

Warrington Speak Up



**CELEBRATION OF
THE YEAR 2024 - 2025**

Message from the Chair of Trustees, Lynne Bennett



Once again this has been a very active, positive and successful 12 months, with continued growth in our service delivery and most importantly maintaining the high level of quality we set and expect of ourselves. Our reputation as an advocacy provider that understands and responds to the needs of our local community, impacts lives and delivers positive change is outstanding and we are delighted that this was reflected in the QPM process and subsequent excellent report last Autumn.

Being so deeply embedded in the community for so long has meant that WSU are able to respond quickly to local need and local issues and your innovative approaches to service development and providing services that people really need is fantastic. It means you are as relevant as you can possibly be to your local community (NDTI QPM)

The principles of advocacy and commitment to people's voice, rights and participations shone through in every single element of the QPM assessment, from the workbook to the policies and every conversation we had on the site visit. This is something to be extremely proud of (NDTI QPM)

It continues to be a pleasure to be a trustee for Warrington Speak Up, to celebrate the successes and achievements, to support the team in the midst of continued financial challenges, to ensure that strong foundations are in place to confidently approach the forthcoming tender process and to work together with our partners to influence change. Prioritising our wellbeing offer, with investment in terms of resources, time and opportunities for our staff team and volunteers will ensure each person feels valued, respected, supported and an equal partner in our vision and ethos at Warrington Speak Up.

On behalf of all the trustees, I would like to extend my thanks to all the staff and volunteers involved at Warrington Speak Up as well as the many partner organisations and stakeholders who continue to support our work. Key to our success and achieving positive outcomes for the individuals we support is collaboration. As a board we remain committed to this and supporting our senior management team to continue to invest in developing relationships in order to creatively meet the needs of our local communities with the resources and finance available to us.

Comments from the Board of Trustees



Lynne Bennett

I believe that every individual deserves to have their needs met and their rights upheld. As a trustee I am dedicated to ensuring that Warrington Speak Up provides the support and advocacy necessary to make that a reality. As a trustee I have the privilege of working alongside dedicated staff and passionate advocates to create a powerful force for positive change.



Steve Cullen

Warrington Speak Up plays a vital role in ensuring that the voices of service users are heard, and that they can participate in decisions affecting their lives. This is crucially important when they may face barriers to communication, or be vulnerable to discrimination. I am proud to be associated with the Charity.



Mike Horne

After many years of running and managing companies in the Engineering Sector, it is a pleasure to work with Warrington Speak Up in the Third Sector. The enthusiasm and professionalism of the management and the team at Speak Up makes supporting them as a Trustee very easy, and it is refreshing that they are always willing to accept advice and to adopt different ideas. I have also learned so much from working with the charity.



Anna O'Mahony

Having been involved in Warrington Speak Up from the early days, I first became a Trustee to support the organisation to get up and running, drawing on my knowledge and experience of working in the third sector. As the years have gone by, it's been incredible to see how Speak Up has grown and thrived, even through very tough times. My role with Speak Up is quite different now however my primary motivation is unchanged; to support however I can to ensure there is a voluntary sector organisation in Warrington to enable people to speak up for themselves.



Katie Donnelly

I chose to become a trustee at Warrington Speak Up because I believe that everyone deserves to have their voice heard and valued and Warrington Speak are truly incredible at what they do to achieve this. They are respected for their integrity, always have people's best interests at heart, and their values and ethics are firmly rooted in getting the best outcomes for others. It's a real credit to see the impact they achieve with limited resources. I'm proud to support such a dedicated organisation that empowers people to speak for themselves and influence the decisions that affect their lives. As a trustee, I want to play my part in making sure Warrington Speak Up can keep changing lives and driving positive change across our community.

Message from the CEO, Mandy Tavin



I am proud to be part of a team that is passionate about making a difference in people's lives. I see on a daily basis the commitment of paid staff and volunteers in ensuring a person's voice is truly heard and rights respected, at a time in their life when it really matters – the team are motivated to provide the right support, at the right time, in the right place, using the appropriate tools, approaches and resources – and all of this work takes place with the support of an enthusiastic, accessible and highly skilled and knowledgeable leadership team who both value and actively promote the culture of 'team', 'collaboration' and 'partnerships'. We are keen to continue to build on our commitment to 'team' and fully embed this within our culture at Warrington Speak Up. Our staff and volunteers are our most valuable resource, and this is something we never want to lose sight of and want to fully invest in, in terms of time and support.

I am also grateful to the Board of Trustees for their time, expertise, support and encouragement and for reminding me on the more difficult and challenging days what Warrington Speak Up has been about since 2006 and will always about!

A significant achievement this year was being awarded our second QPM kitemark and to have validated the excellent quality of advocacy services Warrington Speak Up consistently delivers. We work hard to uphold the advocacy principles in all our interactions with the people we support, colleagues, external partners and commissioners. Our core strength remains our team of dedicated, skilled, passionate and tenacious workers and I am pleased that this has been acknowledged throughout the QPM process. The world of advocacy remains challenging and demanding but our commitment to people, rights, quality of life and sustainability as an advocacy provider, remains steadfast.

Our project work has continued to grow and have a significant impact in the purpose and quality of people's lives – it truly demonstrates the power and strength of the collective voice.

Last year I wrote that we continued to experience significant challenges - Funding and the expectation to deliver more for less, increased demand for spot purchases without the security of affording additional staff, ever increasing high complex caseloads, seeking creative ways to provide much needed and valued services with less resources. Sadly these challenges remain the same and all within a backdrop where statutory services are stretched, funding is scarce, key social care reform continues to change, ever increasing cost of living and competition from other organisation all seeking contracts and much needed revenue. However - our resolve is strong, our passion for social justice is unwavering and we remain tenacious in our commitment to working in partnership with our communities to improve lives.

We look forward to the next 12 months - to both the challenges and successes. We have seen the power that quality services can have, helping people to live the lives they want, in the way they want and that is what continues to motivate us.

However, despite these challenges, there have been many highlights, and much to celebrate, enjoy and be proud of - too many to list them all! But here are just a few - The impact of the Still Me Project on people with a lived experience of dementia bringing hope and a smile, the strength, enthusiasm (and humour) of our Speak Up 4 All self-advocates standing up for better lives, the power and privilege of walking side by side with hundreds of people impacted by suicide and committed to changing the narrative, the laughter of women enjoying the monthly supper club whilst facing the daily challenges of struggling with their mental health, the This is Me project celebrating our uniqueness, the tenacity of advocates as they work tirelessly to bring about change, the outcomes both big and small that make a difference in people's lives.

So, what does the next year look like?

We want to continue to be known as an organisation that is tenacious in its commitment to help people live their best lives. We want to strengthen our reputation as an organisation that doesn't just say they believe in partnership working, but who actively works at strengthening partnerships, respecting and valuing others, and finding ways to work together for the benefit of our communities. We want self-advocacy to be the bedrock for all our activity. We want to be known as an organisation that puts people first in all that it does and is willing to fight vociferously for their right to be heard, respected, valued and included. And we want to do this with a workforce that says they are proud to be part of Warrington Speak Up.

