

# **SPEAK UP, YORK CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY SERVICE**

**ANNUAL REPORT AND REVIEW OF ADVOCACY**

**APRIL 2019 – MARCH 2020**

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York's Children's Rights and Advocacy Service

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speak Up, York Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service, promotes children’s rights and entitlements and provides advocacy for children and young people who are in care, children going through the child protection process or wanting to make a complaint against the Council, and care leavers, in line with the Local Authority’s statutory duty. Speak Up has a service statement outlining details regarding service provision, independence governance, performance and monitoring, and practice in relation to resolution and escalation.

Between April 2019 and March 2020, Speak Up received 81 referrals in total from children and young people; 59% of which were in relation to children and young people in care. Referrals received were from children and young people ranging from 5-21 years, however nearly three quarters of these were young people aged 13+. There were 26 referrals in relation to young people going through the Child Protection Process, which equates to 32% of referrals received. Referrals for young people going through the Child Protection Process were significantly lower last year so this is a positive improvement which can possibly be attributed to increased awareness raising among social work teams. Of the 81 referrals, 36 young people (44%) were receiving SEN support, of which 8 young people had an EHCP.

Referral reasons vary with the most common theme being to support a young person to have their views heard in decision making. Qualitative feedback has been received from young people and professionals who have completed evaluation forms. The feedback is generally very positive, with most young people feeling that advocacy helped them feel listened to and more able to express their views.

## AIM OF THE REPORT

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

This will be done by:

- Analysing advocacy requests and outlining any common themes;
- Reviewing and analysing statistics on the demographic of children and young people who have requested advocacy;
- Evaluating the service's effectiveness and identifying areas for development.

All advocacy requests from the financial year 2019/20 will be explored in the analysis of the service. Advocacy evaluations received in 2019/20 will be explored to aid in evaluating the effectiveness of the service and identifying areas of development. Evaluations are sought from both young people and professionals.

## INTRODUCTION TO ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Statutory advocacy is about listening to children and young people and helping them express their own views, have their voice heard, access information and services, and understand their rights and entitlements. Advocacy is based on the principle that all individuals are equal with the same rights and responsibilities.

It is a statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide advocacy for children and young people who are in care (Children Act 1989), leaving care (Children and Social Work Act 2017) or wanting to make a complaint (Adoption and Children Act 2002). The Children and Young People's Act (2008) places 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. Whilst it is not a statutory requirement to provide advocacy for children and young people going through the Child Protection Process, it is identified as good practice.

The National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services state that:

- ✓ 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.

## SPEAK UP, YORK CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY SERVICE

The Children's Rights and Advocacy Service (known as Speak Up) promotes children's rights and entitlements and provides advocacy for the following children and young people:

- Children and young people in care aged 5-18
- Care leavers up to the age of 25
- Children on a Child Protection Plan
- Young parents (aged 18 and under) who have a child who is on a Child Protection Plan
- Any child or young person wanting to make a complaint about a City of York Council service.

The service provides specialist issue-based advocacy; this kind of advocacy aims to address a specific issue and only exists for the time it takes to resolve that issue. It should be noted however that children and young people often raise numerous issues, sometimes requiring advocacy for a significant length of time. Speak Up also seeks to provide advocacy that is appropriate for the needs of the child or young people. In addition to issue-based advocacy, the service also provides non-instructed advocacy for any children or young who are entitled to access the service but are unable to express their views. Non-instructed advocacy should only be undertaken when the child has no recognized communication system or where they do not have the capacity or understanding. Non-instructed advocacy should be a last resort when all other communication techniques have been explored. Non-instructed advocacy is rights-based, child-centred and usually involves observations of the child in multiple environments.

Speak Up 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 good practice guidance.

Speak Up consists of a Children's Rights Manager (1 FTE) and three part-time Advocacy and Participation Workers (totalling 1.7 FTE). Speak Up also has two trained sessional advocates who undertake advocacy depending on the needs of the service; both sessional advocates have significant experience working with children with SEND and are able to provide non-instructed advocacy. Speak Up is recognising advocacy as a specialist skill and supporting staff to achieve the accredited 'Introduction to advocating on behalf of children and young people' award delivered by the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS).

There is a service statement in place outlining details of service provision, independent governance, performance and monitoring, and practice in relation to resolution and escalation. Within the team, each Advocacy and Participation Worker carries out both advocacy support and facilitates participation opportunities. When allocating advocacy casework, wherever possible, the service seeks 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>.

