

advocacy focus

Our mission:

**To help people to achieve the outcomes
that matter to them in their lives,
by providing high quality advocacy.**

A photograph showing the long, dark shadows of a group of people walking on a light-colored, paved surface. The shadows are cast from the left, indicating a low sun position. The people are walking in a loose line, and their shadows are clearly visible on the ground.

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

“

**I have nothing but admiration for the advocacy
service and I sincerely hope that this service is
never a victim of austerity cuts.
Thank you all for your support.**

”

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VISION AND VALUES

VISION: Ensuring that advocacy is available to all who may need it in our communities.

As a team, we are passionate about what we do, and we actively encourage our people to fully embrace our shared core values with all those that they come into contact with.

Our values were co-produced with our team to create new values that reflect who we are as a growing organisation.

The decisions we make are a reflection of our values and beliefs, and they are always directed towards a specific purpose.



Quality

We deliver high quality advocacy - we have over 20 years' experience of providing expert, person-led advocacy.



People

We put people at the heart of everything we do and want to enable them to make positive change in their lives.



Respectful

We are a respectful team - we treat everyone equally and make sure everyone feels valued, respected and listened to.



Trust

You can trust us and know that we will keep your information confidential and safe.



Independent

We are independent of councils and health services and we are on your side.



Learning

We never stop learning - we learn from the people we support, our partners and each other.



CHAIR'S REPORT

Will Shepherd, Interim Chair, Advocacy Focus

It was a year of change at Board level which saw our existing Chair step down due to work commitments and two long standing members leave the charity due to health reasons and retirement respectively. For much of this reporting period it has often felt that the Board has been in a permanent state of recruitment. Good news however, in that we recruited two new Board members and their arrival has enabled us to retain seven trustees at a time when Advocacy Focus had struggled to gain a level of stability in regard to its governance. One of the new trustees also stepped into the role of Interim Chair, having had previous experience of this important role. As we move into the next financial year, a key focus for the Board will be the appointment of a new Chair so we can support the organisation's strategy and growth plans.

Advocacy Focus is a values-driven charity that provides high-quality independent advocacy and are sector-leaders.

Last year our plans included the need for a larger, more diverse and professional Board and we have made some progress towards this. However more needs to be done, particularly in regard to Board members with lived experience of mental ill health or first-hand experience of accessing advocacy services.

The advocacy Quality Performance Mark (QPM) was retained this year over a stringent four-day evaluation and inspection process, and confirmed what we as a Board already knew: namely that Advocacy Focus is a values-driven charity that provides high-quality independent advocacy and are sector-leaders. It also confirms that we cannot become complacent and compromise in regard to service delivery, as the QPM process becomes more rigorous and raises the bar ever higher in our sector.

The existing Board members and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) attended a productive Board away day in the final quarter of the year and established the charity's strategic objectives for the next three years. These objectives will be the key focus of our newly established sub-groups; Business Development; Finance and Risk; and Service Development. Members of the Board and SLT will focus on these key areas in greater detail outside of quarterly Board meetings. To date, this seems to be working well and will offer the Board a greater level of scrutiny and involvement in the governance process. The Board also finalised changes at constitution level, which will give us greater scope in regard to our services and the individuals we can support in our communities.

CHAIR'S REPORT CONTINUED

In terms of our charity's finances, this year we have had to invest in a number of roles at infrastructure level to ensure we remain effective and sustainable. We have increased in staff numbers from 56 to 63 following successful bids for new contracts. We have also, much the same as many other charities, experienced reduced budgets and resources in an ever-competitive advocacy sector.

During 2019 we lost our in-house Business Development Manager, whom had been a new addition to our team, and for a time the SLT had to continue with tender writing and fundraising. The Board agreed that the time was right to outsource this work. We commissioned Competitive Solutions Limited (CSL), which are specialists in fundraising and tendering for the voluntary sector. We are confident that we will see a return on our investment within the next two years.

At time of writing, the COVID-19 global pandemic has resulted in many changes for our communities and the wider society. The way we now work as an organisation is changing daily and the work landscape will potentially change beyond recognition. It will no doubt be a challenging 12 months for individuals and all sectors, but it's a challenge that we embrace. The cultural values that are pivotal to how the charity and Board operate, will enable us to move confidently into our next phase of development. In our 22nd year, Advocacy Focus's mantra of 'helping people live the lives they want to live' has never been more relevant or needed.



**Advocacy Focus's mantra of
'helping people live the lives they want to live'
has never been more relevant or needed.**

SERVICE DELIVERY

Leanne Hignett, Service Delivery Director

2019-2020 has been a phenomenal year for Advocacy Focus, our staff team and volunteers who have been committed to supporting people to have their voices heard and to be central to any decision-making processes. This hasn't been without its challenges and we have seen our busiest year to date.

We have supported **6649** people with complex advocacy needs across all our contracts compared with **5383** from the previous year. A key focus this year has been the empowerment of the people we support to develop their self-advocacy skills; we have supported **1516** people on their self-advocacy journey to enable them to become their own best advocates. We have made a significant impact within our communities with the support of our partner organisations, but the journey is not over yet, we have more exciting plans ahead for 2020 and 2021 so watch this space! First, let's take you through 2019-2020 to show you what a great year it has been.



6,649

people supported

1516

people supported on
self-advocacy journey

455

people supported with
non-statutory advocacy
needs

Lancashire Advocacy Hub

It has been an incredibly successful year once again for our advocacy services in Lancashire. This year has seen the launch of the new Lancashire Advocacy Hub which introduced the Single Point of Contact and Community Advocacy (non-statutory) services. Advocacy Focus was delighted to be able to continue the great work we do in the Lancashire community and we have been able to expand our services further to provide a more holistic and streamlined service for people to be able to obtain the care and support they may need.

The team has worked together to produce a tiered approach which promotes self-advocacy and the empowerment of individuals across Lancashire. Each individual who contacts the Single Point of Contact has been offered information and guidance in relation to a wide range of health and social care issues. The hub navigates key services across Lancashire to ensure that no one is left without the support they need.

Since the launch of our Community Advocacy work in August 2019, we have supported **455** people with their non-statutory advocacy needs. Holding both the statutory and non-statutory advocacy contracts within Lancashire offers our service users a more holistic and streamlined service in terms of obtaining the support they require. We have found this particularly useful when individuals have contacted us and asked for support to request a social care assessment. Our Advocacy Coordinators can support that individual to request the assessment and then follow the process through to ensure that the individual is informed of their rights in relation to advocacy support under the Care Act.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Lancashire Advocacy Hub continued

We have supported **2,816** people with their health and social care advocacy needs compared to **2,077** in the previous year. Our advocacy provision has enabled all who accessed our service to be central to the decision making process and have their voices heard. When asked if our service users would recommend our service to family and friends, **96.5%** of people scored **10/10**.

We have seen the biggest increase in Relevant Persons Representative under Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards as well as those who wish to make health complaints advocacy.

We have been championing Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy to ensure no-one is overlooked and people have access to what they are entitled to. We continue to support people by acting as Litigation Friend within the Court of Protection, to ensure the rights of the people we support are upheld and we were able to challenge decisions made on their behalf. This year we have supported individuals in Lancashire as their litigation friend in Section 16 welfare applications under the Mental Capacity Act and Section 21a challenges under the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.

