



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

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"You are the only person that has listened to me in the last 10 years, and you've changed my life."

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# VISION AND VALUES

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

We are a team who care deeply about everything we do. We encourage our people to fully embrace and adopt our core values when working with others.

Our values were created with our team and reflect who we are as an established organisation.

We make all our decisions guided by these values, making sure that everything we do has a clear and meaningful purpose.



## Quality

We deliver high quality advocacy. We have over 25 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

7,381

people supported

4,474 people supported with complex advocacy needs

4,349 hours of spot purchase advocacy delivered

2,447 information and guidance notes provided

39,706 annual website users

84,080

ANNUAL WEBSITE VISITS



329

1-1 community advocacy and self-advocacy cases

130

community focus cases, with 180 issues supported and resolved

92%

of individuals we work with rated our service 8 or above

98%

of professionals we work with rated our service 8 or above

WE RANKED 1ST IN TOP EMPLOYER AND SMALL BUSINESS IN THE MIND WELLBEING INDEX IN 2023.

1,696  
PEOPLE VISITED OUR WEBSITE AFTER SEARCHING 'WHAT IS ADVOCACY?'

VOLUNTEERS PROVIDED 872 HOURS OF SUPPORT TO ADVOCACY FOCUS AND THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT



# CHAIR'S REPORT

Chris Lintern, Chair of Trustees

**I would like to warmly welcome you to the Advocacy Focus Annual Report for 2023/24. This is the second time I get to write this as the Chair of Trustees, and I do so with a great deal of pride, as over the last year, the team have continued to make a real difference to so many people's lives across the North of England.**

We have been supporting people via our advocacy hubs across Lancashire, Salford, St Helens and Trafford, and the details and numbers of people that have benefited from our services over the last twelve months are contained within the following pages of the report. We have also continued to provide excellent training on Mental Health First Aid to several organisations during the last year.

In February 2024, the team also opened a brand-new Community Focus Hub in Burnley which has received fantastic feedback. This is something that is really important to us as a charity, as it enhances the support we can provide for the residents of East Lancashire in areas such as housing, benefits and access to training and employment.

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

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We continue to provide a lifeline of support to those in our communities who may need to understand their rights, ensure their voices are heard, and be the focus of any decisions that are made about them.

Advocacy Focus has also relocated its Head Office this year, from the centre of Accrington to its new home in Altham, which is about four miles away. A great deal of work has gone into ensuring a smooth transition to our new address and base of operations.



In March 2024, the team worked incredibly hard to deliver our Breaking Barriers conference in Leyland, which was a day of collaboration and learning across different sectors and was attended by over 100 people. As with previous conferences we have received brilliant feedback from attendees.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the partner organisations who support us in so many ways, whether that's through fundraising, sponsorship, making sure that we have opportunities to attend key events, or any other ways of providing support. Collaborative partnerships are crucial to any organisation's success, and we are grateful to each and every partner that we work with and look forward to continuing those relationships over the coming years.

I am proud to say that we have a wonderful team at Advocacy Focus and each one of them makes me feel welcome when I meet them. We also have a talented group of Trustees who continue to provide their time and expertise for which I am truly grateful.

I hope that you will feel as inspired by the efforts of the team as I and my fellow Trustees do when you read what they have achieved over the last twelve months in this report.

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Photo credit: Liz Henson Photography

# A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

**Justine Forster, Chief Executive Officer, Advocacy Focus**

Welcome to our recap of 2023-24. It's been another busy year for our charity and our people, but another successful one in terms of outcomes for those that used our services. As you will see in the body of our report, we have had some noteworthy successes to celebrate.

Retaining the Lancashire Advocacy Hub contract for another five years, and further embedding our 'Looking After Lancashire' missive. A new service for children and young people in Salford. An 'all age' Advocacy Hub for the people of St Helens. And the launch of our new Community Focus Hub, which opened its doors in Burnley - and helped us to take another step forward into prevention-based support, going beyond our health and social care remit.

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**We look after our team, so they can look after the people that are lost, unheard or invisible in systems and processes.**

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We continued our specialist work with external partners to make the patient experience more positive for people with autism and held our third 'Breaking Barriers' Conference, with tremendous support from our partners in the sector. Looking back, it's not hard to see that we are a charity that genuinely cares about outcomes and the delivery of person-led services.

There is much to read about and digest in this report, however I want to talk more about our team. There are 75 paid team members and around 40 volunteers, yet it is still not enough to meet the demand for our services. Funding is in short supply and the sector continues to be incredibly competitive.

So, we have to do more with less to help and support the people that need it most. Our operations team, the backbone of our services, devoted most of its energies into scaling back what we could, and made our funding work harder for us. This year they have relocated our head office and despite being a small team, they've made a huge impact during this period.

Our biggest spend is our team's salaries and training. That way we can develop and retain best in sector advocates and advocacy coordinators, highly skilled in getting the outcomes people want. Our people are our most valuable resource, and we never lose sight of that, or the fact that they can choose where they work. So, we make our workplace as supportive and positive as we can. We look after our team, so they can look after the people that are lost, unheard or invisible in systems and processes. Quality is our mantra when it comes to our people, and we won't compromise that.

So, I want to end by thanking them, our team, our volunteers, and the people in their lives that support them to do the difficult job they do. Working in health and social care feels harder than it's ever felt. There are a lot of people struggling with a full range of issues and the rising cost of everything. Our team aren't immune to the same pressures. So, all we have achieved in the last year is down to them. To their unwavering passion, commitment, and the way they conduct themselves every day of the week. Here's to you Team Advocacy Focus.

I hope you enjoy our report. But most of all, I hope you can see the true power of quality advocacy in action, and how it can help people to live the lives they want and choose to live.

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# SERVICE DELIVERY OBJECTIVES

## Specialist Advocacy

“Everyone entitled to specialist advocacy can access it, to a high standard and in a timely fashion.”

## Community Advocacy

“Strengthening people and communities via prevention focused services and activities.”

## Influencing

“Positive societal impact via information, education and upskilling of people, professionals and communities.”

## Partnership

“We will work with a diverse range of people, services and sectors to improve a whole community response and improved access to services.”

## People

“Our team will be well trained, diverse, resilient and ready to respond to changing community needs.”

## Sustainability

“A planned, sustainable and ethical approach to income generation.”





# SERVICE DELIVERY

It has been another successful year for Advocacy Focus. As a pure advocacy, person-led service, our ever-growing team of **75** employees and **42** volunteers have been committed to supporting children, young people, and adults to be central to any decisions being made. The demand for our services has continued to rise as people struggled to understand and access the services they so desperately needed. In the 26 years Advocacy Focus has been delivering health and social care advocacy, the issues people face are only getting bigger and more complex.