## ADVOCACY SCOPING

In the 2018/19 annual advocacy report, Speak Up highlighted a report 'Advocacy for Children' published by the Office of the Children's Commissioner. This report included information about all of the children and young people entitled to statutory advocacy, including the legal framework to support this. Speak Up

tasked itself with scoping out the local service providers for children and young people's statutory advocacy, and this was included as a recommendation in the previous annual report.

This scoping exercise has now been completed and has helped in identifying gaps where a statutory service was not being provided. One such gap was that care leavers are entitled to statutory advocacy up to the age of 25 but in York this was only being provided up to age 21. Speak Up has agreed to extend their advocacy provision in line with the statutory requirement, and the service now provides advocacy to care leavers up to the age of 25.

There are 3 other outstanding gaps in the provision of children and young people's advocacy locally:

- Advocacy for young people aged 16 and 17 who are homeless
- Advocacy for young carers who may continue to be young carers into adulthood
- Advocacy for young people who may continue to need care and support into adulthood

The latter two advocacy areas are both classed as Care Act advocacy which is currently being provided by York Advocacy Hub to those over 18 years old. As the Care Act advocacy is commissioned by CYC, it has been agreed that an approach will be made to York Advocacy Hub to purchase this additional Care Act advocacy for young people approaching adulthood from York Advocacy Hub, either on a spot purchase basis or via an amendment to the current commissioning specification that is in place.

The Coram Voice Always Heard Advocacy Report for 2019 highlights that at least 64% of local authorities are not currently providing advocacy to young people aged 16 and 17 who are homeless, despite them having a statutory entitlement to this support. In York, this remains a gap in provision and so further exploration is needed to take place to identify which service would be best placed to provide this. In the first instance an approach will be made to York Advocacy Hub to establish whether they would be able to provide this on a spot purchase basis.

Progress in developing these areas of advocacy will be tracked through quarterly advocacy reports and next year's annual advocacy report.

## **AWARENESS OF THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY SERVICE**

For Speak Up to function effectively, children, young people and professionals need to be aware of, and have an understanding of the service. When a child or young person first comes into care, they are issued with an information pack which includes information about their rights and entitlements and Speak Up. Speak Up aims to send this pack to young people but it is also available electronically. 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 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. The Children's Rights Manager has sought to attend all Children's Social Care team meetings to raise awareness of advocacy.

## ADVOCACY REFERRALS - STATISTICS

This data will provide information in relation to the advocacy referrals made to the service between April 2019 and March 2020.

Speak Up has seen a significant spike in the number of referrals received this year, with the service receiving nearly 30 more referrals than the previous year.

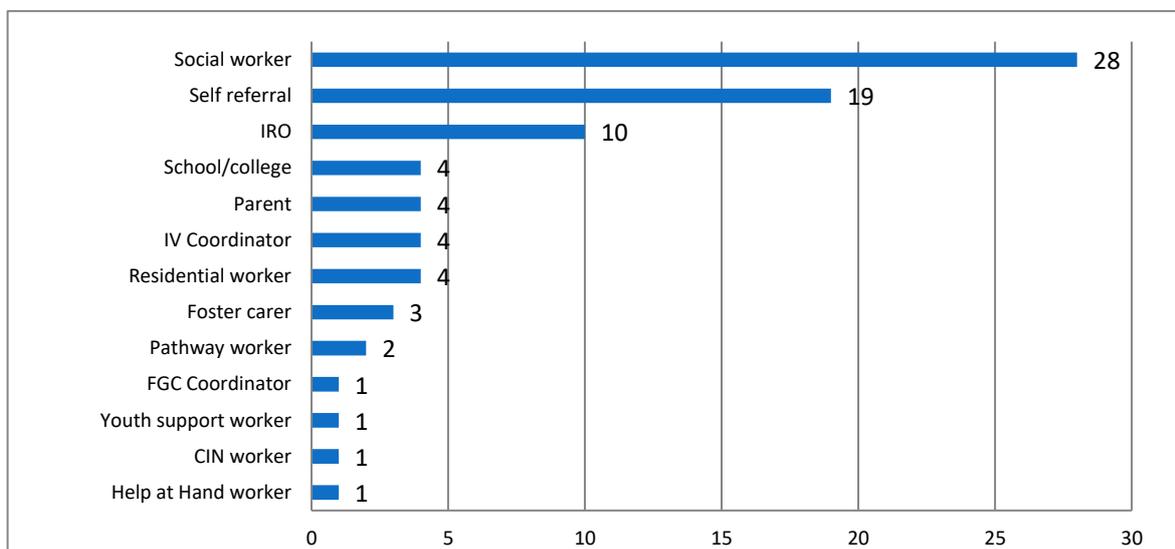
During 2019/20, 48 of the referred advocacy cases were closed, and 32 remained open as of 31/03/2020, with ongoing advocacy still being provided. Last year, Speak Up ended the year with 18 cases remaining open; this highlights that the standing caseload of the Speak Up Service has doubled since last year.