We have spent time as a service preparing for the anticipated changes that are set to occur to the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, which will shortly be known as the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS). LPS continues to be a key topic of discussion at a number of training and forum sessions we have attended. We also attend regular planning meetings with our local authority to discuss implementation and feed into concerns we all have raised about the proposed reform. We have a dedicated Case Law Champion who has created a series of Plain English updates for the team which detailed any amendments made. These updates were shared internally and with external professionals amongst sub-groups and best practice groups which we attend on a regular basis.

We expected as a service that the new LPS legislation would come into force in October 2020, however, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic this now appears very unlikely. Instead our team have had to become aware of new legislative changes in the form of the Coronavirus Act 2020 which allows for the easement of the statutory duties of local authorities and the NHS. You can read more about these changes on the Advocacy Focus website under News and Blogs. Despite some uncertainties, our staff team remain determined to tackle the upcoming challenges both the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the new Liberty Protection Safeguards legislation will bring.

2,816

people supported with health and social care advocacy

Our Care Act advocacy provision has been one of the busiest areas of the service, we have seen 836 referrals for advocates to support people with assessments, care and support planning, reviews, appeals, and section 42 safeguarding enquiries. The Lancashire Advocacy Hub remains a gateway for information and guidance around accessing assessments and support for people. We have also helped a large number of people in challenging their assessments where people felt the support provided did not fully meet their needs. We continue to build upon our offer within the five prisons across Lancashire to ensure prisoners had access to statutory advocacy and their needs were met. Our Advocacy Development leads have ensured advocacy representation has sat amongst the prisoner forums which look at the key issues prisoners are experiencing whilst serving their sentences. Advocacy has ensured prisoners across Lancashire have had a voice by ensuring their rights in regards to key legislation such as the Care Act 2014 have been upheld.

96.5%

would recommend our service

SERVICE DELIVERY

Lancashire Advocacy Hub

We have gone from strength to strength in providing advocacy support to detained patients in hospitals across Lancashire, and to those that are subject to restrictions under the Mental Health Act within their own homes. Our dedicated IMHA Development Advocate has been working alongside our Advocacy Managers to continuously develop our offer. We continue to strengthen our current partnerships and ensure we have consistent and effective referral pathways established in order to ensure that no eligible patients are being left without support.

We have also conducted a great piece of work with the Mental Health Act Administrators across all mental health hospitals to establish a more streamlined referral process for those that are being discharged on a Community Treatment Order and still require advocacy support. This has resulted in an increase in these type of referrals in comparison to previous reporting periods, allowing us to provide support to those in the community in a preventative capacity.

In 2019, Advocacy Focus was approached by Kate Mercer and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to request our involvement in the launch of a Notification of Rights Project across all the hospitals in Lancashire. Patients were provided with a new resource booklet that had been designed by EHRC to notify patients about their rights during their detention. As part of this project, it was imperative that we were able to facilitate gaining the views and feedback of patients, carers and professionals, so that this could then be utilised in the production and distribution of the booklets moving forward.

As part of this project, researchers undertook 12 interviews with people from a combination of civil and forensic settings who had been provided with the booklet during their detention and had consented to participate in the project. In addition to this focus group, interviews were also carried out with a range of stakeholders, including carers and professionals, who were also invited to provide feedback on the project.

Finally, nine of our advocates participated in a group interview with the researchers to provide insight and feedback around the advocate's experience of the project and to give a detailed evaluation of the resource material. This project has benefitted many people who have been detained in hospital to understand their rights, treatment and support.

We have supported a large number of people through health and social care complaints processes where they felt their care or treatment provided by health or social care services had not been satisfactory. We have placed great emphasis on preventative work and self-help tools to help people become their own best advocate and complete their complaint as independently as possible.

This year there were 480 clicks to our new Self-advocacy Toolkit which was co-produced with Stanley's Community Centre and other co-production groups across Lancashire. This has been one of our biggest achievements and has helped people take control of their situation rather than letting the situation take control of them, we always said it was our ambition to do ourselves out of a job by creating a world of self-advocates. I hope we can achieve just that.

We have spoken about the success of the Lancashire Advocacy Hub before and it's no secret when we say that it isn't just the direct delivery of advocacy that makes the hub the best it can be. It is the dedication and commitment of our team raising awareness of people's rights and entitlements. Raising awareness is a key part of the advocacy role, we have done this with the public and with professionals involved in people's lives, providing information and clear communication which is key to getting successful outcomes for people. We have facilitated 50 training and awareness sessions to professionals within health and social care to demystify Independent Advocacy, to help them understand their duties to refer as opposed to powers and strengthen referral protocols.

480

clicks to our new Self-advocacy Toolkit

50

external training sessions delivered

SERVICE DELIVERY

Community Engagement/Pop-Up Advocacy



Community Engagement aims to raise awareness and support self-advocacy across Lancashire. This is through events organised with partner organisations and our own events within the community (markets, community centres, meetings and groups).

We have had engagement with **1400** people from April 2019 to the end of March 2020, either on a one to one basis at stands and information events or as part of awareness raising talks or with other groups across the county.

We raised awareness of advocacy and the service we offer, including non-statutory advocacy and self-advocacy with **936** people.

Over the year we supported **808** people through events or groups promoting self-advocacy.

Professionals Meetings/Awareness Raising

We aim to meet with groups of professionals all over the county, those directly involved with statutory roles and those in the Third Sector but inexorably linked to health and social care. Awareness raising consists of educating professionals, social care workers and volunteers on the role of advocacy, how and when someone would be eligible for an advocate and the role of the agency we can signpost to in order to support this.

These groups include:

- Virgin Care, Ormskirk
- LCC – Academy MCA Day
- Age Concern, Dementia Advisors
- Stroke Association East
- Healthwatch Lancashire
- LCC training session
- CAB team meeting Lancaster
- Inspire team meeting Accrington
- Reablement team East
- LCFT talk Leyland
- Memory assessment team Fleetwood
- LSAB providers
- Learning Disability and Autism Team
- Preston North Social Work Team
- Clitheroe LDA Team

808

people supported
through events or group
advocacy

1400

people engaged with

Advocacy in the Community

The only way to capture public awareness of advocacy in Lancashire is to be available to the people who most need the service. As a result, we work with community groups across Lancashire as well as attending one off events.

These include:

- L'Arche Preston – Family carers meeting
- Longridge Dementia Friendly Day
- Longridge Library Group
- Carers Link Community Hub Pop Up
- LD Week Launch Event Preston
- Parkinsons Group Preesall
- Carnforth High School Health and Fun Day
- Pendle Women's Centre
- Neuro Drop in Centre
- Autism Peer Support Group, Preston
- Family Fun Day, Accrington
- Preston Market
- Nelson Market
- Festival of Mental Health
- Defying Dementia Day
- New Beginnings Conference
- Addison Court Care Home Open Day
- UCLAN International Day of People with Disabilities
- Gannow Community Centre
- Vanguard Community Centre
- HM Land Registry Health and Wellbeing Event



Advocacy in the Community

We work with several groups across Lancashire, promoting statutory advocacy but also supporting self-advocacy and offering groups sharing our own knowledge and experience to have a bigger impact within the communities they support.

Voice for All Group, Brothers of Charity

The Voice for All group are a self-advocacy group who are passionate about promoting self-advocacy and empowerment for people with learning disabilities. The Voice for All group our one of our main partners with co-production.

Friends and Relationships (FAR) Group, Lancashire Learning Disability Partnership Board

FAR are a sub group of the board. The role of the group is to highlight issues and work on tasks related to the board.

