



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

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"My Advocate is the only person I can trust, everyone has the right to challenge decisions made about their lives and my Advocate helped me do that."

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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 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 and are sector leaders with the awards to prove it!



People

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



Respectful

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



Trust

You can trust us to keep your information private and safe.



Independent

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



Learning

We never stop learning – we are always improving and developing our services. We learn from the people we support, our partners and each other.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

7,940

people supported

137,086

ANNUAL WEBSITE VISITS



406 people supported through community & self advocacy provision



98% individuals who used our services rate us 8 or above



98% of professionals we work with rated our service 8 or above



5,534 people supported with complex advocacy across Lancashire, Trafford and St Helens

117

meetings attended with young people

555

children and young people accessed our service

240 hours

provided to children and young people by our team of Independent Visitors

95%

children and young people happy with the service they received

3,704 hours

ADVOCACY PROVIDED TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1,577

community engagement contacts

726

advocacy advice provided to individuals and professionals

427

people supported to access statutory advocacy services

829

people supported with self advocacy

VOLUNTEERS PROVIDED 470 HOURS OF SUPPORT TO ADVOCACY FOCUS AND THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

Advocacy

CHAIR'S REPORT

Chris Lintern, Chair of Trustees

As the current Chair of Trustees, I am extremely proud to welcome you to the Advocacy Focus Annual Report for 2022/23. It's been another amazing year for all the team, in so many different areas, where we have been able to make a real difference to so many people's lives that we have supported across the North of England.

All organisations have needed to respond and adapt to the continuing challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, and over the last year the team have managed to embrace the changes to working practices that would have seemed normal only a few years ago. The methods of delivering support may have changed in some cases, but the most important thing is that we have been able to continue to provide that support to those who need our services.

The range of services that we provide at Advocacy Focus continue to provide a lifeline of support to those who may need to understand their rights, ensure that their voices are heard and to be central to any decisions which are made about them.

Put simply, advocacy in all its forms embodies a person-led approach of nothing about me, without me.

The details of the number of people that we have supported is within the report which follows, but it is fair to say that the team have been able to provide high quality advocacy to a great many people over the last year. I have been very fortunate to get to know a lot of the team through attending meetings and other activities and they are all fantastic, committed and dedicated to helping people live the lives they want to live through the provision of high-quality advocacy services.



Towards the latter end of the year we were successful with bids to provide new advocacy services in both St Helens and Salford, and launched a new Community Focus project in Lancashire. This has enhanced the support for Lancashire residents in other areas such as housing, benefits, access to training and employment. We have also continued to provide excellent and affordable training on Mental Health in the workplace to a number of organisations. Our year concluded with an “Autism Focus” conference in Preston which was well attended, and we received positive feedback from those who attended in person and virtually.

Wellbeing continues to be high on the agenda and we have high expectations of retaining our Gold award in the Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index. We’ve also launched a dedicated space at our Accrington Head Office for team Wellbeing.

We achieved our QPM accreditation with positive feedback and were nominated for several awards during the year. We are also proud of achieving the Silver Award in the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme and the support we provide for the Armed Forces community.

The team continue to monitor the changes within the policy and legislative environment and how these will impact on the services that we deliver – and provide thought leadership through participation in the Leaders in Advocacy national network.

Over the last year we have seen several changes within the Board of Trustees. I would like to thank those who have left for their service and warmly welcome our new Trustees as we begin to work together to support the brilliant work which the team do. We are also extremely fortunate to have partner organisations who support us in many ways, and we look forward to continuing those relationships over the coming year.

The Advocacy Focus team inspire me and my fellow Trustees, and I’m sure that you will share these sentiments when you read what has been achieved over the last twelve months.



A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Justine Forster, Chief Executive Officer, Advocacy Focus

Another interesting year in the Health and Social Care sector. Another year of hearing that we were post Covid. Another year where the charity and health and social care sectors had never felt the pandemic's legacy so keenly. The impact became ever more evident in people, organisations (if they survived the pandemic) and communities. This time of great need was further affected by the fact that everyone was chasing after the same amount of limited funding, whilst tackling the wider impact of a national cost of living crisis. The year was a busy one, bigger caseloads, bigger advocacy issues, bigger funding challenges. We had to cut the cloth accordingly and come up with new ways of working, whilst supporting our own people through very difficult times. All whilst preparing for the potential arrival of new legislation.

Funding is and will continue to be a significant challenge as we head into 2023-24.

As a charity with over 25 years of delivering high quality advocacy and advocacy related activities, we capitalised on and benefited from trusted relationships and secured some pots of additional funding. We strengthened our partnership with Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust (LSCFT) and delivered specialist advocacy services which improved Autistic people's in-patient experience. This culminated in a well-received conference, with best practice shared, and an agreement to be more professionally curious and receptive to people's specific and often misunderstood needs. Internally as a result of this work we improved our own processes and introduced a new neuro-diversity policy to ensure that we were able to offer the best possible workplace experience, alongside an external response.

However, let's talk about the "F" word - again. Funding is and will continue to be a significant challenge as we head into 2023-24. Most of the work we deliver as a charity is via the provision of statutory advocacy services, delivered independently of, but on behalf of local authorities. Local authorities, facing austere measures of their own, are having to reduce their contract budgets and are asking providers to consider how much social value they can give in addition to what they are being contracted to deliver. For example, how many volunteers will be upskilled; how many apprentices will be employed; what training will you offer to smaller charities or workplaces; what percentage of your workforce live and work in the area you will deliver your services. Charities are being asked to go above and beyond and some charities simply don't have the infrastructure or the finances to even apply for contracts when certain expectations are set so high, i.e. insurances, and the ability to absorb upfront costs as local authorities award contracts that will be paid months in arrears. Levelling up and the local agenda being cast aside for the smallest of savings and many essential charities going to the wall.

Such uncertainty over a challenging 12 months and then soon after the year drew to a close, the Department of Health and Social Care announced the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) and the Mental Capacity (Amendment) Act 2019 would be delayed “beyond the life of this Parliament”. This was announced one day after the Government launched its policy paper “Next Steps to put People at the Heart of Care”. The Government’s vision for adult social care reform. The fact that key legislation reform, that the sector had been gearing up for, was shelved after significant time, input and capacity had been ringfenced for this work, was both disappointing and short-sighted. We can only wait to see if any of the work we have prepared tirelessly for comes to fruition beyond Autumn 2024, or if it’s back to the drawing board. In the meantime, people will continue to fall through the cracks rather than being central or indeed at the “Heart of Care”.

Our dedication to our people’s wellbeing continued to develop and thrive. We introduced a flexible working policy, that the team developed themselves, to enable them to work a 4 day week if they chose to and dependent on service need. Another step forward in ensuring that our employee engagement continued to be gold standard and would help us retain our gold award in Mind’s Workplace Wellbeing Index. An Index that we came Top Employer for nationally in 2022. An achievement that is the proudest of our accolades as it clearly states how we value, support and develop our people. Next year we will continue to normalise conversations, share best practice around workplace wellness and support our people to bring their whole selves to work.

This next year we are excited to launch our co-produced Community Focus project. We know that preventative, community advocacy is sometimes all people need to tackle their health and social care and treatment needs independently. Self-advocacy is and will always be our starting point, so we will roll out a pilot project in East Lancashire that takes us back to our advocacy roots. Prevention being better than cure and with two aims; to enable people to be theirs or someone else’s best advocate and to ringfence statutory services for those in the greatest need. With an additional funding pot, we established a self-titled “Mission Impossible” self-advocacy group in Trafford and in 2023-24 and in the spirit of true co-production will look at incorporating any findings and feedback into our community advocacy development. Going beyond health and social care and into areas such as housing and benefits, offering a truly holistic advocacy service for people in our communities that just need a little help to get their lives back on track.