Quarter	Advocacy referrals received	Advocacy cases closed	Active caseload at end of quarter
Q1	17	16	19 - (30/06/19)
Q2	12	14	17 - (30/09/19)
Q3	21	16	22 - (31/12/19)
Q4	31	21	32 - (31/03/2020)

The breakdown by referrals received and cases closed per quarter shows that referrals started to increase in quarter 3 and that there was a more substantial increase in quarter 4. Speak Up currently employs two sessional advocates, one of whom joined the service in January 2020; this has significantly helped in meeting the increased demand for the service.

## REFERRER



The majority of referrals this year came from social workers (35%) and young people directly (24%) which is similar to findings from previous years. There is a broad range of referrers which is really positive. Referrals from education settings has improved over the years but this is an area Speak Up should continue to focus on so that education settings maintain an awareness of advocacy support. At a recent participation meeting with young people, they suggested that more awareness of advocacy is needed within primary schools, so this is an area Speak Up could consider focusing on.

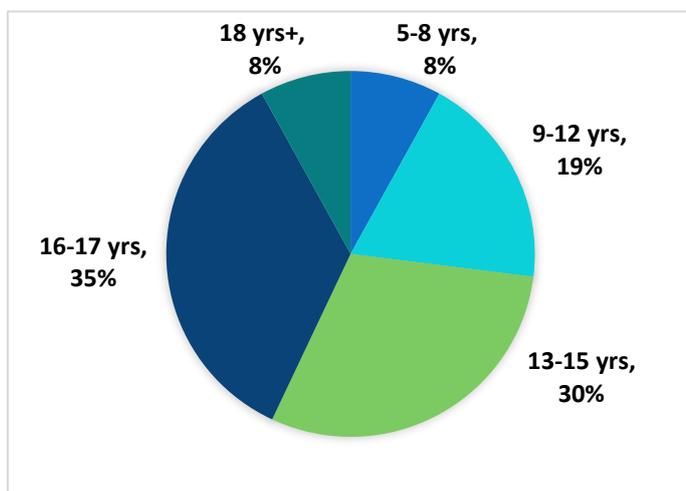
Over the years, referrals from foster carers have always been low and the same is seen this year. It is unknown why this is the case, and it may be that foster carers encourage young people to self-refer. It would be worth exploring this further and considering how to raise awareness of the service with foster carers.

Speak Up is aware that the NSPCC has developed a new service for young people called Seeking Solutions. This service aims to provide a child led and solution focused approach to help young people cope with problems affecting their wellbeing. This service states that they are unable to provide young people with practical support that would be better dealt with by an advocate. In light of this, it may be helpful for Speak Up to make links with this service, so that appropriate signposting occurs where it is identified that a young person may benefit from advocacy, and this could include sharing the advocacy scoping exercise.

## PROFILE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ACCESS ADVOCACY

The following information is in relation to 81 referrals that were received by Speak Up from April 2019 – March 2020.

### AGE



In relation to the age demographic of young people accessing advocacy support this has remained fairly constant over the last couple of years.

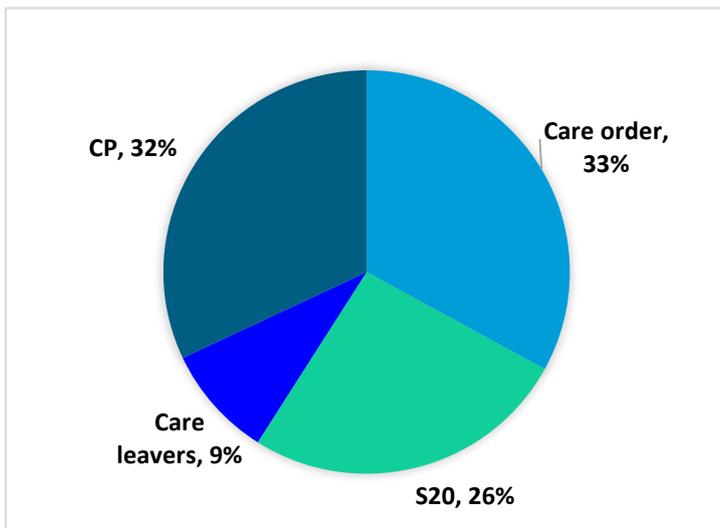
Young people aged between 13 and 17 make up the majority of referrals. Last year, 9% of the referrals were for care leavers and this year that decreased slightly to 8%.

### SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Data has been gathered on the number of young people accessing advocacy that have any known SEN support. Of the 81 children and young people referred for advocacy, 36 young people (44%) have SEN. Of these 36, 8 children and young people (10%) have an EHCP.

The majority of advocacy provided by Speak Up is issue-based, however, Speak Up has received referrals for three young people where a non-instructed approach will be taken; these three cases remain open as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and a more detailed report of the support will be provided in a future report on their closure.

## LEGAL STATUS

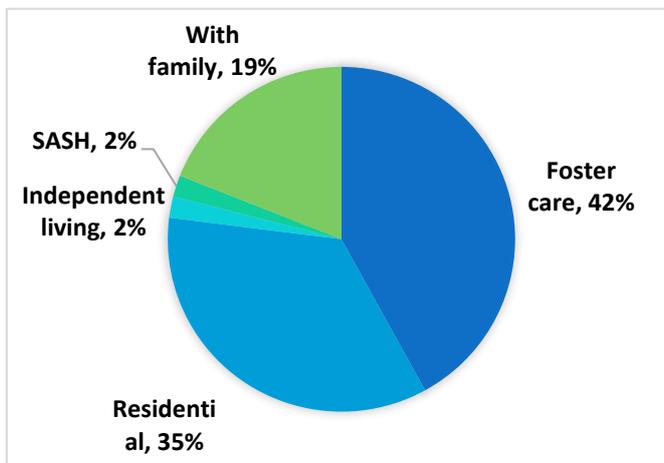


The majority of young people accessing advocacy were in care (59%) which includes young people on a full care order, interim care order or accommodated under Section 20. Referrals for young people subject to a Child Protection Plan made up 32% of the referrals, which is nearly double that of last year. This is really positive, as one of the outcomes from the previous annual report was to raise awareness of advocacy for children subject to a Child Protection Plan. 9% of referrals were for care leavers.

## LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

The living arrangements of all young people accessing advocacy support is very varied. The information within the chart displays the living arrangements just for the 48 children and young people in care who accessed advocacy support.

42% of young people in care accessing advocacy were living in foster care. This is a significant decrease from the previous year in which 61% of advocacy referrals were for young people living in foster care. The number of referrals from young people in residential settings is almost on par with the previous year. There is a significant increase in the number of referrals for young people in care placed with a family member, which was only 2% last year.



This year there was a greater range of living arrangements. Of the 7 referrals for care leavers, 4 young people were living independently, 2 young people were living semi-independently and 1 young person was staying put. Of the 26 young people subject to Child Protection Plans, 24 were living at home with their family. Of the remaining young people, one was living with family friends and one young person was living independently.

## GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The following information is in relation to the 48 referrals for children and young people in care. Speak Up has supported 24 young people in care living in York and 24 young people in care living out of area.

Speak Up continues to provide advocacy support to young people living out of area, demonstrating that those out of area have equal access to advocacy provision. This is very positive, particularly in providing consistency of service for young people who experience multiple placement moves. However, 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. For example, Speak Up has provided advocacy to young people living in Teesside, Scotland and Cumbria within the year 2019/20.

The Coram Voice Always Heard Advocacy Report for 2019 has identified that at least 22% of local advocacy services in the UK are unable to provide advocacy to young people living out of area. Speak Up has consistently ensured over the years that advocacy is available for young people living out of area and this reinforces that Speak Up is performing well in this area.

Out of the 7 referrals received from care leavers, one of these was for a young person living out of area; the other six care leavers lived in York. All children and young people accessing advocacy that were subject to a Child Protection Plan were residing in York.

## ADVOCACY ISSUED RAISED

For reporting purposes, advocacy requests are categorised into the following themes:

- Support to have voice heard in decision making process
- Unhappiness with social work service
- Contact
- Placement
- Education
- Access to support services
- Other (to reflect referral reasons that do not fall within these categories)

These themes allow Speak Up to identify any trends in advocacy requests. Reporting on advocacy requests is broken down into 2 key areas: *referral reason* and *additional issues raised*. The purpose behind this is that children and young people often raise subsequent issues during a piece of advocacy, which may be different to the original referral reason. Reporting on both of these areas ensures that the nature of advocacy requests is captured to provide an overview of emerging themes.

Speak Up captures 2 datasets of advocacy reasons. One dataset is the referral reasons for the 81 advocacy cases referred in the year 2019/20. The second dataset is the advocacy reasons for the 64 advocacy cases closed in the year 2019/20. The purpose of this is that it is helpful to understand the nature of the advocacy request at the point of referral, but to understand the full nature of the advocacy support including outcomes and evaluation, the only way to do this is to report upon closed cases as well. It is the 64 closed cases which will be explored further within each theme.

