The Young Lives Foundation

MEDWAY ADVOCACY REPORT

April - June 2025

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

69

New referrals received this quarter

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 = 19
FGC = 19
CP = 13
JA = 8
CIN = 6
CL = 4

Transgender/Non-Binary = 1

TOP ISSUES

1. FGC – 20
2. CP Meetings – 16
3. Placement – 13
4. Housing/Homelessness – 10
5. Social Worker – 5
6. Education – 3
7. Support at meetings – 3
8. PA - 2
9. Young parent - 2
10. Contact - 1
11. DIsability - 1

New Referral Breakdown by Age

15	0 – 10 yrs
29	11 – 15 yrs
21	16 & 17 yrs
3	18 – 21 yrs
1	22 - 25 yrs

New Referral Breakdown in ages

0 – 10 yrs = FGC/10, CP/2, Education/1, Support at meetings/ 1, Social Worker/1

11 - 15yrs = CP/11, FGC/9, Placement/2, Young Parent/2, Support at meetings/1, Social Worker/1, Education/1, Contact/1

16 & 17 yrs = Housing & Homelessness/9, Placement/7, Social Worker/3, FGC/1

18 – 21 yrs = Housing/1, Placement/1 Support at meetings/1

22 - 25 yrs = PA/1

Family Group Conference

This Quarter the Advocacy Service received 19 referrals for support at FGC's. Almost all these were for children between the ages of 0-15yrs. Talking to an independent person about their wishes and feelings can ensure that children's voices are listened to and heard in a neutral and impartial way, thus building trust and empowering children in the belief that their voice 'matters' and what they have to say is important. Many children who are subject to a Family Group Conference are also under Child Protection Plans. The Advocacy Service received an additional 13 referrals for children under CP Plans. When children believe that their views are listened to and respected during the planning process, they may feel more empowered and hopeful about the plan. The Advocate can potentially reduce the fear and anxiety the child may be feeling by supporting them throughout the process and allowing their wishes and feelings to be heard.

Case Study

Melody 14 years old

Melody was part of a sibling group of 4 children, going through CP processes. Initially, all the children said they were unhappy with the Social Worker's visits and her communication style. They felt that the Social Worker was highly critical of their parents and had expectations and made judgements based on her own children. When the Advocate met with the children, she was able to raise their concerns to the Social Worker, who took on board their worries and modified her behaviour accordingly. The relationship between the children and their social worker improved significantly, with the children reporting more positive visits.

Melody requested that her Social Worker should not meet her in school as she felt embarrassed by this and felt this was a breach of her privacy. The Social Worker listened to Melody's concerns and future visits and meetings took place away from the school. The Advocate supported Melody and her siblings to express their wishes and feelings via meetings, reporting that they were well supported and happy. At the last CP meeting, Melody reported that the level of social work intervention was having a negative impact on her family. The Advocate helped Melody to express this in a review meeting. This was considered, and the children were stepped down to CIN.

The Advocate visited Melody and her siblings following the review meeting. They said they were happy with the outcome of the meeting and had no further issues, so no longer required advocacy support. The Advocate explained to them that if they required advocacy support whilst remaining on a CIN plan, then they could be referred to the service again.
Advocacy played a huge role for this family and enabled them to have the support they needed to have their voices heard and to get the outcome that they wanted.

Children In Care

19 new Children in Care were referred to the Advocacy Service this Quarter. 9 of these children had issues with their placement or issues around a placement move (wanting to move/not wanting to move)

Case Study

Steven 15 years old

Steven was unhappy with his placement and identified issues of not being heard at meetings. The Advocate visited Steven, who lived out of county in a residential children's home. Steven has a diagnosis of ASD and ADHD.

The Advocate subsequently supported Steven in his child in care reviews and helped to raise his concerns to his social worker and staff at the placement. Steven's issues included limited access to his mobile phone, limited contact with his friends, limited internet access, and a significant issue with wanting to attend his Mum's wedding abroad.