Self-advocacy is and will always be our starting point, so we will roll out a pilot project in East Lancashire that takes us back to our advocacy roots.

I want to say a huge thanks to our team, our volunteers and our Board of Trustees. Their unwavering commitment, passion and professional curiosity for what they do has once again been evident. In what has been a hugely challenging year for people personally and professionally. Caseloads remained high, and our Spot Purchase service grew due to unprecedented demand. However, we never wavered on quality and prepared the ground for legislation and sector changes that are now delayed. We re-secured our QPM accreditation for a further three years after a comprehensive and intensive organisation level scrutiny via the team at NDTi (National Development Team for Inclusion). The feedback and testimonials coming as no surprise to me as the leader of a team that tenaciously fights with and for people, to help them live the lives they want to live.

SERVICE DELIVERY

OBJECTIVES

- Establishing preventative community based advocacy and advocacy related activities.
- Providing and improving access to free, independent statutory advocacy for children, young people and adults.
- Influencing social change, justice and inclusion.
- Offering an equitable and positive experience for all.
- A planned, sustainable and ethical approach to income generation.
- Educating and upskilling via high quality training and information.
- Positioning our charity as the trusted name in advocacy.
- Working in partnership to ensure there is 'no wrong door' to service access.
- Develop and revolutionise our volunteer services and co-production activities.
- Further embed our internal wellbeing and workplace experience strategy.





SERVICE DELIVERY

2022-2023 has been a phenomenal year for Advocacy Focus, as a pure advocacy and person led service, our strong team of 63 paid staff and 40 volunteers have been committed to supporting children, young people and adults to have their voices heard and to be central to any decision-making processes. The demand on our services across the North has significantly increased as people continue to struggle to navigate and access services and still continue to have challenges in having their voices heard and wishes and feelings respected. We have supported 5534 people with complex advocacy needs across all our advocacy contracts and our reach has been vast in our service areas.

A key focus this year has been on our preventative advocacy services and early intervention, to reduce the likelihood of crisis situations and the need for specialist statutory advocacy, wherever possible. Our starting point is self-advocacy, and we aim to empower and enable people to build their knowledge, skills, and confidence to face their health and social care challenges head on. We have supported **2406** people via our community and self-advocacy provision to enable them to become their own best advocates, share their learning with others, creating a ripple effect across the communities we serve. We are in the heart of our communities at community groups, schools, colleges, local universities, day centres and more. Accessibility is critical for Advocacy, and we want to make it as simple as possible for people to reach us.

5,534

people supported on
advocacy cases across
contracts

We have made significant impact within our communities with the support of our partners, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. The start of the year has already been strong with two new advocacy contracts in St Helens (an All-Age advocacy Hub) and Salford widening our reach and strengthening our offer.

2,406

people supported through
community & self advocacy
provision

We have a real and continued drive towards early intervention, prevention, and strengthening individuals, groups, and communities and will continue to do so until we achieve our mission of 'Advocacy for all who need it.' Advocacy Focus is a person-led organisation that responds to our community's needs, which has led to the shaping of our plans for the forthcoming year. But first, let's take you through 2022-2023 to show you what impact our support has had in our communities.



ADVOCACY SERVICES

Advocacy Focus was founded in 1998 by Elizabeth Williams, a strong willed and determined woman with a passion for tackling inequality and driven by the need for social change. Advocacy Focus began as a grass roots organisation and was one of the first advocacy providers in the country delivering community advocacy in the East Lancashire area of the county. Today, we deliver a range of community and specialist statutory advocacy services and have continued to grow and develop over the last 25 years.

We have been shaping the advocacy sector since our inception. Advocacy is the heart of our organisation. It is who we are. We exist purely to make a positive difference to the lives of people in our community who would benefit from having a voice that may otherwise struggle to get heard. We are a free, independent, and confidential service with the mission of providing 'Advocacy for All.'

Our team are multi-skilled allowing them to provide holistic support across the differing strands of advocacy ensuring that the person using our service is able to experience consistency, familiarity, and advocacy expertise from one advocate. Our advocates work in a person led way, ensuring that the person using our service is treated equitably and is front and centre of the work we do.

Where possible we ensure that members of our community are able to experience culturally appropriate advocacy. This means that our advocates can meet the needs of people's particular religious, cultural or language requirements to help them more effectively advocate the persons views, wishes, beliefs and values.

Here is some of the feedback we received:



I have difficulty trusting professionals because I've had a lot of poor experiences, particularly from NHS services. However, for the first time in a long time, I feel like someone is actually listening to me and understands my accessibility needs.



I wasn't happy with how I'd been treated by NHS and my advocate looked into it to find out what I was entitled to under the NHS. She is a wonderful woman and worked so hard to support me she's really helped build my confidence.

LANCASHIRE AND TRAFFORD ADVOCACY HUB

Throughout this year and for future years, we will continue to raise and promote the importance of advocacy and the impact advocacy can have on a person's life.

One of our unique services being delivered during 2022-2023 enabled us to provide advocacy support to informal inpatients with autism across Lancashire and South Cumbria as well as ongoing engagement with detained patients with autism across the same area. The overall scope of the project aims to address the gap in legislation and support potentially vulnerable people who are inpatients to have their views heard and be more involved in their care and treatment. Part of this work involved providing information to NHS England around the views of autistic inpatients on their views of advocacy and their care and treatment in hospital. Following from this we were able to produce recommendations aiming to lead to improved quality of life, treatment and care for autistic inpatients and inform strategic development.

With the intelligence we gathered from people we were supporting in mental health hospitals, we were able to share the views of people receiving treatment to key decision makers and other advocacy providers, to help people listen and truly understand what patients needed from services. The conference was truly powerful and eye opening, which has been a real driver for service improvement within the advocacy sector. Good is not good enough, as a sector we must do better.

We welcome change as part of the Mental Health Reform to widen the provisions of advocacy for informal patients, we believe that Advocacy should be available to all who need it and not to be restricted by the gaps in legislation. Leanne Hignett (Services Director) contributes to the Leaders in Advocacy Network. The Leaders in Advocacy Network is a collaboration between advocacy providers across the country who make for an influential voice for the advocacy sector, striving for positive change for the people using advocacy and public services.

We offer a full range of advocacy services across Lancashire and Trafford including:

- **Independent Care Act Advocacy**
- **Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy**
- **Independent Mental Health Advocacy**
- **Independent Health and Social Care Complaints Advocacy**
- **Support under Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard's and Relevant Person's Representative**
- **Community Advocacy**

5,740

individuals across Lancashire and Trafford via statutory, community and self advocacy.

SUCCESS STORY



What was the person's situation before working with Advocacy Focus?

Jack* was autistic and had complex behaviour and communication issues, which often created obstacles to others understanding him, and him fully understanding communication from others. Jack was residing in a hospital environment due to having inoperable spinal cancer.

Jack was identified as requiring hospice care but declined a place in the hospice that had been offered. This was initially due to the hospice not being based in the town that Jack wanted to die in.

The hospice was a “near match” to everything Jack himself had listed as his required criteria, but Jack objected very strongly to the suggested placement. This was partly due to a lack of trust in services, but mostly due to Jack's information-processing difficulties which impaired his ability to make comparisons between his own “wants” and the criteria of the proposed placement. Jack's initial response to the offer was to flatly decline the hospice.

What did advocacy do to help the person?

The advocate had worked with Jack at various times for many years and had a positive relationship with him.

The advocate visited Jack to explain that although the hospice was not in the town he wanted, it was in fact only about a mile away from the border of that town. Jack wanted to be as close to the sea as possible. The advocate slowed down the exploration process to “smaller, micro-steps of understanding.” They showed Jack a map of where the hospice was, where the sea was, and where the border between the two towns appeared to be.