Lastly, I want to thank our staff and volunteers for your unwavering support, enthusiasm and determination in what has been a difficult year. Thank you to our partners for standing with us, putting personal agendas aside and working together for the benefit of our communities. Thank you to our trustees for your advice, guidance, challenge, encouragement and motivation. And lastly thank you to the people we work with, for believing in us, working with us and trusting us.


This report is a celebration of the last 12 months – we couldn't have done it without YOU!



**actively works at
strengthening
partnerships**



**self-advocacy to
be the bedrock for
all our activity**




**puts people first
in all that it does**




**fights
vociferously for
people's right to
be heard,
respected, valued
and included**




**a workforce
that says they are
proud to be part
of Warrington
Speak Up**



**trustees who
continue to advise,
challenge, guide,
encourage and
motivate**



**partners who
stand with us and
work together for
the benefit of our
communities**



**our community
who partner with
us, believe in us,
work with us and
trust us**

Celebrating our staff team - Why I love what I do



To set off for work every day knowing that the main requirement of my job is to make some kind of positive difference to someone's day; to ensure that the people I visit are safe and valued and that their views are heard. I couldn't wish to do anything more worthwhile. This is why I love what I do. Jill – Independent Advocate

It's quite simply really - to make a difference to peoples future, listening to what they want and providing them with the tools to speak up for themselves. I love to watch people grow in confidence when they realise their potential and have the confidence to challenge the things that stand in the way. Tina - Independent Advocate

I have worked for Warrington Speak Up for 13 years - for me advocacy is a vocation and something I am deeply passionate about. I value the ethics and the culture that underpin WSU. We will not compromise on the quality of advocacy support we deliver, and we keep the people we support at the centre of everything we do. I would not want to be an advocate if this was not the case. Lisa – Independent Advocate Senior Practice Lead

I love being an Independent Advocate, supporting parents at their most vulnerable time, to ensure that they are given a fair opportunity to participate fully in a process, whilst making sure their rights are upheld. I strongly believe that an outcome can change if parents have early access to appropriate support and help. Every day is different and a new challenge, but I love building working relationships with parents and it is a privilege that they feel they can open up to me about their very raw, and often difficult and upsetting situation.

Natalie – Independent Advocate

I love how creative you can be as an independent advocate. Coming up with creative ways to support people to have their voice heard and witness the difference that has made to somebody's life is extremely rewarding. I take pride in challenging injustice and ensuring people's rights are upheld. Without advocates many people's voices would remain silenced and knowing that I am part of a team that works hard to ensure that doesn't happen is the loveliest feeling.

Working on the front line to support the community's most vulnerable is a true pleasure. That is why I love my job! Amy – Independent Advocate



I feel very proud to work for an organisation that has such an exceptional reputation whilst creating a positive and encouraging working environment. This is all due to the amazing team at Warrington Speak Up who work incredibly hard to support the people they work with.

I love being part of the team and my role and direct involvement provides me with an opportunity to support the Board of Trustees, CEO and staff team, enabling Warrington Speak Up to maintain delivery of high-quality advocacy services and project work. My role is to also ensure that the organisation remains compliant with legal, charitable and contractual obligations.

I enjoy being able to problem solve and like to be able to do things as efficiently as I can. My overall aim is to make a real difference to the team and the people we support. I love that every day is different and there is always something new to get involved in, that's why I love what I do! Cathy Business Lead

Being a member of the WSU team provides me with a sense of purpose and helps my own mental well-being. Yes, I am supporting others with their well-being, but this has a massive positive effect on my own mental health. Working within such an enthusiastic and committed team helps me to achieve my own personal outcomes and know I am making a difference to other people's lives. Every day is different and it is rewarding to know that I am appreciated as a valued member of this incredible team. Andrea – Project worker, volunteer co-ordinator

I want to support individuals to receive equal and fair treatment and be fully aware of their rights and make informed decisions about things that are important to them and affect their daily lives. It is lovely to see an individuals confidence grow so they can begin to advocate for themselves.

Advocacy is not just about the big decisions in a person's life but also about the little things that make a difference to their quality of life - a garden in their new placement because they enjoy sitting in the garden is of equal importance to a person as to the level of care and support their care package can offer.

Advocating for people so they have the opportunity to tell us about what's really important to them is a skill that I have learned throughout my own life and family circumstances and this is why I do what I do. Claire – Independent Advocate

Celebrating our staff team - Why I do what I do



This question makes me think about my values as a person, how I was brought up by my parents and in essence this job is authentic to me.

My own personal values of honesty, hard work, integrity and doing the right thing appear in general to be in line with the values of Speak Up and the role of an Advocate and feels like a natural fit for me.

I can't stress enough how strongly I feel that a person is listened to, that a person is treated respectfully by professionals, that a person's rights are upheld and that these same professionals do all that they can to put a person in the centre of decisions made about them.

Andy – Independent Advocate

We have all experienced a time when we have felt a lack of control over a situation and our voice wasn't heard. Sadly, this is a daily reality for marginalised communities who face additional discrimination.

I believe we all have the right be heard, to good support and information that informs us to take action and make a change in our lives. We all have the potential to make a difference that's why I do what I do! Val - Independent Advocate and Practice Lead

As an IMHA supporting people on the wards, being at the right place at the right time for the individual, can be instantly impactful in creating a positive difference. Advocacy can have a powerful impact, especially for someone who feels isolated or disempowered. It helps people feel supported, empowered, and genuinely heard.

This is why I do what I do and love what I do! Ellen - Independent Advocate and Practice Lead

I love to see individuals I work with feel involved, listened to, treated fairly and empowered. It's even better when people feel that they are truly part of their community and form new friendships. It gives me such job satisfaction and a sense of purpose.

This is why I do what I do! Rob - Independent Advocate



They are a highly values led organisation with a passionate, dedicated, skilled and knowledgeable team.

The whole team are extremely passionate about the work they do and that come across really strongly.

It was clear that advocates at Warrington Speak Up are committed and tenacious and follow issues through to seek outcomes and resolution of issue.



Gail Petty, QPM Manager and Lead for Advocacy and Rights at NDTi

Celebrating our volunteers



A word from Andrea - Volunteer co-ordinator and Self-Advocacy / MH Project Worker

Volunteers enhance and strengthen our community projects, using lived experiences and life skills to support individuals who are facing challenges with their physical, social, emotional and mental well-being and health.

It is widely recognised that volunteers significantly contribute to social value: supporting community needs, encouraging social connection, building relationship, improving wellbeing and emotional resilience and promoting positive social change through the giving of their time and activity. And this can result in an improved sense of purpose and quality of life for individuals and local communities.

Our volunteers help us to work through social, cultural and emotional challenges to ensure we are providing a person centred and effective approach. We are regularly provided with very positive feedback about our volunteers from the community and other professionals.

Many volunteers share that helping others has had a positive impact on their own mental health and has improved their own self resilience and self-worth.

Our volunteers have been involved in leading well-being walk and talks, ladies' supper clubs, soup and chat events, Still Me dementia groups and our very well-known Speak Up 4 All self-advocacy group. Volunteers help to connect people at these groups and events by listening, talking, encouraging, supporting and standing with someone in a time of need.

