



The Young Lives Foundation

MEDWAY ADVOCACY

REPORT

April - June 2024



LISTEN - SUPPORT - EMPOWER

ADVOCACY MISSION....



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



IMPROVING RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

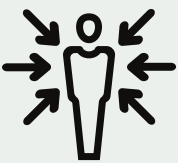


IMPROVING EXPERIENCES INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE AND LEAVING CARE



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

The infographic features a central blue circle with a thick green border. The number '31' is displayed in a large, yellow, stylized font within the blue circle. Below the number, the text 'New referrals received this quarter' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background is white with several orange, cloud-like shapes scattered around the central circle.

31

**New referrals received
this quarter**

ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES



CHANGES FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Each Quarter the service measures outcomes for young people following support from an Advocate. This Quarter 84% of young people had their issues resolved. This could be life changing for some of these young people. Other young people learn that they can and do have a voice and feel empowered to raise their concerns in a positive way.



CHANGES TO HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

- This Quarter Medway entered into a new SEND contract with YLF. There is greater recognition across the country that some children and young people with disabilities fall through the gaps. Visiting advocacy ensures that these young people's rights and entitlements are upheld and their safety and well being is paramount when living in residential care.



CHANGES TO WIDER COMMUNITY

- This Quarter 7 young people were prevented from becoming homeless with joined up support via a joint housing assessment. Advocacy enabled these young people to make informed choices about their future in a time of crisis, thus reducing homelessness in the wider sense.

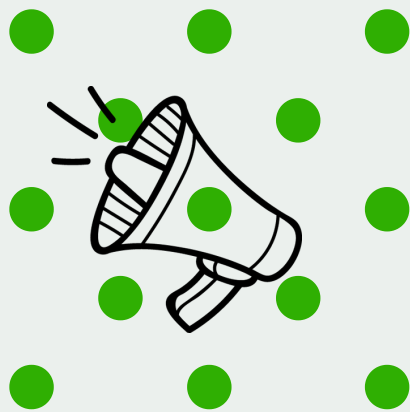


CHANGES TO THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

- Full time advocates, Shelly Allen and Abbie Wright, were promoted to Advocacy Coordinators to give a central structure to the team, alongside the Manager, and to free up time to develop a digital advocacy offer. Referrals continue to be processed and allocated in a timely fashion, in line with National Advocacy Standards and the team will benefit from additional support in the co ordination of referrals to the service.
- YLF are pleased to welcome a new Director of Advocacy Services, Anna Withers, who will offer additional support and direction to the Advocacy Team.

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.

JHA = 7

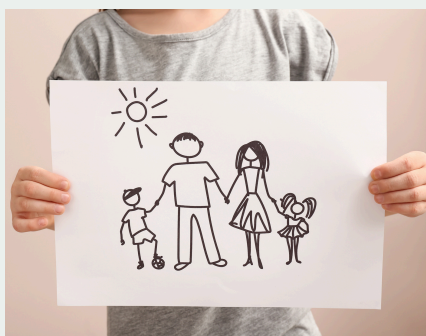
CIC = 7

CIN = 6

CL = 5

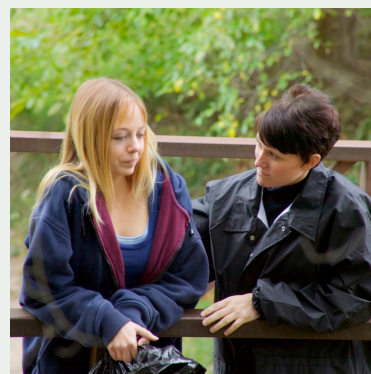
FGC = 4

CP = 2



TOP ISSUES

1. Housing/Homelessness – 10
2. FGC – 5
3. Disability – 4
4. Finance – 3
5. Social Worker – 3
6. PA – 2
7. Placement – 2
8. Support at Meetings - 2
9. Immigration/Asylum - 2
10. Education - 1
11. Complaint - 1