The advocate explained that it was also the only hospice anywhere close to Jack's personal choice of town. From previous conversations with Jack, the advocate also knew that the hospice being proposed met many of Jack's other desired criteria. The advocate visited the hospice and took multiple photographs of inside the hospice and the grounds, as well as the surrounding area directly adjacent to the hospice. The advocate took these to show Jack and Jack seemed to “trust” the advocate's photographs more than the hospice brochure he had been given.

Jack began to see that the hospice had a lot of what he wanted- a rural setting, gardens, a shop, a café, and the option to go out on trips (health permitting.)

The advocate supported Jack to understand that the hospice place could get taken by someone else at any moment and that by delaying his decision, the option might get taken away from him anyway.

*names changed

What was the outcome?

With adaptations to communication style to meet Jack's needs, the advocate was able to support Jack in face-to-face meetings (with no time constraints) to make a more informed decision that was based on Jack's actual wants, rather than being founded on his initial instant reaction to refuse what was being proposed. Jack then chose to move to the hospice.

Jack was very nervous about the move because any change was always stressful for him, even if it was something he wanted. Jack felt safer in the knowledge that his advocate would be visiting him on the afternoon of his arrival at the hospice. The advocate spent time supporting Jack to feel more settled and agreeing a series of visits in the coming days. This made Jack feel a bit more relaxed.

Once Jack arrived at the hospice, the advocate spent considerable time negotiating with hospice management to make a reasonable adjustment under the equality duty for Jack to keep his private room for the duration of his stay there. Standard practice was for patients to be moved around between private rooms, shared rooms, and a ward environment. An understanding of Jack's difficulties meant that the advocate could foresee that Jack would never have settled with that level of uncertainty looming, and his needs meant that to relax and feel safe, he would need a private room.

As this request was presented by the advocate within a framework of legislation – outlining Jack's legal right to "reasonable adjustments" to accommodate aspects of his disability, the hospice managers were able to meet the request.

The advocate also spent time in meetings with the hospice staff, explaining to them Jack's communication style and needs.

EXAMPLE OF HOW THIS MADE A DIFFERENCE TO JACK:

On one occasion the advocate arrived to find Jack in severe pain. Staff explained Jack had suddenly started refusing any pain relief the day before. Staff said it was so upsetting to see him in so much pain and they could not understand what was underpinning this choice.

On talking with Jack, the advocate was able to eventually understand that a staff member who was new to Jack had worded their communication differently to other staff when they had come to offer pain relief. They had said, "Do you think it's time for your pain relief now?" They had just meant it in a conversational way, but this had led Jack into thinking the staff weren't sure when he had last taken his tablets and whether or not he should be having more. This has brought Jack to the conclusion that it wasn't safe to accept any medication. Jack didn't want to be in pain, but he was afraid the staff weren't keeping track of medication.

The advocate explained to staff that they should consider adapting their communication to offer pain relief in a more literal way. For example, saying, "We have looked at your medication chart, you last had pain relief at 10am so it is time for your tablets now."

Staff adopted this approach and Jack immediately began to gladly accept pain relief again.

How do you think this impacted on the person?

- Jack's desired criteria about the sort of place he wanted to reside, were realised.
- Jack was able to spend his last days in an environment that met his needs and his wishes.
- Jack was able to spend his final days feeling comfortable and doing things that he had wanted to do for a long time. For example, going to a café, going shopping for second-hand books, spending time outdoors, spending time with nature and animals and, being treated with dignity and respect.

Why do you think advocacy support was so effective?

The advocate already had a good rapport with Jack and Jack trusted them more than other professionals. Jack's trust in the advocate was because they did not have any hidden agendas – they were there just for Jack, with the sole purpose of getting Jack's wishes heard.

The advocate made every effort to facilitate Jack's understanding and to maximise his ability to weigh up information and make a decision, as per the Mental Capacity Act. This was done by listening to Jack for a long time and gathering intelligence from what was said. Jack struggled to answer direct questions (due to executive functioning issues), but if the advocate sat with Jack for a long time, the events of recent days and hours would eventually be shared verbally by him, in between accounts on other topics that were of intense interest to him. With patience and careful listening, the advocate could piece together information to build a picture of how Jack had been experiencing recent interactions with others, what he had understood from the interaction, how he felt, and what his reasoning was behind his response or reaction.

The advocate could then pinpoint where any misunderstanding had taken place and support Jack to revisit the issue in a style that was accessible to him. For example, seeing photographs, reminding Jack of his own listed wants and wishes, and showing him ticks next to the list when the proposed placement met his wishes.

At times, it was more appropriate to ask professionals to adjust their way of communicating to support Jack daily and in ongoing communication. By talking to professionals and asking them to adapt their communication style regarding medication, the advocate was also upholding Jack's right to, "the best possible health," In line with Article 25 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

The advocate kept the client's wishes at the centre of their work at all times, whilst linking these to the wellbeing principles in the Care Act, when talking with professionals about Jack's needs.

The advocate used the legal obligations outlined in the Equality Act 2010 to negotiate a permanent private room for Jack. By using this approach, this also enabled the managers involved to justify a decision in Jack's favour whilst demonstrating that their adjustment was a requirement in order to meet their legal duty to Jack.

SPECIALIST AUTISTIC INPATIENT ADVOCACY SERVICE



Advocacy Focus has worked with autistic people across Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust to gather their views, wishes and experiences around their inpatient admission and advocacy provision. These views have been collected with the vision of this shaping how inpatient services meet the needs of the autistic people using their services and how effective advocacy services are. Additionally, we provided a bespoke service which offered advocacy support to autistic people who were informal inpatients, this is a current gap in the legislation of the Mental Health Act.

Through our work, we have had ongoing engagement with **47** autistic people within inpatient facilities and provided advocacy support to **18** informal patients, who currently do not have the right to an IMHA. We have been able to champion the collective voice of autistic people accessing services and ensure that their experiences and views are heard within the trust to shape how services work to better meet the needs of autistic people. Working with key members of the trust, we have been able to offer independent insight into the views and experiences of autistic people and feed into strategic change.

Through our Autism Focus conference, we have been able to share these views with delegates across the health and social care sector, including other advocacy providers. They have heard how services can be improved to better support autistic people and heard the feedback of those experiencing inpatient services with autism. We also heard from other speakers sharing their knowledge about legal remedies, discussion around the national advocacy review, as well as how the trust will be moving forward with the feedback they have received.

We have been able to provide a bespoke person-led service to autistic informal patients which has helped to bridge the gap in the current legislation and enhance the views and wishes of informal autistic people and ensure that they are fully involved in their care, treatment, and discharge. We have supported people to have their voices heard in a variety of meetings, to raise concerns, ensure they are aware of their rights and to gain back control and autonomy.



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ADVOCACY

Over the last 12 months, we have strengthened our multi-agency approach, partnership, and collaborative work with external agencies, which in turn has allowed us to provide more effective and holistic support to children and young people across our commissioned services.

To ensure that we do not compromise on the quality of the advocacy support we provide to the young people accessing our service, we guarantee that all referrals are thoroughly triaged, reviewed, and allocated as swiftly as possible.

Advocacy Focus has supported young people to raise issues that matter to them and has influenced change and protocol review within local authorities. We have seen the powerful impact young people's voices have had in changing social work response times to their queries, ensuring that complaints are managed in a timely manner. We have also seen an increased presence from young people at meetings following changes to the way these are held and delivered by children's social care teams.

Throughout this year we worked tirelessly to tackle and prevent child exploitation, improve young people's access to mental health and well-being support, and provided a safety net for children facing loneliness, isolation, and crisis situations. We have worked to empower young people to voice their wishes and feelings in a way they feel that they are being listened to, improving their self-advocacy skills, and promoting their ability to self-advocate in the future.

