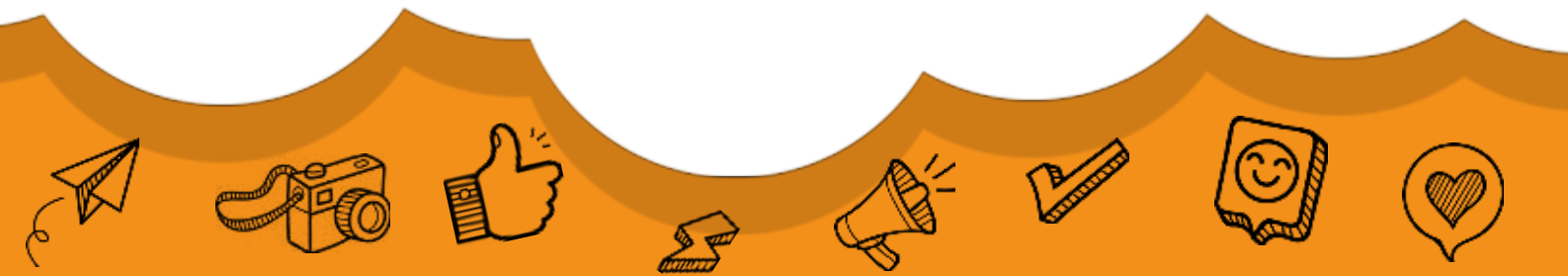




The Young Lives Foundation

MEDWAY ADVOCACY REPORT

October - December 2023



#makingadifference

ADVOCACY MISSION....



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



IMPROVING RESILIENCE AND
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL
WELLBEING

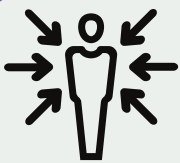


IMPROVING EXPERIENCES
INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE
IN CARE AND LEAVING CARE



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



38

**New referrals received
this quarter**

ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



CHANGES FOR INDIVIDUALS

- This Quarter 38 children and young people were allocated an advocate. All these children and young people had issues that they needed support to resolve. Having their own advocate to stand beside them and be their voice, when needed, gave these children and young people a sense of importance and empowerment. This report captures important data on the number and nature of referrals, but nothing speaks louder than the feedback given by a child whose life has changed due to the impact of advocacy: "You helped me a lot. I didn't want to be in Medway, it was 7 years since I lived there. This is my home and I'm pleased to be back. You helped by listening to me. I got back with my real Mum and Dad (not my birth Mum). They taught me to read and write and swim when I was eleven. Thank you."



CHANGES TO HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

- In December one young person was given an opportunity to meet with the Head of Children's Services following his complaint against Medway for historical abuse whilst in the care of the local authority. This young person was given an opportunity to talk about how he wanted to influence change in the system. He was offered an opportunity to become involved in the training and recruitment of social workers and invited to join MCYPC at YLF. This young person said that he would like social workers to listen to children and young people more and ask basic questions, such as 'have they brushed their teeth'. He was told " This is within my gift to influence, and I will work with my service to ensure we are doing exactly that".



CHANGES TO WIDER COMMUNITY

- Advocacy can help young people to find a voice when reporting safeguarding concerns. Many young people this quarter 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. This Quarter, 8 homeless 16 & 17year old young people were supported by an advocate during their Joint Housing Assessment. Independent and impartial support allowed them to make decisions that they felt were in their best interests, thus reducing future risk of homelessness for these young people.

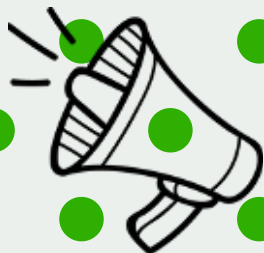


CHANGES TO THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

- The end of this Quarter saw the departure of Kristy Tidey from her role as Director of Advocacy Programmes. However, Kristy remains an integral part of YLF and is very excited to start her new role as Director of Youth Programmes at YLF. This Quarter we welcomed our new Director of Advocacy Programmes, Carly Maskell.

New Referrals

THEMES AND TRENDS



NEW REFERRALS –SERVICE USER BREAKDOWN

The main purpose of an advocate is to enable children and young people to express their wishes and feelings and to encourage the empowerment of children and young people to uphold their Rights. The advocacy team focuses on issue - based advocacy and aims to encourage young people to self-advocate and have the confidence to be able to express themselves to professionals involved in their care planning.