New Referral Breakdown by Age

2	0 - 10 yrs
7	11 - 15 yrs
15	16 & 17 yrs
7	18 - 21 yrs
0	22 - 25 yrs



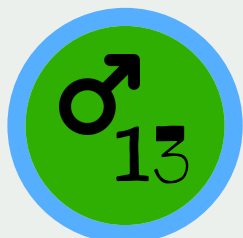
New Referral Breakdown of age/issues

0 - 10 yrs = FGC = 2

11 - 15yrs = Disability = 2, FGC & CP = 3, Education = 1, Placement= 1

16 & 17 yrs = 15 Housing/Homelessness = 7, Placement = 2, SW = 3, Asylum = 1, Support at Meetings = 1

18 - 21yrs = 7 Disability = 2, Housing = 2, Finance = 2, Asylum = 1, PA = 1, Complaint = 1



Children & young people with disabilities (SEND)

The Young Lives Foundation Advocacy Service has an excellent reputation for delivering high-quality support to children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. YLF Advocates consistently help young people with SEND to secure the support they need to be safe and to thrive. All YLF Advocates are appropriately trained and equipped with the resources required to communicate effectively with young people, parents, schools, and professionals around the young person. However, to meet the needs of rising demand in this cohort of young people, YLF successfully recruited a specialist advocate (Jenny) who can communicate in BSL and MAKATON in addition to other more general communication aids.

Furthermore, this Quarter, the Advocacy Service entered a specific contract with Medway to reach out to young people with SEND/Sensory Impairment who are living away from home during term time but don't fall under the current statutory contract. This contract moves from Issue-Based Advocacy to Residential Visiting Advocacy, thus promoting the voice and lived experiences of children and young people who are currently living in residential settings. Advocates ensure their rights are upheld and respect the national advocacy standards and the quality standards of the setting. YLF's visiting advocates work with the young people on individual issues relating to their experience of the setting and level of care. Residential visiting advocates are independent of the setting, they are purely there for the young people who reside

Case Study

Kai 11 years old

Kai has learning difficulties, including social and communication difficulties.



A referral was made to the Advocacy Service as Kai had just moved to a new residential school and was unhappy with his change in circumstances and was finding it difficult to settle. The Advocate contacted Kai's House Manager and discussed with him the best time to visit Kai on-site. In order not to disrupt the school day, the Advocate arranged to meet with Kai just before the end of the school day, when he would be able to leave the classroom following the meeting and go to his house for his tea. The Advocate initially met with Kai and his keyworker so that he could start to build a relationship of trust. Initially Kai seemed a little unsettled in his new environment so the Advocate made sure that he scheduled in regular contact visits so that he could observe Kai's interactions, mood and presentation. He used photographs and PECS to communicate with Kai. It was clear, over time, that Kai had settled into his new environment and presented in a positive way on each visit. Kai demonstrated to the Advocate that he was happy and settled and was too busy to spend time with him on most visiting days!

Homelessness & Housing Issues

All young people need the security and stability of a place they can call home. Sadly, not all young people have the benefit of a stable family life.

In 2023 more than 129,000 young people in the UK under the age of 25 asked for help with homelessness. The experience of being homeless penetrates the very core of a young person's well-being, often giving rise to stress, anxiety, social isolation, loss of identity, impact on education and work, and vulnerability to substance misuse. The Advocacy Service received 7 referrals for homeless young people, aged 16 & 17 years old this Quarter. All these young people had the support of a Social Worker and the request for advocacy support at their JHA was responded to within 24 hours (if not sooner). The Advocate was able to support each young person in an impartial and non-biased way, ensuring that their options were explained, their rights and entitlements were upheld, they were treated fairly, and their voices were heard.

On the 3rd June, the Advocacy Manager and the specialist JHA Advocate met with N W, who has been recruited by Medway as a specialist Social Worker for JHA's. Young people often get caught up in responsibility conflict between the Housing Department and Children's Services. With a specialist Social Worker taking the lead and an independent Advocate to support, stress and anxiety should be mitigated for the young person.

Case Study

Charlotte 16 years old

Charlotte lived with her mother and stepfather. She had experienced conflict with both parents for many years, but this had recently escalated to unmanageable levels. Her stepdad had serious health issues and mum feared that the ongoing conflict had put him in jeopardy, so she had asked Charlotte to leave the family home. Charlotte felt that she could not live at home as her stepdad continually targeted her. A JHA was called.