26

young people supported to make a complaint

117

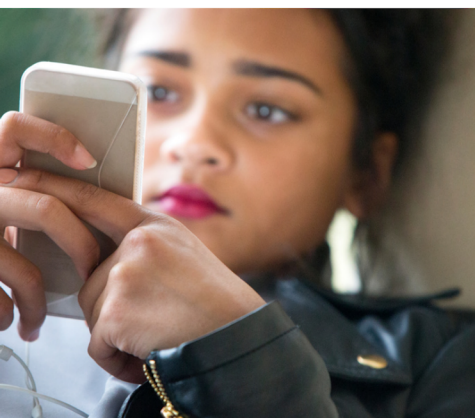
meetings attended with young people

We are passionate about supporting children and young people to have a say in the things that matter to them. Our advocates will champion the rights of young people and ensure that their voices are heard, valued, and at the centre of any decisions that affect their lives.

Advocacy Focus hopes to achieve so much more with young people in the future via the use of our expanding toolkits and workshops. We are committed to supporting young people's mental health and well-being, whilst ensuring their rights are upheld and voices are heard through key health and social care processes.



FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE AND STAKEHOLDERS



“

Cause like I know u got a job n that n like you have to help other people but you helped me thru the hardest time of my life and most probably wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for you.

Young Person

“

(My advocate) helped me prepare for the meetings which I probably would not have attended if it wasn't for my advocate.

Young Person



“

Thank you so much for coming out feel like I got everything off my shoulders.

Young Person

“

The advocates have been worth their weight in gold.

Police

The services we have provided to children and young people in St Helens and Trafford include:

- Children's Rights Helpline
- Advocacy service for Children in Need
- Advocacy service for Child Protection
- Advocacy for children in care
- Advocacy for Care Leavers
- Independent Visitor service
- Independent Person in Secure Accommodation Panels
- Advocacy Drop-in Children's Residential Homes



SUCCESS STORY

What the person's situation before working with Advocacy Focus?

Kenny* was a 17 year old female who lived at home with her parents and sister. Kenny was made subject to a child protection plan following a disclosure of sexual abuse, with her brother being the perpetrator. Kenny was struggling with her mental health and was not accessing any support in relation to this. A referral was made for an Independent Advocate to support Kenny to have involvement in the child protection plan.

What did you do to help the person?

Kenny's Independent Advocate made contact with her to introduce themselves. Kenny's Independent Advocate asked her what her preferred method of contact was; Kenny stated that she would like to keep this as telephone meetings initially, as she felt most comfortable talking in this way. Kenny asked her Independent Advocate to follow up on a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referral, as the social worker said this had been made but Kenny had not spoken to anyone yet. Kenny also asked her advocate to clarify with the social worker or police whether there were any restrictions in place relating to contact with her brother.

Kenny's Independent Advocate followed both of these queries up with Kenny's social worker and relayed the information back to her. Following this they maintained regular telephone contact with Kenny. Kenny did not wish to attend any core group meetings, as she preferred to keep social care and their involvement separate from other aspects of her life. To ensure that Kenny's voice was heard, despite her not attending meetings, with Kenny's consent, her Independent Advocate shared relevant information with the social worker and raised questions on Kenny's behalf when she instructed them to.

After a number of telephone meetings Kenny informed her advocate that she would be happy to start meeting face to face. The Independent Advocate met with Kenny and enabled her to share views, wishes and worries relating to the child protection plan. Kenny shared that she was concerned that her parents were allowing her brother to come to the house, and she would sometimes return home unaware that he was there. Kenny stated that she found this increased her anxiety levels. Kenny also shared that she felt that her parents wanted her to have a "normal sibling relationship" with her brother and that this would "never happen".

*name changed

Kenny also shared concerns in relation to ongoing support from mental health services once she turned 18, as she had “waited long enough for CAMHS”. Kenny stated, “I don’t want to go backwards now I’m finally getting somewhere.”

The Independent Advocate attended the Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) on Kenny’s behalf at her request and, with Kenny’s consent, shared her concerns. Although at the RCPC it was agreed that the risk of significant harm had decreased, therefore the threshold for child protection was no longer met, it was felt that there was some outstanding work to be completed before the case could be closed. Part of this work would include a review of the safety plan for Kenny and the expectations from parents in relation to any contact between Kenny and her brother.

The Independent Advocate visited Kenny after the RCPC to explain the outcome. Kenny stated she understood, but would like advocacy support for the discussion with her parents and social worker to allow her to fully participate and be honest with everyone. Although the case was closed to Children’s Social Care, it was agreed that Kenny’s advocate would complete this final piece of work with Kenny, as she had requested it and it tied in with ending the advocacy relationship.

What was the outcome?

During the final meeting with her advocate, Kenny stated that she felt that support, following her turning 18, was now in place and that she was pleased that she had been listened to. Kenny stated that she felt like her parents had listened to her concerns and that she had been taken seriously by them. Kenny stated that she felt that she had access to the tools and services to allow her to start to move forward and was hopeful of going to university next September. Kenny is now closed to Children’s Social Care and advocacy but is continuing to access support from CAMHS and specialist therapy.

Why do you think advocacy support was so effective?

Advocacy support was so effective as it afforded Kenny the privacy and separation that she wanted, whilst still allowing her to be involved in the child protection process. In allowing Kenny to take the lead and respecting how and when she engaged with advocacy, Kenny was able to build a trusting relationship and be completely honest about her worries. In consenting for the advocate to share these concerns with professionals, the issues were addressed and measures were put in place to ensure Kenny was able to feel safe and protected at home. Kenny has also continued access to appropriate support services. Had the advocate insisted on face to face meetings from the start, Kenny may have disengaged, or not felt able to be completely open, which would have been detrimental to her progress. Advocacy support allowed Kenny to move at her own pace and engage when she was ready, which ultimately led to a better working relationship and better outcomes for Kenny.

Kenny also shared concerns in relation to ongoing support from mental health services once she turned 18, as she had “waited long enough for CAMHS”. Kenny stated, “I don’t want to go backwards now I’m finally getting somewhere.”



SPOT PURCHASE ADVOCACY

Spot purchase advocacy has supported people in times of great need, where people have fallen through the gaps in services, due to a variety of contractual and need related reasons. Advocacy Focus believes advocacy should be available to anyone who needs it, and this is why we deliver bespoke spot purchase services.

In addition, there has been a significant rise in the number of people requiring support for Child Protection processes. We are currently arranging meetings with Social Workers outside of the area where we are currently receiving referrals, to expand this part of the service.

The flexibility of our spot purchase service means that we can support people in times of great need, or where there may be gaps in services that statutory advocacy cannot fill.

Our Child Protection service is a complex area of advocacy, where often the people we support are unable to understand the legal process and the nature of meetings and assessments. Our role varies in these cases due to some people being authorised to have Court intermediaries, and some people not. These cases are very much person-centred.

WE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING ADVOCACY SUPPORT SERVICES:

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

161

people supported via our spot purchase advocacy service by our specialist team who operate across the North of England

COMMUNITY FOCUS

In January 2023, we launched our new East Lancashire Community Focus project, affirming our commitment to our preventative community advocacy offer and responding to the needs of people who are experiencing challenges with a range of services such as housing and benefits.

For many, taking the first step towards addressing their issues is daunting, so our Community Focus project exists to enable and empower people to achieve a better life for themselves and their families, ensuring they have a voice in the decisions that affect their own lives.

Working alongside the people we support, our Community Focus Advocates offer practical support to promote access to organisations that can provide opportunities for education, training, career advice and employment.