We supported **4,474** people with complex advocacy needs across all contracts and increased our outreach in our service areas. During this period, we expanded into Salford with a children and young people's advocacy service and launched our first All-Age Advocacy Hub in St Helens. Rolling out further support for children, young people, adults, and our elderly communities.

## 4,474

people with complex  
advocacy needs across all  
contracts

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Over the last two years, we have focused on preventative advocacy services and early intervention, to reduce the need for crisis support and statutory advocacy, wherever possible. This work will continue into next year as we aim to enable people to build their knowledge, skills and confidence to face any health and social care challenges and achieve their personal outcomes.

## 329

people supported through  
community & self advocacy  
provision

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As a result of our prevention work, we launched our Community Focus project and expanded beyond health and social care support. This project supports people with housing, benefits, employment, education, and training issues. This is because we know that people often have a range of challenges they are dealing with, and it is hard to focus on one issue in isolation. The project has been a huge success in the East of Lancashire, and we have supported over **130** people since 1st January 2023. It has had such an impact that we plan to expand this offer across our service areas and reach even more people.

Our experienced Community Engagement team continued to work in the heart of our communities to help people understand the difference that high quality advocacy can make in a person's life.

We supported **329** people with community and self-advocacy support to help them to advocate for themselves. This created a ripple effect across the communities we work with and gave people the skills they needed to advocate for their family and friends. We pride ourselves on developing new services and projects to bridge gaps and break down barriers for the often overlooked people in our service areas.

As well as launching three new services, we held two sector leading conferences, Autism Focus and our third national Breaking Barriers conference. The conferences saw us welcome over **100** people and offered further learning and the sharing of best practice. Once again, we had packed agendas full of sector experts with one goal at heart, to improve life outcomes and services for the people we support.

Our charity will continue to listen to the people we support so we can grow, learn and be the best possible advocacy provider. A provider that is fit for purpose and one which our communities need and deserve. We have big plans for 2024 and beyond, but read on to find out what impact our team made during 2023-2024.

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Community Engagement  
team continued to work in  
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# ADVOCACY SERVICES

We offer a free, independent and confidential service that provides advocacy for all.

We aim to make a positive difference to the lives of the people in our community. We want to make sure that their voices are being heard and that they are at the centre of decision making.

Our team of multiskilled advocates can support people across the different strands of advocacy. We have supported **4,474** people with their health and social care advocacy needs, compared to 3,179 in the previous year. Our team has worked hard to engage with the public and statutory sectors to ensure all adults who had the right to advocacy were able to have the support they need.

Throughout the 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.

Excitingly, we launched our new All Age Advocacy Hub in St Helens which offers a cradle to grave approach to delivering advocacy. We continue to deliver our range of community and specialist statutory services across Lancashire, Trafford, St Helens and across the North of England.

## 4,474

people supported with their health and social care advocacy needs

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## Services delivered:

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

# LANCASHIRE, TRAFFORD & ST HELENS



## Lancashire

We were thrilled to re-secure our Lancashire Advocacy Hub and continue to support our local communities. This led to the opening of our Community Advocacy Hub in Burnley, where people can get help to access services and have a friendly face to speak to about issues they are struggling with. In the past year, our Paid Relevant Persons Representative service under Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards has remained the busiest strand of advocacy. The past year has seen the opening of two new Mental Health Units, one in Royal Preston Hospital (Skylark) and the other in Whalley (Woodview). We have worked together with the teams at Skylark and Woodview to ensure that detained patients have access to our Independent Mental Health Advocacy Service.

## Trafford

It's been another excellent year in Trafford. Our busiest strand of advocacy in Trafford has been Paid Relevant Persons Representative under Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards. We have supported people to have their voices heard and improve their quality of life in the homes they are living in. In the last year, we have seen the funding of our community advocacy service come to an end. Our advocates worked hard to ensure that people using our service were able to get the outcome desired and signposted them to other services for continued support. The Mission Impossible Self Advocacy Group continues to make a great difference to people who are autistic and/or have a learning disability by making sure that issues that are important to them are heard and actioned for change.

## St Helens

Once again, it's been another great year for the St Helens Advocacy Hub. We first launched the hub on 1st April 2023, and it grew considerably within its first year. The key to success was that the team worked hard to engage with the public and statutory sector in St Helens. This ensured 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 130 people receiving advocacy support, by the end of year one we have supported 610 people.

# SUCCESS STORY



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

Laura\* was living at home with her family and going to classes at college that were for students with learning disabilities. Laura enjoyed going to college as she made lots of friends and having a routine was very important to her. Laura was coming to an age where she would be finishing college and so a decision needed to be made between Laura, her family, and the social worker to plan her next steps.

## How did we help?

The advocate met with Laura and her family many times to find out her wishes and feelings about her social care assessment. It had been a year since the last assessment, so the social worker needed to review this, but it was very important due to the changes that would be happening once she had finished college. Laura required 24-hour care which the family provided with the support of a home care company and the college.

Laura was unable to express her needs to her advocate, so they spoke to her family, the provider, and the college to gather all the information needed, as well as observing and interacting with Laura. The advocate supported Laura and her family in going through the assessment, reported all the changes, and gave some options for the social worker to consider when looking at a day centre. The advocate supported the family in voicing their concerns about the financial implications of Laura needing extra care within the home.

## What was the outcome?

The social worker was unable to provide a package of care that the family felt would benefit Laura the most. On that basis, the advocate helped Laura and her family to respond to this and appeal it, highlighting things which were important to Laura (such as her sensory needs), and how the desired day centres would be able to support her in those areas compared to the proposed options. The appeal was taken to the board for them to decide.

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**Laura was coming to an age where she would be finishing college and so a decision needed to be made between Laura, her family, and the social worker to plan her next steps.**

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The outcome was an enhanced package of care that was able to place Laura in the day centre that would benefit her the most, enable the family to retain the existing home care company, as well as continue to enjoy their own family time with Laura.

### Why was advocacy support so effective?

The advocate was able to use their knowledge of the Care Act wellbeing principles in the appeal, as well as making sure that Laura and her family were involved throughout. Advocacy was able to ensure that the views and wishes of Laura and her family were heard. In addition to this, the advocate was able to make sure the Care Act was adhered to, specifically how adult social care in England should be provided. Namely, the care and support provided by the local authority should ensure that people who live in their areas receive services that prevent their care needs from becoming more serious or delay the impact of their needs. For Laura, this meant that she was able to access a day centre that would meet her needs, but also ensure that the skills she had learnt in college would not be diminished.

