The Young Lives Foundation

KENT ADVOCACY REPORT

April - June 2025

LISTEN – SUPPORT – EMPOWER

74

New Children and Young People in Kent were supported by the Advocacy Service this past Quarter.

42 JA's
32 General Refrrals

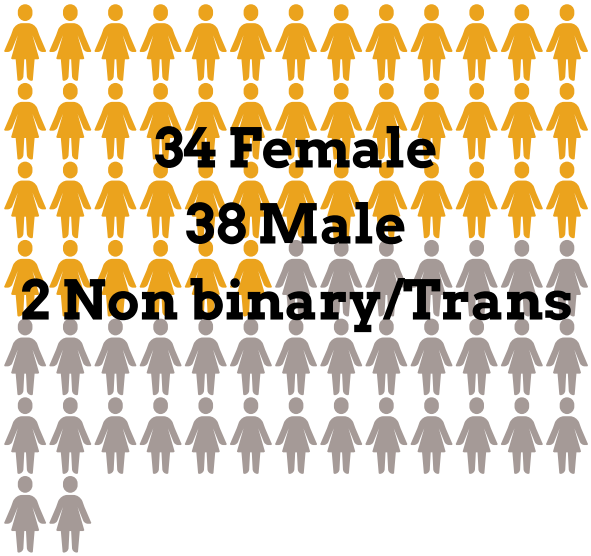
Quarterly Data

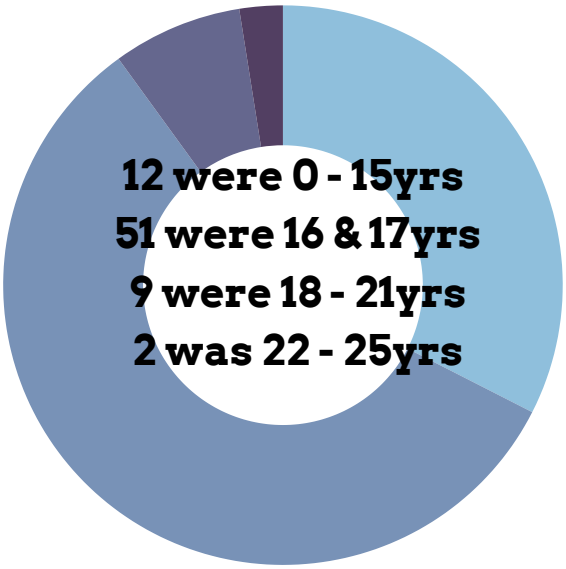
Demographics, Themes & Trends

Referrals

A total of **74** referrals were received this quarter.

JA	**42**
CIC	**18**
CL	**9**
CIN	**3**
CP	**2**





Closed Cases

A total of **80** cases were closed this quarter. 81 % were satisfied with the outcome of advocacy.

Sometimes issues are resolved but before a case can be formally closed, the young person may lose contact with the Advocate for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they move but at other times, they have reached a point of self-advocacy and empowerment and no longer need an Advocate.

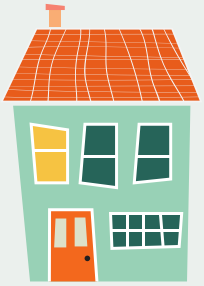
JA Districts:

Tonbridge & Malling = 4
Ashford = 3
Swale = 3
Canterbury = 2
Gravesham = 2
Tunbridge Wells = 2
Maidstone = 1
Sevenoaks & Swanley = 1

Not given at point of referral = 23. Likely to be Thanet, Folkestone & Hythe & other districts.

Issues

Housing/Homelessness	**48**
Placement Issues	**12**
Support At Meetings	**5**
Disability	**4**
Education	**4**
Finance	**3**
Social Worker	**2**
Child Protection	**2**
Contact	**1**
Young Parent	**1**



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

Brief Interventions (open and closed within same Quarter) = 36
45% of children and young people had their issues resolved within the Quarter.

