



The Young Lives Foundation

# MEDWAY ADVOCACY REPORT

2022 - 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

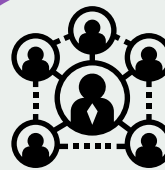
# ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



CHANGES FOR  
INDIVIDUALS



CHANGES TO HEALTH &  
SOCIAL CARE



CHANGES TO WIDER  
COMMUNITY



CHANGES TO THE  
ADVOCACY SERVICE

# ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



## CHANGES FOR INDIVIDUALS

This past year 143/170 children and young people had their issues resolved with support from their advocate.

100 % of homeless young people aged 16 & 17 years were supported by an independent advocate at their Joint Housing Assessment. These young people were enabled to make informed choices about their lives and helped to understand their rights and entitlements in relation to the Law.

This past year 46 children and young people were referred for support with child protection processes, thus reducing fear and anxiety and enabling them to have a voice in plans made to safeguard them and their families.

41 children in care asked for support to have their voices heard in their statutory meetings, giving them an opportunity to be listened to and to have a say in plans made about their lives and their futures. Young people are important, and their thoughts wishes and feelings matter. Many young people said they felt glad that someone was on their side and was helping them to get their point across to professionals. Young people felt empowered to advocate for themselves in the future.

17 Care Leavers asked for help from an advocate. This often involved facilitating better communication between the young person and their PA, and issues were quickly resolved.



## CHANGES TO HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

This year one young person was supported to put forward a complaint against Medway Children's services for years of abuse suffered at the hands of his former foster carers. The young person wanted to ensure that the local authority took notice of his past experiences and learnt from these, so that no child in the future should have to suffer at the hands of their foster carer and that their voice would be heard, and they would be believed. The young person wanted better training for foster carers and more diligent recruitment of LADO's.

# ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



## CHANGES TO WIDER COMMUNITY

There have been 33 referrals for FGC's this past year. The advocate performs a vital role in Family Group Conferences, promoting the wishes and feelings of the child to the group, thus allowing the 'family' to find their own solutions that are in the best interests of the child. This in turn, alleviates the need to bring the child/children into the care of the Local Authority.

This past year there were 41 referrals for support at joint housing assessments. Enabling homeless young people to make informed decisions via the joint assessment process ensures a reduction in homelessness and related issues for this cohort of young people, thus reducing potential risks to the wider community.

Advocacy, Mentoring and Legends engaged in LGBTQ+ Training in order to enhance learning and create a non-judgmental and safe environment for Young People accessing the service.



## CHANGES TO THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

The Advocacy Service continues to adapt and develop to meet the ever-increasing demand on the service. Advocates enter an agreement/contract with a young person at the start of their work, which outlines their role and sets parameters around the issues described. Advocates and young people can end pieces of work when issues are resolved but young people are always given an opportunity to refer to the service again if needed. In this way, all young people referred to the service can be allocated an advocate in a timely fashion.

The Advocacy Service has consulted with children and young people to redesign its leaflets (soon to be post cards that service users of all ages can easily understand). Policies have been re written in consultation with young people and a new, easy to use feedback form has been designed and is now in use.....Advocates are getting an average of 4.8 stars out of 5 !!



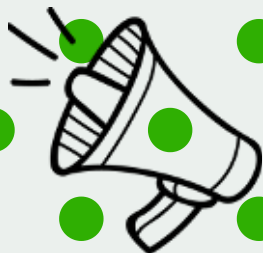
185

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



# New Referrals

## THEMES AND TRENDS



### NEW REFERRALS - SERVICE USER BREAKDOWN

JHA - 41

CIC - 41

FGC - 33

CL - 17

CIN - 7

### ISSUES

- 1) Child Protection - 51
- 2) Housing/Homelessness - 47
- 3) FGC - 33
- 4) Support at Meetings - 21
- 5) Placement - 14
- 6) Disability - 11
- 7) Contact - 5
- 8) PA - 5
- 9) Court Proceedings - 4
- 10) Education - 4
- 11) Finance - 4
- 12) Immigration/Asylum - 1



Of the 185 children and young people referred this year...