CIC = 10

CIN = 9

JHA = 8

CP = 7

FGC = 4

CL = 0

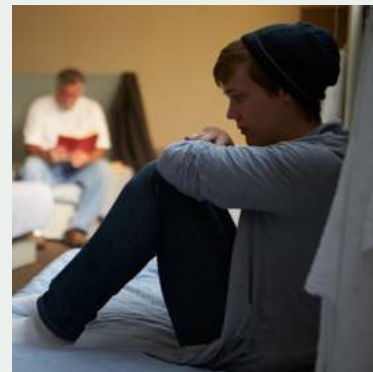


3 young people referred to the services this quarter identified as transgender or non-binary



TOP ISSUES

1. Housing/Homelessness – 10
- 2.Support at meetings – 8
- 3.Child Protection – 7
- 4.Court Proceedings – 6
- 5.Placement – 2
- 6.Contact – 1
- 7.Disability– 1



New Referral Breakdown by Age

11	0 - 10 yrs
7	11 - 15 yrs
20	16 & 17 yrs
0	18 - 21 yrs
0	22 - 25 yrs

Housing/Homelessness

8 young people who found themselves homeless this Quarter had support from an advocate during their Joint Housing Assessment. This enabled them to be informed of their rights and entitlements in an independent and impartial way, thus allowing them to make an informed choice about their accommodation and support needs.

CASE STUDIES:

Homelessness

Claire 17 years old

Following an irretrievable relationship breakdown with her mother, Claire was asked to leave the family home. Prior to the JHA, the advocate spoke to Claire about her rights and entitlements under both Children's Act and housing law. A JHA was held, and Claire opted for supported accommodation via the council route.

Louis 16 years old

Louis turned 16 one month prior to the JHA. Following a family breakdown, he was kicked out of the family home. The advocate supported Louis in the JHA, as he found this confusing and had lots of questions to ask. After hearing his story, the housing officer refused to continue with the JHA as Louis was still in year 11 at school and had been completely abandoned by his family. The social worker agreed to sign Louis into care, under s.20, and placed Louis in emergency housing whilst undertaking a search for foster care in the local area

Phoebe 16 years old

A JHA was held with Medway Council for Phoebe, who had recently moved to the area from Surrey, to live with her dad. The relationship had broken down. The advocate supported Phoebe in the JHA. Housing said that Phoebe did not qualify for homeless duty as she only moved to the area 2 months ago. The advocate helped Phoebe to understand why she was not eligible for housing via Medway (Phoebe did not want to enter care). Phoebe was supported by her social worker to present to Surrey Council for a fresh JHA.



CASE STUDIES:

Support at meetings

“An advocate is independent from any other professional. They are there to listen to you and to make sure you are involved in all decisions made about your life. An advocate can go to meetings with you, or on your behalf, and represent your wishes, feelings, and views to professionals around the table.”

Alex 16 years old

Alex had been in his foster placement for 7 years but was struggling both in the placement and in his college placement. There was also police involvement whereby the foster carers felt unable to continue to care for Alex, and he was transferred to an emergency respite placement following a violent incident. Alex was referred to the advocacy service at this point. He was reported to be feeling suicidal. The Local Authority searched throughout the south of England for a new placement. Throughout all this time, Alex expressed that he wanted to remain in the area where he had spent the last seven years. Alex's advocate continued to feedback his wishes and feelings to his social worker. Alex was placed in a supported living placement in Medway, far away from his preferred area. With persistence from his advocate and various meetings to discuss placement option, Alex was finally able to return to his former foster carers. Soon after this, he started attending a new local college.



CASE STUDIES:

Child Protection



Evidence has consistently shown that ‘the child’s voice is often not heard and effectively represented in child protection cases.’ Research has found that both professionals and children themselves think that the meaningful engagement of children in the decision- making process would lead to improved outcomes for children at risk. For example, an independent review into child protection and social work practice reported on a submission made by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England, in which children who had experience of the child protection system ‘voiced the importance of being heard separately from their parents and being listened to’ (Munro 2011). The children consulted for this review found the child protection process confusing and wanted better information, greater honesty, and consistent support from the same worker through services which would not be withdrawn as soon as the crisis has passed.

The Advocacy Team are proud of the support they give to children and young people at an incredibly stressful and vulnerable time in their lives. The Team is appreciative of the diligence and compassion that Medway pay to these children by allowing them to have their voices represented via advocacy. This Quarter, 16 children and young people had support from an advocate either in court proceedings (6), Child Protection Meetings (6) or Family Group Conferences (4).

Carl 13 years old - The Advocate said: “Carl and his brothers were allocated to me as their advocate, after SS became involved following an incident with their Mum and the oldest of the boys, Reggie. It became known that Mum had problems with drink and drugs, but this was denied by her as being a problem. Carl is a very quiet child, and it was hoped that he would ‘open up’ to an advocate if he needed someone to talk to. I was very aware that Carl was very loyal to his Mum, and he did not want to say anything that would get her in trouble or upset her. Carl always engaged when I spoke or messaged him, but did always say that everything was OK, even when I knew that maybe it wasn’t. I offered him the chance to speak away from home and tried to call/message when I knew he would be walking home from school. Carl was very close to his Nan, and for a while his Mum had stopped him going to see her. This had upset Carl, and we did manage to get this re-instated after presenting his views about this at the CP meeting. Mum worked with SS to prove she was committed to the safe care of her sons, and the case was dropped down from CP to CIN.”