Housing/Homeless & Placement Issues

This Quarter has seen a significant rise in referrals for homeless young people. However, with good advocacy support and a joined-up approach from the Housing Officer and the Social Worker at a JA, not all these young people enter care or go into emergency housing via the council.

In a breakdown of data for the past year, it was shown that a significant number of young people return home or remain with alternative family members/friends.

Between January 2024 – January 2025 the Advocacy Service received 181 referrals for JA's. We were able to collate data for 115 of these cases, as shown below:

Total of given outcomes = 115

- Housing route = 43%
- Return Home/other family = 31%
- S.20 = 23%
- CIN = 3%

- 26 young people opted for s.20, and this was approved
- 36 young people returned home or remained with other family members/partners family.
- 4 young people chose section 17 (CIN) accommodation.
- 49 young people were accepted under Relief Duty/Housing route.

Due to the continued rise in referrals for JA's, the team worked hard to improve the Advocacy website, giving young people an opportunity to gain vital information about the JA process.

In collaboration with students from Mid Kent College, the Advocacy Team produced a video that has been added to the information page about JA's and allows young people the opportunity to learn visually about such a complex process.

The Advocacy Team also produced a poster for homeless 16 & 17-year-olds, to be distributed to local schools and colleges. The aim is not only to inform homeless young people of their rights and entitlements and where they can go for help, but also to encourage prevention of homelessness by giving young people permission to talk about their difficulties with trusted adults.

JHA Case Study:

Harrison - 16 years old

Harrison had been in and out of the family home from the age of 14. There had been significant social work involvement and safeguarding concerns over the years. Harrison's older siblings had been taken into care many years before. Harrison's mother and brother were drug users and Harrison had a volatile relationship with both. Harrison's brother had assaulted him both at school and in the community. Harrison had been sofa surfing between his aunt's, sister's and various friend's houses. He had lived this nomadic lifestyle from the age of 14. His sister was supportive but unable to have Harrison live with her in the longer term.

Due to his age and family history, Harrison's Social Worker was keen for him to consider signing himself into care under s.20. Harrison was reluctant to consider this due to the experiences of his older siblings who had been in care. The JA was arranged as Harrison could no longer remain with his sister. Harrison had aspirations for the future. He had wanted to finish school, but his lifestyle and conflict with his brother had made this difficult. He wanted to be able to go to college and have the stability he needed, but be close to his sister and aunt. Harrison had no interest in drugs and wanted to detach himself from all family members involved in such activities.

The Advocate called Harrison prior to the JA. Harrison spoke to the Advocate about his life and the difficulties he had experienced. He said that his Social Worker had talked to him about signing himself into care, but he was reluctant to do this due to the stories he had heard from his siblings and other people who had been in care. The Advocate helped to break down the barriers of misinformation and gave Harrison additional information about the route into care for a 16-year-old. The Advocate also gave information about the Housing Act 1996, explaining how Harrison would have priority status for emergency housing under relief duty. She explained what this would mean and what his rights and entitlements would be.

The Advocate supported Harrison during the JA. Both the Housing Officer and the Social Worker gave detailed information about what each route could offer. Neither could promise accommodation in Harrison's familial area. The Social Worker explained the support that Harrison would get if he came into care. The Housing Officer explained that, if he chose the housing route, there would be minimal support.

JHA Case Study:

Continued...

Harrison was given time, after the meeting, to discuss his options in more detail. The Advocate helped him to weigh up the pros and cons of both options. Harrison was also supported by his sister throughout the discussions. His sister talked about her own experiences of being in care and how this had helped her. Harrison asked lots of questions about both routes to accommodation. The Advocate answered all his questions in a fair, balanced and honest way. Harrison asked if he would be placed far away if he chose the housing route. The Advocate answered that this could happen, but most housing districts try their best to place young people close to home, particularly those aged 16. Harrison asked questions about what accommodation would look like if he chose to enter care. Again, the Advocate gave honest, informative answers to his questions.