\*name changed

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**The advocate was able to use their knowledge of the Care Act wellbeing principles in the appeal, as well as making sure that Laura and her family were involved throughout. Advocacy was able to ensure that the views and wishes of Laura and her family were heard.**

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# CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE ADVOCACY

Our advocacy offer to children and young people has widened geographically over the last twelve months with the addition of the Salford commissioned service. The support offered has again strengthened with the continued positive partnerships and collaborative working with external agencies.

Children and young people remain at the centre of all changes and decisions made about the support on offer. We regularly ask for feedback and direct input to provide the service they want and need. This is then fed back to commissioners to ensure that it remains young person focused. Awareness of the advocacy service is continually being promoted to ensure more children and young people have access to the support of an advocate at important meetings that are about them. This empowers children and young people to be involved and to play an active role in decisions being made about their care.

**Our advocates make sure that the voices of young people are heard and listened to. We also aim to support young people to speak up for themselves and improve their self-advocacy skills. As part of this, we have made a new self-help toolkit for young people – a guide to support in meetings. This toolkit will support young people to understand meetings that are taking place, to prepare for meetings, and to develop their skills and confidence to attend meetings about their care and wellbeing. We are planning to create more resources and are asking young people to tell us what they want us to develop.**

This year, the government suggested making changes to the national advocacy standards for children and young people's advocates. Our advocates talked about the new standards with the young people that they are supporting. They focused on standards 1 - 3, which say that young people are the most important part of advocacy. We included feedback from the young people in our response to the government. The young people felt that the changes to the standards made sure that they would be listened to and supported. Our response also had some suggestions of how the standards could be improved, such as advocacy services holding the Quality Performance Mark to show that they are a high-quality service and advocates having an Independent Advocacy Qualification. We also raised that, where possible, advocates should support and encourage young people to be empowered to raise any concerns about their safety. We also said that if the government wants more people to access advocacy, they need to consider increasing funding to local councils so they can pay for these services.





# FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE AND PROFESSIONALS

“ When you say that I am like your boss, it makes me feel powerful.”

“ You’re like my arm bands when I am swimming in the deep end.”

“ My advocate taught me to express my feelings and build my confidence to speak for myself. My advocate also taught me how to improve on communicating my feelings.”

“ I was sent a Christmas miracle, like an angel.”

“ Since having an independent advocate, O has been freely expressing his wishes and feelings to professionals and to his teachers.”

“ It is a game changer having an advocate in these meetings, thank you.”



The services we have provided to children and young people in Salford, 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 was the person's situation before working with Advocacy Focus?

Rachel\* was 15 and lived at home with her mum and little sister. Rachel's older sister and her two children often lived there too. A social worker referred Rachel to Advocacy Focus for support at her Initial Child Protection Conference. The advocate spoke to the social worker and explained that they would speak directly to Rachel and help put her at ease. The advocate reassured Rachel that she only had to share as much information as she was comfortable with.

## How did we help?

Rachel wanted to speak to her advocate by text message. Rachel explained that she had lots of appointments and people wanting to see her and that sometimes it was too much. The advocate explained that it was up to Rachel how they spoke, and she decided she would like to speak on the phone. Following the call, Rachel asked if she could meet her advocate in person.

The advocate met with Rachel before the Initial Child Protection Conference. Rachel was worried about the information in the reports, and she said that they were not right. Rachel stated that she wished to go to the conference with support from her advocate, to challenge the information shared. The advocate arranged for this to happen and supported Rachel to attend the conference, and helped her to share her views and worries with the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) before the conference.

Rachel attended the conference and continued to attend all core group meetings and review conferences that came after, with her advocate in support.

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## What was the outcome?

In the Initial Child Protection Conference, it was agreed that the threshold was met for Child Protection. Even though Rachel disagreed with this, she did hope that it might help her get the support required to get back into college, which was very important to her. Rachel's social worker then left their role, and the family were without a social worker for several weeks. However, the advocate remained in regular contact with Rachel.

By doing this, it made sure that when a new social worker was allocated, the advocate was able to share Rachel's views and wishes straight away. Rachel did not need to 'start again' or repeat her story to someone new. Something that Rachel held strong views about.

The advocate spoke with the college about their plans and shared these with Rachel to keep her fully informed. Rachel was able to say that the plans were not what her hopes for the future were, so she looked for other colleges that would help her in the career she wanted.

The advocate was also able to share some helpful ways of dealing with other professionals. This was due to Rachel saying that she felt that professionals only "bothered her" when there was a meeting. Rachel struggled with her mental health and found it hard to ask for help. A contact plan was put in place between the advocate and Rachel, where the advocate would send a text message once a week to give Rachel the chance to ask for more support if she needed it. This was shared with professionals in the core group meeting and was written into the Child Protection Plan for all professionals to mirror this plan.

## Why was the support so effective?

The advocate was able to help Rachel from the beginning and had been led completely by her. Rachel was given a sense of power and control when so much of that had been taken from her. Rachel was able to reach out to the advocate as, "*the person who will have my back.*"

In supporting Rachel to challenge the reports for the Initial Child Protection Conference, the advocate showed Rachel that her feelings were important. It also showed Rachel that she would be supported, even if she did not agree with what other professionals were saying, doing, or planning. This gave Rachel more confidence to challenge other aspects of her life, for example, the plans for her education. It also made Rachel feel more confident to voice the reasons for this and take action to change any plans she did not agree with.

Having an advocate gave Rachel the chance to move forward in the Child Protection process, even when professionals changed or moved on. Rachel shared what was important to her with her advocate, who made sure it was written into the Child Protection Plan. This made sure that no matter who the lead professional was, the level of contact and support would remain the same.

\*name changed

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**In supporting Rachel to challenge the reports for the Initial Child Protection Conference, the advocate showed Rachel that her feelings were important. It also showed Rachel that she would be supported, even if she did not agree with what other professionals were saying, doing, or planning.**

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# SPOT PURCHASE ADVOCACY

Spot purchase advocacy has supported people in times of great need, and where people have fallen through the gaps in services. This could be due to a variety of reasons, where people are not legally entitled to advocacy or because of a unique set of circumstances. Advocacy Focus believes everyone who needs help should get it, which is why we offer a bespoke spot purchase advocacy service.

In the last year, there has been a significant rise in the number of people requiring support for Child Protection processes. 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 who are not. These cases are very much person-centred.

Our Rule 1.2 Representative service has also been in high demand, with more court deprivations being authorised in people's own homes.

**WE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING ADVOCACY SERVICES ACROSS THE NORTH OF ENGLAND:**

- Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA)
- Paid Relevant Person's Representative (RPR)
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)
- Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA)
- 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

**4,349 hours**  
of spot purchase advocacy provided



# SUCCESS STORY

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

Mark\* is a 21-year-old man who lived in a care home. Mark has a diagnosis of a learning disability and lacks capacity regarding his care, treatment and where he should live. A Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) was in place which meant that Mark had to live at a care home under certain restrictions (rules).

