

ANNUAL ADVOCACY REPORT

APRIL 2015 – MARCH 2016



INTRODUCTION

Advocacy is about providing individuals with support to help them express their own views, have their voice heard, access information and services and understand their rights and entitlements. It is based on the belief that all individuals are equal, with the same rights and responsibilities. Every Local Authority is required to provide advocacy services for children and young people who are looked after or wanting to make a complaint.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY SERVICE

The Children's Rights and Advocacy Service (known as Speak Up) promotes children's rights entitlements and provides advocacy for children and young people who are looked after, on a child protection plan or wanting to make a complaint against the council, in line with the Local Authority's statutory duties. The service provides issue-based advocacy and only exists for the time it takes to resolve the specific issue. It should be noted however that children and young people often raise numerous issues, sometimes requiring advocacy for a significant length of time. It is a confidential service and is independent from Children's Social Care, in line with the National Standards for the provision of Children's Advocacy Services (2002).

The role of an advocate:

- Advocates should work for children and young people and no one else.
- Advocates should value and respect children and young people as individuals and challenge all types of unlawful discrimination.
- Advocates should work to make sure children and young people in care can understand what is happening to them, can make their views known and, where possible, exercise choice when decisions about them are being made.
- Advocates should help children and young people to raise issues and concerns about things they are unhappy about, including making informal and formal complaints.

National Standards for the provision of Children's Advocacy Services (2002)

THE SPEAK UP TEAM

The Speak Up team are made up of two Advocacy and Participation Workers (each 0.4 PTE), a Service Support Apprentice and a Children's Rights Manager (0.7PTE). Speak Up also have a small pool of trained volunteer advocates who also undertake advocacy with children and young people. However due to service pressures and an increased demand, a temporary increase in hours has been agreed for an additional 0.6FTE Advocacy and Participation Worker.

Advocacy referrals can be made directly by children and young people or professionals on their behalf, via telephone, email, Facebook or through the websites www.showmethatimatter.com and www.yor-ok.org.uk.

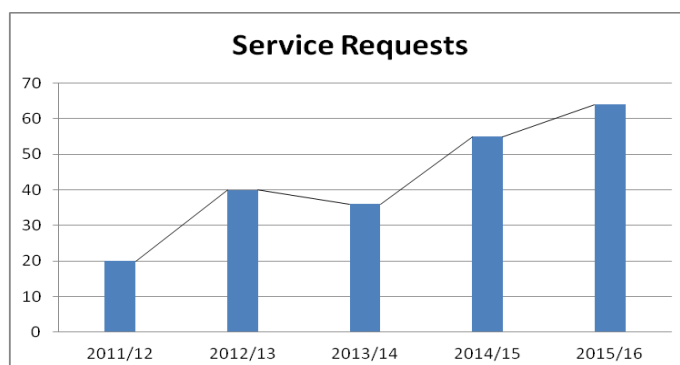
AWARENESS OF THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY SERVICE

For Speak Up to function effectively children, young people and professionals need to be aware of, and have an understanding of, the service. When a child or young person first comes into care they are issued with an information pack which includes information about their rights and entitlements and the Speak Up service. Speak Up also send quarterly newsletters to all looked after children and young people aged 7+ which include details of the service, with specific reference to advocacy and how to access this.

Children and young people are also made aware of the service through professionals. All professionals working with children and young people in care should be aware of the service so they can signpost and refer young people who may benefit from the support of an advocate. There is currently a varying degree to which professionals know when to seek advocacy, so it is important to ensure professionals have a clear understanding so they can make an informed decision about when to promote involvement of the service. The Children's Rights Manager regularly liaises with social work teams and attends team meetings to promote the service to professionals.