38 were 0-10 yrs

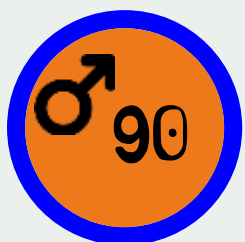
70 were 11-15 yrs

59 were 16 & 17yrs

18 were 18 - 25yrs



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



Referrals this past year (October 2022 - September 2023) were significantly higher than the previous year (49 more referrals this year).

# One Predominant Theme this year was:-



## Child Protection:

28 % of all referrals this last year were for children and young people needing support through the Child Protection process.

*“Child protection describes the processes, decisions and actions taken by statutory agencies and others to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child who is suspected to be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.”*

“Independent advocates are key to creating a listening culture and protecting children from poor practice.”

Advocacy is child-led and child-controlled. Independent advocates are focused on what children say they need and want. Our advocates, at YLF, follow the child's instructions as to what will be communicated, the reason for the communication, and the form the communication will take. We support the child through the CP processes for as long as it takes to raise their voice and give their instructions. We end the support if the child stops giving instructions or is confident in advocating for themselves.

- Children and young people are good at judging whether adults respect them or not.
- Children and young people have lots of ideas and views about how they are cared for, and what would make life better for them.
- Social Services can make things much worse for children and young people when they do not support them to make and influence decisions about their own lives.
- Many of the changes which children and young people want would not cost a lot of money, what's important is that social workers and others have a good attitude and show they care about children and young people.

# CP - Case Study

## Lilly (16 years)

Lily was on a CP plan that had started after her mum had reached out for help when Lily disclosed that she had been abused by a friend's dad. Lily's behaviours had quickly escalated following this disclosure, she was self-harming, being violent in the home and had stopped attending school.

Lily had many complex needs and due to her anxiety, would become overwhelmed in CP meetings. The social worker was suspicious that Mum was 'putting words in Lily's mouth' and wanted an independent advocate to support Lily through the CP process. Lily welcomed the opportunity to have somebody supporting her in her wishes and feelings and helping her to be included in plans made about her life.

The advocate used gentle, indirect strategies (drawing and play) to encourage Lily to talk about what she would like to happen in her CP plan. Advocacy showed that Lily was indeed voicing her own words, and her mum was not making her say anything. This meant that her voice started to be listened to and things in her case could move forward, as the focus shifted back to Lily and away from mum.

Lily now has a new social worker, is attending school every day and is waiting for therapy to start within the next few weeks. Her case has been downgraded to Child in Need and she is very happy about this.

When asked for feedback, Lily said:

**“ Thank you, you really helped me, you are nice and you listened to me”.**





# CP - Case Study

## Charlie (12 years)

At the point of referral, Charlie had been arrested and was on police bail. The allegation related to a disclosure of inappropriate sexual behaviour from his sister, but this had been investigated and looked to be consensual, both being perpetrators and victims. Charlie was temporarily in the care of his Maternal Grandmother.

The Advocate said :

“This was a case of a very delicate nature, and Charlie needed support at CP meetings to ensure that he felt properly listened to. There were many concerns and worries about both Charlie and his sister (who had her own advocate). The case was ongoing for some time and was a good example of an advocate being able to support a young person consistently, particularly when there were quite a few changes in a Social Worker. The advocate was able to pick up on Charlie’s mood changes at various stages in the case, and she also recognised a change in attitude as Charlie matured and found himself in different situations. It was of great help that Charlie’s Mum and social worker actively encouraged him to remain in contact with his advocate, so he has felt supported throughout the process”.



# Housing & Homelessness

***Housing & Homelessness*** continue to dominate referrals, demonstrating a need for advocacy at critical points in a young person's life. (25% of all referrals were in this cohort of young people).

'Medway have a joint protocol between Medway Children's Services and Medway Housing Department, concerning 16 & 17 year olds who find themselves homeless and in need of accommodation. Medway has demonstrated its commitment to these vulnerable young people by establishing a co-ordinated strategy to make sure that the housing, and other, needs of 16 – 17 year olds are comprehensively considered before any decisions are made about future accommodation and/or support. Professionals from both services will meet to carry out a Joint Homelessness Assessment (JHA) for each young person. All 16 – 17 years old's, who approach either Medway Children's Services or Medway Housing Options, will receive the same assessment.