The FAR group are working with us to produce the 'Your Rights within Sex and Sexuality' easy read. Though not instructional, the document is a self-advocacy tool to enable people to access their rights within the care system.

We also attend as active participants of the group.

Stanley's Community Centre Advocacy Hub in Morecambe

Stanley's worked with us to produce 'The Essential Self-Advocacy Toolkit' which launched during the self-advocacy conference in Morecambe.

Stanley's are also offering a self-advocacy hub in Morecambe which will be supported by Advocacy Focus in the long term to offer statutory advocacy support when needed.

Preston Learning Disability Forum

The forum is a local Preston meeting that supports the voices of people with learning disabilities campaigning on a local and county level.

We are also working with the forum supporting the housing task group in an effort to promote and support people self-advocating in supported housing. This will include finding suitable housing, exercising your rights as a tenant, and raising awareness of tenancies to make these rights accessible to all.

Lancashire Learning Disability Board

We attend board meetings and are members of the Friends and Relationships sub group. We have been working with the board to support easy read minutes and also to create a working group with services across Lancashire to promote an accessible information in both Plain English and Easy Read.

Dementia Hubs

The Bay (Morecambe and Lancaster), Bolton-le-sands, Caton, West Lancashire and Fylde Coast – The dementia hubs are held monthly and offer people who have or are newly diagnosed with dementia and their carers a chance to meet services in one room. We attend the hubs to promote our service and also to offer on the spot advocacy support and information.

Task and Finish Groups

We attend the consent to sex and marriage task and finish group. The group is part of the Lancashire Adult Safeguarding Board and we are tasked with specific roles to create information and guidelines for social care services across the county



SERVICE DELIVERY

Trafford Advocacy Hub



Once again it's been another great year for the Trafford Advocacy Hub. We first launched the hub on the 1st April 2018 and it grew considerably within its first year. The key to success here was that the team worked hard to engage with the public and statutory sector in Trafford to ensure that all adults who had the right to advocacy were able to access the support they needed. We carried out a variety of advocacy training and awareness sessions, all of which has continued to see a significant growth in referrals.

When we first took over from the previous services there were 197 people receiving advocacy support, by the end of year one we reached over 644 people, by the end of year two we have supported a staggering 1,309 people across both years.

In 2019-2020 we have supported **152** people as Relevant Person's Representative under Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, **135** people for advocacy support under the Care Act, **73** people for advocacy under the Mental Capacity Act, **35** people for advocacy support with health complaints and **211** people for advocacy under the Mental Health Act.

Our Child Protection Advocacy Service continues to support young people's voices to be heard when they are subject to a child protection plan. Despite this being a smaller project it has really impacted upon young people's lives. We have supported **59** young people with advocacy support this year which has enabled them to have their voices heard in initial child protection conferences, review conferences, and core group meetings something which historically never occurred. The service has enabled children to be heard and taken seriously in regards to their situation and has given them opportunity to take some control over what was happening.

59

young people supported with advocacy this year

152

people supported as Relevant Person's Representative under Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

73

people supported under the Mental Capacity Act

211

people supported under the Mental Health Act

SERVICE DELIVERY

Spot purchase Advocacy

We have supported **89** people through spot purchase advocacy in 2019-2020 via our two specialist multi-skilled advocates who operate across the North West and Yorkshire. Spot-purchase advocacy has supported people in times where there has been no contract to provide that particular piece of advocacy, to bridge a gap in services. Advocacy Focus has provided Independent Advocacy Services on a spot purchase basis in the following areas:

- Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy
- Paid Relevant Persons Representative (RPR) Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards
- Independent Mental Health Advocacy
- Care Act Advocacy
- Health and Social Care Complaints Advocacy
- Children's Advocacy
- Missing from Home - Return to Care Interviews
- Rule 1.2 Representative
- Litigation Friend
- Support for parents through Child Protection proceedings



OUR

SERVICE AREAS





SERVICE DELIVERY

Return to Care Service in Bradford

The Return to Care Service was hugely successful with children and young people in Bradford and also with young people placed out of area. We have supported with **1,198** interview requests this year alone. The year 2019-2020 saw an average of **101** missing episodes per month, a decrease on the amount we received referrals for in 2018-2019. The reduction of missing episodes is a reflection of key services working together to minimise risk and harm occurring to the young people of Bradford.

In 2019-2020, we completed **933** Return to Care Interviews and all referrals were processed within the statutory **72**-hour timeframe. We couldn't be more delighted with the team who have been dedicated and committed to making a real difference in young people's lives. The relationships the Return to Care Coordinators have developed with young people and the professionals involved in their care has contributed to keeping young people safe and getting young people the help and support they need to reduce them going missing again in the future.

Our Return to Care Coordinators are often the first point of contact for young people when they were experiencing difficulties or facing a crisis.

Our team made numerous referrals to local authority, health and third sector organisations on a weekly basis to assist young people with advocacy, educational courses and training and support with substance misuse and more.

Our Return to Care Coordinators raise safeguarding concerns with professionals and alerts when necessary. A key part of the role is explaining the dangers of risking taking behaviours and explaining how a young person can keep themselves safe. We give practical tips and support on what to do if a young person finds themselves in danger. We have been using the Signs of Safety model with our young people and have clear processes in place around sharing a young person's information with the local authority and other key partners.

Our commitment to young children has led to many positive outcomes and has supported the young person's transition into adulthood.

We have seen over the past year a significant reduction and/or eradication of Missing Episodes. We have seen many young people who used to go missing daily change their behaviours for the better, such as stopping or reducing the use of illegal substance, ending inappropriate sexual relationships. Many of the young people turning 16, 17, and those who are nearly 18 years old had begun to engage in employment, education and training. We have seen an increased engagement in positive and meaningful activities, and settlement within placements with increased engagement with other services. All of the above has contributed significantly to the reduction of risk taking behaviour and has assisted with the development of positive relationships with key people in their lives.

Our key to success has not changed and never will. We will always listen to young people and take them seriously and we will always try and help them achieve the outcomes that matter to them.

1198

interview requests supported

101

average missing episodes per month

933

Return to Care interviews within the last year

72 HOURS

all referrals processed within this time frame



ROCHDALE ADVOCACY

It has been our first year in delivering the Children's Rights Service since the contract take over from the Children's Society. We started off with 14 young people being transferred from the Children's Society to Advocacy Focus. Since then we have developed and transformed the service to what it is today. Its success has been down to the mobilisation at contract launch. The performance of the service was very successful given the large percentage of young people that engaged with advocacy, return to care interviews and the Independent Visitor service.

We have supported **86** young people with Independent advocacy support through key meetings in their lives. We have completed **179** Return to Care Interviews for young people who have run away from care. The number of positive engagements, missing from home interviews completed and the nature of the information that young people shared with us has helped us improve children and young people's lives for the better.

We have strengthened our multi agency approach, partnership and collaborative work with external agencies allowed us to provide more effective and holistic support to the young people of Rochdale. Advocacy Focus hopes to achieve so much more with the young people of Rochdale, we are committed to supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing, whilst ensuring their rights are upheld and voices are heard, through key health and social care processes.

86

children and young people
supported each month

179

Return to Care interviews
within the last year

SERVICE DELIVERY

Independent Visitor Service

Advocacy Focus commenced our Independent Visitor service, as a new strand for our charity, from 1st April 2019.

