

ANNUAL ADVOCACY REPORT

April 2017 – March 2018



York's Children's Rights and Advocacy Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 in care, going through the child protection process or wanting to make a complaint against the council, in line with the Local Authority's statutory duty. Provision has recently been extended to include advocacy for care leavers up to the age of 21, as a result of feedback from young people and in line with the National Standards for the provision of Children's Advocacy Services (2002). A Service Statement has recently been put in place outlining details regarding service provision, independence governance, performance and monitoring, and practice in relation to resolution and escalation.

Between April 2017 and March 2018 the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service received 53 referrals in total from children and young people; three quarters of which were in relation to children and young people in care. Referrals received were from children and young people ranging from 5-19 years, however three quarters of these were young people aged 13+. Improvements have been made in capturing information relating to the SEND profile of children and young people accessing the service and for the first time we are able to report on these.

Referral reasons vary with the most common theme being to support young people to have their voice heard during a decision making process (34%). In comparison to the previous year we have seen a slight increase in referrals in relation to placements, unhappiness with social work service and access to support services, and a decline in contact issues as a reason for referral. For the first time, this report has captured secondary issues raised by young people, 9 of which have been reported, spanning across a number of different themes.

For evaluation purposes, based on the feedback we have to date, young people speak highly of the service and their experience of having an advocate, with all young people reporting that they are happy with their advocate and the service they provided. Whilst existing professional feedback is limited, initial feedback has been positive, including comments such as, "I value this service in helping marginalised young people develop the confidence they need to navigate difficult and stressful situations".

Moving forward it is important that next year's annual report looks at the progress that has been made in raising awareness of the service amongst professionals within the education sector and fostering community, as these are areas that have been identified in further need of development.

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. Advocacy is based on the belief that all individuals are equal with the same rights and responsibilities.

Every Local Authority is required to provide advocacy for children and young people who are in care, leaving care or wanting to make a complaint. The Children and Young People's Act (2008) placed additional duties on local authorities to ensure that the views of children and young people in care are represented throughout the care planning and review process. This act requires local authorities to provide advocacy support to any child or young person in care that may require it.

AIM OF THE REPORT

The aim of this report is to explore and review the advocacy provided by the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service to see if it functions effectively and to outline any areas of the service in need of further development.

This will be done by:

- Looking at an overview of the advocacy service
- Reviewing statistics on the demographic of children and young people who have requested advocacy
- Analysing advocacy requests and outlining any common themes
- Reviewing the outcomes of the service, evaluating its effectiveness and looking at areas for development

All advocacy requests from the financial year 2017/18 will be used in the analysis of the service.

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 in care, on a child protection plan or wanting to make a complaint against the council, in line with the Local Authority's statutory duty. More recently the service has been opened up to care leavers up to the age of 21, in line with the National Standards for the provision of Children's Advocacy Services (2002) which state that 'The standards... cover advocacy for children and young people (including those leaving care) up to the age of 21'.

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. The service sits within the Early Help and Local Area Teams structure to ensure that it can function independently from Children's Social Care, in line with statutory requirements.

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 their 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 a Children's Rights Manager (0.7PTE), Project Officer Apprentice (1 FTE) and three part-time Advocacy and Participation Workers (totalling 1.7 FTE). Speak Up also has a small group of trained volunteer advocates who undertake advocacy with children and young people.

There is a service statement in place outlining details regarding service provision, independence governance, performance and monitoring, and practice in relation to resolution and escalation. Within the team there is a distinction between practitioners carrying out advocacy casework and those facilitating participation opportunities, thus when allocating advocacy casework the service does, wherever possible, seek to appoint a worker that is not delivering participation activities with the child or young person, to avoid the potential for any conflict of interest or confusion for young people about the two functions of the service.

Advocacy referrals can be made directly by children and young people or professionals on their behalf, via telephone, email, Facebook or through the website <http://www.showmethatimatter.com>.