A team of volunteers also support staff in our community listening space, Pause, using their understanding and experience to support people who are being challenged by their mental health. They listen and communicate in a non-judgemental way providing support and guidance to other appropriate services and activities if needed.

Other volunteers attend community events including asylum seekers coffee mornings, college well-being events, community shop activities, regular Warrington In Mind mental health marketplace events. These community-based events provide an opportunity for volunteers to challenge the stigma around mental health, benefiting local communities and making a difference to peoples' lives.

And we can't forget to mention the team of volunteers who support with our annual Hope100 walk supporting world suicide prevention day.

Celebrating our volunteers



Here are a few comments from some of our amazing and much valued volunteers

I volunteer with Get Warrington Talking because I believe in the power of connection, especially for communities who may feel isolated or unheard. As someone who came to the UK from Hong Kong, I understand how much a kind conversation or helpful information can mean. Volunteering has given me a way to give back, while also helping me grow in confidence and purpose. It's rewarding to know that simply listening or sharing encouragement can make a genuine difference in someone's life.

Andy – volunteer

I became involved in Get Warrington Talking as a volunteer as I wanted to make a difference following my own life experience and struggles with my mental health.

Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose, even when having a difficult day. It makes me feel that my own struggle has not been for nothing and making a difference to just one person makes my life experience worth it. I thrive from seeing the change in the people that we support and for being appreciated for giving our time to listen to others.

Being part of a supportive team and an organisation that values, cares, encourages, supports and puts me and my wellbeing first is amazing. I love being able to give back to an organisation that has supported me to overcome debilitating challenges and give me hope to hold on in times of despair.

Lesley - volunteer

The main reason I volunteer is the joy I get from watching and listening to the group of people that come to Speak up 4All on a Tuesday morning.

There is such a variety of disabilities, some worse than others, but all have a common theme, they enjoy and like helping each other to the best of their abilities. Great to be a part of it all.

Judy - volunteer

I volunteer because I'm passionate about helping people, especially those who just need someone to listen or offer a moment of kindness. For me, it's about making sure every person leaves feeling just a little bit better than they did when they walked in. That's what drives me and fills each day with purpose.

Clint – volunteer

Celebrating our volunteers

I thoroughly enjoy my volunteering with Get Warrington Talking. It's incredibly important to me to have a sense of purpose and to feel useful and I know that the activities I'm involved with are really appreciated and valued by those who access them. It's gratifying to know that the benefit is mutual when you make a commitment and turn up to do your bit to make something happen. I couldn't volunteer in just any setting - the ethos, professionalism and dedication of the team at GWT are inspiring and it's a privilege to play just the smallest role in making sure it continues to make a difference.

Pip – volunteer

I volunteer my time to support SADA because I believe Dementia can be an incredible isolating experience, especially for individuals from ethnic backgrounds where language barriers, stigma and lack of knowledge can make things even harder. By offering my time, I hope to bring comfort, dignity and support to those affected by Dementia and to their families. I find it deeply rewarding and meaningful to give back to the community and to ensure no one faces this alone.

Gita – volunteer

I started to volunteer in may, and from the first day I felt welcomed by everyone, I love working in our listening space “pause” this is where we get to meet all different types of people and all require very different support and guidance, no day is the same in pause, it is very rewarding helping people achieve goals they never thought they could.

Sarah - volunteer



My journey - from a client to a member of the team



At a particular challenging period in my life I had been introduced to Warrington Speak Up and had been provided support through Parent Advocacy.

From the very start I was shown care, support, respect and always listened to. I had been given my voice back and empowered to advocate for myself again.

I can honestly say without the team at Warrington Speak Up I would not have been here to tell my story today.

My life journey has given me the passion, strength and aspiration to want to make a real difference to the lives of others. I strived to be mentally well and have stability for myself and my children and I set myself a personal goal to be able to give back to an incredible organisation because of the dedication and support I felt from them at a time in my life I needed it the most.

I had been provided an opportunity to volunteer under the Project of Get Warrington Talking, regularly dedicating my time within Pause as a listener and supporting the amazing events held to support engagement within Mental Health.

The team valued my voice and personal life experience, empowering me to help families who need the support and understanding from parents like me who want to be part of a network and organisation that stands up for our rights and help make a real difference.

Warrington Speak Up gave me a focus, providing compassion, knowledge, guidance and commitment that gave me a foundation to develop and grow as a person.

Over the 3 year period I've evidenced my personal abilities and achievements and this has been celebrated and encouraged, enabling me to believe in myself and to build personal confidence.

Having a mental health condition doesn't defy me as a person or a mum, it has given me resilience to face each day with an open mind and encouragement to never give up.

When a vacancy became available as a mental health project worker it gave me a chance to demonstrate what I have learnt over the time I had been a volunteer. It provided me an opportunity to push myself to reach my goal and to be part of a project that ensures that people who find themselves facing a battle with their own mental health are provided with compassion and a place to access that feels safe.

My journey - from a client to a member of the team

It is a privilege to be part of the team with Warrington Speak Up because the organisation is passionate about people of Warrington – but most of all Speak Up has been a saviour to myself in a time I had lost all hope.

I don't work in the role because I have to, I enthusiastically come to work each day because I'm passionate about what I can do and what I can achieve every day. I wholeheartedly love being part of Warrington Speak Up from being a parent accessing support to now being a paid member of staff.

Looking back, I can see what an amazing personal achievement this has been and will continue to be as I go about my work as a Mental Health Project Worker. I feel overwhelming pride to be part of the team, each and everyday - It helps me bring a smile not just to myself but to people around me.

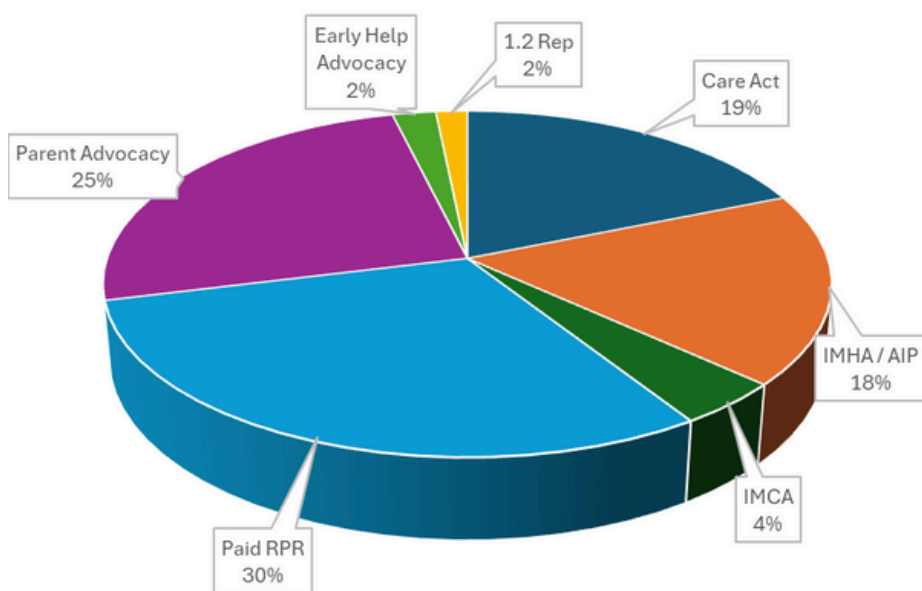
If I could help just one person or family by using my personal experience to facilitate change then my experience has been worth the fight.