Medway Children's Services have a duty to find out about the Young Person's wishes and feelings about services that are provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, and under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Medway will, as far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with the Young Person's welfare, find out the young person's wishes and feelings about their preferred provision of accommodation and give due consideration, with regard to the Young Person's age and understanding, to the wishes and feelings they have been able to find out.

Medway will give the Young Person the contact details for the Young Lives Foundation for independent advocacy: [www.advocacy@ylf.org.uk](mailto:www.advocacy@ylf.org.uk).

It has been evidenced (via reports from individual advocates) that Medway Housing Officers frequently request that Medway Social Workers complete formal referrals for the presence of an independent advocate at a JHA. Often the JHA marks the start of a positive journey for a young person, as evidenced in the case studies below:



# JHA - Case Study

## Lucas (16 years)

Lucas was in hospital, waiting to be discharged. They had been stockpiling medication with an intent to commit suicide. This was directly related to their life at home and the breakdown in relationships with their parents. Lucas said that they would “hurt themselves again” if they were made to go home. Lucas’s parents said that they were no longer able to manage these behaviours as they had been ongoing for some time.

An urgent JHA was called. Initially, children’s services said that Lucas did not meet the criteria for s.20, which was their preferred choice. Lucas had identified that they were far too vulnerable to live in accommodation that was minimally or unsupported and they refused to return home. The advocate escalated Lucas’s case to the Head of Medway Children’s Services as well as to the Head of Medway Housing and persisted in the plea that Lucas’s voice needed to be heard and that their safety and well-being would be in jeopardy if they were made to return home. Lucas was mentally ill and needed support. They were accommodated with an experienced Medway foster carer and supported in the immediate aftermath by the CAMHS crisis team. They are now happily thriving with the foster carer, engaging in college and living a happy and fulfilled life.

Advocacy intervention was life- saving for Lucas due to them stating that they had been stock piling medication, and they would overdose again if they were made to return to their parent’s care.

Lucas has recently referred themselves back to the advocacy service for support with their transition to care leaving services, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of advocacy in their life.



# JHA - Case Study

## Scarlett (17 years)

Scarlett needed an urgent JHA as she was homeless. She was a few weeks away from her 18th Birthday. Scarlett's relationship with her parents had broken down and there was domestic abuse in her parent's relationship, which was a trigger for Scarlett's mental health issues. Scarlett was living with a friend, but the friend could not continue to accommodate her.

Scarlett was supported by an advocate in her JHA. Following the JHA, Medway Housing agreed to keep her case open under a 56 day assessment whilst she continued to sofa surf with her friend. Medway children's services assessed Scarlett to be a child in need and offered ongoing support under s.17.

2/3 weeks after the JHA, the sofa surfing arrangement broke down and Scarlett called her social worker for support. Scarlett was placed in an emergency bed for 2 nights whilst her social worker looked to Medway Housing to offer Scarlett somewhere to live. Medway Housing refused to do this, saying that children's services should look to accommodate Scarlett. Scarlett called her advocate for support. Scarlett wanted more information about signing a s.20, (coming into care). The advocate explained what would happen and what this would mean for Scarlett. However, as Scarlett was a few weeks away from her 18th birthday, the advocate confirmed that she would not be entitled to care leaver benefits and would be homeless again at 18 yrs if her situation with her family hadn't changed. Scarlett considered this and decided not to sign a s.20 as she did not feel that this would be in her best interests. The advocate liaised with the social worker who was supporting Scarlett, under s.17, and wrote several emails to Medway Housing, quoting the Housing Act and raising Scarlett's profile as a vulnerable 17 yr old who was eligible for priority housing. After 2 days of battling back and forth (Scarlett spent a further night in the e bed and a night at her Grandmother's house), Scarlett was invited to an interview at a supported housing resource in Medway. The advocate and the social worker supported Scarlett in her interview and Scarlett was offered a room, with a view to moving in on the day. Scarlett spoke alone to her advocate and explained that her dad was putting emotional pressure on her to return home. The advocate listened to Scarlett and helped her write down the pros and cons of her situation. Scarlett could only see positives in accepting the room, she did not want to return home as she felt that nothing would change and her already fragile mental health would suffer. Scarlett liked the placement and accepted the offer. The advocate spoke to Scarlett following her first weekend in the placement. Scarlett said she was happy, thanked the advocate for her support and agreed that her case could be closed.