The Advocate spoke to Charlotte prior to the JHA and explained her rights and entitlements in accordance with the law (Housing Act 1996, Children Act 1989). The Advocate also gave detailed information about what housing may potentially offer if she chose emergency Relief Duty. She explained that Charlotte would not be able to hold a tenancy due to her age but could be offered either shared housing or supported accommodation (such as a YMCA). The Advocate also explained what would happen if Charlotte chose to sign herself into care under s.20 and what her rights and entitlements would be as a child in care. The Advocate explained that this would have to be agreed upon at a management level as she may not meet the threshold for care.

The Advocate supported Charlotte in the JHA, where options were presented and discussed. Charlotte said that she did not feel ready to live on her own, but she liked the idea of supported accommodation with other young people. The meeting was very positive with both services working together to make the best plan for Charlotte. Charlotte felt included in the plan. The Social Worker agreed to make a referral to supported housing, alongside the Housing Officer, and a robust child-in-need plan would be put in place to support the time Charlotte needed to spend at home whilst waiting for referrals to be processed. Charlotte was happy with the plan and thanked the Advocate for her help.



Children In Care

7 new referrals for children in care were made this Quarter. However, this does not consider the number of children in care who receive ongoing advocacy support in their review meetings.

With support from an Advocate, children in care are enabled to take part in decisions that affect their lives and are helped to voice their opinions in an environment they may find challenging. Advocacy gives them the confidence and ability to find their voice and enables empowerment for their futures.

Case Study

Leila 13 years old

Leila was new into care and the IRO felt it would be appropriate to refer her to the advocacy service so that she would be supported in child-in-care reviews and helped to understand the processes and systems around being a child-in-care. The Advocate met with Leila face-to-face to get to know her and to build a rapport. Leila opened up to her Advocate and was confident in asking her Advocate to put forward her wishes and feelings around family contact. Leila said that she was happy being in care and did not want to go home due to the difficult relationship she had with her Mother. The Advocate supported Leila in a CIC review but at a subsequent review, Leila said that she felt confident enough to speak for herself and no longer needed the support of an Advocate.



UASC Young People

Although the service does not currently record specific numbers of UASC young people being referred to the service, numbers continue to slowly increase in this cohort of young people.

Case Study

Mohammed 17 years old

Mohammed lives in a residential placement in Kent, although he is a Medway looked after child. Staff at the placement were supportive but Mohammed felt that his rights and entitlements were not being upheld. He felt that his Social Worker failed to communicate with him, he had no clothing allowance and he had difficulties in affording travel to college. His key worker referred Mohammed to the Advocacy Service.

The Advocate met with Mohammed at his placement and arranged for an interpreter to be present over the phone. Mohammed explained his concerns about his Social Worker and stated that he wanted more contact with him. The Advocate struggled to contact the Social Worker but eventually received a response to his emails. The Social Worker said that he would need to do an assessment for a clothing allowance. He also confirmed that Mohammed had travel money for college and had a gym pass. The Advocate was satisfied that Mohammed's rights and entitlements as a child in care were being met. However, he encouraged the Social Worker to have more contact with Mohammed, whilst at the same time managing Mohammed's expectations around being in care and explaining the resources that are available to the Local Authority. The Advocate continues to support Mohammed as he will soon be transitioning to leaving care services.



A Refugee's Poem:

“ You have to understand,

That no one puts children in a boat,

Unless water is safer than land.

No one burns their palms under trains beneath carriages,

No one spends days and nights in a truck, feeding on newspaper,

Unless the miles travelled means something more than a journey.

I want to go home, but home is the barrel of a gun,

No one would leave home unless home chased you to the shore,

Unless home told you to quicken your legs, leave your clothes behind,

Crawl through the desert, wade the oceans, drown, be hungry, beg, forget your pride,

Survival is more important.