We support people with a range of issues such as housing and tenancies, access to benefits or are having financial issues and, where people wish to share their experiences, we will offer support to guide people through the complaints/compliments process.

We recognise the importance of working with other agencies to achieve better outcomes for the people we are supporting. Therefore, our Community Focus team seek to connect with other agencies and build professional relationships with organisations across East Lancashire.



50

requests for support
between January
and March 2023



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

It has been an exciting year for Community Engagement, as groups and events finally fully opened up, after closing as a result of the pandemic.

Some groups only moved away from an online-only presence earlier this year, though this did not impact our attendance and ability to offer support.

Over the last year we have engaged with **1,577** people. Within that figure we raised awareness of **186** people, and supported or encouraged self-advocacy with **829**.

We continue to attend the regular groups we support, however we've also engaged with new services, offering advocacy awareness and support on an ad-hoc basis.

We regularly attend The Bay Information Hub, various self-advocacy groups in Lancashire, The Friendship and Relationships Group, Pathways Associates Living Well Group, to name a few.

We have also delivered bespoke community outreach projects to Kemple View (in the form of self-advocacy sessions), Clifton Hospital and East Lancashire Hospital Stakeholders Group.

We remain adaptable and eager to find inventive and alternative ways of reaching groups to raise awareness and provide support.

We strive to adapt our delivery of community engagement and outreach to meet the individual needs of groups and organisations, to enable us to share the importance of advocacy.

1,577

community engagement
contacts

186

people supported to access
adult social care

829

people supported with
self advocacy

SELF ADVOCACY IN TRAFFORD

Since April 2022, Advocacy Focus has been supporting Trafford's first Self-Advocacy Group, the Mission Impossible Self Advocacy Group. The group is for individuals who have a learning disability or an Autistic Spectrum Condition who live in or use services in the Trafford area.

The group meets on the second Thursday of every month. There is no cost to join the group – it is entirely free at the point of use.

Between April 2022 and April 2023, we facilitated 12 meetings and supported 15 different self-advocates to learn and develop the skills required to speak up for themselves and to have a say in the issues that affect their lives.

The group met with professionals from other services to provide feedback, raise their concerns, and learn about other services in the area whilst developing the skills needed to advocate for themselves and have a stronger voice in issues that affect their lives.

The members met with engagement workers from the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board, the NHS, and Trafford Council, and spoke to professionals from other local services to learn what services were available. We learnt from each other about what our rights are, and how we can exercise them, and we submitted several group complaints to tackle the issues we had been facing.

Outside of the monthly meetings, our members also had the opportunity to meet other Self-Advocates from around the country by attending several conferences and participating in the Greater Manchester Confirm & Challenge meetings.

We have seen our members grow in confidence and become more comfortable speaking out about issues that affect them. 2023-2024 will see our members continue to build on their self-advocacy skills and develop stronger partnerships with local services to enable us to improve services for individuals living with a learning disability and/or autism.



Mission Impossible

SELF ADVOCACY GROUP

THE GROUP'S AIMS ARE:

- **Support people to be more confident when speaking up about issues that affect their lives.**
- **Support people to have a voice so they can have meaningful input into decisions that affect their care and support.**
- **Teach each other new skills and share information.**
- **To work together to improve services and to reduce inequalities faced by people with Autism or Learning Disabilities**

SUCCESS STORY



What the person's situation before working with Advocacy Focus?

Clark* lives independently in the community and receives a small package of support from a local provider. Advocacy encountered Clark whilst carrying out community engagement outreach and promoting Advocacy Focus' self-advocacy group. Clark informed the advocate that he used to conduct interviews for his support provider and used to feel very comfortable speaking out about issues, but that since the Covid-19 pandemic he has lost some confidence.

Clark expressed an interest in joining the self-advocacy group and has since attended a number of meetings.

What did you do to help the person?

Clark has attended the self-advocacy group and participated in the group discussions. The group supports people using peer-to-peer and self-advocacy frameworks, and the aim is to empower people to be able to speak up about issues that affect their lives. At first, Clark typically sat away from the group and interacted more with the support staff, and it was unclear how much he was gaining from the group other than the social aspect.

During a meeting, the group discussed the local area's Partnership Board. Following the meeting, Clark approached Advocacy Focus and said he would like to be involved in the Board. At the next meeting, the advocate spoke with Clark again to confirm if he would still like to be involved, and he indicated that he was very keen.

What was the outcome?

Clark has yet to participate in an upcoming Partnership Board meeting (they are yet to be arranged). However, at the last self-advocacy meeting Clark appeared much more confident and involved. Rather than sitting away from the group, Clark took notes and helped to chair the meeting. Clark also instigated a conversation about how we could promote the self-advocacy group, showing a proactive interest in supporting others to attend.

Why was advocacy support was so effective?

By following a peer-to-peer advocacy approach, Clark feels more empowered to join in group discussions and to speak up about issues that affect him. Clark now plans to sit on the Partnership Board as an individual with experience, where he will have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Self-Advocacy group. This seems to have already had a positive impact on Clark's self-esteem and he is presenting with increased confidence. Clark is also actively looking for ways to promote the group, which will empower others to have a greater voice in decisions and issues that affect their lives.

*name changed

“

FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE USED OUR SERVICE

”

“

My advocate was very efficient, I am so grateful and glad that she is working on my behalf

“

Thank you very much for your continued support and assistance. You have been a positive form of help and reassurance

“

My advocate is an excellent communicator and reliable. She works in a professional, compassionate and non-judgemental way

“

Got clear focus from my advocate from the start, got an action plan in place, worked together to get the desired outcomes

“

My advocate far exceeded my expectations of what an advocate should be. I wish that all advocates were like her. Very pleased with the outcome, her communication style was perfect, service was 10 out of 10, totally fantastic. Felt that my advocate worked in a way that was wonderful for autistic people

“

My advocate deserves a medal for what she did for me



“

Lovely working with the advocate who was professional and supportive to the safeguarding enquiry. She sought and advocated the person's views and wishes both verbally and in writing and remained responsive throughout the enquiry process. Thank you.

OUTCOME MEASURES



“

She did an amazing job in supporting the person to ensure that her voice is heard and her feelings and wishes are well reflected within the plan



“

The advocate involved was amazingly helpful to the person and very professional to work with



“

Thank you for your time yesterday. Having you in the room with me was massively helpful and I really appreciate it. I probably would have walked out quite early on if it weren't for you being there with me.

OUTCOME MEASURES FEEDBACK

“



“

She was very nice, I'm going to have to get my dental work done to help my teeth, she showed me pictures and listened to me. 10 out of 10 is fantastic score, she is a very nice lady.

“

You have done an amazing job, thank you from the bottom of my heart.





VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Our volunteer team continues to grow and adds value which is vital to the delivery of our services. Our volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and have a wide range of skills, the time they kindly offer enables us to reach and support more people who need it. Within 2022-2023, our volunteers provided a total of **470** hours support to Advocacy Focus.

We continue to support the running of our statutory IMHA service which provides advocacy to patients that are sectioned under the Mental Health Act. This involves supporting detained patients to understand their rights, support with appointments/meetings and support accessing health and social care services.

We also have volunteers who support children in the care system by taking the young person out on monthly fun visits under the Independent Visitor service.

Advocacy Focus know the importance of investing in the training and mentoring of those who choose to volunteer with us, and we, therefore, ensure that volunteers enter our training programme which supports them to undertake their various roles to the highest standard. This is recognised within our 'Investing in Volunteers' accreditation.



Volunteers provided **470** hours of support to Advocacy Focus and the people we work with

Our volunteers join Advocacy Focus for many reasons, some are aspiring advocates, psychologists, and social workers who feel this valuable experience will aid them in future employment. Others are people who want to expand their social networks, gain meaningful experiences, and give back to others in the community who may need additional support.