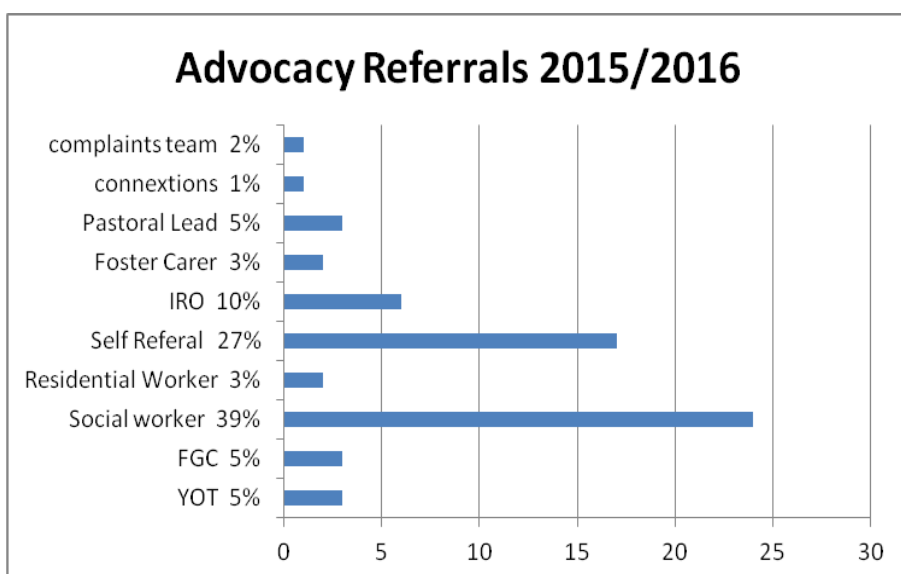
ADVOCACY STATISTICS

Referrals hit an all time high in 2015/2016 with 64 referrals for advocacy made. It is worth noting 14 of these referrals ended with no further action as the child or young person declined / no longer required the service, and 50 cases required ongoing casework. At the point of writing this report 34 of these advocacy cases had been closed and 16 remained open.



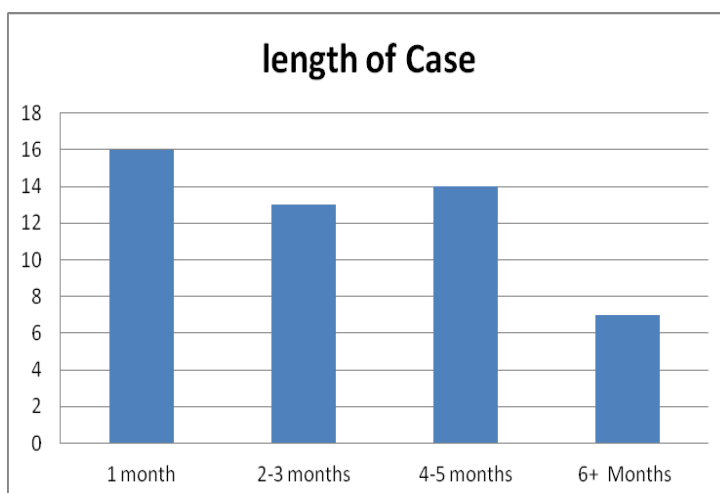
REFERRALS

Most young people were either referred by their Social Worker (39%) Independent Reviewing Officer (10%) or made a self referral (27%). There have been half as many referrals from IROs compared to 2014/15 but a significant increase in referrals from the social work teams at 39%, which is almost double the amount of referrals from 2014/15. Self referrals have remained similar to the previous year.



LENGTH OF TIME

The length of time cases remain open depends entirely on the wishes of the child and the issues they raise and so varies accordingly, as can be seen from the table adjacent. To give an indication of length of time cases have remained open, a snapshot has been taken on 31st March 2016. However it is worth noting that some of these cases remain open and so cannot accurately be used to judge the average length of time a case has been open but gives the statistical status of the service at this given point. .

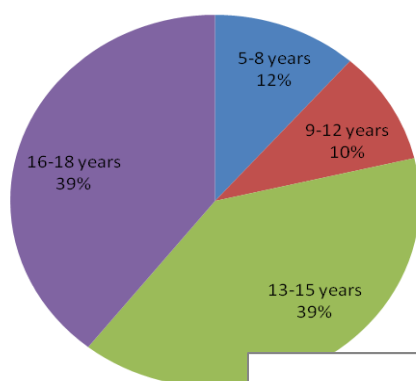


PROFILE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ACCESSED ADVOCACY

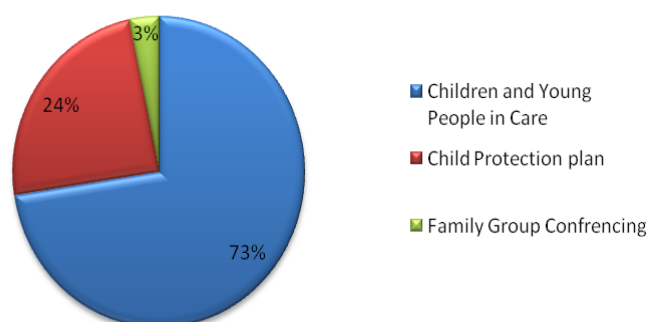
AGE AND LEGAL STATUS

A large proportion of children and young accessing advocacy were aged 13+ (78%). 73% were children and young people in care and 24% were subject to child protection plan. 3% were children who requested independent advocacy whilst going through Family Group conference (previously polited but no longer in place).