AWARENESS OF THE CHILDRENS RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY SERVICE

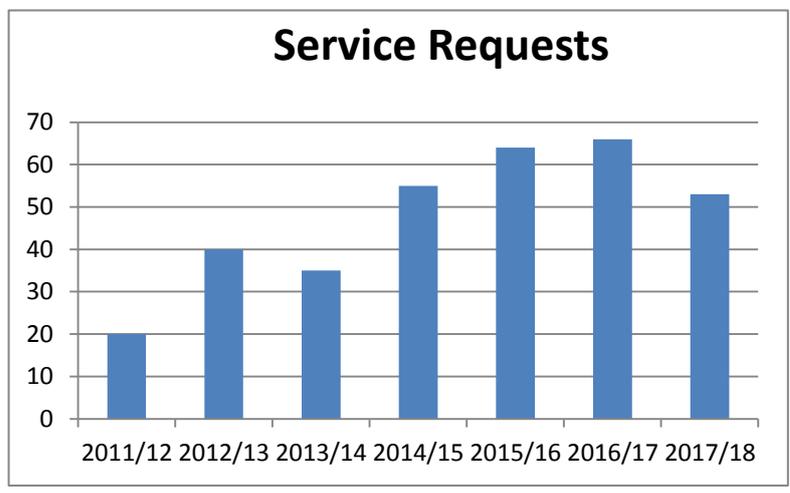
For Speak Up to function effectively children, young people and professionals need to be aware of, and have an understanding of, the service. When a child or young person first comes into care, they are issued with an information pack which includes information about their rights and entitlements and the Speak Up service. Speak Up also send quarterly newsletters to all children and young people in care aged 5+ and care leavers aged 18-21 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. It is important that all professionals working with children and young people in care are aware of the

service so they can signpost and refer young people who may benefit from the support of an advocate. The Children’s Rights Manager regularly liaises with social work teams, the Virtual School and teaching staff to promote the service to professionals.

ADVOCACY REQUESTS- STATISTICS

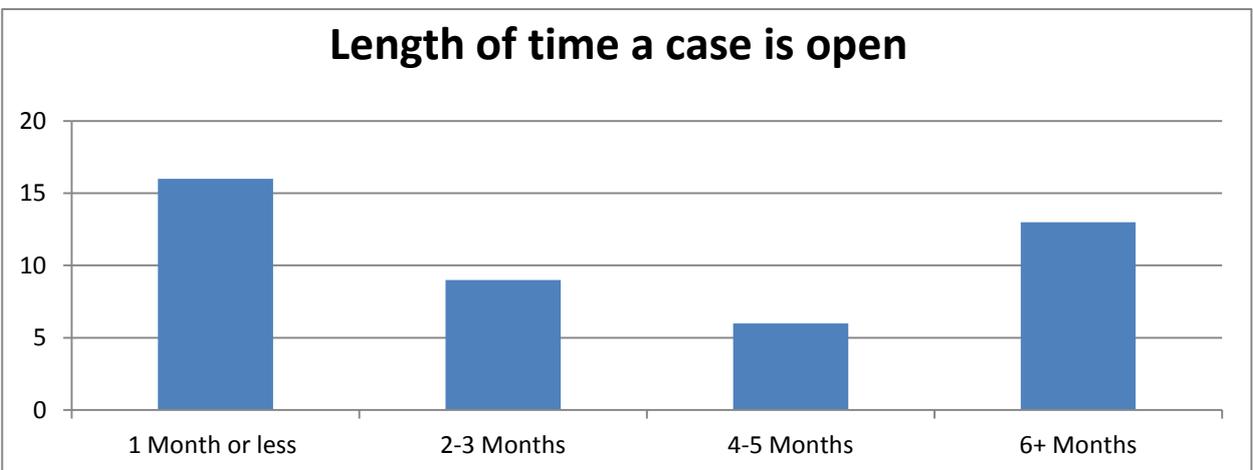
In 2017/18 there has been a slight dip in numbers (a decrease of 20%) which may, in part, be as a result of the decrease in overall number of children and young people in care. Although there has been some fluctuation in referrals over recent years, over the past four years the service has on average received 59 referrals per year, which is useful information to help predict



numbers going forward. However it should be noted that there is no comparable data for the advocacy referrals for care leavers as this is currently a new area of the service and will be an area for the service to compare in next years report