The care home had locked doors and Mark was not free to leave. Mark always had a staff member with him from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm and if Mark was going outside of his local area, he had to have two staff members with him. A member of staff would also sleep in the room next to Mark's bedroom at night. Mark also had an alarm on his bedroom door so the staff would know if he left.

Mark was not allowed to access the internet on his own and was only allowed to use the internet for 3 hours per day with staff present. When Mark was online gaming or speaking to his family or friends, his calls were monitored and listened to by staff using a headset.

Mark was not able to go to community events at short notice, as staff supervision needed to be put in place to ensure that activities were taking place safely in the community. This meant that Mark could not be spontaneous and had no control over his daily or weekly routine.

## How did we help?

The independent advocate explained the DoLS to Mark and the restrictions that were in place.

Mark objected to some of the restrictions and told his advocate he wanted to move to live closer to his dad who lived 300 miles away. Mark told his advocate that he did not feel he had any freedom and that he felt restricted in all aspects of his life.

**Mark was not able to go to community events at short notice, as staff supervision needed to be put in place to ensure that activities were taking place safely in the community. This meant that Mark could not be spontaneous and had no control over his daily or weekly routine.**

Mark was informed of his right to challenge the DoLS authorisation and that he could also challenge the restrictions in place by accessing the Court of Protection.

The advocate helped Mark to speak up about his wishes and feelings and ask that his restrictions be changed to give him more freedom.

Mark's advocate asked for meetings to take place with all the people who put the restrictions in place to see if changes could be made. The advocate also helped Mark to find a solicitor, so that he could challenge where he lived and move nearer to his dad.

## What was the outcome?

The independent advocate challenged the restrictions on Mark's behalf. Mark's capacity was assessed in relation to each restriction to see if Mark could make the decision for himself.

Following on from this, the restrictions on Mark's gaming, using the internet, and telephone calls with his family and friends were stopped. Mark was able to spend the daytime alone in his bedroom to give him some space and free time to enjoy alone. Mark was able to have friends over to the home to spend time gaming without staff being in the room.

Mark has now moved to the area where he wanted to live, to be near his dad. This has had a huge impact on Mark's mental health, as he missed his dad dearly, and had not seen him for many years due to how far away they lived from each other. Mark has now started college to do some of his GCSE exams and would like to start an apprenticeship.

## Why was advocacy support was so effective?

Advocacy made sure that Mark's thoughts and feelings were listened to. The advocate acted as a safeguard for Mark to make sure that the people making decisions for him listened to his views, and that any decisions made were in Mark's best interests. Advocacy ensured that Mark took back control of his life.

Mark's advocate made sure that his rights were upheld and that he was able to challenge the authorisation, as is his right, under the DoLS framework.

The independent advocate made sure that all decisions made on Mark's behalf were the least restrictive option and that they promoted Mark's control over his own life and gave him more independence.

Advocacy helped Mark to gain the confidence and learn skills to be able to say when he did not agree with something, or when he wanted certain things in his life to change.

\*name changed

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**The advocate acted as a safeguard for Mark to make sure that the people making decisions for him listened to his views, and that any decisions made were in Mark's best interests.**

**Advocacy ensured that Mark took back control of his life.**

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# COMMUNITY FOCUS

Photo credit: Liz Henson Photography

On the 2nd of February 2023 we officially launched our Community Focus project. The project covers East Lancashire. It aims to provide much needed advocacy support within the local community. It exists to enable and empower people to achieve a better life for themselves and their families. This ensures they have a say in the decisions that affect their own lives. The Community Focus team help people with a variety of health and social care issues. They include work, complaints, family issues, benefits and where to get more help. The team has grown over the past year and demand from people needing the service continues to grow too.

## Advocacy in the East Lancashire Community

To promote the Community Focus project and advocacy there have been several sessions to raise awareness. We have visited the following places to provide information:

- Colne Health Centre
- Health and Wellbeing Team Burnley PCN
- People of Pendle
- Hyndburn Volunteer and Community Resources Centre
- Social Prescribing Link Workers
- The Park Childrens and Family Centre Accrington
- Curry on the Street Nelson
- Community Gateway
- Veterans in the Community-Burnley Football Club

**9**  
community spaces visited to promote community advocacy

## Outreach

Over the past year the team have started to attend regular community sessions. This helps us to work closely with people directly in the community. We call these sessions outreach.

An example of one is Burnley Together - Calico Homes. This is a food bank and drop-in community facility. Our attendance there has been so successful we now visit every month. Whilst there, our team has helped people with a wide variety of issues. They include Education Health Care Plans, benefits, kinship caring and access to healthcare records.

## The Community Focus Hub

The Community Focus Hub celebrated its opening on the 1st of February, at our dedicated space in Burnley town centre. Lots of different people attended like business owners, local people and partners. Our team made new connections telling them about the Community Focus project. Local newspaper, Burnley Express, wrote an article about The Hub, spreading the word about Advocacy Focus.

After the open day, the Community Focus Hub has continued to open on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 am to 2 pm. People can just drop by for some one-on-one help with an advocate. The team help with things like work, complaints, family issues, benefits and where to get more help. People come alone, with family, friends, or with someone like a social worker. There are also laptops available too, these are good for tasks such as filling out forms, finding information, and checking out local resources.

# £439

raised through the **Community Cuppa** campaign

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## Building Relationships

Our Community Focus team seek to connect with other agencies and build relationships with organisations across East Lancashire. Some of these include:

- Healthier Heroes
- Selnet
- New Ground Together
- Burnley Family Hubs Network
- Burnley Pendle and Rossendale CVS
- Lancashire Domestic Abuse Forum
- SafeNet
- Burnley Leisure and Culture
- Carer's link

## Community Cuppa

We have been fundraising for the Community Focus project via the Community Cuppa to encourage people to access the support they need. This has been advertised over social media and people have been very generous with giving donations.

**#communitycuppa**  
**#cuppakindness**





# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement raises awareness of advocacy services, whilst giving people the information, tools, and confidence to feel equipped to self-advocate. Community engagement has taken place across our Lancashire, Trafford, and St Helens service areas. Community Engagement is carried out in a variety of ways, in the heart of our communities with people, but also in partnership with other organisations and services.

## We have attended lots of different engagement sessions and events in Lancashire:

- Pendle Food for All
- Burnley Together
- Disability Information Day-Blackburn College
- Bay Information Hub Lancaster/Morecambe
- National Autistic Society
- Blackburn College Careers Fair
- Christians against Poverty
- UCLAN-University of Central Lancashire
- Pathways Living Well Group
- Salvation Army Preston
- Community Gateway Preston
- Lancashire Voices

**12**  
engagement  
sessions attended  
across Lancashire

We continue to attend and provide support to groups or one-to-one support. This person-centred information sharing is completed online and in person. The community team has also assisted in providing advocacy to people in need of health and social care support. Examples have included assisting with complaints, housing issues and support for their family and friends.