Scarlett said: **"Thank you so much for you support, I don't know where I would have been without it!"**



# Child In Care/Support At Meetings

**21 children in care asked for support in their statutory meetings this past year.**

**The YLF advocacy service are prompt in their allocation of a named advocate to all children who are in the care of the local authority. 100% of all children and young people in Medway's care, who are referred to the service, have been allocated an advocate within one week of referral (often sooner). The advocacy service recognises that many of these children live out of county and are isolated, away from friends and family.**

## **Lilac (aged 14 years)**

Lilac lived in the North of the country, at a secure placement, where she was subject to a DOL order. Lilac was not happy in the placement and asked her advocate to support her in her planning meetings, to help her to get her views across to the professionals involved in her care. She felt she hadn't been listened to and was becoming increasingly frustrated. Lilac wanted to be moved back to Medway and wanted all restrictions removed.

The advocate supported Lilac to articulate herself in her meetings and some months later she was moved to a residential placement in Kent. Lilac asked her advocate to continue to support her, particularly as she still felt isolated away from family and friends. The advocate continued to support Lilac in raising her voice and eventually she was moved to a foster placement in Medway. She remained on her DOL order but was happy to be close to her family and friends and said she liked her foster placement.

Lilac said; **"Thanks for your help, it made a difference."**

**Staff at the secure placement said: "We just wanted to say a big Thank You for the support you provided for Lilac, it was very much appreciated."**





# Disability & FGC

**11 children and young people with significant disabilities were referred to the advocacy service this past year**

## **Phoebe (aged 8 years)**

Phoebe had a diagnosis of Spina Bifida and hydrocephalus. Phoebe had recently had surgery due to a pressure sore which was marked as a level 3, when in dad's care and then was a level 4 when surgery took place. Phoebe was discharged from hospital to temporary foster carers.

There were concerns around the pressure wound that Phoebe had acquired when in her father's care. Mum was not able to look after Phoebe due to her own disabilities. Phoebe was on a child protection plan and under PLO. The local authority held an FGC to find out which family members could support Phoebe and the family and wanted to hear Phoebe's voice as part of the plan.

Phoebe's Grandparent's put themselves forward to care for Phoebe under an SGO. The advocate met with Phoebe, who confirmed that she wanted to live with her Grandparent's. The advocate liaised with the local authority, on Phoebe's behalf, to ensure that a package of care support would be put in place when Phoebe moved to her Grandparent's home.

Phoebe moved to her Grandparent's home, with a care package of support which was agreed by the local authority. The case was closed.



# Closed Cases

## THEMES AND TRENDS

**170 CASES CLOSED – 84% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEEDING ADVOCACY SUPPORT HAD THEIR ISSUES FULLY RESOLVED**



109

Advocacy complete - All Issues resolved

15

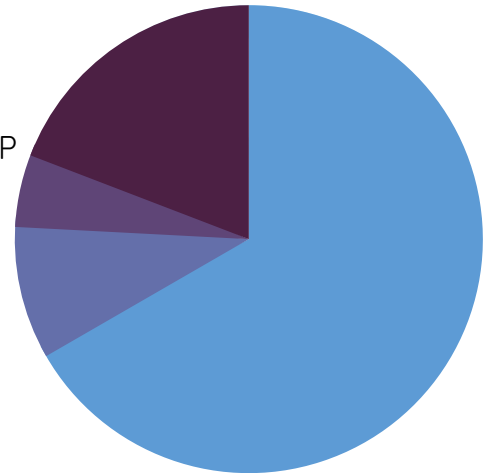
Advocacy support complete - Outstanding issue for YP

19

Advocacy complete - Outcome unknown / young person lost contact

24

Young Person chose not to take up Advocacy



## WAYS OF WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Advocates continue to support children and young people in a variety of different ways.....many young people seem to prefer What's App and UASC young people benefit from google translate over What's App, which can be fun at times!

TEAMS, Face Time and What's App video calls are also very popular with young people. Telephone and email contact are also used and face to face contact continues to be popular, particularly with younger children or those with disabilities.