An Independent Visitor is someone who we safely and strategically match with a young person that lives in care, with a view to building an emotional connection through trust, kindness a genuine interest in their overall interests and development.

The service continues to evolve and improve through the implementation of best practices; alongside building a wealth of useful contacts. Both of these elements are bearing fruit in terms of more relaxed, yet stronger, relationships being forged with the young people that we work with. We achieved 14 matches at our peak and our target is to achieve 15 matches.



Young Person Feedback:

"I love having an Independent Visitor. They give me the chance to speak freely about my feelings and thoughts. It is my safe space for me to bring up any concerns I might have and share the positives that have gone on in my day."

Carer Feedback:

"I am a foster parent who looks after two 'looked after children'; one being *Adrian who has special and complex needs as well as a toddler. Having an Independent Visitor has been incredibly helpful to our family. My Mum died 18 months ago which caused a lot of upset however the support we got from the Independent Visitor (*William) was just fantastic. *William reacted to our needs by offering more respite care and being extra sensitive to the grief we was all experiencing. I can't thank the Advocacy Focus enough for the service, the continued support is stable, reliable and of huge relief and support for all of us so we are extremely grateful."

Volunteer Provision

Our volunteers have made a significant contribution to our service offer, with the support of our Volunteer Manager and Volunteer Coordinator, which has allowed us to engage, build relationships and support a wider range of people within our communities during 2019-2020.

Our volunteers have also gained a diverse range of skills, experience and knowledge from their time with us, and for some this has also helped them overcome their social isolation, improve their health and wellbeing and successfully secure potential routes to employment, as well as supporting their local community.

Again we are pleased to announce that some of our volunteers have successfully secured paid roles within the organisation as evidenced below:

Kelly started volunteering with us in April 2019 and embraced her role, shadowing Advocates and learning all aspects of advocacy, including a lot of self-study and attending additional training and starting her Independent Advocacy qualification. Kelly was so keen she donated over 60 hours of her time in her first eight weeks as a volunteer and when an opportunity came up to join our paid workforce she successfully secured a position as an Advocate.

Kelly said: "Volunteering for Advocacy Focus and learning about advocacy has been a positive experience for me. It has helped to develop my knowledge and skills to support and empower others. The volunteering experience gave me a head start to pursue a career in something I love and find very rewarding."



SERVICE DELIVERY

Recruitment and Diversity

Interest in our Volunteer Programme remains strong and vibrant which has enabled us to maintain and develop new services. We continue to use a range of recruitment streams so that we are able to connect with a range of backgrounds, ethnicities and personalities so we can strategically match our volunteers with the specific needs of our service users.

We have a diverse team of volunteers from a variety of backgrounds with their own unique aims and motivations for volunteering at Advocacy Focus.

Some are retired professionals from the social care sector and other public sectors who want to continue to give back to the community through supporting people to overcome their difficulties and be a part of something that is both rewarding and fulfilling. We also have some that are students who volunteer to gain vital experience to pursue a rewarding career working with vulnerable people in the future.

One of our volunteers said "Since I have become a volunteer at Advocacy Focus I feel more confident, have a purpose and looks forward to getting involved and giving back to the community. Most importantly, I feels that I a valued and no longer feels socially isolated as I am making a positive impact on other people's lives."

During the year we have had a total of 31 volunteers who have passionately supported our service users across the board; 8 mental health volunteers, 14 Independent visitors and 9 community focus volunteers. During this year the volunteers donated a staggering 1262:45 hours in supporting our service users.

Over the last year we have we launched three new services that were volunteer led projects; an Independent Visitor service, and the East Lancashire Community Focus Project. Through these projects we were able to support people to give them a voice to resolve matters, empower them through educating them about their rights, befriend socially isolated people and provide stable and positive support to our young people through fun activities.

"Since I have become a volunteer at Advocacy Focus I feel more confident, have a purpose and looks forward to getting involved and giving back to the community. Most importantly, I feels that I a valued and no longer feels socially isolated as I am making a positive impact on other people's lives."



SERVICE DELIVERY

East Lancashire Community Focus

In July 2019, we launched the Community Focus project to provide support in East Lancashire to vulnerable people in the community experiencing social isolation, who lacked digital skills or who may require support to facilitate daily living tasks. The themes heavily leaned towards helping resolve issues for people who struggled to understand society's social system or they feel their voice was not being heard when dealing with key issues around health, education or housing issues and more.

Overall we have had a productive quarter as the scheme is firmly fully embedded in the social care network across East Lancashire. Our profile is increasing in value each time we support people as word of mouth spreads among our service users and the professionals we have been assisting, and this is evident in the rise of referrals.

Some of the topics we have supported our service users with:

- Accessing Services
- Companionship
- Digital Skills
- Support with Paperwork
- Hoarding
- Complaints
- Bereavement
- Befriending
- Accessing the Community
- Confidence Building
- Support at Appointments
- Benefits
- Debt Management
- Housing
- Accessing free counselling

Service User Feedback:

"I have been feeling guilty for a long time because I was unable to get the support for my son he deserves. I used to worry about my son all the time and dreaded that he was going to come home upset again. The Advocate arranged all the meetings and helped me to voice my concerns and for the first time it felt like the school listened to me and took it seriously. My son is a lot happier at school and has started connecting more with children in his class. Since he has got the support from his teacher, he has not had a bladder infection. I am ever so grateful for all the support my advocate has given me as I would not have achieved these results without her help."

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY – NON STATUTORY

The Community Advocacy provision is a further service area where our volunteers provide support in relation to low level advocacy. For those who are ineligible for statutory advocacy, and whose issues cannot be dealt with over the phone via our Duty Advocate, we are able to provide face to face support through a series of time limited volunteer led interventions. The majority of these requests have been in relation to support for parents through the child protection process, assisting with complaints and supporting with medical appointments.

Our volunteers also continue to support us with marketing and research tasks where appropriate and provide support both in the community, accompanying Advocates on home visits as a second person when needed, and providing invaluable support to patients on the mental health wards as described below.



Mental Health Volunteers

Our Mental Health Volunteers support our service users via a weekly drop-in on each ward, taking referrals for new patients, raising awareness of advocacy support, informing patients of their rights, promoting and sharing self-advocacy skills and identifying key issues to feed back to both Advocates and hospital staff. We also have a dedicated volunteer who provides support to informal patients on the Perinatal Ward at Chorley Hospital alongside completing regular drop-ins.

Our Mental Health Volunteer Feedback:

"My contact at Chorley Hospital is so good for the patients, as they do not feel so isolated when I and my colleagues talk to them. They can feel that there is someone else on their side who is able to empower them with knowledge of their rights and that AF is there to support them and help them get their questions answered. I feel quite privileged to be approached by service users that I had seen previously when I was shadowing an Advocate. It felt a rewarding experience when this service user felt that she could confide in me. I am learning more about mental health in practice as I continue with my volunteering role alongside my knowledge about the Mental Health Act. This has increased my confidence when talking to service users."



COMMUNITY ADVOCACY – NON STATUTORY

Outreach

Our Volunteer Team, along with our Volunteer Coordinator, have supported us to engage with different communities via our Pop-Up Advocacy provision and networking, raising awareness of our services, alongside signing up individuals to the Electricity Northwest priority register, and identifying individuals who may feel isolated and who could benefit from the support we offer. This has enabled us to identify the type of tailored support that individuals require to gain independence and confidence.