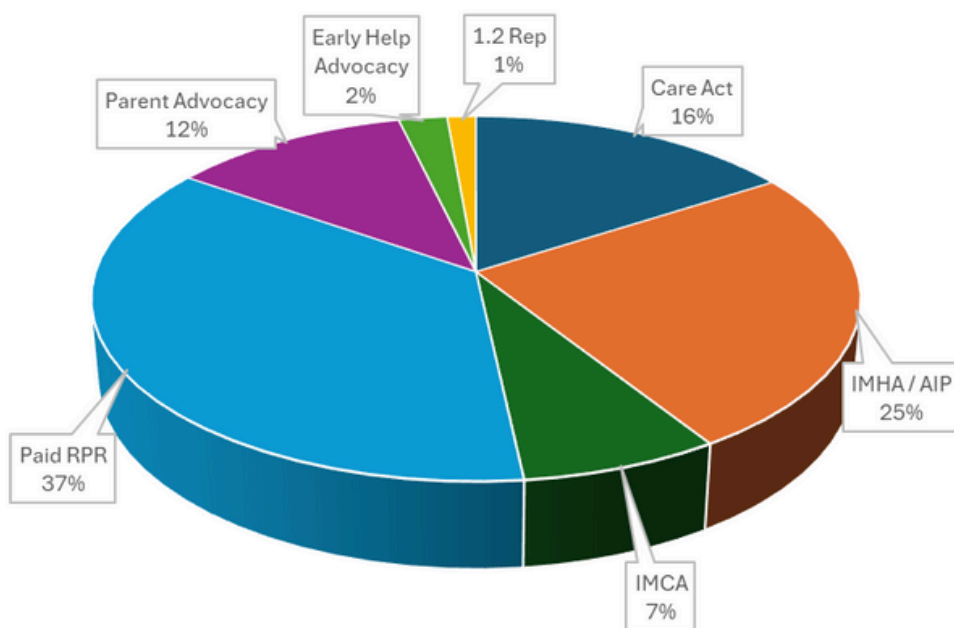
Advocacy Hours Delivered

Care Act	2194
IMHA / AIP	2086
IMCA	484
Paid RPR	3527
Parent	2917
Early Help	258
1.2 Rep	188



Number of Clients Supported

Care Act	332
IMHA / AIP	523
IMCA	153
Paid RPR	760
Parent	242
Early Help	49
1.2 Rep	29



11,654
Advocacy Hours
Delivered

2088
Clients
Supported

Advocacy story – Emily

Using a rights based approach to advocacy



About

Emily is a quiet and reserved young woman with a diagnosis of autism and mental health needs. Emily has her own tenancy and lives independently. Emily's partner has his own tenancy but spends most of the week with Emily.

Emily has previously suffered with alcohol misuse and was having severe epileptic seizures. She was socially isolated with very limited support.

Emily's partner had previously been subject to the sex offenders register (Historical) and Emily had raised multiple concerns regarding controlling and coercive behaviour.

Advocacy need

Although the initial referral was made by children's social care under CIN due to concerns this was quickly escalated to child protection and pre proceedings. The local authority were concerned as engagement with services was inconsistent. In addition concerns had been raised regarding Emily's cognitive abilities although at the time of the referral she had no diagnosis of learning disability.

What we did

Article 8 right to family life promoted and upheld throughout the process.

Emily was fearful of services and that their involvement would lead to her baby being removed from her care.

The first step in supporting Emily was to support her understanding of the process and her rights and responsibilities within it so she could begin to develop her confidence and establish a working relationship with the social worker and other professionals. Building a trusting advocacy partnership was key to the success of this.

Promoted her right to reasonable adjustments and fair access to services under the Equality Act 2010

At the start of her advocacy journey Emily was reluctant to speak in meetings and was reliant upon the advocate to share her views. The advocate provided Emily with easy read information at each stage of the process - putting information into bite size chunks enabled her to process more easily and over time helped reduce her anxiety.

We needed to revisit this regularly to ensure her full understanding.

The advocate supported Emily to prepare for and attend all meetings with CSC. Easy read tools were used throughout the process, which was key to ensuring her understanding, promoting active participation within meetings and ensuring a greater sense of control. An example of this was the use of our parent planners, which we would use prior to any meetings to discuss and plan what Emily wanted to raise and any questions she had. Following the meetings we would then write down the actions which helped her to focus and plan for the next meeting.

The advocate confirmed a cognitive assessment had been completed and ensured all professionals were both clear re the recommendations outlined in terms of the specific approaches needed and that these were met.

The advocate also supported Emily to attend solicitor's appointments in preparation for pre proceedings meetings.

Right to assessment under the Care Act -2014

The advocate ensured that Emily's right to access appropriate services was met, confirming that referrals were made to the IDVA service and adult social care for assessment under the Care Act 2014. The advocate then supported Emily in a meeting with adult social care for an initial assessment, although following a decision by Emily it was agreed that ongoing support was not needed.

The cognitive assessment confirmed Emily had a moderate learning disability and highlighted the need for Emily to have a specialist parenting assessment. A 'parent assess' was agreed and this would be completed by an independent social worker.

The social worker had planned to begin the assessment shortly after birth (11 days)
From an advocacy perspective, this was a significant worry, as good practice dictates that time is needed for both mum and baby to settle prior to any assessment taking place to ensure the process is fair. After raising this with the social worker it was agreed that the assessment would start at the appropriate period of 6-8 weeks.

Outcome

It was important to stage the withdrawal of advocacy support as although it was clear that Emily had developed in confidence, she was initially reluctant to end the advocacy partnership. The following steps were put into place to support with this:

- The advocate encouraged Emily to continue with the tools used throughout our involvement to prepare for meetings.
- The advocate agreed to plan for meetings together and encouraged Emily to attend meetings independently and promoted her self advocacy skills.
- The advocate highlighted Emily's achievements and skills developed throughout her advocacy journey.

Emily had a positive parent assessment, and her baby girl has remained in her care.

Emily continued to develop both her self-confidence and her ability to self advocate. She now will contact professionals and seek support and advice if needed and attends meetings independently. After a three month period the involvement of children's social care reduced significantly, reflecting the progress parents had made.

Advocacy story – Paul & Sue

The benefit of key professionals working together



About

Paul and Sue are a young couple who were expecting their first child together.

The couple were living together independently with some daily support from ASC as both parents had moderate learning difficulties. The support was in place to assist with managing daily routines and to encourage access to local community services, this support was increased once Sue became pregnant.

The couple were both incredibly happy, excited, and looking forward to becoming parents however it was clear that they were also feeling overwhelmed by the increase in professionals involved.

A referral by the hospital had been made to children's social care and it was agreed that threshold had been met for a pre-birth assessment. As a result of these concerns a child protection plan was agreed.

Advocacy referral

Initial referrals for advocacy support were made for both Paul and Sue by the adult social work team under the Care Act, at this point Sue was 18 weeks pregnant.