Advocates at YLF are adept at tailoring their methods of communication to the needs of the young person.



# FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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



0808 164 0096

"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"



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

"I'M GRATEFUL FOR YOUR HELP, THINGS GOT SORTED AS SOON AS YOU GOT INVOLVED! I WILL BE RECOMMENDING YOUR SERVICE"... (COMMENTS FROM A CARE LEAVER)

"I WILL MISS YOU, I LIKED YOU SO MUCH AND I ENJOYED TALKING TO YOU"

"OH MY GOD C, YOU HAVE BEEN AMAZING, YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE WHO LISTENED TO ME. THANK YOU SO MUCH"

"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR FIGHTING FOR ME. I NEVER WOULD'VE GOT THIS FAR WITHOUT YOUR HELP."

"YOU WERE VERY HELPFUL, AND I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH FOR YOUR SUPPORT OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS. YOU MADE SUCH A DIFFERENCE TO ME AND MY CHILD AND OUR LIFE IS BETTER THAN I EVER IMAGINED DUE TO YOU NEVER GIVING UP ON US. THANK YOU"

"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR FIGHTING FOR ME. I NEVER WOULD'VE GOT THIS FAR WITHOUT YOUR HELP."

"YOURS 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."



# FEEDBACK FROM PROFESSIONALS



## Parent

“Thank for your help and advice”

“I just wanted to say a massive thank you from all my family members for all the amazing work you’ve done for our little E.. It’s been amazing working with you, on behalf of E we can’t thank you enough”

“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!”

## Housing Officer

“Thankyou for speaking with M and giving M clear information to what her options are in respect of housing.”

## Social Worker

“Thankyou for speaking with M and giving M clear information to what her options are in respect of housing.”

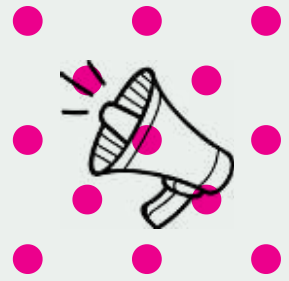
## IRO

‘Thank you for all the great work you’ve done with the YP over the past few months as it has been very helpful, and we all have good working relationships’





# CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENTS



During this last year, there has been an increasing demand on the advocacy service from both Kent and Medway. The team continues to develop strong professional working relationships with Medway Children's Services, Care Leaving Services, Medway FGC service, and Medway Housing.

This last year the advocacy team has supported a total of 6 social work students, who have been instrumental in representing the voices of many children and young people, particularly those on CP plans and in FGC meetings. All students stated that the skills and knowledge gained via advocacy will inform their social work practice in the future.

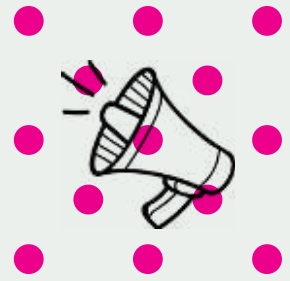
Care leavers continue to be under-represented by advocacy (44) which is something that YLF intends to work on by strengthening the links between MCYPC and the Advocacy Service.

The Advocacy Team has been strengthened by the introduction of a hybrid model, with 3 full-time advocates and 5 part-time advocates (two who were newly recruited in September 2023). The team works with both Kent and Medway but referrals via Medway take priority, in accordance with the commissioning agreement (175 referrals per year).

In consultation with children and young people, a new website is currently being designed by the communications team. The advocacy team has created new postcards to explain the service to children and young people alike, new policies have been written in a way that can be understood by a wider audience of children and young people and a new, electronic feedback form has been created to capture feedback that is often elusive!! So far the advocacy team is scoring 4.8 out of 5 stars !!!







## Charity Challenges:

### Raising Funds for YLF

In September 2023, 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 £1325 For the charity.....



## Volunteers Week 2023 :

Despite the high volume of advocacy work this year, the Advocacy Team rolled up their sleeves in order to help raise funds for the charity. Shelly Allen (advocate) taking the lead on raising funds at a local children and young people's football tournament:

"A massive Thank you for leading on the Barming Tournament stand this weekend. We all really appreciate the time and effort.... (Stephen Gray) (also supported by Marcya Farmer and Abbie Wright, fellow advocates).





## **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), Marcy 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.**