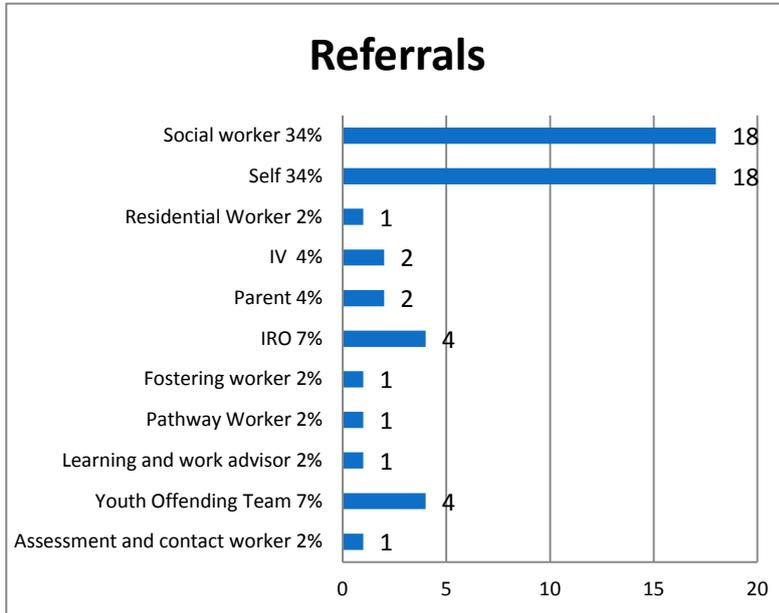
During 2017/18, 26 of the new advocacy cases were closed, 6 resulted in ‘no further action’ and 21 remained open with ongoing advocacy still being provided. The service has also continued to work with an additional 18 cases that carried over from the previous year.

Reviewing the length of time in which cases have been open provides Speak Up with valuable information. The following data is based on the 26 new advocacy cases that were closed as well as the 18 cases carried over and closed in the year 2017/18. It does not include the cases that resulted in no further action or those which are still ongoing.



The data shown is similar to last year's data in that the majority of cases were either open less than three months (53%) or in excess of six months, either as a result of the complexity of the situation or the young person raising a number of subsequent issues.

REFERRER



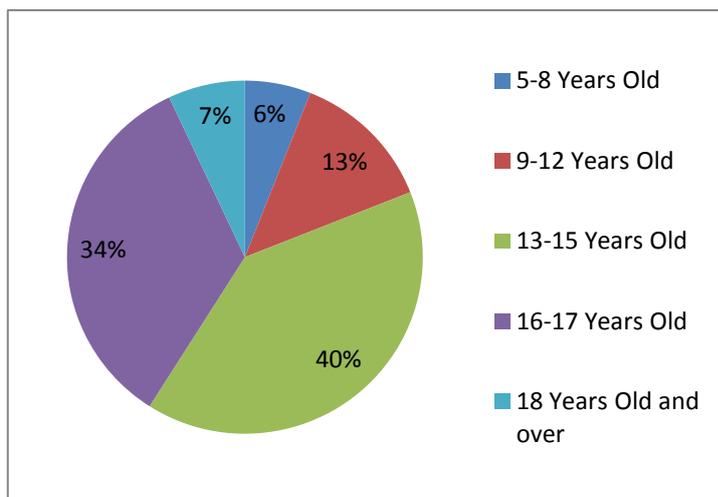
The majority of referrals this year came from social workers and young people equally (34% each) which is similar to previous year's findings. Awareness of the service amongst several new areas such as the Youth Offending Team, fostering and the Pathway Team is a real positive. Although we have received a referral from a Learning and Work Advisor which suggests that the message is slowly spreading to people in relation to education settings, more work

needs to be done to address the lack of referrals from this sector. This year we haven't received any referrals from foster carers; this could be due to a number of reasons and should therefore be an area for development.

PROFILE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ACCESS ADVOCACY

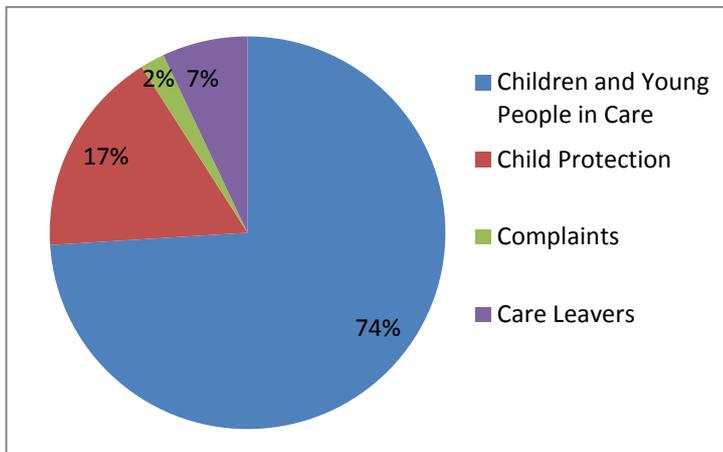
The following information is in relation to 53 referrals that were received by Speak Up.