I don't know what I have become but anything is safer than home”

(Part of 'Home' by Warsan Shire)



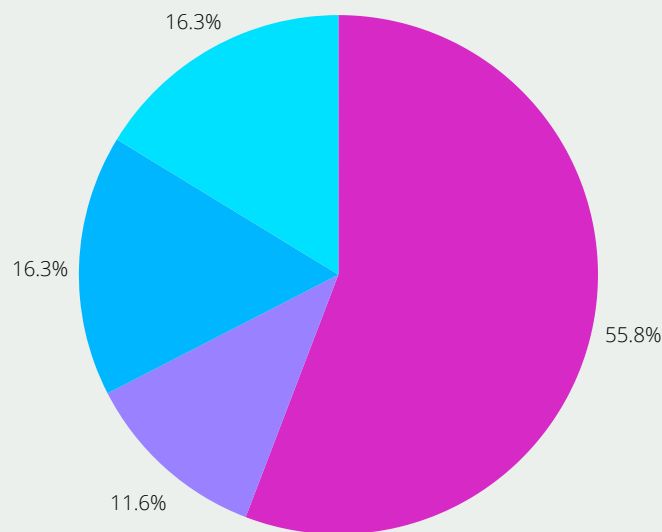
Closed Cases

THEMES AND TRENDS



43 CASES WERE CLOSED DURING THE QUARTER

- 24 Advocacy complete - All Issues resolved
- 5 Advocacy support complete - Outcome unknown
- 7 Advocacy complete - Outstanding issues
- 7 Young person did not take up advocacy



84% of children and young people received successful outcomes to their issues this Quarter.

Note:

Outstanding issues would be those beyond the remit of 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.



0808 164 0096



“YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WE TRUST, WE DON'T WANT TO SPEAK TO THE SOCIAL WORKER, WE JUST WANT TO SPEAK TO YOU”

**“THANK YOU, I APPRECIATE THIS SO MUCH. THE SOFA'S HAVE FINALLY ARRIVED AND I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SIT ON AT LAST!”
(YOUNG PERSON WITH LONG DELAYS IN GETTING HER SETTING UP HOME ALLOWANCE)!**

**“I WAS SO SCARED IN THE MEETING BUT IT ALL MAKES SENSE NOW YOU HAVE EXPLAINED THINGS TO ME”
(YOUNG PERSON FOLLOWING A JHA MEETING)**



“THANK YOU SO MUCH, YOU'VE HELPED ME LOADS”

**“THANK YOU FOR EXPLAINING THAT AS ME AND L DIDN'T FEEL WE COULD”
(YOUNG PERSON FOLLOWING A CORE GROUP MEETING FOR HER BABY).**

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

“Despite the difficulties you face, you are still one of the best advocacy services in the country” **Children’s Commissioner, Help at Hand Team.**

“ I just thought I would give you a call to say thank you so much for the work you have done with E, when I took over this CP case I was struggling to connect and build a relationship with E as she had lost trust with SS. I know she talks to you about the things we discuss and things have turned a corner. She is now agreeing to my suggestions, thanks to you. I feel I can go into my weekend now knowing that her and her baby are safe.” **SW (Senior Practitioner).**

“ I would like to thank M for all the support she has given S and L over this difficult time” **Team Manager**

“It is such a beneficial thing for L to be able to discuss his anxieties with an independent person and we are very grateful for the time and effort you have put into getting to know L, so that he feels comfortable talking to you.” **Parent**



NEWS AND SERVICE UPDATES

There is a brand-new structure to the Advocacy Service, which means that targets can continue to be met and the service can continue to develop, despite the ever-increasing demand for advocacy in such a challenging climate of change. In June we welcomed Anna Withers as our new Director of Advocacy Services.



I am delighted to have joined YLF as Director of Advocacy Programmes. For the last 5 years I have worked as Director of Inclusion in a large selective boys school and prior to that I worked for 2 local authorities within their SEND Education and Learning Teams. I am passionate about inclusion and hearing the voice of every young person regardless of need or circumstance. I look forward to working within a charity that supports young people to thrive, be heard and empowered.

Our full time Advocates, Shelly Allen and Abbie Wright have been promoted to Advocacy Co Ordinator's, strengthening the team to meet demand as well as giving time to developing our advocacy digital offer. Well done Shelly and Abbie!



AND

We welcomed our new specialist SEND Advocate to the team, Jenny Gard. Jenny is fully conversant in BSL and Makaton and has a long history of working with children and young people with sensory impairment, SEND and complex needs.



**WELCOME ✖
✦ to the TEAM**