## Engagement sessions and events we have attended in St Helens:

- Carers Centre
- Social Prescribing
- MIND Befriending
- Perinatal Services
- Willis House, LD Team
- Change Grow Live
- Four Ways
- Health Visitor
- AS Support Group
- St Helens Gateway
- St Helens Adult Healthwatch
- St Helens South PNC
- The Autism & Asperger Society
- Hope Centre
- PAUSE
- Newton Community Centre
- Starting Point
- Chain Lane Community Centre
- Winderemere Medical Centre
- Lansbury High School
- Wellbeing
- Womens Hub
- Chrysalis Centre
- Park Farm Community Centre
- Dementia action day
- Atlas House
- Dementia action day

## Engagement sessions and events we have attended in Trafford:

- Strategic Partnership Meetings
- The Bread and Butter Thing
- Thrive
- Involved in research on the impact of poverty on young people in Greater Manchester
- Early Break Holding Families service
- Trafford Domestic Abuse Multi-Agency event
- BlueSci Wellbeing Hubs
- Welfare Rights
- Social prescribing and support groups
- Trafford Community Hubs
- Trafford Carers Centre

27

engagement  
sessions attended  
across St Helens

11

engagement  
sessions attended  
across Trafford



# SUCCESS STORY

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

Sarah\* had been through several admissions in various acute mental health settings in recent years. Sarah had not been sectioned before, during any of these admissions, and had no awareness of what advocacy was. Sarah had a diagnosis of Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD), autism and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Sarah had a good relationship with her parents, but the support they were able to provide to her was limited, as she did not want them to know the details of the traumatic events that led to her developing PTSD. Unfortunately, mental health professionals in the past had invited Sarah's parents to a meeting without her consent, and divulged in the meeting the details of these events.

This led to Sarah having very limited trust in mental health professionals and the mental health system. Added to this, Sarah felt that she had been let down in other ways, such as several past Care Education and Treatment Review (CETR) meetings making recommendations, and then professionals simply not responding to these and discharging Sarah back home without the correct resources in place.

## How did we help?

An advocate met with Sarah to see what kind of support she might need. Sarah explained to her advocate that there had been a CETR meeting, but that the recommendations were not being acted upon by professionals involved in her care. The meeting was quite some time ago, so Sarah's advocate explained that she could ask for another one to be arranged.

Sarah agreed that this was a good idea, and she began speaking with the team to see if this could be done.

**Sarah had a good relationship with her parents, but the support they were able to provide to her was limited, as she did not want them to know the details of the traumatic events that led to her developing PTSD.**

Sarah also advised her advocate that she wanted to make a complaint about the historical issues that led to her developing PTSD. Sarah's advocate found the information about the support which was available to her and Sarah chose to pursue the complaint. It was agreed by professionals that Sarah would benefit from another CETR meeting to re-assess where the past recommendations were up to. Sarah asked her advocate to attend the meeting with her and advised them of the issues that she would like to address. Sarah and her advocate looked over the past recommendations and identified the ones that had not yet been resolved.

**Sarah's main concern was that the type of support she was able to access during crisis was not robust or preventative enough to avoid her getting to a point where she required hospital admission. Sarah wanted to have the diagnosis of EUPD removed from her records. This was part of the previous recommendations following a second opinion, but this had not yet been addressed.**

Because of Sarah's lack of trust, and because of the problems Sarah had experienced in past meetings, she was extremely nervous. Sarah's advocate spent time with her before, to come up with a plan during the meeting to support her to feel less overwhelmed.

Sarah and her advocate attended the meeting, and she discussed all her concerns with the panel. When Sarah got to the part where she planned to discuss the removal of the EUPD diagnosis, she became upset and asked her advocate to explain her concerns about this. Sarah's advocate began to explain her concerns, and when Sarah felt ready, she stepped back in and took over. Following the meeting, Sarah thanked her advocate for helping her to feel more confident and explained that just having someone there, other than her parents, helped her to put her distrust in the staff to the back of her mind, meaning she was able to express herself much better.

Once Sarah received the recommendations, she and her advocate looked through them together, and Sarah was supported to communicate with her social worker and care coordinator to continue chasing up the completion of the new recommendations. During this process, Sarah advised her advocate that she would like to continue her university course but was unable to find any information about how they might be able to support her if she were to go back. Sarah's advocate sourced the contact information for the onsite counselling and support service at the university and passed this on to Sarah for her to have a discussion with them.

## **What was the outcome?**

All the CETR recommendations were met before Sarah was discharged. Sarah was able to get a referral to a supported living setting that would be better suited to respond to her needs when in crisis. The EUPD diagnosis was removed from her records and Sarah was referred to an autism support service in the community.

Sarah was able to overcome her distrust in professionals enough to be able to achieve the level of support she knew that she needed. Sarah was also validated in her feelings about her diagnosis and the fact that she believed the EUPD was a mistake.

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**Because of Sarah's lack of trust, and because of the problems Sarah had experienced in past meetings, she was extremely nervous about the meeting. Sarah's advocate spent time with her before, to come up with a plan during the meeting to support her to feel less overwhelmed.**

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Sarah was also empowered in such a way that she was able to start believing she could achieve much more, such as continuing her university degree, showing that she was able to focus on her future as a result of the outcome she achieved.

### **Why do you think advocacy support was so effective?**

The support advocacy provided meant that Sarah felt confident enough to challenge professionals about their inaction regarding the past CETR recommendations. Sarah was also able to overcome the anxiety she had around her distrust of professionals by having someone independent with her. Sarah was then also empowered to continue following up on issues from the meeting, meaning that when she was discharged, it was to a more appropriate setting for her needs, and had developed skills and confidence to support her to self-advocate in the future.

\*name changed

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**Sarah was also empowered in such a way that she was able to start believing she could achieve much more, such as continuing her university degree, showing that she was able to focus on her future as a result of the outcome she achieved.**

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# PEER ADVOCACY

The Mission Impossible Self-Advocacy Group helped people who are autistic and/or with learning disabilities in Trafford during the 2023/2024 year. They met **12** times at Stretford Public Hall on the second Thursday of each month.

The group worked with others to make services better in Trafford and Greater Manchester. They worked with the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board (ICB) to talk about what can be improved in urgent care services and to give their thoughts on changes. People in the group told Trafford Council what they thought of the services Trafford Council offer to people with disabilities as part of Trafford Council's co-production review.