We have proactively collaborated and worked in partnership with other organisations so that our service users can have access to the range of support services available to them. Due to this we have been able to adapt our approach accordingly and identify areas where language barriers are an issue to accessing services e.g. providing Pop-Up Advocacy in Nelson and having conversations in Urdu/Punjabi where appropriate.

To raise awareness of our services we also hosted a 'fun day', which was an interactive pop-up session at a local venue in East Lancashire. The day was a great success resulting in various conversations around people's wellbeing and the recruitment of volunteers and additional registrations for the Electricity Northwest Priority Service Register

Our Accrington Community Hub has also proved to be an invaluable space for us to reach out to our community via our volunteer team and support the community with different health and social care related matter outside of our statutory contracts and referrals.

2019-2020 has been an incredible year for the volunteer team with the introduction of new services. Our volunteers continue to be a reliable, dedicated and compassionate team, and are an essential resource for the charity. The interest to be a volunteer is still strong and a favoured choice for those working in the volunteer network. Furthermore, the introduction of Volunteer Coordinator to the volunteer team is an indication of how much value the volunteers bring to the charity.

To date, 37 Advocates have completed their IAQ and are recognised multi-skilled advocates. In 2019- 2020 8 employees have been progressing well in the qualification.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Volunteer training

Training is a pivotal part of the volunteer process and all of our volunteers undertake the foundation course in advocacy, alongside their robust induction. Our volunteers have received training regarding our non-statutory provision, outlining the rights of individuals and enabling them to support members of the community with low level advocacy. This has further helped them to effectively identify people within our communities, such as family, friends and neighbours, who need support through difficult times and who might benefit from our services. Our volunteers also receive ongoing training which includes topics; Project Specific; Safeguarding Adults and Children; The Care Act; Human Rights and many more.

Working with our communities

Supporting our communities is key to our organisation. By investing in our external training delivery, particularly through our Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid courses, we have helped individuals and businesses gain the skills they need to stay mentally well in the workplace.

Alongside a comprehensive advocacy training schedule, our Advocates have access to ad-hoc seminars and workshops delivered by leaders in the sectors we work in. This ranges from legal workshops to other relevant topics within the health and social care sector. Besides this, we have also started working with a local Burnley charity, PH7 Health and H7Wealth, who offer our teams Mental and Financial Wealth workshops and support.

Working with our communities and strengthening our networks also helps us promote our training offer further which will create further revenue streams in 2020/2021.



In 2020/2021, we hope to further expand our range of external training packages, including training in advocacy and mental health.

Looking into the future

We recognise the continuously growing demand on our service with increasing referrals being made in all our service areas. Despite this, we believe that we should continue to invest time and resources into the training and development of our people. As only by doing this, our highly-trained and motivated teams will continue to deliver high quality advocacy.

In 2020/2021, we hope to further expand our range of external training packages, including training in advocacy and mental health. This will create an opportunity for increased revenue in this area, and we hope to be able to invest some of this revenue back into the community by offering free places on our courses to members of the public, volunteers, service users, and other charities.



PLEASE NOTE - In the following 6 Advocacy Journeys all names have been changed to protect identities.

ADVOCACY

JOURNEY 1 - 39D

Ann was diagnosed with dementia in 2008 and began to deteriorate significantly in 2017. Ann was living at home with the support of family but became very aggressive towards the family members and refused to get out of bed or eat. By July 2017 Ann was deemed 'end of life' and was shortly after admitted to a care home where she physically improved. Unfortunately, this care home closed down and Ann was moved to another. Advocacy Focus received a 39d referral for Ann under the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards as she was being deprived of her liberty in the new care home.

Why was advocacy support so effective?

It is important for Ann to have updated care files and risk assessments in place that reflect where Ann now resides. Ann needs support and it is essential that all support is given in Ann's best interests and to ensure this is done in the least restrictive way, and in a way that will not cause Ann any distress. Staff also need this information (which needs to be reviewed regularly) so they can support Ann with her care needs effectively.

Advocacy Focus gave independent support to Ann and consulted with the BIA*. It was important to support Ann regarding her care needs and make sure all the up to date information is in place around Ann's care and that Ann is receiving the care and support she requires.

(* BIA - Best Interest Assessor)

What did we do to help?

James, an Independent Advocate visited Ann and it was apparent that she had difficulty communicating and was mainly bedbound. There was no evidence that Ann wanted to live anywhere else and Ann appeared happy and settled. James reviewed the care plans, risk assessments, daily notes and other relevant documentation and realised that Ann's care file was from the previous care home and had not been updated for some time and related to her previous residence.

He consulted with the staff and nurses to get some information on the day to day care for Ann and requested that all Ann's care plans and risk assessments were written and completed for Ann's care needs at her current placement.

James completed an extra visit to the new care home to ensure that Ann's care files, risk assessments and other relevant documentation had been completed and updated. Ann had restrictive measures in place around her personal care as Ann can become agitated. These restrictions were documented in the DoLS authorisation. He came across an extra restriction that was in place around Ann's personal care that was not documented in the DoLS authorisation. It was recorded in the completed care plans that Ann's dentures be removed before supporting Ann with her personal care. James highlighted the extra restriction in his 39d report and consulted with the BIA.

What was the outcome?

The BIA stated that she will ensure that a mental capacity assessment and best interest decision is completed around removing Ann's dentures prior to personal care. The BIA will also ensure that care plans are reviewed monthly, and ask that behaviours, especially around personal care, are documented.

ADVOCACY JOURNEY 2 – CHC*

Molly has been diagnosed with an acquired brain injury due to being in a road traffic accident. Molly is in a wheelchair and needs to wear a spinal jacket for 23 hours a day and splints for both her arms. Molly lives on her own and was constantly struggling due to not having the correct care package in place to meet her needs. Molly had a social worker who she felt did not listen to her and didn't comprehend the level of Molly's needs. Molly has full capacity in regards to her care and residence and wanted to remain living at home with the correct care package. Molly's home was owned by the council and wasn't appropriate for Molly and needed a number of alterations. Due to Molly's mobility she struggled getting around the property safely.



Why was advocacy support so effective?

Molly was highly anxious and apprehensive about involving new professionals due to being let down on a number of occasions. Advocacy support gave Molly a voice in the process and allowed her to get the correct support to meet her needs and home adaptations which allowed her to maximise her independence.

(* CHC - Continuing Health Care)

What did we do to help?

Paul, an Independent Advocate, met Molly when he took over the case from another advocacy provider. It took a number of visits for him to build up a rapport and to gain Molly's trust. This was due to Molly being let down by a number of professionals. Molly confided in Paul that she no longer trusted her social worker and wanted to request a new social worker. He supported Molly to do this and Molly then ended up with two social workers being allocated to her. Molly's social workers were extremely sympathetic to her situation and arranged to start an assessment from scratch, straight away. Paul supported Molly through the assessment at a pace that met Molly's processing needs. During the assessment a CHC checklist was carried out and it triggered a full CHC assessment. Paul then supported Molly through the CHC assessment, attending weekly meetings going through one domain at a time to ensure Molly was fully involved in the process and giving her time to have full input. Molly also had a Senior Occupational Therapist allocated to her and adjustments in the property were being explored.

What was the outcome?

As a result of getting two new social workers and a CHC assessment being triggered, Molly was awarded full continuing health care funding. Molly received her backdated contributions which she had been making towards her care package for ten months. This was due to the fact Molly should have been receiving full CHC funding for a long time but had slipped through the net. Molly's property was also being assessed by both the council and fire services and adaptations were made to maximise Molly's independence and make it a more safe and accessible environment. Outcomes of the intervention from Paul ensured the processes were followed in a person centred manner and Molly's wishes were taken into account.