This followed concerns raised by Sue's family and adult services about both the support she would need and her ability to manage her pregnancy and the demands of becoming a mum.

In addition, adult social care had raised concerns that both parents would struggle to understand and engage with the child protection process and the assessments that children's social care would need to carry out prior to and following the birth of her baby.

A second referral under parent advocacy was subsequently received for both parents.

What we did

It was agreed at the start of the advocacy partnership that two advocates would be allocated to avoid any possible conflict and ensure parents right to advocacy was met. Whilst two advocates were not always needed initially this did provide flexibility and ensure advocacy was readily available.

It was essential at the start of the advocacy journey to reinforce clarity of roles for parents due to the numerous professionals involved. The distinction between the role of the adult social worker and children's social worker was particularly confusing for parents, something we regularly revisited throughout the advocacy support given.

Whilst the initial referral was made by adult social care the focus and priority became parent advocacy as this progressed to family care proceedings.

The advocates first responsibility was to ensure that parents rights to reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act (2010) were met. The advocates worked alongside parents to identify and agree the reasonable adjustments needed to aid understanding and positive participation and ensure these were met – for example highlighting the need for all professionals to provide easy read summaries when completing reports.

Throughout the advocacy support advocates provided easy read information and visual communication tools to support parents understanding of plans in place and actions agreed. Parents were supported to prepare for and attend meetings with children's social care and other professionals. Easy read planners were used as a tool to prompt questions and promote self advocacy.

The increase in support at home whilst beneficial was also restrictive and needed to be balanced alongside parents' Article 8 Right to family life as it was evident this was impinging on parents need and right to privacy. Advocates worked with parents and professionals to highlight this and produce a timetable to enable professionals to liaise with parents and each other prior to making any appointments.

Advocates also provided support in meetings with the solicitor prior to and within the various court hearings within family care proceedings.

Outcome

Unfortunately, parents were unable to continue to care for their son at home and a Special Guardianship Order was agreed with maternal grandparents.

The court acknowledged the importance of the ongoing relationship between parents, grandparents and their son and this was reflected in the level of family time agreed.

Both parents continue to confidently engage with professionals, and it is clear that their understanding and confidence in self advocating has increased - they now attend meetings independently and confidently express their views and wishes.

Feedback

Advocacy is really good, all parents should have one if they have a learning disability because we need to be treated fairly.

Advocacy story – Sima

Supporting Sima to a place she can finally call home.



About

Sima is 23 years old of Afghanistan heritage. She had recently been granted asylum in the UK and lived in a Women's Refuge.

Concerns were raised by local residents as Sima was found to be wandering the streets wearing little clothing and seemed disorientated to her surroundings. As a result Sima was detained under section 2 of the Mental Health Act in the local acute mental health hospital.

Due to Sima's circumstances, there is little information about Sima's history or background. Sima has no family or significant others whom she is in contact with either in England or in Afghanistan. It is known that Sima has experienced neurological trauma and has a diagnosis of an acquired brain injury (ABI) which is believed to have occurred following an assault when Sima lived in Afghanistan. Due to Sima's ABI she presents as vacant and expresses minimal communication.

Following the assessment under the Mental Health Act it was established that Sima did not have a mental health diagnosis but that her presentation is a result of her ABI diagnosis.

Whilst on the ward, Sima was subsequently detained under s3 of the mental health due to her vulnerabilities and care and support needs. No other legal frameworks were deemed appropriate such as deprivation of liberty safeguard (DoLs), as Sima was residing in a mental health hospital and she did not have capacity to consent to her care and treatment.

Discharge planning was of the utmost importance for Sima as she was inappropriately placed in a mental health hospital and homeless.

Advocacy need

The ward referred for an IMHA in Sima's best interests as she was deemed to lack capacity regarding instructing an advocate. Sima was also assessed to lack capacity regarding her accommodation and care and support needs and was therefore referred by her social worker for support from an IMCA under change of accommodation.

In line with Advocacy NICE guidance, continuity of advocacy was upheld and Sima was supported by the same advocate under the IMHA and IMCA advocacy stream.

Due to Sima's communication needs and neurological diagnosis, advocacy support is vital for Sima to ensure that she is independently represented and supported as much as possible to be a part of the decision-making process.

How we helped

Taking into consideration Sima's presentation and diagnosis, the advocate implemented a non-instructed approach. The advocate gained information from key professionals such as her community social worker, and ward staff, especially those who supported Sima on a daily basis. The advocate regularly visited the ward to gain an understanding of Sima, to try and build a rapport and to be a familiar person she may connect with. The advocate tried to use pictures to promote engagement with Sima but she did not respond to these. There was limited engagement from Sima towards both professionals and other patients on the ward.

However, as the advocate visited the ward on a regular basis they began to notice Sima's routines and preferences such as being in quiet spaces, spending time outside sitting on the grass, listening to music and her particular love of having her nails painted. An observational approach supported the advocate to gain a further understanding of Sima's personality.

The advocate was aware of Sima's cultural preferences and ensured that both these and her religious needs were being fulfilled by the ward. It had been confirmed that Dari was Sima's first language so an interpreter was always present in her meetings.

As Sima did not have a mental health diagnosis she was inappropriately placed on the ward but had nowhere to be discharged to safely.

The drive for discharge planning was necessary for Sima to live a fulfilled life. The advocate represented Sima in key discharge planning meetings where different accommodation options were explored. Within the best interest meeting the advocate raised the importance to offer Sima the opportunity to visit the proposed placement and for her presentation before, during and after the visit to be recorded to validate Sima's views and wishes.

The advocate also highlighted the need for Sima to have a financial capacity assessment in order to access appropriate benefits.

Outcome

Advocacy ensured that Sima remained at the centre of the decision making process. An appropriate placement was identified which suited Sima's needs and preferences. Sima soon moved to her new home and is now enjoying a new and less restrictive life.

Advocacy story – Albert

The importance of finding out what matters most to a person



About

Albert is a 63-year-old gentleman with mental health issues, living in a supported accommodation setting with support 24 hours a day. Albert is a very sociable man. He enjoys volunteering with a local charity, accessing the community regularly with his support staff and watching football.

Advocacy need

An IMCA referral was received for Albert, requesting support with a serious medical decision regarding a large polyp (mass) in his colon. Decisions needed to be made in relation to the investigation and possible removal of the mass. Albert was assessed as lacking capacity in relation to this decision.

What we did

The IMCA contacted Albert's care provider and discussed his communication needs and level of understanding. The IMCA was advised that Albert is able to read, understand basic information and with the appropriate support in place, verbally communicate his wishes and feelings.

Prior to meeting with Albert, the IMCA researched relevant information relating to his medical condition and created some easy read information to support him to understand to the best of his ability.

The IMCA visited Albert at home to discuss his options and gain his views and wishes. Albert shared that he did not really understand what the Doctor had said to him at his first appointment. It was agreed together that the IMCA would request another appointment for Albert to see the Doctor and Albert consented to the IMCA supporting him at that appointment. The IMCA also asked Albert what was most important to him in terms of his day-to-day life. Albert shared that he loves his volunteer work and it's very important that he can continue with it and be well enough to do so.