AGE



In relation to age there have been no significant differences compared to last year's report. The only difference is the addition of the over 18 category as a result of advocacy being opened up to care leavers which is currently at 7%. Advocacy for care leavers was introduced part way through the year in January; therefore this number is likely to increase.

LEGAL STATUS



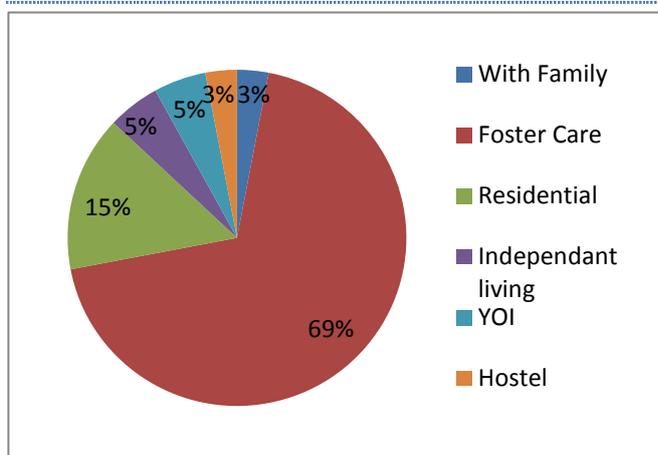
74% of those accessing the advocacy service were children and young people in care (39 referrals), 17% were going through the child protection process (9 referrals) 7% were care leavers (4 referrals) and 2% of requests were to support children or young people who wanted to make a complaint (1 referrals). It is worth noting that in addition to this there were a further 2 young people who were in care that went on to make a

complaint, therefore the service supported 3 young people in total through the complaints process.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS SPECIFICALLY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

The following information is in relation to the 39 referrals from children and young people in care.

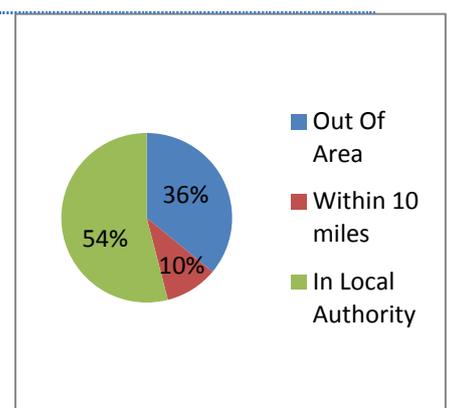
LIVING ARRANGMENTS



The reporting of living arrangements of the children and young people accessing advocacy has changed this year as we now shows the living arrangements of children and young people in care only. 69% of young people were reported to be living in foster care, 15% living in a residential setting, 8% living independently or in hostel accommodation and the remainder 8% living either with family or in a Youth Offenders Institute.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The reporting of geographical location of the children and young people accessing advocacy has also changed this year as we now only provide this information for children and young people in care. This is broken down into 3 areas: within the local authority, within 10 miles of the city boundary and residing out of this area. Figures show that a significant number of children and young people in care



accessing advocacy are living out of area. Whilst this demonstrates that we are ensuring that those out of area have equal access to advocacy provision (some of whom being our most vulnerable and hard to reach young people) it should be noted that this brings with it operational pressures as a result of the amount of time needed to carry out this casework.

ADVOCACY REQUESTS

For reporting purposes advocacy requests are categorized into the following themes at the point of referral to the service: placement issues, unhappiness with social work service, contact, education, access to support services, support to have voice heard in decision making process and 'other' (to reflect referral reasons that do not fall within these categories). It should be noted that children and young people often raise subsequent issues during a piece of advocacy so this does not reflect all advocacy issues raised but the presenting themes at the point of referral. In addition to the initial issues raised at point of referral, we will be reporting on any secondary issues raised by young people during the piece of advocacy, to ensure that all issues that have been raised are captured to provide a more thorough overview of emerging themes.

All the information described below relates to issues raised directly by children and young people. As outlined in our Service Statement, advocates must act exclusively on the behalf of children and young people and have no potential or apparent conflicting interests. On no occasion will the work be influenced by the views or opinions of the advocate but solely driven by the voice of the child, as one of the key, underlying principles of effective advocacy.