Here is what our volunteers have to say about their work and why they want to volunteer at Advocacy Focus:



Volunteering is a great way for me to have an insight into different field areas and see what I would like to specialize in later in my career. I know I would like to go into the mental health industry, and I am leaning toward PTSD therapies however, I don't want to limit my experiences and so I believe Advocacy Focus is ideal for me to get a broader understanding of other fields.



I am hoping to gain valuable experience working with vulnerable people. I am looking at pursuing a career in mental health services, therefore want to complete voluntary work that would give me experience working in this area. I also want to give someone the chance to succeed and help to find opportunities for them.



I enjoy using the skills I've gained to learn more to help nurture a young person, being a listening ear or source of inspiration, or whatever role is needed.



INDEPENDANT VISITOR SUCCESS STORY

The referral

We received a referral for a girl who was seven years old. Laya* is placed with her brother at a foster placement. The children have been exposed to domestic abuse throughout their whole lives. Despite significant intervention from Children's Social Care they did not have a role model in their life so it was felt Laya would benefit from an Independent Visitor. In addition to this, it was noted that her brother is quite controlling of her and it was felt that someone to take Laya out separately on fun activities would be further comfort for Laya.

How has it helped?

This has helped the family massively with foster mum saying that she constantly needs extra eyes on the siblings. The visits help Laya relax and be herself on the visits. The foster carer has four other children, including Laya's brother. The time out from the family enables Laya to develop her social development and confidence.

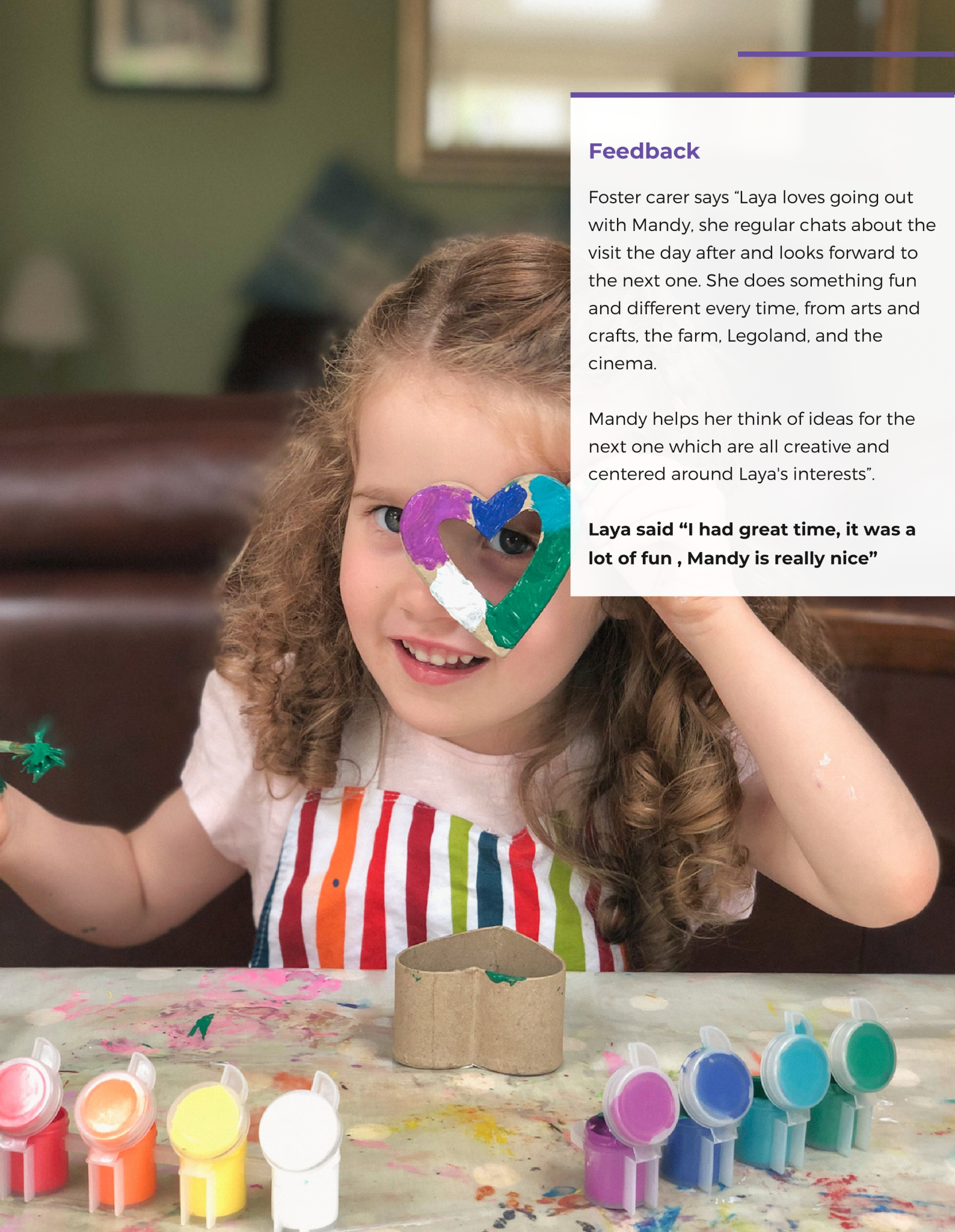
Why our volunteer wanted to get involved

I retired five years ago from a senior role in a large comprehensive school in Rochdale. I had taught Dance and English for over 35 years, but my area of responsibility was pastoral care. I was Pastoral Director of the school for 7 years and the last three years of my full-time role, I was a member of the Senior Leadership Team. During that time, I was the Designated Officer for Child Protection and Safeguarding and the school lead for Looked after Children.

The school was in a very multi-cultural area and the children came from a very mixed socio-economic catchment area. Over the years I have dealt with a wide variety of child protection issues and worked closely with a range of outside agencies.

For the last four years, I have been volunteering as a Counsellor for Childline. I want to continue to support the most vulnerable in our society and engage with young people to achieve the best possible outcomes in their lives. My career has provided me with a range of skills and expertise which I could bring to this role.





Feedback

Foster carer says “Laya loves going out with Mandy, she regular chats about the visit the day after and looks forward to the next one. She does something fun and different every time, from arts and crafts, the farm, Legoland, and the cinema.

Mandy helps her think of ideas for the next one which are all creative and centered around Laya's interests”.

Laya said “I had great time, it was a lot of fun , Mandy is really nice”



LIBERTY PROTECTION SAFEGUARDS

The long-awaited materials for consultation (including the draft Code of Practice and draft Regulations) were finally released at the end of March 2022, and the consultation period ran until 14th July. During this time, our LPS lead read through all of the materials and prepared our consultation response which was submitted to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

We also attended round table meetings with DHSC during this time where they were seeking feedback on specific topics such as the role of the Independent Mental Capacity Advocate (IMCA), the role of the Appropriate Person (which will replace the role of an unpaid Relevant Person's Representative) and the definition of a deprivation of liberty.

SOME OF THE KEY ISSUES WE HIGHLIGHTED IN OUR RESPONSE WERE:

- The proposed definition of a deprivation of liberty as set out in the draft Code of Practice does not align with the definition given by current case law (Cheshire West) and could result in many people being heavily restricted but not eligible for safeguards (and therefore the right to challenge those restrictions) under LPS.
- Under the draft Regulations, there is no right for the IMCA to visit the person under an LPS authorisation where they are supporting the Appropriate Person. This is a reduction in the person's rights from under DOLS, where a 39D IMCA has the right to visit both the person and their RPR.
- The level of involvement in the IMCA role and timeframes suggested for completing an authorisation will place a huge demand on advocacy. There will therefore need to be a large increase in advocacy funding for this demand to be met and ensure advocacy can be provided in the proposed timeframes.
- The use of section 4b appears unclear from the draft Code and could potentially be open to misuse.
- The guidance relating to young people in the draft Code was contained in one chapter and not threaded throughout the Code.