As a result of the Advocate's intervention, Steven's mobile phone access was increased. He was able to walk to and from school, enabling him to see his friends and was able to have unsupervised contact with his friends after school. Steven also had increased contact time with his family, rising to 9 x per year (from 6x per year). However, attendance at his Mum's wedding was denied due to safeguarding issues and managing risk.

Riley 17 years old

An urgent request came in via commissioners to support Riley at his eviction appeal from supported accommodation. An Advocate was allocated immediately as the meeting was the same day. The Advocate made telephone contact with Riley and went through what he wanted to say in the meeting (he had already submitted an appeal letter but wanted to tell his Advocate his version of events). The Advocate supported Riley in the meeting and helped him to voice his appeal when he struggled to find the words to do this himself. Riley presented a good case for himself, with support from his Advocate. Unfortunately, the appeal was not upheld due to significant safeguarding concerns posed by Riley, but the panel thanked Riley for his honest account and wished him well for the future. His voice was heard but concerns were too great to overturn the eviction.

Riley thanked his Advocate for her support in the meeting. He said that his social worker and PA were helping him to find alternative accommodation.

Housing/Homelessness

The Advocacy Team continue to receive referrals for homeless young people aged 16 & 17 years old (8 this Quarter).

To enhance support to this vulnerable cohort of young people, 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.

Case Study

Kieran 17 years old

The Advocate introduced herself to Kieran and explained her role. She sent Kieran the link to the advocacy website, which he read with his aunt, who he was temporarily staying with. The Advocate called Kieran again to discuss his rights and entitlements. Due to his autism, Kieran struggled to take in all the information. The Advocate subsequently attended the JA, where Kieran heard his options from both the Social Worker and the Housing Officer. After talking through his options with his Advocate, Kieran requested section 20 as he felt he would need a greater level of support due to his has ADHD, Autism and Dyspraxia. He said he "struggled to look after himself in most ways." The Advocate spoke to the Social Worker who agreed that a referral to Adult Services would be made later so that Kieran could continue to be supported until 25 years old or beyond

ARE YOU 16-17 YEARS OLD?

Do you worry about having a bed for the night?

Have you been asked to leave your home?

Are you sleeping on a friend's sofa?

Are you worried about becoming street homeless?

You don't have to live on the streets to be homeless, you can be provided accommodation!

Call the numbers below to get help

CONTACT NUMBERS:

Medway Local Authority:
01634 33 44 66

Kent Local Authority:
03000 41 11 11

OUR ADVOCATES CAN HELP YOU!

The Young Lives Foundation can offer independent advice on your rights and entitlements as a homeless young person.

Listen • Support • Empower
the Young Lives foundation

CALL OUR FREE PHONE NUMBER FOR SUPPORT: 0808 164 0096

OR SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.ylf.org.uk advocacy@ylf.org.uk @ylfcharity Registered Charity Number: 1119528

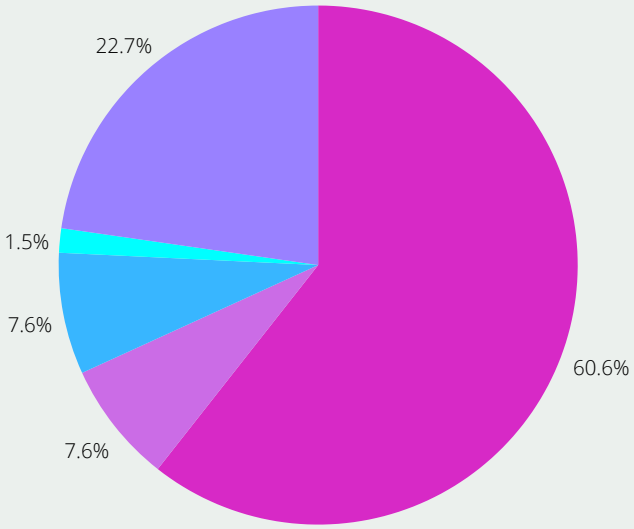
Closed Cases

THEMES AND TRENDS

66 CASES WERE CLOSED DURING THE QUARTER

40	Advocacy complete - All Issues resolved
5	Advocacy complete - Outcome unknown
5	Advocacy complete - Outstanding issues
1	Advocacy Incomplete - YP Lost Contact
15	Did not take up Advocacy

33 cases were opened and closed within the same Quarter demonstrating that 48% of children and young people referred this Quarter had their issues resolved with 'brief interventions'



This Quarter 76% of young people had their issues resolved, with support from their Advocate.