Molly's wishes and feelings were taken into account and she felt she had professionals on her side instead of feeling pitted against them. Molly was more confident now she understood her rights and what support she was entitled to. Molly will now receive the correct level of care which she has been desperately asking for, for a long time. Molly has support for her future to make choices and have autonomy in her life.

ADVOCACY JOURNEY 3 – REVIEW/CHC*/COMPLAINTS

Janet, a 52-year-old lady, with a diagnosis of a learning disability was living in her own flat. Janet, although relatively independent, had some support from two personal carers. Janet was in control of her Direct Payments in order to employ these two carers as well as be in control of the rest of her finances.

Janet had been in contact with a team from social services for some time in order to request a Care Act review. This was very distressing to Janet, and from months of being stressed and not understanding the situation, Janet began to disengage with social services completely.

It was of the opinion of the decision maker that Janet lacked capacity to look after her Direct Payments and therefore was proposing to have a best interest meeting regarding the package of care in place.

A referral was made to support Janet through the Care Act review and gain her views and wishes around the change in her package of care and financial situation. It was made clear that Janet did not communicate or engage with professionals, and that the Independent Advocate involved would be working in a non-instructed manner.



What did we do to help?

Maisie introduced herself to Janet as a Care Act advocate, and explained that she was there to support her through her Care Act review; looking through the assessment with her and also supporting her through any changes in her support plan. It became clear on Maisie's first visit that Janet was able to communicate well and express her views and wishes. Janet explained to Maisie that she had learning disabilities and therefore needed some time to process things, as well as having certain preferences of how best to communicate with her. Janet explained that it was best for her to have information posted to her about a week in advance, and this to be in large print. Janet also preferred to get her views across when she has time to think, and often prefers to do this by writing notes for the person. Janet stated that she is able to express herself the best on paper.

From this, Maisie explained to Janet that she would be able to work with her in a way that suits her best. She explained to Janet that Advocacy Focus had easy-read documents for her Care Act assessment, and also easy-read information about Mental Capacity Assessments. She made sure that any information was passed onto Janet through the post in large print so that she could easily understand it, and asked for all professionals involved to do this also. Janet really appreciated this outlook on her needs, and started to engage well with her advocate.

**Continued on
next page**



(* CHC - Continuing Health Care)

ADVOCACY JOURNEY 3 – CONTINUED

What was the outcome?

Janet has now successfully filled out an easy-read document of all of her needs, as well as writing Maisie letters and notes to give her views and wishes. Janet has started to engage really well and has an active part in her cases open with social services. From supporting Janet through her Care Act case, she has also felt empowered to raise a social care complaint about the team she previously dealt with and Maisie has been able to support her through writing the letter. Janet is currently waiting to hear back from the complaints team regarding this.

Maisie has been able to support Janet to prepare and attend a meeting with new professionals from social services in order to assess her capacity around her Direct Payments, and this is currently being worked on. She is also currently supporting Janet to get some input from LILS in order to maximise her knowledge and confidence on her Direct Payments.

Finally, her advocate is supporting Janet to get her needs documented on her Care Act assessment and supporting her to challenge the decision from the previous team that assessed her as lacking capacity. Janet herself explained to Advocacy Focus that their support has allowed her to feel more in control of her life, and she is very thankful that Maisie took the time to listen to her needs and communication preferences in order to get her views and wishes across. Janet often thanks Maisie when she sees her for respecting her preferences and supporting her through three different cases.

Professionals have made comments that they have seen a different person in Janet now that she has started to engage well and attend meetings and speak for herself.

Maisie believed that advocacy has helped Janet feel comfortable and also empowered her to put her views and wishes forward to professionals. Maisie has supported her to make a complaint when she felt that she was not treated fairly, and she is continuing to support her through a life-changing decision around her capacity with Direct Payments.

Why was advocacy support so effective?

Maisie believe that from speaking with Janet on an independent basis, she was able to build up a rapport with her and also help to provide her with plenty of resources that were both easy-read and large font. This allowed Janet to feel more confident in herself and also allowed her to feel that she could engage with professionals with the right support. Maisie has been able to keep in contact with Janet throughout the process and keep her informed of her rights to be able to make a complaint, challenge her capacity assessment as well as support her through her Care Act assessment.





ADVOCACY JOURNEY 4 – CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY

Neil was in a previous foster placement that appeared to be breaking down. Due to a having a number of different social workers, Neil was struggling to engage with his new social worker around what it was that he wanted as he didn't feel that he could trust them yet. Neil hadn't been attending his meetings as he felt that no one was listening to him and what he wanted.

Why was advocacy support so effective?

Advocacy was effective in this case due to the fact that Stacey was someone who was there to be on Neil's side. She was there to support him to put forward his wishes and feelings without giving her own opinion. Neil knew what he wanted but needed some support to put this forward.

During meetings, Neil would do most of the talking but on occasion he did ask Stacey to talk about a couple of specific points that he had trouble talking about. Neil continues to have advocacy support.

What did we do to help?

In order to ascertain Neil's wishes and feelings over a number of visits his advocate, Stacey, spent time with him building a rapport and explaining her job role in relation to independence and confidentiality.

Neil and Stacey met both at school and at his foster carers – Stacey was able to ascertain Neil's wishes and feelings and since working with him Neil has been attending more of his meetings in order to put forward his wishes and feelings.

What was the outcome?

During Stacey's involvement Neil's foster placement broke down as Neil was becoming increasingly unhappy there. Alternative placements were being arranged until an emergency placement was needed. Neil went to a couple of different places but is now with a new foster carer. Neil talks about liking it there and says that he would like to stay there. Neil continues to engage well, but for Neil it is currently unclear whether he can stay at this foster placement long term.

Neil appears to be feeling happier and more settled in his current placement. Neil is currently engaging well with all of the services involved. Neil's social worker is due to change soon which Neil isn't happy about as he feels that he can trust this social worker now. Neil continues to want support until he knows where he is going to be staying long term.



ADVOCACY JOURNEY 5 – RETURN TO CARE AND CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY

Dylan had been going missing from his home and it transpired that Dylan felt that he wasn't getting answers to some of his questions. Staff weren't concerned by the missing episodes and felt that something else was going on. Dylan explained to the Return to Care coordinator that he wanted to have family time but that he hadn't been getting any answers about this from his social worker.

What did we do to help?

Mary, the Return to Care Coordinator, made contact with Dylan's social worker in order to get some further information and provide the social worker with a copy of the missing interview. Mary was able to have a conversation with Dylan's social worker in relation to Dylan's family time. It was explained to her that Dylan's social worker still needed to undertake some work with Dylan's family in order to be able to organise Dylan's family time. Mary went back out to see Dylan and had a conversation with him around what the social worker and she had discussed and at that time Mary asked Dylan if he wanted any further support under our Children's Advocacy contract. Dylan agreed for Mary to become his advocate.

What was the outcome?

Mary, the Return to Care Coordinator, made contact with Dylan's social worker in order to get some further information and provide the social worker with a copy of the missing interview. Mary was able to have a conversation with Dylan's social worker in relation to Dylan's family time. It was explained to her that Dylan's social worker still needed to undertake some work with Dylan's family in order to be able to organise Dylan's family time. Mary went back out to see Dylan and had a conversation with him around what the social worker and she had discussed and at that time Mary asked Dylan if he wanted any further support under our Children's Advocacy contract. Dylan agreed for Mary to become his advocate.