It should also be noted that NFA cases haven't been included in these results.

Theme	No. of Requests raised	Percentage 2017/2018	Percentage 2016/2017
Support in Decision Making	17	37%	43%
Placement Issue	8	17%	12%
Unhappy with Social Work Services	7	15%	7%
Other	6	12%	12%
Contact	5	11%	16%
Education	2	4%	3%
Access to Support Services	2	4%	0%
Disagreement with Care Plan	0	0%	7%

SUPPORT IN DECISION MAKING

The number of advocacy requests for this theme has dropped from 42% in 2016/17 to 37% this year; however it continues to be the theme with the highest number of requests. Support in decision making as a theme includes assisting children and young people to attend reviews or other decision making meetings, or attending on behalf on a child or young person and feeding in their views. It has also included helping young people have their voice heard during particular periods of transition or to help them ensure they have an understanding of current situations.

Of the 17 referrals, 8 were in relation to child protection (4 were from children subject to child protection plans and 4 were to support young parents with children going through the child

protection process) and 9 were to support young people in care. Out of the 17 referrals, 8 were to support children and young people to attend meetings (5 of these required the advocate to support the young person to attend and 3 asked their advocate to attend on their behalf). 2 referrals were of Primary school age, 11 were secondary school age and 4 were school leavers. 7 were placed out of area either in a foster placement, residential setting or young offender's institute and the other 10 were living in foster placements, with family or living independently.

In addition to the 17 referrals, this theme was raised as a secondary issue for 2 other young people already engaging with the service who wanted the support of an advocate during their reviews.

PLACEMENT ISSUE

There has been a 5% increase this year in the number of advocacy requests relating to issues with placement (from 12% to 17%) all of which were in relation to children and young people in care. Issues with placements included requests to change placement, unhappiness with decision making around change of placement and general unhappiness in placement. Out of the 8 referrals regarding placement 5 young people were placed in foster care, 2 young people were living in a residential setting and the other was living in hostel accommodation.

This theme was raised as a secondary issue by 2 other young people, the first being a young person who wished to express their unhappiness with being placed out of area (who has subsequently moved back to York) and the second was a young person who had conflicts within placement and wanted the help of an advocate to resolve these.

UNHAPPY WITH SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

There has been a significant increase in the number of cases relating to unhappiness with social work service going from 7% to 15%. There were 7 referrals that were received relating to young people reporting a general unhappiness with the social work service. Out of the 7 referrals, 2 resulted in complaints which were dealt with at a stage 1. 3 young people requested a change of worker; this was the outcome for 2 young people but the third reported that they were satisfied that their issues had resolved through discussions. This theme was not raised as a secondary issue by any young person.

OTHER

Requests falling under the category of 'Other' have stayed at 12% from last year. These were 6 requests that didn't fit any of the common themes. The referrals under the category of 'Other' were in relation to:

- Support to input into police investigations and a criminal trial.
- Understanding their rights and entitlements including their right to make a complaint.

There were 3 secondary issues that were raised that fell into the category of other which were in relation to access to provision, including IT provision.

CONTACT

The number of contact issues has dropped slightly this year from 15% to 11%. Contact issues refer to any issues that arise relating to the young person's contact arrangements with either relatives or friends. Out of these 5 referrals, 3 were in relation to siblings on child protection plans who wanted to discuss their feelings around seeing one of their parents, 2 were in relation to children and young people in care, one of which was a young person in care who wasn't happy with contact arrangements and the other was a young person who wanted to start contact with a younger sibling who had remained with family.

Contact was raised as a secondary issue for 2 other young people; one was in relation to a young person in custody who wanted to challenge a decision to restrict his contact with a particular young person and the second was a young person who had issues regarding contact with her mother.

ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES

This year there have been 2 referrals for young people who came to the advocacy service in relation to accessing support and services. 1 young person wanted the help of an advocate to access mental health services and the other wanted the help to explore their options accessing support after frequent episodes of going missing. This still remains to be the theme that is least referred as for the previous 2 years no referrals were received. This theme was not raised as a secondary issue by any of the advocacy cases this year.

EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE

Direct feedback is obtained from children and young people who have accessed advocacy, in an attempt to evaluate and improve the service. Towards the end of 2017/2018 we reviewed our evaluation process with young people and as a result revised our evaluation forms, introducing two separate forms for younger and older children, and created an online survey, giving young people the option of providing feedback online. All evaluations have the same questions which have been adapted from previous forms, making them easier for young people to answer, in an attempt to improve the number of responses received. In addition to this a professional's evaluation has been created, to capture the views of professionals.