Note:
(note, when young people lose contact, this could indicate they feel that their issues have been resolved)

ADVOCACY IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

CHANGES FOR INDIVIDUALS

- 100% of children and young people referred to the Advocacy Service this Quarter were allocated an independent Advocate.
- 48% of these children and young people had their issues resolved within the Quarter and the remaining 52% will continue to receive ongoing advocacy support until their issues are resolved or they choose to disengage from the service.

CHANGES TO HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

- One UASC young person submitted a Stage 1 complaint which highlighted the high turnover of staff within the 16-plus team (16-18) and the lack of education provision within Medway and surrounding areas. The response to the complaint acknowledged that there had been difficulties with staff turnover and limited education provision, but efforts have been made to close gaps and ensure that all young people are supported by a Social Worker who responds to their issues in a timely way.

CHANGES TO WIDER COMMUNITY

- The Advocacy Team have highlighted the need for visiting advocacy, particularly to children living out of county and those with additional needs and disabilities. The current model does not allow for visiting advocacy as budgets and resources are focused specifically on issue- based advocacy.

CHANGES TO THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

- The Service has added an addition to their advocacy webpage, describing the process of Joint Assessments (JA) to young people who may be at risk of homelessness. Young People can view a video as well as read about the JA process. Posters explaining homelessness and signposting to services have also been distributed to schools and colleges within the county.
- The Advocacy Service has just recruited 3 x sessional advocates to expand the team to meet demand.

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

"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 SO MUCH FOR ALL YOUR HELP. EVERYTHING IS SO MUCH BETTER NOW."

"I GOT LISTENED TO, MY ADVOCATE HELPED ME TO GET THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME IN MY LIFE. THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT, YOU'VE MADE MY LIFE BETTER".

"I AM VERY PLEASED WITH THE SERVICE AND WOULD USE IT AGAIN IF I NEED TO"

"I APPRECIATE YOUR WILLINGNESS TO HELP ME IN SUCH TIME WHERE I FEEL LIKE I HAVE BEEN FAILED AS NO ONE IS WILLING TO HELP ME. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME. IT MEANS MORE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE."

"TERRI IS MY FAVOURITE VISITOR. SHE LISTENS TO US AND EVERYTHING SHE HAS SAID TODAY HAS BEEN WHAT WE HAVE SAID AND HOW WE FEEL AND I TRUST HER."

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

'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. Thank you!" **Commissioner**

"Leo received your congratulations card today and he wanted me to pass on his thanks. He was so pleased. It is very kind of you to think of Leo and take the time to let him know you are thinking of him".
Foster Carer

" I thought I would bring you up to date on what's been happening to J* and A*. Medway have greed their transition to specialist college. I must thank you for all the help and suggestions relating to this as I couldn't have done this without your input. Once again, many thanks for everything you have done for the boys." **Parent (SEND transitions)**

"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**

NEWS AND SERVICE UPDATES

Due to the consistent increase in the number of referrals to the Advocacy Service, we have recruited 3 new sessional Advocates who are due to start in September.

Despite high demand, the Advocacy Service continues to offer prompt allocation of an individual Advocate.

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.

Challenges

Communication remains a challenge, with some confusion from professionals around source of referral and how Advocates respond to referrals.

The Advocacy Service receives most referrals from Social Workers. However, other referrals come directly via the young person or sometimes from their foster carers or keyworkers. All children involved in social care are entitled to an Independent Advocate and permission does not need to be sought from the Social Worker at point of referral. Issue-based Advocacy is led by the voice of the child and should be about what the child wants to say in the context of their Rights and Entitlements. However, when children are young and lack capacity, the Advocate should inform the Social Worker that they are involved. This will allow the Social Worker to respond if there are complexities around the case that the Advocate needs to be aware of. This should not undermine the child's voice or their rights, but will inform good practice all round.