**The group held a very busy session with Ring and Ride, who provide transport for people with a disability across the Trafford area. At this meeting the group, parents, and carers of disabled people came together to tell Ring and Ride about problems with their service. The group asked Ring and Ride to make it easier for disabled people to use the service.**

As well as monthly meetings, members of the group went to 'Confirm and Challenge' meetings with people that provide and fund services. These meetings talked about things like transport, health care, housing, social care, and activities. The group told the funders what would make these services better.

The group attended self-advocacy events, joining in with the national movement for self-advocacy. At these events, group members had the chance to work with other groups from around the country. They shared their knowledge and skills with other self-advocacy groups. Members of the group continue to grow in confidence and develop their skills, feeling more able to speak up for themselves. The group are looking forward to doing even more in 2024-2025.



# SUCCESS STORY

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

Paul\* has been speaking up for himself as a self-advocate for a long time. Advocacy Focus got to know Paul when we started working with the Mission Impossible group in Trafford. Paul was part of initial talks with Trafford Council about why Trafford needed a self-advocacy group.

## How did we help?

Paul started coming to the group meetings in 2022, and he has been there for every single one since. These meetings give Paul a chance to bring up any concerns, practice speaking up for himself, and grow his confidence. Paul now also helps run the self-advocacy group.

## What was the outcome?

During the past year, Paul has become more involved in how the group operates. Paul has helped Advocacy Focus with five sessions to raise awareness, where he talked to other groups about what Mission Impossible does and helped the group grow.

Paul's confidence has grown so much that he spoke at the Breaking Barriers conference about his experiences as a self-advocate and why speaking up for yourself and working together is important. Paul has also started leading some of the monthly meetings with help from Advocacy Focus staff.

## Why was advocacy support so effective?

Paul speaks up about problems that group members are facing, and his voice is helping the group be heard. For instance, Paul spoke for the group at a meeting with Ring and Ride, and he was very vocal during Trafford's co-production review.

\*name changed

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**Paul's confidence has grown so much that he spoke at the Breaking Barriers conference about his experiences as a self-advocate and why speaking up for yourself and working together is important.**

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# FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE USED OUR SERVICE

Helped me understand things I didn't at the start.

The whole experience was very friendly and encouraging as well as informative and extremely helpful.

Thank you so much Jackie. It is so good to know that there is someone there, on our side. You have been so helpful

You helped a lot. Having you there in my ward round and speaking up, made them listen. I feel confident enough to speak up for myself now without an advocate being there.

Thanks again for being there with me.



# FEEDBACK FROM PROFESSIONALS WE WORK WITH

Hazel was easy to contact and always replied to emails. She visited her client at times that were the most convenient to him, listened to his wishes and passed information on in a professional manner.

As always - a great service provided by Advocacy Focus.

Joanne is an asset to the advocacy service and those you support. Anyone who gets her as their advocate is very lucky to have her, as I have no doubt, she will do her best for them.

I would like to say Jackie was brilliant, everything an advocate should be and absolute credit to the profession and your organisation. An outstanding professional advocate.



# VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Our volunteer team has continued to grow, playing an important role in the delivery of our services. Coming from various backgrounds and having lots of different skills, they give up their time so we can reach more people.

During 2023-24 we recruited **42** Volunteers who gave **872** hours of their time helping Advocacy Focus across three projects. They did a great job, especially with supporting our Independent Mental Health Advocacy service. This service helps people who are detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act to understand their rights, express their views and opinions, and get the help they need in important meetings. Our volunteers support our Independent Mental Health Advocates in their day-to-day advocacy practice and are a valuable resource to them.

We have also brought in new volunteers to help at our Community Hub. They will be helping people with matters including benefits, housing, supporting people with appointments and accessing healthcare.

Our volunteers are also a big part of the Independent Visitor service. They spend time with young people who live in care, taking them to places that match their interests once a month and are there for them when they need a listening ear.

We make sure all our volunteers get excellent training so they can do their jobs well and provide the best service possible. The training is conducted via a range of methods to ensure we cover all learning styles and are flexible with in-person training, as well as online and e-learning opportunities.

We want to say a huge thank you to all our volunteers for everything they do. They make a big difference to the lives of the people we help, and we couldn't do it without them.

# SUCCESS STORY



## Independent Visitor Success Story

### What was the person's situation before the match?

The independent visitor has been matched with Harriet\* for 2 years. Harriet lives with her older brother, younger sister, and grandparents. It was felt that an independent visitor would help Harriet have someone to relate to and enjoy activities with.

### How has this helped?

Going out and doing activities that Harriet loves has helped her during a very difficult time. The independent visitor has been able to offer Harriet someone to talk to, and to work through everyday problems. Harriet and her independent visitor have a strong bond, and Harriet feels able to speak to them openly. They get on well with each other, and they can offer support through life's ups and downs.

### What sort of things do they do?

Harriet and her independent visitor have done lots of things together. From bowling and mini-golf to full-day adventures at theme parks. There have been endless options for how Harriet and her Independent Visitor spend time together. Harriet is a very active person and enjoys activities like trampolining and Nerf gun experiences. The independent visitor has also been able to introduce Harriet to other activities, such as pottery painting and ring making. Harriet has found that she has a passion for art, and they have done other activities together, such as glass painting, which Harriet loves.

### Why do they do it?

Harriet's independent visitor said:

***"I volunteer for Advocacy Focus for many reasons, including personal fulfilment and skill development. Seeing Harriet grow brings me so much pride. Being an adventure-loving person myself, it allows me to enjoy regular outings, doing activities I love, while bringing joy and laughter into someone else's life."***



# LIBERTY PROTECTION SAFEGUARDS

The government has confirmed that the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) will not be implemented before the next general election. Since they announced this in April 2023, there has been no further update.

This is incredibly disheartening news, but we are optimistic for the future. Advocacy Focus has put in an incredible amount of work, which had also identified many issues within the draft Code of Practice and Regulations. The Government has been made aware of those issues during the consultation process. Whilst we are disheartened that the delay appears to be indefinite, we are relieved that the current draft guidance will not be implemented.

This means that the future of LPS depends on whoever wins the next election and whether they still want to continue with the changes.

We are also still waiting to hear when the updated Mental Capacity Act Code of Practice will be published.

## What is next for us?

We are working hard with people who use our services and our partners to make the best use of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards. Our LPS Lead continues to chair a national LPS sub-group of advocacy providers. Once the general election has happened, the group will think about campaign work to bring the reform of the current Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards to the new government's attention.



# MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

We are disappointed about the decision not to keep working on the important changes to the Mental Health Act. This law is important because it decides how we treat people who are really struggling with mental illness, especially when they need to be in a hospital or get treatment, even if they don't want it.