Harrison's sister thanked the Advocate for taking the time to talk to him so thoroughly after the meeting. Harrison said he would think about his options over the weekend.

2 weeks later, the Advocate called Harrison to ask what route he had chosen. Harrison said that he had chosen the housing route, and the council had allocated him a flat in his preferred area, close to his sister, who could provide him with all the support he needed.

Note: Harrison had a dog who had been his support throughout his time of homelessness. Conversations about the dog were a part of the JA meeting as this was important to Harrison. The council not only provided Harrison with a self - contained flat, but this had a garden for the dog. Harrison did, however, chose to offer the dog to a friend as he felt that looking after himself and a dog would be too much for him and not fair on the dog.

Feedback from the Social Worker:

Harrison has moved into a flat via the council, with his own bathroom and kitchen. The accommodation is close to his support network.

There is a garden, and he could have taken his dog, but he has chosen to let the woman who is looking after the dog adopt her, as he thinks that will give his dog a better life.

Thank you for your support in securing this outcome for Harrison.

Placement Issues

Placement stability for children in care is crucial for their well-being and development, aiming to minimize disruptions and promote a sense of stability and security. However, the Advocacy Service receive many referrals for children who are told that they are going to be moved as they approach 16 or 17. Some of these young people live out of county and have formed new social networks and have achieved a sense of stability for the first time in years. Whilst they understand that they will need to leave residential care prior to turning 18, some of these young people are not ready to leave their familiar placements and start a journey into semi- independent living, back in an area that may trigger past trauma.

Other young people want to leave foster care or residential care to move into semi-independent living but are told they are 'not ready'. Young People in this transition stage consistently make up many of the referrals to the Advocacy Service (51/74 this Quarter). It is important that the young person has a voice in plans that are made about their care and their future.

Case Study

Jake - 15 years old

The Referral:

'Jake requires an advocate to support him sharing his wishes and feeling. We are concerned regarding the proposed move of Jake from our care home. As the manager of the service, I have had the privilege of witnessing the remarkable progress Jake has made during his time with us, and I strongly feel that the decision to move him may jeopardise his continued success. Since joining us, over 12 months ago he has excelled in every aspect of his life, including his education, health, and overall well-being. He has formed strong, trusting relationships with staff and peers, which has been a cornerstone of his growth. His academic achievements are outstanding considering his starting point, and his health, both physical and emotional, has improved significantly under the consistent and supportive environment we provide.

A sudden placement change could disrupt this stability and undo much of the progress Jake has worked so hard to achieve. Jake has made it clear to Kent Social Services, his Social Worker, family and staff that he is very much against moving homes.'

The Advocate who was allocated to Jake had supported him previously with different issues. She set up a video call to find out what help he wanted from the service. Jake explained that he had been told that there was a plan to move him back to Kent. Jake said he didn't want this to happen. He told his Advocate that "he liked his placement, he had made friends, he had stayed out of trouble, and he was doing better in education than ever before".

The Advocate sent Jake's wishes and feelings to his Social Worker but received no response. She waited a week and then called the Social Worker to talk about the care plan and to explain Jake's views about the proposed move. The Social Worker explained that she had been told to move all her young people living out of county back to Kent, where possible. The Advocate challenged this by consulting with the commissioner for YLF Advocacy Services, who raised this to the Director of Children's Services. The response was that only children and young people in unregulated placements should be moved to alternative accommodation. Jake was not in an unregulated placement. Jake asked his Advocate to support him at his CIC review, where the topic of a move back to Kent was discussed. Again, the Advocated helped Jake to express his wishes and feelings about a move back to Kent. Despite family objections, the Social Worker and the IRO maintained that a move had always been in the Care Plan. Both Jake and his family raised concerns around his former gang involvement and drug related issues, but these concerns were refuted by the LA due to lack of police evidence to support the concerns.