Age of Children and Young People accessing Advocacy



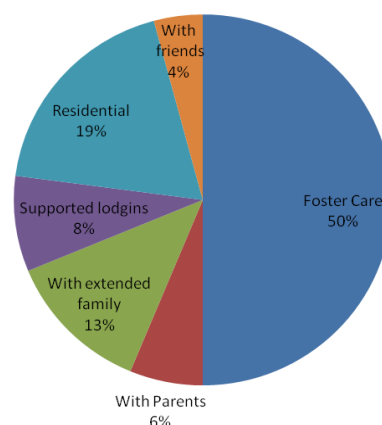
Legal Status



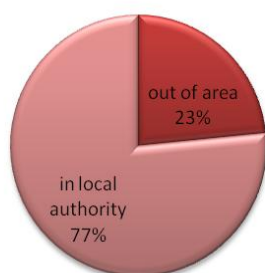
PLACEMENT TYPE AND LOCATION

Half of the children and young people in care who received advocacy were living with foster carers. 19% of children and young people were living in a residential settings and 19% looked after by family members.

Living Arrangement



Location of Advocacy Referral



23% of the advocacy referrals for children and young people in care were in relation to children and young people who were placed out of area. This may be attributed to

recent efforts to ensure service promotion is not only geared to children and young people placed locally but also those placed at some distance, in an attempt to target some of our more hard to reach children and young people. It is however worth noting that out of area advocacy has placed increasing pressures on the service in light if the additional time such cases inevitably require.

ADVOCACY REQUESTS

EMERGING THEMES

Each advocacy request is different and is specific to the young person in question, though there are some common underlying themes, outlined below and discussed in more detail overleaf:

Theme	No. of requests raised 2015/2016	Percentage 2015/2016	Percentage 2014/15
Contact issues	2	3%	13%
Unhappiness with social work service	11	17%	11%
Placement issues	7	11%	13%
Disagreement with Care Plan	3	5%	11%
Access to support/ services	5	8%	5%
Support to express views in decision making process	32	50%	45%
Other	4	6%	2%

Almost half of all advocacy request received were in relation to children and young people requiring support to have there views heard within the decision making process, similar to the previous year. Other requests in 2015/16 were made up of, 2 requests to be supported having name changed, 1 young person not happy with new school, and 1 for support with personal issues.

CONTACT ISSUES

Contact issues refer to any issues relating to the young person's contact arrangements with a person significant to their life, most often relatives and close friends. Only 3% of advocacy requests were in relation to contact issues, a 10% drop from the previous year.

UNHAPPINESS WITH THE SOCIAL WORK SERVICE

Young people identified difficulties in their relationships with social worker and spoke about general unhappiness with the social work service, including issues with confidentiality and accessibility. Requests included support when relations between young people and workers had broken down, on occasions resulting in a request to change worker, and frustrations about being unable to get in contact with their worker. 17% of advocacy requests were due to unhappiness with the social work service, an increase from the previous year (11% in 2014/15).

PLACEMENT ISSUES

Issues with placement include requests to change placement, unhappiness/disagreement with placement rules and regulations and general unhappiness with placement. 11% of advocacy requests were relating to issues with placement, a slight drop from the previous year (13% in 2014/15)

DISAGREEMENT WITH CARE PLAN

5% of advocacy requests were in relation to children or young people who were not in agreement with their overall care plan. These included support to access independent legal advise regarding a request to make an application to discharge a care order, as well as disagreements regarding planned placement moves. This was a drop from the previous year (11% in 2014/15).

ACCESS TO SUPPORT/SERVICES

Access to access support / services included request to challenge decisions regarding service provision and unhappiness regarding accessibility of services in light of being placed at some distance from the city. 8% of advocacy requests were in relation to this, a 3% increase from the previous year.

SUPPORT TO EXPRESS WISHES AND FEELINGS

This theme includes having support to attend or feed views into review meetings and Child Protection Conferences, as well as general support in establishing children and young person's view

at times when it has been identified that independent support is necessary. This category has the highest percentage of requests as to be expected, with 50% in 2016/17.

EVALUATION

Direct feedback is obtained from children and young people who have access the service in an attempt to evaluate and improve the service. During 2015/16 16 evaluation forms were complete by children and young people. This is a significant increase from previous years as obtaining feed back from young people has proved difficult, with young people being reluctant to complete evaluation forms once the work is concluded.

Children and young people are asked to complete an evaluation form once the work commences, to gather their feedback on the service and measure outcomes. A short series of questions are asked at the start of the work (documented on the child's initial agreement form) and measured with their responses on the evaluation form.