We have this year seen an increase in response rates as the service has received 16 evaluations from young people and 4 from professionals, compared to 11 the previous year. Overall, feedback has been very positive, both in terms of quality of service provision and outcomes for children and young people.

FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

This year there were 16 evaluation forms completed by children and young people; a 10% increase from the previous year. The responses received were from a mixture of both the old and new evaluation forms and so we have combined the responses from across the two forms.

Feedback on service provision was very positive with all young people reporting that their advocates treated them with respect, 94% stating that their advocates were easy to talk to and 83% stating that their advocates listened to them. All young people reported that they were happy with the support they had received and all who were asked indicated that they would use the service again or would recommend the service to another young person. When asked the question young people did not identify anything that the service could or should do differently. One young person commented, "...all the support and help I received was a great standard. I am pleased at how well it went with this support," and another went on to say..."she was always very helpful in helping me plan what to say at my conferences".

67% of young people who were asked agreed that they felt more listened to by other professionals and that they had been more involved in the decision making process, 75% felt more confident to communicate their views or raise any concerns they may have in the future. When asked the question 'what has changed as a direct result of the advocacy' 44% were able to identify positive outcomes, which included:

- *I feel more confident with sharing my views with people and knowing that they listen.*
- *I knew what my rights were.*
- *I got the math's tutor I wanted.*
- *I felt better.*
- *I've been able to speak to people.*
- *I have moved placements twice 😊*
- *I have got more on my CV as they have introduced me to SMTIM.*

It should however be noted that a significant number of young people failed to answer this question and 2 young people reported that in their view nothing had changed. These young people did not however go on to identify anything that their advocate could have done differently. Despite this it is encouraging to hear directly from young people about the positive impact the service has had for many of them.

FEEDBACK FROM PROFESSIONALS

From January to March 2018 the service piloted the use of professional feedback forms and received 4 responses in total. When asked the question 'were young people more involved in decision making as a result of the advocacy' there was a 50/50 split in responses, however 75% reported that young people were more confident to express their views as a result of the advocacy. When asked what difference the advocacy had made, and for general feedback on the service, the following comments were made:

"...the service provided them with confidence to become an active participant. The young person is now very confident in voicing his opinions and accessing support".

"Just knowing that there was an adult, independent of other services, available to the young person made a difference."

“From a professional’s perspective, the advocacy service is invaluable in supporting children and young people who are often experiencing difficult and stressful situations”.

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

AWARENESS OF THE SERVICE

This continues to be an area that needs to be developed as there are very few referrals being received from those in the education sector or fostering community, despite these two groups spending the most amount of time with children and young people. We have however received a high number of referrals directly from young people so it may be that foster carers are contributing by ensuring that young people have the information to self refer. Nevertheless, further attempts should be made to engage foster carers by forging further links with the Commissioning and Supporting Placement Team and York Area Foster Cares Association. Moving forward, the service aims to reach out to schools, in particular designated teachers and pastoral leads who will work directly with children and young people in care.

EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE

Although the number of evaluations compared to the number of referrals is better than last year, it is still relatively low. This makes it difficult to gain a true representation of the efficiency of the service and also the views of children and young people. Historically, it is known that gaining feedback from children and young people after the event is difficult, as they often don’t return forms or attend final meetings where an evaluation could be completed. This may be a result of the child or young person having no interest in taking part in the evaluation or not wanting to complete the form knowing it would be returned to their advocate directly.

The service has recently changed the way in which young people can provide their evaluation by working with young people to change the questions being asked to make them more straight forward. In doing this, the service has tailored how they receive feedback to suit how young people would prefer to respond. As this was done towards the end of the year, it is difficult to say if this will have an impact on the number of responses the service will receive with the new evaluation forms. This will however be evident in next years report.

Continuing to gather feedback from professionals will be a priority for the service going forward. Although only a small amount of feedback has been received from professionals to date, the messages from professionals working directly with children and young person regarding their views on how effective the advocacy has been has been invaluable.

CONCLUSION

This report has provided an overview of the advocacy service and the casework that has taken place during 2017/18. It has compared different statistics from 2017/18 and 2016/17 and highlighted and explored common advocacy themes, before identifying areas for further development.

REFERENCES

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