Time passed with no further mention of a proposed move to Kent. Then, some months later, notice was given on the placement. Jake asked his Advocate to support him in writing a letter to his Social Worker to object to the move and to justify why he wanted to remain in his residential placement. There was no response from either the Social Worker or the IRO, who had been copied into the letter. Jake was unhappy with the absence of a response and asked his Advocate to help him to write a formal Stage 1 complaint, with a request to freeze the placement move.

The response to the complaint advised that the LA felt it was in Jake's best interests to move him back to Kent. Jake was then told that a placement had been found for him in Medway. Again, Jake asked his Advocate to express his concerns, particularly around an area where he felt he would be groomed by gangs. He also expressed concern that he was part way through the school term and due to sit his exams.

The day before the proposed move date, the Advocate tried to contact the Social Worker to find out if the move was happening as Jake hadn't received confirmation of this. The Social Worker was on leave, so the Advocate tried to contact the Team Manager and IRO, with no response. She then went to the Quality Assurance Manager, who looked on the system and could not see any record of the proposed move. A request was submitted for the Team Manager to call the Advocate. The Manager confirmed the move would happen in 2 weeks' time. Jake was told he would have an opportunity to visit the new placement, but the new placement gave no response to arrange this, which caused Jake further distress.

A few days later Jake's placement manager got an email to say that notice had been withdrawn, and he could remain in his current placement until 16yrs, as requested.

Children and Young People with Disabilities and Education

Children and Young people have a right to receive appropriate support to access education and reach their full potential. This is guided by legislation such as the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice.

The Advocacy Service received 4 referrals this Quarter for children with disabilities, and all of these had issues with education. Despite consistent advocacy to raise these young people's voices, the common response has been a shortage of school spaces within specialist provisions.

Case Study

Jacob - 13 years old

Jacob was referred to the advocacy service in 2023. He is mainly non-verbal and has additional needs. However, he can communicate his needs via body language and basic sign language.

Jacob had been living in a children's home in London that was subsequently rated inadequate by Ofsted. Jacob was moved to a new residential placement in Kent, where he quickly settled. However, frustrations soon began to appear as Jacob was not able to attend school like his peers. Despite numerous applications, all specialist schools in the local area and beyond stated they were at capacity and had no space for Jacob. Tutoring was put in place, but staff felt this was not meeting Jacob's social needs and he would become distressed when he saw other children in the placement going to school.

Jacob was allocated an Advocate. The Advocate visited Jacob regularly to get to know him, his needs and his wishes and feelings about education. Jacob clearly wanted to be in school. The Advocate liaised closely with VSK, SEND and the Social Worker, all working together to identify appropriate education for Jacob. Despite home tutoring, Jacob's behaviour remained disruptive, particularly when he saw his friends going to school. The Advocate submitted a Stage 1 complaint on Jacob's behalf, which was supported by Jacob's parents.

This was upheld and Jacob was awarded compensation, but the parents wished to progress this to Stage 2.
In the meantime, The Advocate, working alongside VSK, proposed off site tutoring, to get Jacob out of the placement, thus giving him a sense of 'going to school'. Staff saw significant improvements in Jacob's behaviour and the structured socialisation within the community gave evidence of change and development for Jacob. The Advocate was able to submit Jacob's voice, via these changes, to update his EHCP and there is now an identified school place on the EHCP. The next step will be to transition him into school. The Advocate will continue to support Jacob's voice until he is in school. For the update to the EHCP, Jacob's tutor told the Advocate:

'How I like to learn'

We took J to the library and to the shop. He verbalised what he would like to do with verbal prompting. Upon return to the home J wrote his name with assistance and then spelt it out with prompting. J then verbalised painting, so we moved onto painting since this activity helps him regulate, J had a good day his verbalisation is improving, and he is always smiling around me and waves when I go.