Changes to the Mental Health Act have been needed for a long time and the reform gave us a chance to make a difference to how we help people with their mental health. It was a welcomed opportunity to make sure people's views and wishes were listened to when they were in a mental health hospital. The changes would have helped the present unfair ways in which it is used, especially for people from different ethnic backgrounds who are four times more likely to be held under the Mental Health Act.

This chance has now been taken away, and the decision made by the Government has let down thousands of people and their families by not keeping its promise to change the Mental Health Act.

## What is next for us?

We are determined to keep listening to people's views and wishes and make sure their rights are listened to. We have taken part in lots of workshops, helped people with questionnaires and shared our own views on standing up for people in hospitals.

We will keep helping people who need our support and speak out about the changes that are needed to the Mental Health Act so that people can have more control over their own decisions and mental health journey.

We are hopeful that the campaigns that are happening at this time will change the decision and help create a more focused law which will give people more independence over their life.



Photo credit: Liz Henson Photography

On the 21st of March 2024, we welcomed over 100 health and social care professionals to our third Breaking Barriers Conference which was sponsored by Stephenson Solicitors. Our bi-annual conference aims to raise awareness of advocacy and brings professionals together to share ideas and best practices that can make people’s lives better. As well as NHS, Local Authority and legal professionals, our full-day conference also welcomed expert speakers who delivered a range of topical sessions.

Neil Allen has become a Breaking Barriers staple and this year attended to share the latest updates on Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and making the best use of this legislation. We also welcomed, for the first time, Laura Ingham from Armed Forces HQ, who spoke passionately about the importance of advocacy within the armed forces community, and how we can make our services more accessible to veterans and their families.

We saw Kate Mercer from Blackbelt Advocacy and Philippa Curran from Odonnell’s solicitors make a return too, this time around, speaking about the power of advocacy and section 16 welfare applications, respectively. Other sessions discussed topics such as ‘Advocacy for Autistic People in Mental Health Inpatient Settings’, ‘Capacity to Engage in Sexual Relations’ and ‘Internet, Social Media, and Mental Capacity’ to name a few.

We received excellent feedback from delegates who rated the speakers as **Excellent (85.7%)** and **Good (14.3%)**. The overall event also received an exceptionally high rating, with respondents rating it **Excellent (84.5%)** or **Good (14.3%)**. During this event, we were also able to fundraise £150 towards our Community Cuppa campaign through the sale of our reusable Advocacy Focus water bottles. This money will help us provide a warm and safe space to community members in Burnley, together with a good cuppa and some nice biccies too!

“

“Congratulations on all your achievements and for promoting advocacy.”

“I really enjoyed the event and thought there were good opportunities for networking and collaborative learning.”

“All was excellent and well delivered. Thank you!”

”



Photo credit: Liz Henson Photography



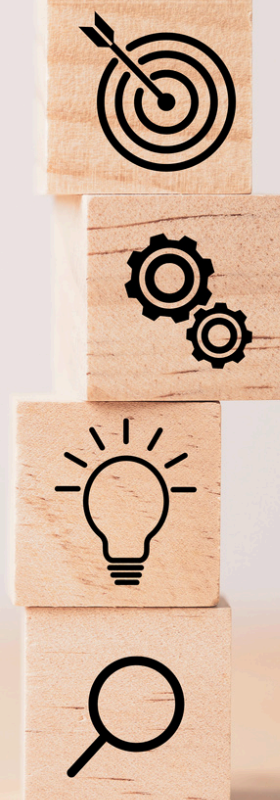
# AWARDS

- **Winner** of overall Top Employer in Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index and Gold Award Winners
- **Winner** of Outstanding Advocate at the National Advocacy Awards.
- **Winner** of Mental Health Safety Improvement Award at the HSJ Patient Safety Awards
- **Winner** of Heart of Salford Award for Volunteering Team of the Year





# OPERATIONS



Over the last year, we have seen some change with regards to the staffing of the Operations Team, with us appointing a new Operations Co-ordinator and Marketing Executive. The team has also expanded, with the introduction of additional resource in training, through the appointment of an Advocacy Training Co-ordinator to further develop our advocacy training provision. We have also enlisted, additional resource in the Finance Team, recruiting for a role which focused on the credit control of our block contracts and spot purchase work.

With regards to our people, our People Manager has developed an overarching People Strategy, which sets out our vision in relation to our people and how we will work to achieve this in 2024. We have also revised our organisation's maternity offer, to provide our team with an enhanced maternity package to support our people's financial wellbeing as they embark on motherhood.

IT has been a particular focus over the last 12 months, with the installation of Azure AD and InTune to provide more robust security across our IT systems. Windows Autopilot has also been configured to reduce the time taken to set up new equipment, thus increasing productivity and time efficiency. We have also implemented a new telecoms system, with the introduction of 3CX, a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) which enables telephone calls to be made using the internet via an application that is installed on laptops and mobile phone handsets. At the same time, we have introduced a Bring Your Own Device policy, with 95% of the team opting into both. The revision of our telecoms provision has enabled us to make cost and environmental efficiencies by reducing the organisation's purchase of hardware.

## 95%

of the team opted in to Bring Your Own Device

We have launched several fundraising campaigns over the last year. Most notably, our Christmas Fundraiser, to support our Independent Visitor services in St Helens and Trafford, which raised **£1,105**. We continue to fundraise for our ongoing Community Cuppa campaign, which raises money to provide a hot drink to those in need who visit our Community Hub.

Training and development, marketing, and health and wellbeing have all continued to be key priorities within the Operations Team over the last 12 months, with further details outlined within this report.

In conclusion, the past year has marked significant developments and achievements within the Operations Team. Over the next year, we remain committed to driving innovation, fostering a supportive work environment for our people, and making meaningful contributions to our communities.

**1**

Community Hub opening

**83%**

achieved on our most recent Health & Safety Audit

**1st**

place we ranked in the Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index in 2023

**£1,500**

worth of equipment donated to other local VCSEs

**100%**

of the team upgraded to new and improved IT systems



# TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

This year our team logged a total of **217** external training sessions, alongside our internal training schedule. These sessions ranged from completing the accredited Adult or Youth Mental Health First Aid courses, to upskilling on leadership and management skills, and furthering our knowledge of technical advocacy skills.

We have also worked with various solicitor firms and professionals to deliver topical training to our team, covering topics such: as Social Media & the Internet and Mental Capacity; Litigation Friend Training; Communication Skills; and more.

Internally, we have also expanded our mandatory training schedule to include the Oliver McGowan training and Basic Sign Language Awareness training. In addition, our team has completed annual refreshers on Human Rights, Children and Adult Safeguarding, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, GDPR, and more.