At the appointment, Albert was given three possible options:

1. Take no further action.
2. Undergo a keyhole surgery under general anaesthetic in order to take a biopsy of the mass for testing, possibly resulting in a further surgery being required.
3. Undergo full surgery under general anaesthetic to completely remove the mass.

Albert was supported by the IMCA, using easy read information, to understand the information given to him to the best of his ability.

Albert shared that his preferred option was to undergo full surgery so that he could get back to what he enjoys doing and living life to the full. The consultant agreed that this would be the best course of action.

Following the appointment, the IMCA spoke to Albert's care provider and recommended that they consider requesting some additional funded support hours whilst he is in hospital and following his surgery.

The IMCA also spoke to Malcom's cancer nurse and got some information relating to the surgery, any steps that needed to be taken prior to the surgery and what Albert should expect following the surgery. The IMCA ensured that the information was provided to Albert to help him understand what would be happening whilst he was in hospital and what his recovery may look like.

Outcome

The surgery was a success and Macolm was quickly able to go back to his volunteering role and cheering on his local football team.

This story demonstrates the importance of the person being at the centre of a decision making process and providing information in a way that empowers them to be make an informed choice.

Advocacy story – Lily

Capacity assessments may change but my views don't!



About

Lily is 74-years old and had lived at home with her husband for over 40 years. Lily has a diagnosis of border line personality disorder and severe anxiety disorder and has experienced enduring mental health issues for several years, with a recent been dementia diagnosis.

Lily's husband was her main carer. However, within the past 2 years her husband had become physically unwell and struggled to care for Lily. Unfortunately during this time Lily's mental health deteriorated and she was detained under section 3 of the Mental Health Act on an acute dementia ward.

Advocacy need

Lily had been detained in an acute dementia ward out of area for several months prior to being transferred to her local mental health hospital. She had been assessed as lacking capacity to her care and treatment on the ward or to instruct an IMHA. On Lily's behalf and in her bests interests the ward made a referral for an IMHA to support her to and understand and be involved in decisions about her care and treatment and to plan for discharge from hospital.

How we helped

The advocate visited the ward on a regular basis to meet with Lily. During the advocacy visits, the advocate noticed that Lily was very unsettled and it became apparent she was finding the ward environment challenging due to the noise and the number of people on the ward. Lily would present as distressed and often asked to return to the hospital where she was originally placed.

Over several months the advocate continued to meet with Lily, establishing a positive relationship. Recognising the difficulties Lily was experiencing with the ward environment, the advocate met with Lily in a quiet room where she felt comfortable to share her views and wishes.

Lily was clear that she wanted to be discharged, but identified that she would not be able to manage at home even with a package of care in place. Unfortunately despite being clinically ready to leave hospital there were many delays in the discharge process. Funding was highlighted as an issue due to the high level of care that Lily needed to meet her needs and enable her to remain close to her husband and nieces.

Lily was able to clearly communicate her wishes to the advocate that she wanted to live in a specific care home, near to her husband and nieces in line with her Article 8 Right to a family life.

The advocate supported Lily to share her views within her discharge planning meetings which included all the key professionals involved in her care. The advocate raised Lily's rights around her entitlement to appropriate s117 Aftercare. With the agreement of Lily, the advocate challenged the social worker when they would not consider her preferred care home due to the high funding cost.

The advocate discussed with Lily her right to seek legal advice regarding this matter and her right to appeal the detention as Lily wanted to be discharged.

The advocate supported Lily to contact a solicitor of her choice and support her in legal appointments. The solicitor and advocate discussed with Lily that as she clearly understood the appeal and discharge process she had capacity in these areas. As a result a tribunal application was submitted immediately to ensure the appeal process was in motion.

Due to Lily's level of understanding the diagnosis of dementia was also reviewed by the consultant on the ward and this resulted in this diagnosis of dementia being removed.

Following this review of her mental health the section 3 was also rescinded as there was no further care and treatment required under the Mental Health Act. The ward requested that a DoLs be put in place whilst Lily was on the ward as they deemed that she lacked capacity to consent to her hospital stay.

A best interest assessor reviewed Lily on the ward and declined to proceed with a DoLs process as it was their assessment that Lily had capacity to consent to her hospital stay and to make decisions about her care and support within the discharge process.

Lily agreed to remain on the ward as an informal patient until a suitable care home was found. The advocate discussed Lily's rights with her as an informal patient to support her understanding of the change in status.

Due to the changes in Lily's status a discharge meeting was arranged quickly. The advocate met with Lily to prepare for her discharge meeting and discussed the care home options presented by the social worker, including Lily's preferred option.

Outcome

The local authority agreed to fund the placement of Lily's choice. Lily shared in her meeting that she felt this would be a good move for her, as it was quiet and near to her husband and nieces.

The ward arranged for Lily to visit this placement a few days after the meeting and she loved it. Lily is happy and doing well in her new home, where family visit regularly.

Advocacy was vital in supporting Lily to understand and exercise her rights throughout her hospital stay under each status. The advocate ensured that Lily's voice was heard by challenging decision makers and championing Lily's views to ensure they were respected in the decision-making process.

Advocacy story – Mavis

Power of the advocacy process



About

Mavis is a 62-year-old lady, living with a diagnosis of Korsakoff's Syndrome. She has been living in 24-hour care in Warrington for a number of years.

Advocacy need

Mavis has had the same advocate supporting her for approximately five years, in the capacity of Paid RPR for the duration of six Deprivation of Liberty (DoLs) authorisations, and as a Care Act advocate. She has consistently objected to being in 24-hour care during this time. Mavis had previously been supported to challenge her placement via a Section 21a challenge to her DoLs authorisation, which had unfortunately been unsuccessful.

Mavis expressed a wish to access the community more regularly, live more independently, and be closer to her family in Manchester. The advocate could see that since the last S21a challenge there had been an improvement in Mavis's presentation and she was no longer requiring a high level of support.

What we did

After seeking legal advice, the advocate raised a second Section 21a challenge under the Paid RPR role. As part of this process the advocate also supported Mavis in an Adult Social Care Review under the Care Act Advocacy, providing continuity of advocacy support. The advocate attended best interest meetings supporting Mavis to share her views and wishes, and ensuring her voice was central to the decision making process. Following this Section 21a Challenge, Mavis moved to a 24-hour care setting in Manchester. Unfortunately, lesser restrictive options were not available at the time, but this placement fell in-line with Angela's wish to be closer to her family.

However, Mavis continued to be dissatisfied and felt that she was too young to be in a nursing home, as all of the other residents were considerably older than her. Additionally, Angela's wish to access the community more regularly was not being met. Mavis was supported by the same advocate to raise these issues during her new placement review, and steps were taken to fulfil Angela's wishes and improve her quality of life at the nursing home. An independent care and support agency was employed to support Mavis to access the community more regularly and engage in activities that she enjoys like shopping, going for coffee, and getting her hair and nails done. She was also supported to purchase some new furniture and soft furnishings for her bedroom, to make it more homely and in-line with Angela's taste.

Despite this, Mavis was still unhappy in her placement and informed the advocate that she wished to formally challenge it again. The advocate again sought legal advice, and a third Section 21a Challenge was raised on Mavis's behalf.