Why was advocacy support so effective?

Although Mary wasn't acting as Dylan's advocate whilst completing the return to care interview, this provided her with the opportunity to ask Dylan whether he would like further advocacy support. Mary was able to ascertain Dylan's wishes and feelings in relation to him spending time with his family which resulted in him getting the answers he required and which subsequently reduced his missing episodes. Dylan agreed for Mary to become his advocate.



ADVOCACY JOURNEY 6

Sophie is a 17 year old female who was reported missing from placement on a daily basis. Sophie was at high risk of child sexual exploitation and was involved in relationships with various unknown older males. Sophie was a cannabis user and drank alcohol regularly. She would frequently truant from school and was guarded about information she shared with professionals as she felt they did not listen to her or understand her.

What did we do to help?

Advocacy Focus helped Sophie by listening and providing information, advice and guidance. The Return to Care Coordinator, John, helped Sophie build her confidence and provided her with a safe environment for her to open up about her missing episodes. John liaised with other professionals and had various safeguarding discussions in regards to Sophie and the risks posed. John worked closely with the residential staff in order to safeguard and protect Sophie.

What was the outcome

Sophie engaged with John, built a relationship and was open in sharing information about herself and would disclose information that she would not share with the police or with other professionals. Sophie attended all of her GCSE exams and was attending school regularly, which led to her gaining a place at college. Sophie is now in a stable, age-appropriate relationship and has stopped smoking cannabis. Sophie's missing episodes have reduced massively and she is now only reported as 'absent without authorisation' occasionally.

Sophie has begun to trust professionals again, she was able to engage and feel like her safety was paramount. Previously, she had felt overlooked and neglected, with the help of her Return to Care Coordinator, Sophie was able to build rapport with professionals which allowed her to be open and unguarded about information. This then took away confusion and stress allowing her to receive the guidance she needed.

Why was advocacy support so effective?

Being an independent organisation allowed Sophie to share information with John, where she felt that she was being listened to and not judged. Advocacy Focus was effective as Sophie did not feel that she had to hide or act a certain way with professionals. Our flexible approach allowed her to contact us whenever she needed and allowed her to know that we cared.

Working with other professionals allowed Advocacy Focus's work to have a great impact as the core focus between all parties was ensuring Sophie was happy and safe.

FEEDBACK

Return to Care Service

"I would like to say that when a young person goes missing the staff conducting the return interviews with the young people are always friendly, polite and have a good rapport with our clients."

Care Act Service

"I have nothing but admiration for the advocacy service and I sincerely hope that this service is never a victim of austerity cuts. Thanks you all for your support."

Mental Capacity Advocacy

"I continue to be highly impressed by the service offered by the advocates. I am particularly impressed by the accuracy and speed with which staff seem to pick up the subtleties around this niche area of special care dentistry and the interface between the treatment needs of the individual client and matching this to the holistic short, medium and long term needs/goals of the patient. Always helpful and clear communication. I am also very impressed by the obvious care advocates express towards clients - I feel they treat each client like they were a member of their own family."

Mental Capacity Advocacy

"The advocate ensured the services users views were heard at Best Interests meetings and displayed good knowledge and excellent interpersonal skills. I feel this contribution was essential to the decision making process and provoked discussion of issues that may not have been considered."

Mental Health Advocacy

"I have never come across an advocate experienced like you."

You listen, talk, spend time on the ward with clients. You make clients feel happy and confident."

Mental Health Advocacy

"She is a diamond! Treasure her, never have I met such an astute woman!"

Child Protection


"She spoke to me like I wasn't a child. She was perfect."

Community Advocacy

"Thank you for not giving up on me."

You have been more help to me than you could realise... just by being there and listening.

Thank you so much."



Who How What Why
When Where

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Investing in our team

Learning is one of our core values, and this transpires into everything we do. From investing in Independent Advocacy Qualifications (IAQ), to providing technical and soft skill development, our Advocates have a wide range of opportunities for continuous learning.

To date, **37** Advocates have completed their IAQ and are recognised multi-skilled advocates. In 2019- 2020 **8** employees have been progressing well in the qualification. The organisation continues to enrol Advocates into this course after 6 months of employment, and the majority of staff complete it within 12 months. As a commitment to this investment, Advocates continue to be trained to be multi-skilled, maintaining our 'tell us once' approach which enables continuity of the support we offer.

In November 2019, we welcomed a Training Manager into our team who has been working on further developing our internal training delivery. Besides this, the training department has also worked collaboratively with Advocates to create further advocacy training packages. Some of which will be delivered externally and some that have already been delivered in-house.

Training our team attended during 2019/2020 included:

- Youth Mental Health First Aid
- Adult Mental Health First Aid
- Safeguarding – Adults and Children
- Mental Capacity Act, Covert meds, DNACPR, Serious Medical Treatment, Train the Trainer
- Section 16 proceedings and Acting as Litigation Friend
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards processes, Part 8 review, issuing proceedings (Section 21A)
- Care Act- Indicative budgets, shared background support, 1:1 hours training, and challenges
- Health and Social Care Complaints
- Independent Mental Health Act updates and Perinatal Advocacy
- Children's advocacy
- Prison Advocacy
- ACAS Management Suite
- Engage Enable Management training programme
- Time to Change Champions training
- Leadership

37

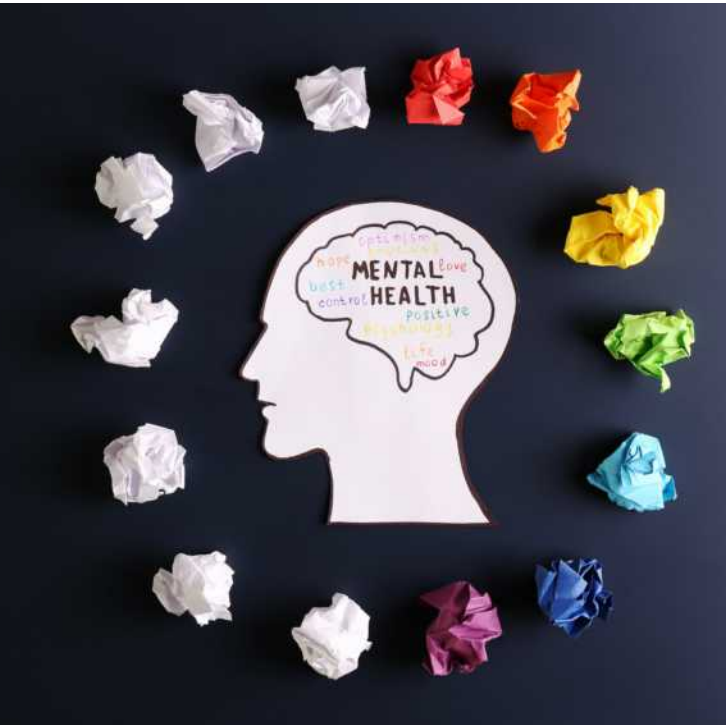
Advocates have completed their IAQ and are recognised multi-skilled advocates

8

employees progressing with IAQ

HEALTH & WELLBEING 2019-2020

Over the past 12 months we have introduced new metrics to measure culture and engagement, wellbeing initiatives, knowledge and skills, people management, and support tools as part of the MIND Workplace Wellbeing index



Areas of wellbeing focus 2019-2020:

- Introduction of an additional Counselling service including mental health and debt management support via PH7 and Able Futures.
- Develop and promote Active 'Time To Change' team, workshops and sessions.
- Trained more of our team to become Mental Health First Aiders - adults and youth which means can support team with wider family members. SMT trained in both areas.
- Introduction of Microsoft Teams to improve team communication and to replace intranet.
- Introduced virtual 'Lunch room' facility on MS Teams, particularly during lockdown.
- Our Health and Wellbeing Champion introduced Badminton/ social walks and other activities.
- We increased the annual leave entitlement for those with more than 3 years' service to 28 days and those with more than 5 years' service to 30 days.