WERE YOU HAPPY WITH THE HELP YOUR ADVOCATE GAVE YOU?

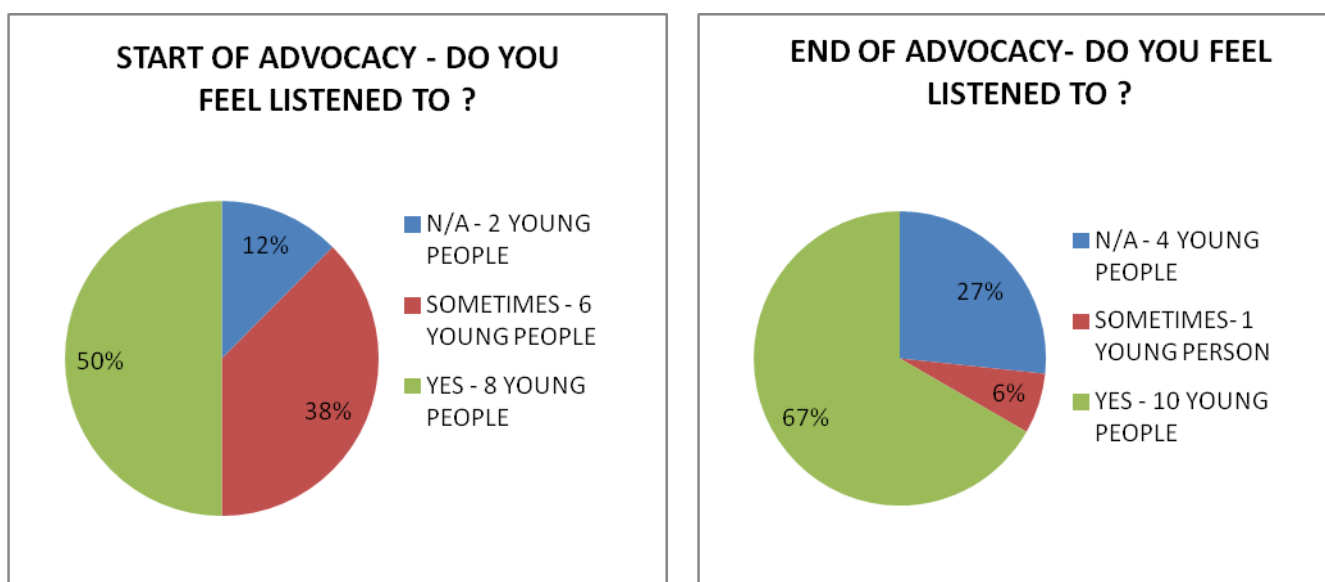
All young people stated they were happy with the help they received and would request an advocate again in the future if needed.

HOW CONFIDENT DO YOU FEEL IN BEING ABLE TO PUT YOUR POINT OF VIEW ACROSS?

8 young people felt very confident when asked if they felt able put their views across, 3 were confident, and 5 did not answer the question. This is the same result as when the young people were asked in the initial agreement.

ON THE WHOLE DO YOU FEEL LISTENED TO?

The charts below indicate an overall 17% increase in children and young people who felt listened after accessing advocacy.



AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

AWARENESS OF THE SERVICE

An ongoing area of development is raising awareness of the service. Speak Up will continue to raise awareness of the service by attending service meeting and briefings and circulate quarterly newsletters to all children and young people in care aged 5+. Information is regularly sent to social work teams via email updates and visits to team meetings. Speak Up also send out New to Care letters and Information Packs to children and young people shortly after they become looked after, containing information about rights and entitlements and the Speak Up s care. The packs include a variety of useful information as well as details of the Speak Up service. Information can also found on the Show Me That I Matter website (showmethatimatter.com).

REMIT OF ADVOCACY SERVICE

One area being looked at for future development is extending the advocacy remit to include provision for care leavers. Following feedback from the Children in Care Council steps are in place to explore how further capacity might be sought to enable this to be delivered.

Whilst offering advocacy to young people going through Family Group Conferencing has not been formally offered, this has been piloted over the last two years (2 cases during 2015/16). However it is not recommended that this continues in light of pressures on existing resources.

SUMMARY

This report has provided an overview of advocacy casework that has taken place during 2015/16. It has highlighted common advocacy themes and identified areas for further development. It is important that next year's annual report looks at the areas of development to establish if progress has been made and evaluate any changes made to the service.

REFERENCES

Department of Health (2002) *National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services*. Department of Health Publications.