Closed Cases

THEMES AND TRENDS



35 CASES WERE CLOSED DURING THE QUARTER

16

Advocacy complete - All Issues resolved

4

Advocacy support complete - Outstanding issue for YP

4

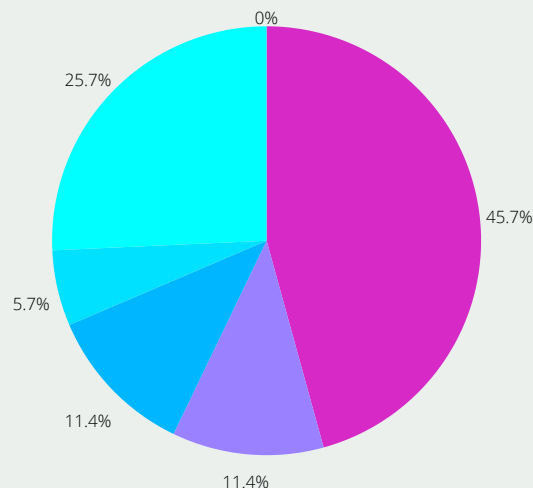
Advocacy complete - Issue Outcome unknown/Lost contact

2

Advocacy incomplete - Issue Outcome unknown/Lost contact

9

Young person did not take up Advocacy*



68.6 % of children and young people supported by advocacy had their issues resolved this Quarter.

Note: Outstanding issues would be beyond the remit of advocacy.

Advocacy incomplete/outcome unknown could be a result of the young person feeling they no longer need support and are able to advocate for themselves. An Advocates aim is to empower the young person towards self-advocacy.

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.



"YOU GUYS HELPED ME A LOT. I DIDN'T WANT TO BE IN MEDWAY, IT WAS 7 YEARS SINCE I LIVED THERE. THIS IS MY HOME AND I'M PLEASED TO BE BACK. YOU HELPED BY LISTENING TO ME. I GOT BACK WITH MY REAL MUM AND DAD NOT MY BIRTH MUM. THEY TAUGHT ME TO READ AND WRITE AND SWIM WHEN I WAS ELEVEN. THANK YOU."



0808 164 0096



"THANK YOU VERY MUCH, YOU WERE VERY PROFESSIONAL AND HELPFUL".

"THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING, YOU MADE SUCH A DIFFERENCE."

"ON MY LAST VISIT, SHE HUGGED ME TWICE AS WE TALKED AND GIGGLED ABOUT THINGS OUTSIDE OF FAMILY MATTERS SUCH AS MUSIC AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS. THIS IS HUGE FOR T AS SHE DOES NOT LIKE PHYSICAL CONTACT." ADVOCATES FEEDBACK ON HER GOODBYE VISIT (YP HAS DISABILITIES)

"THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING THAT NIGHT. I WAS VERY UPSET AND I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH" '

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE ADVOCACY SERVICE ?

We are currently developing a new website with easier access to information and online referrals. We have re written our policies and procedures, in consultation with young people, and believe these to be clearer and easier to read and understand by our service users.

We ensure young people know of their right to complain and to request an alternative advocate where possible.

We triage referrals in order of urgency and look to allocate an advocate as soon as possible so that no young person has to wait to have their voice heard.

We have devised a new, electronic feedback form that is easy to use and quick to complete.



FEEDBACK FROM PROFESSIONALS

“Mum thanked me for all my help in ensuring that A’s wishes and feelings were being spoken about at all meetings.”

Advocates report on parent feedback

“I understand the letter for D was sent to you last week, just want to check that you have it. I hope it helps D and he feels he was heard. Thank you for being his advocate- its such an important role.”

Medway safeguarding and quality assurance officer

“It has been a pleasure working with you, thank you for all the support you have given to M”

Social Worker

“I appreciate that this is your "role", however I would like to thank you for your help with this. You have completely captured how C is feeling and I hope this now pushes them to resolve this positively for C. Thank you!”

House Manager

“Thank you so very much I really do appreciate it. I know having your input will be beneficial to his LAC review and how we can support T moving forward.”

Social Worker



NEWS AND SERVICE UPDATES

CHANGES TO THE ADVOCACY TEAM

Kristy Tidey says “Goodbye” as she starts her new venture as Director Of Youth Programmes in YLF.



The Advocacy Service welcomes Carly Maskell, the new Director of Advocacy Programmes at YLF.