We developed our Core Values and implemented initiatives to embed those values into practical use. Some examples of those initiatives are:

- Produced values postcard for internal and external promotion of values.
- Moved to a values-based appraisal process
- Developed values-based job descriptions and interview processes

Policies

In addition to working with our Board of Trustees to review and develop all policies, we enhanced and improved content of our Health and Wellbeing policy following some recommendations from the Mind Wellbeing Index

Future developments

We plan to continue to implement the recommendations from the MIND wellbeing report such as policy reviews and a wellbeing strategy review the development of our Time to Change programme and the continuation of the Investors in Volunteers' process due to be completed by September 2020.





OPERATIONS

It was a busy and productive year for the operations area of Advocacy Focus with significant developments in Finance, IT, Facilities Management, HR, Marketing, Fundraising and Environmental responsibility as detailed below.

Finance

Moore and Smalley continued to provide financial investment services making recommendations and appropriate changes on the management and best return on investment of our reserves. They also recommended and implemented a change of the charity's death in service benefit to Legal & General. Mayes were also retained as our Accountants following a busy year with the appointment of our new treasurer on the Board of Trustees. We had some staff changes in the area of financial administration and we are in the process of restructuring the role to provide optimum efficiency in this area.

Infrastructure

After changing our IT supplier from Stonehouse Logic, our Operations Director has worked closely with Serium to assess security and cyber protection currently in place. We introduced 'two-factor authentication' to enhance our security by helping to lower the likelihood of identity theft and as phishing scams.

As part of our agile working project to efficiently move our Advocacy team from office to remote based working, we were able to supply them with supplier funded Tablet PCs allowing them to work productively away from their office base. This turned out to be a timely project with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. We have also embarked upon a review of our current IT infrastructure, with a view to making improvement in the summer of 2020.

We appointed Northern Monkey to design and implement a Smartphone/Tablet Advocacy App and we are in the development/pre-launch stage.

Risk Management

A Board of Trustees/SMT sub-group was set up to continue the management of the charity's Risk Register, focusing on areas such as Finance, HR, Operations, Compliance, Governance, Environment and other external factors. Several areas under each heading were scrutinised and updated as necessary to ensure that our risk management processes are robust. This will ensure that our charity is protected, able to anticipate risk where possible and react positively to any challenges.



MARKETING

Our Marketing output continued to develop significantly in the last twelve months. We completed a literature rebranding exercise and designed and created a new Self-Advocacy Toolkit, launched 'Advocacy Friends' and commenced the promotion of Mental Health First Aid Training.

Our website statistics continue to show that we are one of the leading online voices for advocacy in the UK. Our web traffic has increased by 15% on the same point last year and traffic increased by 141% in total versus the previous year. Each month we are averaging around 2,000 visits to the website, with an average of 90% of these being new visitors, demonstrating that we are attracting new users all the time.

We continue to appear on page one for more and more search terms including new terms 'what is advocacy?' and 'advocacy services,' alongside national advocacy providers. Our Social Media activity showed an increase of 90.86% on the same period in 2019, highlighting the continuing growth and influence of our social media and online presence.

Fundraising

Our new Fundraising strategy was developed during this financial year, agreed by the Board of Trustees and implemented in 2019. As part of this, we actively sought and appointed a Fundraising Consultancy to provide expertise and help the charity develop in this area. Our 2020 Fundraising campaign saw various initiatives such as a local family fun day, hosted by an Accrington pub/restaurant and a supplier taking part in a skydiving event, all contributing to healthy donations for the charity over the year. Our Marketing apprentice was tasked with implementing fundraising through Social Media and we are making progress in this area.





Premises

In April 2019, we opened a retail unit within the Arndale Centre in Accrington Town Centre with the support of Avire, a company, specialising in supporting landlords to provide premises for charities and avoiding business rates costs. This became our local Community Hub and part of our Community Focus project, allowing us to use a shop fronted town centre location to engage directly with a greater number of East Lancashire citizens.

As part of our Agile working project we were able to slightly reduce our premises portfolio by closing our Fylde and Wyre offices with staff moving to a more flexible and productive remote working process.

HR

We successfully planned and project managed the implementation of Remote Working for our Advocacy team commencing in the autumn of 2019.

The remote working process introduced the concept that work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go. The technology that we made available the team, included numerous tools that help us work in new and different ways, to meet the needs of the people who use or service, reduce costs, potentially reduce waiting lists and also reduce our carbon footprint.

We undertook a full review of all policies at Advocacy Focus guided by Napthens, our retained legal services provider and overseen by our Board of Trustees. We also reviewed and updated our recruitment and retention processes and documents as our team continued to grow and develop to a total of 65 employees.

Environment

Advocacy Focus was proud to be the first charity in England to achieve the 'Green Rose Award' accreditation via East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce Low Carbon Team. This is awarded to organisations who show a strong commitment to carbon footprint reduction and East Lancashire Chamber has requested that Advocacy Focus be an ambassador for the benefits of the award to local businesses in Lancashire.

This award is the equivalent of the British Standard (BS) 8555 which helps organisations improve their environmental performance by providing a way to build an environmental management system (EMS).



PLAN FOR 2020-2021

BOARD OF TRUSTEES' OBJECTIVES

- 1.** Continued delivery of high-quality, best practice advocacy across Northern England.
- 2.** Further strengthening of our organisational culture and health and wellbeing agenda.
- 3.** Maintaining steady growth and income diversification.

SERVICE DELIVERY OBJECTIVES 2020-2021

- 1.** Continue to deliver and develop high quality advocacy and service delivery across our current contracts and seek new opportunities in the North of England.
- 2.** Build on our Investors in Volunteers accreditation mark and volunteer processes, across all service delivery areas.
- 3.** Further embed co-production to ensure continuous service development and local services for local people.
- 4.** Further develop our cultural engagement and health and wellbeing approach at organisational and community level.
- 5.** A focused marketing strategy to further demystify Advocacy and improve accessibility to our service and resources.
- 6.** Increase our training offer as a credible provider and generate further charity revenue.



COMPANY INFORMATION

Charity Name:

Advocacy Focus

Charity Registration Number:

1086151

Company Registration Number:

04135225

Principal Office:

First Floor,
The Old Tannery
Eastgate,
Accrington
Lancashire
BB5 6PW

Trustees:

Mr S Burrows (Chair)
Mr W Shepherd (Interim Chair)
Mrs D Bond
Mr D Rodgers (Treasurer)
Ms C Southworth
Mr A Clarkin
Mr G Campbell
Mrs A Lindon
Mrs Z Maqsood
Ms D Parr

Bankers:

Lloyds Bank

Auditor:

Mayes Accountants
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