'How best to communicate with me'

The session started with Zones of regulation, J pointed to the green Zone and said good, we then read through a recipe and with assistance, J wrote the shopping list for ingredients. We went to the shop and with assistance,
J picked out the ingredients. J understands basic counting. If you say two potatoes, he will get two potatoes. He is very independent in the Kitchen. If you say 'please can you get the salt' he will get the salt. J cooked mashed potato with Cheese and for desert Chocolate crispy, we had a good day he is getting more verbal and is building confidence in maths, the session ended with J waving to me and saying bye.

Support in Meetings (Hear My Voice)

This Quarter 5 new children and young people asked for support in meetings. This data does not take into consideration the number of existing children and young people who are being supported in 6 monthly CIC reviews or children on child protection plans receiving ongoing support from their Advocate.

Children and Young People often say that their voice goes unheard amongst the professionals involved in their care.

Case Study

Summer - 13 years old

Summer wanted support in her CIC review meetings to share her wishes and feelings around contact with her birth parents. She struggled to speak up in meetings and her parents were not accepting that she didn't want regular contact with them. The Advocate met with Summer, face to face, and gained her wishes and feelings about contact with her birth family. The Advocate sent these wishes and feelings to the Social Worker and supported Summer in her child in care review. Summer thanked the Advocate for her support and said, "she felt better once she had shared her wishes and feelings properly". The Advocate asked Summer if she wanted support in other meetings, but Summer said that she felt she could manage but would get back in touch if she wanted help in the future.

Dante 15 years old

Dante is a 15 year old transgender young person who had been admitted to hospital due to a significant suicide attempt. Dante reported feeling unsafe to go home, and reported feeling they were not being heard by social care who had reported there were no safeguarding concerns within the family home. Dante was living in the hospital as the hospital trust had significant concerns about discharging them home.

The hospital referred Dante to the Advocacy Service. The Advocate met with Dante, who told her that their parents had strict religious beliefs and did not accept their gender identity. Dante told their Advocate that their Social Worker was on the side of their parents and did not hear their voice or believe their concerns about their treatment at home. The Advocate advocated for a change of Social Worker and raised concerns about some of the language that was used around Dante that could be deemed discriminatory. A change of Social Worker was granted. The new Social Worker listened to Dante and liaised with the family around allowing Dante to be accommodated under s.20 of the Children Act. The parents agreed to this, and Dante was placed in foster care, which they were happy with and settled very quickly. Dante thanked their Advocate for her support in getting such a positive outcome. They said they felt happy and safe and no longer needed advocacy support.

Advocacy for Care Leavers

Kent Care Leavers

Number of referrals = 9

Source of referral:
Email = 8
Telephone call = 0
Website = 1

Referrer:
PA = 4
SW = 3
Self = 1
Support Worker = 1

Issues:
Housing = 3
Placement = 4
Support at Meetings = 1
Young Parent = 1
Other = 2

Cases Closed

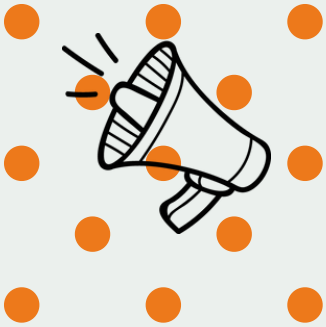
Cases Closed = 10

Advocacy complete, all issues resolved = 5
Advocacy complete, Outstanding issues = 2
Advocacy Incomplete, YP lost contact = 0
Did not take up advocacy = 3

"Thank you for everything you have done for me, I really appreciate it"

Case Study

Amun - 21 years old



The Advocate supported Amun over a period of 18 months. The initial referral came from Amum, who had been rejected by Ready Homes based on a risk assessment that he felt was inaccurate. The Advocate helped Amun to challenge this, and he secured a place in a Ready Homes shared house. Amun had previously been living in a KSH, but his relationship with his host had broken down. The Advocate remained involved throughout Amun's transition to Ready Homes as he felt vulnerable, particularly as he was living in a house with other young people of a different culture and religion from his own. The Advocate supported Amun in raising safeguarding issues between himself and another young person and supporting him in house meetings to resolve the issues. Amun was moved to a temporary (emergency) Ready Homes when his house closed. He settled in the new placement but was then asked to move to a house in a different area. Amun did not want to do this as he felt unsafe in the area he was being asked to move to and had established friendships in the area that he lived. There continued to be challenges for Amun, and the Advocate supported him in these. Amun felt unhappy with the way he had been looked after by the LA, particularly around accommodation and Pathway Planning. He asked his Advocate to support him in drafting a Stage 1 complaint. Amun was not happy with the response to the Stage 1 complaint, but was able to draft a Stage 2 complaint without help from his Advocate.