**We have delivered over 50 hours of Advocacy Awareness training to Local Authority professionals and local community groups, as well as delivering a host of technical advocacy skills training to advocacy providers and care homes across the country.**

This year, we have continued offering bespoke Workplace Wellbeing and Advocacy Skills training to businesses and not-for-profits across the country. We trained **65** Mental Health First Aiders to provide life-saving support to young people and adults. We have also delivered a host of training to veteran organisations as part of The Forces Wellbeing Collective, promoting the understanding of statutory advocacy services and creating safer pathways for veterans and their families. We have continued to work with organisations such as Citizens Advice, The Poppy Factory and supported companies in the law, logistics, housing, and insurance industries to deliver positive mental health and menopause initiatives within their workplaces.

“

**“Thank you for such a brilliant session that you provided, you were fantastic and supported so much learning for newer staff and also for staff that have worked in the service longer. Your presentation created lots of helpful discussion between staff in the following days and continues to do so.”**

**“Zoom training can be difficult to keep everyone engaged and to get everyone involved but Carolina made it a safe space and I felt everyone contributed which made the whole experience much more informative.”**

”





# HEALTH & WELLBEING

Looking back on the past year, it is clear that the challenges faced by our communities are far from over. The long-term effects of the pandemic continue to cast a shadow over people's mental and physical health, as well as the constant strains of economic instability. At Advocacy Focus, we know that our ability to support others goes hand in hand with the wellness of our own team. Just like we help people who need our support, we also make sure to support each other. This past year has shown us how important it is to look after ourselves and each other so we can keep giving our best to those who need it.

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**The Wellbeing Team meet monthly to talk about plans, organise activities and check in on each other around their own wellbeing.**

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To support our commitment to our team's health and wellbeing, and as part of our wellbeing strategy, we now have a Wellbeing Lead who is dedicated to delivering support and resources to our whole team. The Wellbeing Lead has also gathered a group of trained Wellbeing Champions, who are spread across the organisation and help offer low-level support to our people.

**Our wellbeing model is built around prevention, support, and aftercare. The team offers support when people are going through tough times and help people by simply having a chat, providing signposting suggestions or ensuring that wellness action plans are followed.**

The Wellbeing Team also meet monthly to talk about plans, organise activities and check in on each other around their own wellbeing. Striving to empower our team with skills and knowledge to help them manage their own wellbeing, the team deliver and arrange training and information sessions at each of our all-staff team meetings. These offer helpful coping techniques and self-help resources for the team to take away.

We have introduced a wellbeing induction for all new team members who join Advocacy Focus. This takes place within their first few days at work to make sure they know about all the support we offer. We have introduced 'Wellness Wednesdays', where the Wellbeing Team post internally about relevant weekly wellbeing topics. They also regularly remind people of their Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and its benefits to their physical and mental health.

At the beginning of 2024, as we have for the past four years, our team took part in the national charity Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index, which we eagerly await the outcome of since achieving the Gold Award and Top Employer award last year. We will continue to invest in this for our team each year.

Our team continue to work flexibly, allowing people to work their hours between 7:30 am and 8:30pm each day. This makes a four-day working week possible, and we have guidelines to make sure our people don't burnout. Our wellbeing room gives our team a quiet space that is well-used for reading, relaxing, praying, breastfeeding, or catching up with their teammates. Our wellbeing hour is popular and is a permanent fixture, reducing full-time hours down to 36 per week. We have recently moved to our new head office in Altham. This area now offers lots of greener, calmer, outdoor space where our team can go for walks or relax on the grass in the warmer months.

Advocacy Focus continues to make a substantial investment in widening what we offer our team to promote their health and wellbeing. Throughout the year, we have continued to hold monthly 'wellbeing walk and talk' sessions, which we tailor to suit all abilities. We again hosted a staff away day at Whitehough Outdoor Education Centre and continued to have a rolling schedule of massage sessions for the team via YOLO Wellness and Tropics treatments. We have also recently introduced low-cost group acupuncture treatments, which the team can claim back the full expense of via their EAP provision. Advocacy Focus is committed to enhancing our team's wellbeing. This commitment is ongoing, and we will continue to improve and invest in this as we move forward.



“

**“I feel very happy and content with AF and the working conditions, and of course my job which I love!”**

**“Thank you for creating a work force that I feel is positive and supportive. I am just blown away by the flexibility policy, I think it is amazing, and every team meeting I go to I always come away feeling AF do actually care about you as a person first.”**

”





## Advocacy Focus

# WEBSITE

This year, we worked hard to make our website easier for everyone to use. We made the language simpler, so it is easier to understand. We also wrote blog posts and articles and shared them on social media.

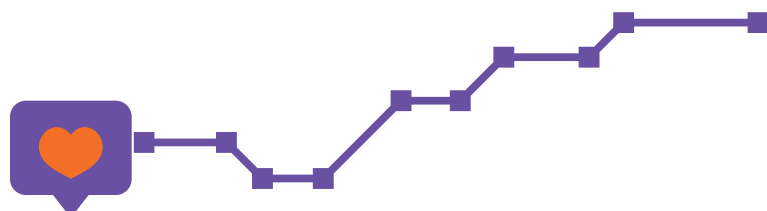
**Our social media followers have grown a great deal, reaching more people than ever before. We want to keep growing and reaching even more people.**

We are big on helping people stand up for themselves. We have provided lots of resources, including booklets and toolkits on our website. We have also shared helpful information on social media. More people are visiting our site and using these resources.

Next year, we want to make our website even easier to use. We will check all the content to make sure it is easy to read and organise related topics better so they can be found in two clicks or less. We also want to find new ways for people to support our charity through fundraising campaigns.

We are also updating how we use social media. We will start using Instagram and TikTok to connect with younger people and share information to help them understand advocacy and how they can become their own advocate.

**Our main goal is to spread the word across all ages and make sure everyone knows how advocacy can help them now or in the future.**





# MARKETING STATISTICS

**84,050**

annual website visits



**1,696**



people visiting our website after searching 'what is advocacy'

## TOP 5 COUNTRIES

UK

**13,341**

Philippines

**4,141**

USA

**2,451**

India

**741**

Nigeria

**472**

**39,706**



annual website users

**1,087**



conversations with people via our live chat service with 100% satisfied users



# COMPANY INFORMATION

**Charity Name:**

Advocacy Focus

**Charity Registration Number:**

1086151

**Company Registration Number:**

04135225

**Head Office:**

Saturn House  
Mercury Rise,  
Altham Business Park  
Altham  
Lancashire  
BB5 5BY

**Trustees:**

Chris Lintern (Chair)  
Denise Bond  
Dean Rodgers (Treasurer)  
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