LIBERTY PROTECTION SAFEGUARDS



Advocacy Focus co-hosted a webinar with Kate Mercer and NDTI aimed at the wider advocacy sector and engaging them in the consultation process.

Our LPS lead continued to chair the national LPS sub-group of advocacy providers. During the consultation period, a series of meetings were held to discuss the content of the draft Code of Practice and the concerns we have as advocacy providers. As a result of these discussions, a joint advocacy response to the consultation was formulated which Advocacy Focus signed up to with around 30 other advocacy providers.

In co-production with the LPS Implementation Lead at Lancashire County Council, we have produced a 'plain English' LPS guide and are planning a series of literature to be developed once the final Code of Practice is published.

Whilst awaiting further updates and the publication of the final Code of Practice, we continued to work to get 'LPS ready'. Our LPS Lead liaised with the local authorities we work with to try and identify expected demand levels. We started to develop a service delivery model for LPS and also planned a series of resources that will be accessible to the Appropriate Person to support them in their role.

There has very recently been an update from the government, confirming that the implementation of LPS has been delayed "beyond the life of this Parliament" due to the need to prioritise other work within health and social care at this time. This means that implementation will not happen before the next general election and will be a matter for the new government, and so nothing further will be decided until at least 2025. The Department of Health and Social Care have announced that they plan to publish the summary of responses received during the consultation, which we will read and share once this takes place.



MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

Discussions continue around the reform of the Mental Health Act. The Mental Health Reform pre-legislative scrutiny was released in January 2023, giving the government a 3-month period to respond.

As it stands there were over 50 recommendations that the joint committee had suggested within the pre-legislative scrutiny. We are awaiting the government response to see which recommendations they will be accepting which should then form the basis of the new reform.

Some of the recommendations are:

- Advocacy being available to informal patients.
- People being given the option to accept or decline advocacy at the point of their 132 rights being given, including informal patients.
- Community Treatment Orders being abolished for patients under Part 2 of the Mental Health Act.

Our Mental Health Act Development Worker has taken part in policy workshops and panel discussions around the reform and aims to continue their involvement in any groups launched following the government's response.

They have also compiled presentations to keep our advocates up to date with what is going on at present, but this is still subject to change, and we are awaiting the government response so that we can move forward.

QUALITY PERFORMANCE MARK (QPM)



The Quality Performance Mark (QPM) is the only quality mark for organisations that deliver Independent Advocacy. The National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) is responsible for assessing and awarding organisations with QPM status.

Being awarded the QPM is confirmation that an organisation is delivering the gold standard of advocacy. It is widely recognised and respected across the advocacy sector. It demonstrates that an organisation is delivering advocacy in line with the [Advocacy Charter](#).

The purpose of a QPM assessment is to make sure that our advocacy policies are up to date, we are following best practice, and all our delivery is in line with the QPM standards that are required to achieve and retain the award. The QPM assessment allows us to showcase to an industry expert all the work that we do, who then examines how we are delivering our advocacy services in line with the QPM standards and the Advocacy Charter. We're then given useful feedback that we can use to shape and develop our services moving forward.

We have proudly held QPM for many years, and every three years we undergo further assessment to retain our QPM status. In November 2022 we underwent our assessment once again, and we are happy to have successfully achieved our QPM status once more.



Some of the glowing feedback from NDTi demonstrates exactly how we are delivering quality advocacy services in line with the principles of the Advocacy Charter:

CLARITY OF PURPOSE

“Advocates had an impressive understanding of the importance of being clear about their roles, remits, and professional boundaries and how to communicate the purpose of advocacy to people who use their services and to professionals. They were clear about the purpose of all the types of advocacy they offer. This was reflected throughout the organisation.”

INDEPENDENCE

“Advocates and Managers clearly prioritise their independence from service providers, funders, commissioners, and other stakeholders. **They gave excellent examples of how they maintain their independence in practice** and how important it is to demonstrate independence to people who use their services.”

PERSON-LED AND EMPOWERMENT

“This is an outstanding area of good practice. Advocacy Focus supports self-advocacy with toolkits and other resources, such as the Justice for LB Toolkit available on the website. Advocates were clear about ways in which they work in a person-centred way and how they support people to get their voices heard. **Advocacy Focus has co-produced excellent easy read guides and documents.** There was a clear commitment to encouraging self-advocacy wherever possible. Advocacy Focus has a commitment to learning from people who use the services, for example using feedback from its RPR service to create a new RPR fact sheet.”

ACCESSIBILITY

“Easy read options and a very clear website ensure that services are accessible, along with use of translations and interpreters when needed. **The website has an excellent video: ‘What is advocacy and how can we help you to self-advocate?’**”

SUPPORTING ADVOCATES

“This is another outstanding area of excellence at Advocacy Focus. **Staff report feeling very well supported and staff wellbeing is clearly prioritised.** There is an open, trusting culture of honesty, peer support, managerial support, enquiry and reflection, teamwork, personal and organisational development. Staff reported manageable workloads, autonomy, and good communication. Staff and volunteers appreciate outstanding and positive leadership around wellbeing.”

As part of the assessment process the QPM assessor speaks to people who have worked closely with Advocacy Focus, including people our Independent Advocates have supported, and external professionals in the health and social care sector.



SOME OF THE WONDERFUL FEEDBACK WE RECEIVED FROM OUR STAKEHOLDERS INCLUDED:

“My advocate understood my needs and wishes, we had rapport straight away...I’d still be there now if it wasn’t for them. There’s nothing they could have done better, she was superb. **The outcome was exactly what I wanted, largely due to the advocate.**”

Person who has used services

“She had a lovely manner, **very skilled, very person centred.**”

Person who has used services

“I could always get in touch (with the advocate), messages were always passed on and responded to. **The whole services was excellent, really welcoming, nothing was too much trouble.**”

Person who has used services

“(The advocate was) helpful, listened to me and what I was dealing with, help with paperwork, even though the outcome was not what I wanted, her help was phenomenal, she went above and beyond. **The advocate and the company, no-one else has ever helped me like that.**”

Person who has used services

“**They provide a very clear voice for the individual**, their reports are very thorough with detailed evidence of what the person is saying, next steps and any action.”

Health and social care professional

“**Advocates create and maintain positive working relationships** whilst also being very forceful on the side of the child or young person they are working with.”

Health and social care professional

“The quality of their reports is excellent. **They are like a dog with a bone, they are persistent...** I have confidence that they do the job properly, they know DOLS inside out. They have the confidence to challenge where they need to. 10 out of 10.”

Health and social care professional

Hearing feedback like this makes us so proud to have an amazing team who are dedicated to going above and beyond to deliver quality advocacy worthy of the QPM award. Here’s to another three years of being a QPM awarded advocacy provider!

AWARDS



- Achieved Mind Workplace Wellbeing in 2022 GOLD award.
- Winner of Outstanding Advocate at the National Advocacy awards
- Finalists for Red Rose Not For Profit award
- Finalist for Red Rose Commitment to Skills award



LANCASHIREBUSINESSVIEW
RED ROSE
AWARDS 2023



UPDATE

OPERATIONS

There has been a period of change within our Operations Team over the last year. Our Operations Director, John, bid Advocacy Focus farewell to take semi-retirement after 8 years with the company. We then appointed Becci Jackson-Maher into the Operations Manager role, who has also been with Advocacy Focus for 8 years, working within Service Delivery, to take over the reins of leading the Operations Team.