A number of placement options were explored for Mavis and the advocate ensured that she was supported to view these options to help her form an opinion and make an informed decision. Mavis declined the options of supported accommodation and expressed her wish to move to an alternative 24-hour care placement in the Manchester area. This placement offered an extensive activities programme, is in an area very close to several shops and cafes and can offer a much more person-centred approach due to the layout of the units which are designed to promote independence.

Outcome

The outcome of the Section 21a Challenge was that Mavis should move to this new placement. Since moving, the advocate has visited Mavis several times as her Paid RPR.

Mavis is much happier in her new home and is no longer objecting. She attends activities within the home daily and continues to access the community on a twice weekly basis, supported by the external agency. Plans are currently being made to arrange a spa day for Mavis and to visit the Trafford Centre to buy some new clothes.

This story demonstrates the value of having an advocate in place who knows a person well and understands their history and how the advocacy process can empower a person to continue to express their views and wishes, even when lacking capacity, until their voice is heard and the right decision is made.

Feedback

During the last meeting before Angela's final move, her niece Jodie thanked the advocate for their support and said that they had really fought for what their Aunt wanted and she was really grateful for that.

Client Feedback



"My advocate has been a gem. They explain everything. My situation has been really frustrating and the advocacy has really helped."



"A ton of pressure has been lifted by having an advocate. I feel extremely well supported"



"My advocate picks up on certain things – if someone doesn't get back, they're on it chasing for a response. Or if I'm not feeling comfortable they'll notice and check with me what will help."



"I'd trust my advocate with my life! I've got confidence in them and they believe in me. Don't let them leave...."



"Since working with my advocate she has helped me positively with any concerns I had and helped me raise these concerns with the right professionals. My advocate has been reassuring with any worries I had and made sure I understood what was going on. Me and my advocate built up a good rapport – I enjoyed working with her and know I can call on her if I need to check anything out. I am so happy to be with my baby girl at home".



"Thank you for all your support over the past 10 months or so, you have really helped me understand what is going on with social care and this time is has been so different to my last experience"



"For me, advocacy gave me a real boost of confidence in the way I was feeling, also to know that someone is there for me, to help and explain things I don't get - not only that but advocacy gave me a sense of control in an environment I maybe thought I'd have no control. Thank you so very much for supporting me"

Client Feedback



"I really appreciate having access to advocacy - it has really helped me in understanding what's going on and the responsibilities of the SW and us as parents in moving forward"



"My advocate has been the only person to treat me like a human being"



"I couldn't have done this without you, you break down information into smaller sections and you can also tell when I am struggling with concentration"



"Without my advocate I wouldn't have got out so soon".



"If it wasn't for my advocate I'd still be stuck here with no social worker"



"Advocacy is really good, all parents should have one if they have a learning disability because we need to be treated fairly, an advocate makes sure this happens"



"Thank you me for visiting me, it was good to be listened to properly by someone and accepts me when I lose my train of thought"

Partner Feedback

I would like to provide some positive feedback around the support from advocacy on my wards. I would like to highlight the support provided in respect of a complex patient on the ward and your input into the difficult meeting with the Local Authority. I do feel your courageous input on the day advocating for our patient resulted in the more appropriate setting being sourced so thank you.

The service is invaluable across all the wards and the visibility of advocacy is paramount for us to demonstrate commitment to always ensuring our patients' rights are maintained and their care and treatment remains at the heart of all of what we do.

Thank you for your continued support

Mental Health Ward Manager

College strongly believe in the importance of ensuring that our students' voices are heard, and we recognise advocacy as a valuable and independent means of achieving this.

Pastoral Support Officer

The advocacy support provided by the advocate has been beneficial to both the client and myself. The advocate has known the client for a number of years, and due to her communicative and cognitive impairment, this has proved invaluable. The client appears relaxed around the advocate and has been more likely to interact with her when we have tried to engage her in discussions. The advocate appears to have a good understanding of the client's baseline presentation, which has been helpful as a practitioner that did not know her, when completing assessments, assessing levels of risk and trying to establish if she is happy and settled in her current accommodation. The advocate tailors her approach when interacting with the client to meet her individual communication needs, and advocates in her best interests well, making helpful suggestions, providing useful information, and asserting the client's rights where appropriate. The advocate is easy, friendly and professional to communicate with and always prompt and clear in her responses.

Social Worker

I deal with a wide variety of reports which on occasion lead to patients being interviewed. Having on-site advocacy support to assist in this process is extremely beneficial. It not only expedites the process from an investigation point of view, but more importantly provides a known 'friendly' face for the service user involved whom you have already built a rapport during visits. If I had to use a 'call centre' advocacy service this level of service would not exist. This service would lead me to managing attendance and introductions with interviewee and staff and the additional stresses this would place on the service user.

In addition to formal interviews, you have assisted with ad-hoc meetings when I have attended to discuss a disclosure or issue that has arisen. Again, this impromptu meeting would not be possible with an 'off-site' service with a simple task made very difficult if I had to book an unknown representative on each occasion. To reiterate, you are easily contactable, known to service users and staff which without doubt assists the policing process.

Mental Health Hospital Police Liaison Officer

Partner Feedback

I have very much enjoyed working with you this year, you are a great advocate and your clients are lucky to have you – looking forward to more joint working next year.

Solicitor

I was contacting you to make you aware from speaking with H, he has communicated that he now feels reassured that things are progressing well (stating it began when yourself became involved) and feels involved, listened to whilst working himself to promote a more reflective approach.

Social Worker

I would like to provide some positive feed back around the support from advocacy on my wards at the mental health hospital. In particular I would like to highlight the support you have provided in respect of a complex patient on the ward and your input into the difficult meeting with the Local Authority. I do feel your courageous input on the day advocating for the client has resulted in the more appropriate setting being sourced so thank you. In addition, you have supported with seclusion reviews as part of the MDT and provided valued input.

The service is invaluable across all my wards and the visibility of yourself, is paramount for us to demonstrate commitment to always ensuring our patients' rights are maintained and their care and treatment remains at the heart of all of what we do.

Thank you Claire for your continued support

Matron - Mental Health Hospital

Your support to the client has been invaluable in this process. You are a key link between us and the social worker and can provide information as to what is happening on the ground and the outcome of meetings. Which makes our job in providing advice to the client that much easier.

It is clear that you are a very good source of support to the client and you have assisted her understanding of this process. These are difficult times, only made easier by you and your role.

You have ensured that the client's voice is heard in meetings. The client is very shy and finds it hard to articulate her points. She can also become intimidated and overwhelmed and your presence again makes this easier.

Working in partnership with you is brilliant and provides a great service to all of our clients.

Solicitor

Partner Feedback

From my point of view, it was a real relief to have an independent advocate supporting my sister, especially as I am, as well as the rest of the family are based in New Zealand. It gave us peace of mind knowing someone was there to help her make sense of things and speak up on her behalf. It also took a bit of pressure off me, so I wasn't always sounding like I was telling her what to do. Having your involvement made a big difference. When I spoke to my sister after your visits, she was really positive. She said how lovely you were and that she was happy for your involvement. I think it's such a valuable role, and I'm really glad she had you there to help her.