Amun additionally asked his Advocate for support in providing information about move on housing. The Advocate facilitated several housing meetings between Amun, his PA and the 18plus Accommodation Advisor. Amun reached a point where he felt empowered to advocate for himself and no longer needed the support of his Advocate.

Amun said,
"Thank you so much for all you have done for me, I don't know what I would have done without you"

Feedback

From Young People

"Thanks so much for listening and understanding."

"Thank you for helping me. I think I am doing well and I don't get as stressed as I used to so am ok now, but thank you"

"Thank you for all your help."

"I have really liked talking with you and can tell you anything, but I want a fresh start now I am leaving primary school, and everything is better now."

" Thank you for that. Yes, I saw it and I am reading it now thank you for everything you do for me."

"I don't know what I'd have done without my Advocate. Even though I am an adult, people don't listen to me, but as soon as my Advocate contacts anyone, they listen".

"Thank you so much for always listening and being there for me. It really matters."

Feedback from professionals and family:

"E has expressed that she has really appreciated your support, but she feels she is now in a better position and is able to use her voice, so no longer requires an advocate. Thank you for all your support with E, it has been much appreciated"
Social Worker

"Thank you for your support in securing this outcome for J"
Social Worker

Feedback from professionals and family:

"Thank you for letting me know and for all your support with the M children. It was truly a pleasure working with you. I hope our paths cross again in the near future."
Social Worker

"Thank you for letting me know & thank you too for the support you have given B."
Parent

"A Huge thank you to you both with your responses to my urgent requests. This has been greatly appreciated."
Team Manager

"I wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the exceptional support we have received from Shelly Allen, who has been advocating on behalf of one of our young people, OC, from Kent Authority.

OC had been with us for 18 months and was deeply distressed at the prospect of having to leave. In response, we arranged for advocacy support, and Shelly Allen was assigned to the case.

From the outset, Shelly demonstrated outstanding professionalism, dedication, and compassion. She maintained regular communication with both OC and our team, ensuring that OC's voice was heard and represented at every stage. Her commitment to the young person's well-being was evident throughout the process. Even when the initial complaint outcome was not in OC's favour, Shelly did not relent. She pursued the matter further, challenging the decision and engaging with OC's family to provide additional support and insight. Her persistence and advocacy were instrumental in achieving a positive outcome.

Thanks to her tireless efforts, it has now been agreed that OC can remain with us until the age of 16. A semi-independent placement will also be arranged, along with a well-planned and supportive transition process.

We cannot thank Shelly enough for her hard work and unwavering commitment. She has made a significant and lasting impact on OC's life, and we are truly grateful. Thank you for taking the time to read this message, and please do share our sincere appreciation with Shelly."

Manager of a Residential Children's Home

News and Service Updates

Due to the consistent increase in the number of referrals to the Advocacy Service, the team has recruited three new sessional Advocates. Inductions are taking place in August and September.

Despite high demand, the Advocacy Service continue to offer prompt allocation of an individual advocate.

On 18th June Anna Withers gave an outstanding presentation at Canterbury Cathedral for Refugee Week. On the same day, Anna and Marcya also gave a short talk to SEND teams in Kent, highlighting the need for visiting advocacy that sits outside the remit of YLF.

The Team continues to adapt to the demands of the service and the increased complexities in issues for young people. Outcomes remain good despite pressures on local resources within and outside Kent and Medway.