The last year has seen the introduction of some key health and wellbeing related policies, our Life Leave and Flexible Working Policy, to demonstrate our commitment to our team's work-home life balance. We recognised that many organisations are moving to a more flexible way of working, and we want Advocacy Focus to be part of that movement.

Our IT systems continue to run smoothly and to the consistently high standard that we have always delivered on. We have begun to work on further exploring our organisation's cyber strategy, with more exciting developments coming up in the next 12 months.

We have opened two new offices this year. In line with the launch of our new Salford Children's Rights Service, we have merged the Trafford and Salford teams to give them the opportunity to work from an office in the centre of Salford, saving costs and minimising our carbon footprint by running two teams from one premises. We have also downsized our office in Leyland, which has allowed us to move further into Leyland centre and have access to a wider range of facilities.

Training and development, marketing and health and wellbeing have all been key priorities within the Operations Team over the last 12 months, with further details outlined further in this report. The next 12 months sees Operations continue to build on the amazing work they already do in providing a solid foundation to the organisation to support the delivery of quality advocacy services.



TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In the past year, our team have continued to prioritise learning and development through a wide range of training delivered in-person, online, and through self-paced courses.

Besides our comprehensive annual schedule, which covers topics such as Human Rights, Safeguarding, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training, our colleagues also accessed a variety of legal workshops and awareness sessions with local and national charities.

Our team are our biggest asset, and we continue to invest in the career progression and knowledge advancement of our colleagues.

Employees have had access to external training on leadership and management, supporting LGBTQ+, armed forces, British Sign Language, amongst many other topics. Collectively, our team have completed **137** external training courses this year alone.

We have a strong commitment to personal and professional development and benefit from a highly skilled workforce. This was once again recognised at the Red Rose Awards when we were nominated for the Commitment to Skills Award. Further to this, our work on staff well-being was again recognised by Mind's Wellbeing Index when we were nominated **number 1 employer**, receiving a **Gold Award**.

In addition to the training delivered in-house, we have continued to work with organisations across the country to deliver high-quality mental health, menopause, and advocacy training. We worked with corporate and third-sector organisations to support their own teams to implement positive well-being initiatives and supported the introduction of new well-being policies in those workplaces.

FEEDBACK FROM TRAINING



Brilliant trainer - really engaging, helpful, friendly. They had excellent presentation skills, relatable examples and experiences, and made the training very comfortable for all of us. I would definitely recommend them to anyone else considering this course.

This course was very interesting and educational with regards to the many different mental health issues and has provided me with much more confidence when supporting my service users.



Excellent content package delivered well and was very engaging. The instructor was very helpful at all times and looked after the well-being of all persons involved, would definitely recommend.



HEALTH & WELLBEING

These last 12 months have brought about a sense of uncertainty in society, where people are feeling the pinch of the rise in the cost of living, and the direct long-standing impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on people's mental health is starting to emerge. It has never been more important to invest in health and well-being.

At Advocacy Focus we look after our own. We understand that in order to provide quality advocacy support to the people we work with, we must also place priority on our own team's wellbeing. We must be putting our own oxygen masks on first.

We began 2022 by once again taking part in the national charity Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index for the third consecutive year. Not only did we again achieve the Gold Award, but we were also awarded Top Employer out of the **119** organisations taking part. This was a huge achievement for the organisation as it recognised all the hard work that we put into ensuring the well-being of our team. We have further committed to the Workplace Wellbeing Index for 2022/2023 and hope to retain the accolade of Top Employer once again.

We also sought feedback from the team about what their well-being priorities are, so that we could further tailor our health and wellbeing initiatives to our staff's individual needs and preferences. One resounding theme that emerged was a request for further flexible working arrangements. As an organisation we prioritised responding to this feedback and with input from our team, we launched our new flexible working policy.

Our new policy allows staff to work a 4-day working week or even a 9-day fortnight and gives people free rein on determining their working hours and pattern between our operational hours of 7.30 am-8.30 pm, allowing our staff to adopt a working pattern that suits their lifestyle, personal commitments and work responsibilities.

To measure the success of our new flexible working policy, we have rolled out a happiness survey, which enables us to measure staff morale and productivity prior to the introduction of flexible working and compare it with the results following the implementation of the arrangements.

We also introduced a Life Leave Policy, which provides our staff two extra days leave each year to use for planned or unexpected life events, for example for a religious celebration, moving house, a wedding or civil partnership, or the bereavement of a pet. Our Life Leave Policy allows our staff to take leave for such events, without having to use their annual leave entitlement.

In October 2022 we proudly opened our well-being room at our Accrington Head Office. Our well-being champions worked tirelessly to create a welcoming, peaceful space that staff could use to take time out away from work to focus on their well-being. Since opening our well-being room, we have arranged a range of complimentary therapies, delivered by expert practitioners, including Reiki, massage and Tropics treatments.

Advocacy Focus continues to make a substantial investment in widening what we offer our team to promote their health and well-being. Throughout last year, we continued to hold our quarterly well-being walks, hosted a staff away day at Whitehough Outdoor Education Centre, and collaborated with YOLO Wellbeing, to provide our team with a meditative sensory experience, including scalp, neck and shoulder massage all from the comfort of YOLO's mobile provision.

Our organisations dedication to the promotion of a happy and healthy workforce is a permanent commitment which we have made and will continue to further develop and invest in going forward.





WEBSITE

Our main focus this year was to improve our online experience for people needing advocacy support. We launched our new website, which saw an overhaul in content and pathways, improved SEO (search engine optimisation) and a range of accessibility features to ensure everyone had equitable access to the content available.

Social media has also grown exponentially as part of our online offer and, more than doubling last year's figures, we have reached a wider audience than ever before and aim to continue this upward trajectory.

Advocacy Focus is committed to promoting self-advocacy whenever possible. Prevention plays a key role in advocacy support and this support is available through a range of resources such as healthy self-booklets, self-help toolkits, social media posts with useful links, and other free downloadable materials on our website. We have seen a major increase in site visits and users, demonstrating that these resources are being accessed more frequently.

Over the next year, we plan to further develop the different ways people can support Advocacy Focus as a charity. Through fundraising and other methods, such as Advocacy Friends, we are looking at the various ways people and organisations can raise money and awareness for our charity.

We also have two new services that we will continually promote; the Children and Young People's Rights Service in Salford, and the Adult's Advocacy Hub for St Helens, which has allowed us to launch the All-Age Advocacy Hub in that specific service area.

We will also continue to produce and release content to demystify advocacy and the wider sector. With the production of "What is Advocacy" videos, a new TikTok profile aimed at young people, and additional 'Understanding Advocacy' resources; the aim is to raise awareness and make sure that people who need advocacy or may need it in the future, are equipped with correct and relevant information.

MARKETING STATISTICS

137,086

annual website visits



36,523

people visiting our website after searching 'what is advocacy'



71,546

Annual Website Users

1st



the place we ranked in the Mind Wellbeing charity index in 2022



TOP 5 COUNTRIES

UK

27,900

USA

8,852

Philippines

15,604

India

1,955

Germany

1,293



COMPANY INFORMATION

Charity Name:

Advocacy Focus

Charity Registration Number:

1086151

Company Registration Number:

04135225

Head Office:

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

Trustees:

Chris Lintern (Interim Chair)
Denise Bond
Dean Rodgers (Treasurer)
Linda Stewart
Orooj Ajub
Paul Carroll
Karen Christie
Mujahid Wahab

Bankers:

Lloyds Bank

Auditor:

Mayes Accountants
22-28 Willow Street
Accrington
Lancashire
BB5 1LP

SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM



Justine Forster
CEO



Leanne Hignett
Services Director