Family Member

I referred a client to the advocacy hub as there was no one to support her with making decisions about her care and finances. The advocate made arrangements to speak to the client and managed to create a rapport with her. This made it easier for me to communicate with her as she was quite comfortable with the advocate's professional and calm approach. The advocate was always on time for our joint visits and offered person-centred support to the client. Thanks for the support.

Social Worker

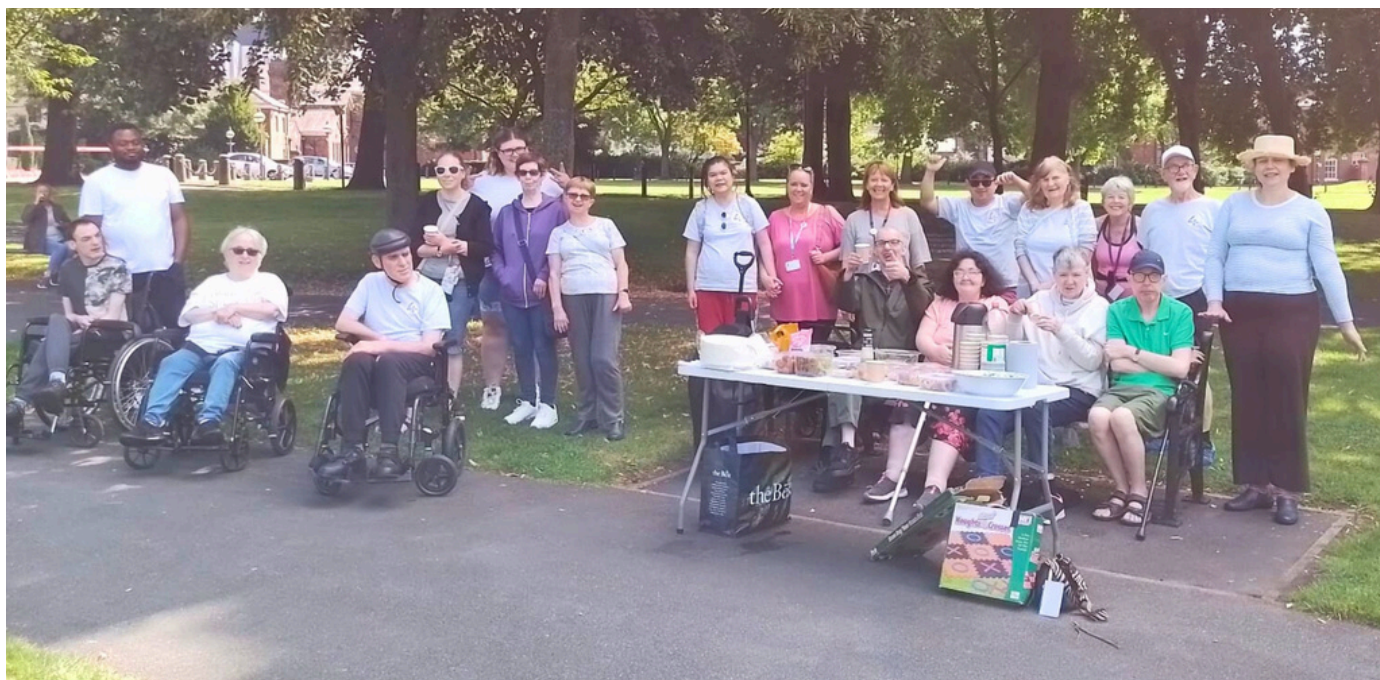
Since Restore piloted in 2020 Speak up have been a significant service that Restore have considered in supporting our families in need. Given the families we work with have experienced extremely difficult times with services previously in particular children's serviced I believe Speak up has supported Restore in building better relationships between Families and Children's Services. Speak up have provided our families with a voice in the support that is being put in place around them which is extremely important if we wish families to succeed and sustain change. They really support families in understanding processes in place and reduce some of that pressure, especially for our families where there is mental health and learning needs. Speak up took time to understand Restore and its offer and we have created a positive working relationship with them. Communication with the Speak up team has always been good.

Team Leader

I completed a referral to Speak Up for a female who was about to be released from prison. The client had a diagnosis of autism and her capacity around her care and support was not clear nor was the level of care and support that she would require. I did not have a lot of time to get a good understanding of the client's needs due to the prison release date pending and faced further barriers as visits to her had to be on a specific time and days. The client would often provide 1 word answers. The advocate was able to attend visits with me and provide me with resources and advice around best ways to communicate with the client which opened up communication between the client and myself. The advocate also supported the client to prepare for upcoming meetings to ensure that her voice was heard and her wishes and feelings were paramount throughout all decision making procedures. The advocate was prompt in her responses and made herself available when required. The advocate was able to challenge me when she felt that the process could be changed in a way that would better suit the client which really demonstrated that she had her best interests at heart.

Social Worker

Celebrating the Speak Up 4 All Self-Advocacy Group



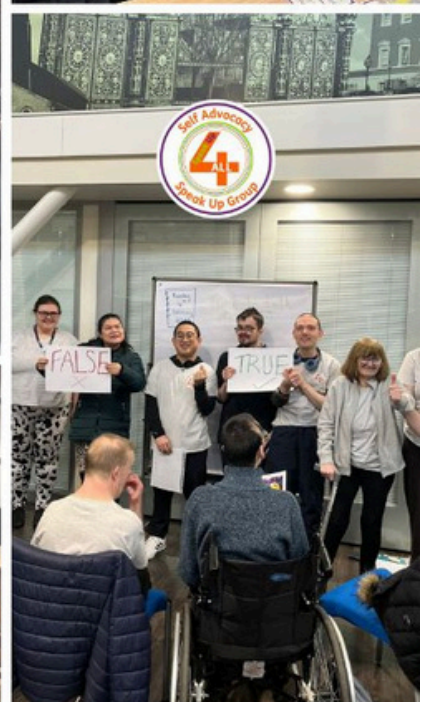
Self-advocacy remains the foundation of all our activity. Our advocacy journey began in 2006 with a couple passionate individuals challenging injustice and it has grown from strength to strength in the subsequent years. Here are just examples of some of the amazing work our self-advocates have been involved in:

- Contributed to Mersey Care's learning disability and autism plan outlining how they will transform care and treatment
- Consulted with social workers as to how they can improve their approaches and communication
- Met with WBC to share what's working and not working in adult social care
- Shared ideas around the Living Well Hub digital platform
- Participated in university research around Artificial Intelligence
- Been an active member of the Cheshire Cancer Alliance
- Worked with Photosymbols to improve easy read information
- Co-designed safeguarding easy read information
- Met with managers from Warrington's Own buses to share feedback and ask for better information and timetables
- Participated in the regional self-advocates conference in Blackpool
- Run mental health and 5 ways to wellbeing courses
- Supported our local community through litter picking, cancer podcasts and organising Macmillan coffee mornings
- Connected with other local groups

Something we are very proud of is our work with Warrington's Learning Disability Strategy and bringing lots of people together for the Living Our Best Life conference. This work continues to make a difference in people's lives living in Warrington!







Celebrating Working Together (Co-Production)



Living My Best Life