### Dataset 1: New referrals for advocacy from April 2019 – March 2020

Theme	Initial referral reason	Raised as additional issue	Total
Support to have voice/rights heard in decision making process	41	5	45
Unhappiness with social work service	15	4	19
Placement	13	3	16
Contact	5	2	7
Education	1	0	1
Access to support/services	1	0	1
Other	5	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>95</b>

Speak Up received a total of 81 referrals. Some young people presented with more than one advocacy request at the point of referral, so there were 81 referrals in relation to 95 advocacy requests.

## Dataset 2: Advocacy closures from April 2019 – March 2020

Theme	Initial referral reason	Raised as additional issue	Total
Support to have voice/rights heard in decision making process	27	3	30 (31%)
Unhappiness with social work service	12	8	20 (21%)
Placement	15	7	22 (23%)
Contact	3	6	9 (9%)
Education	2	3	5 (6%)
Access to support/services	1	0	1 (1%)
Other	7	1	8 (9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>95</b>

Speak Up closed 67 advocacy cases within the year 2019/20. There were 28 requests raised as additional issues by young people during their advocacy support, meaning in total Speak Up has supported with 95 advocacy requests.

Speak Up produces quarterly reports which explore in detail all of the cases closed within the previous 3 month period. This report is essentially collating the data from the quarterly reports to identify any trends. To see more detailed exploration into each closed advocacy case and the outcome, please refer to the quarterly reports.

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. The only exception is the provision of non-instructed advocacy; it has been appropriate to provide this type of advocacy to one young person within this year.

### SUPPORT TO HAVE VOICE/RIGHTS HEARD IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS

This is the most common reason for young people requesting advocacy support this year, accounting for 31% of referrals. This advocacy theme includes assisting children and young people to prepare for and/or attend decision making meetings, or attending on behalf on a child or young person at their request. It has also includes supporting young people to express where they are in disagreement with a plan, or supporting young people to understand their current situation and the specific detail of their plan.

Of the 30 cases which included this theme, 14 were to support children and young people to prepare and contribute to their Child Protection Conference. There were 7 young people who attended their Child Protection Conference, 3 young people who requested their advocate attend on their behalf, and 2 young people where throughout the duration of their support their advocate attended on their behalf and supported the young person to attend meetings. There were 2 young people who unfortunately did not engage with advocacy support and were closed with no further action.

For one of the young people subject to a Child Protection Plan where their advocate attended meetings on their behalf, the type of advocacy provided was non-instructed advocacy.

There were 16 young people in care who were supported by an advocate to prepare and contribute towards decision making processes. Three young people attended their review meetings with their advocate, 3 young people were both supported to attend reviews but also requested their advocate attend on their behalf on some occasions, and 2 young people requested their advocate attend on their behalf.

As well as supporting young people to attend reviews and Child Protection Conferences, advocates have also supported young people to take part in other meetings such as Personal Education Plan meetings and meetings with the Youth Justice Service.

Eight of the young people in care who were not supported to attend meetings were supported to explore their views and feelings in relation to their current situation and their views were fed back to their social worker. It is worth noting that this exploration of views and feelings takes place with all young people but for these cases it was the sole focus of advocacy.

## PLACEMENT

Requesting advocacy due to issues with placement is the second most common theme this year, accounting for 23% which includes the initial referral reason and additional issues raised.

The nature of the advocacy within this theme includes the following issues raised by young people:

- Unhappiness with decision made by social care for the young person to move to a new placement, when they would like to stay at their current placement.
- Requesting a placement move due to unhappiness in their current placement.
- Unhappiness at the immediacy of a placement move.
- Unhappiness with the lack of notice of a placement move and the way in which the placement move took place.
- Challenging relationships with carers and/or residential staff.
- Unhappiness with being placed out of area.

## UNHAPPINESS WITH SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

There has been an increase in the number of cases relating to unhappiness with social work service going from 10% last year to 21% this year.

The nature of the referrals within this theme is varied and includes the following issues raised:

- Unhappiness with multiple changes of social worker;
- The view that the right support was not provided by Children's Services;
- Unhappiness with communication from their social worker;
- Request for a change of worker;
- Concerns that information shared by a social worker about the young person was inaccurate;
- Concerns that their social worker was not listening to them or explaining decisions clearly.

## CONTACT

The number of advocacy requests in relation to contact accounts for 9% of the advocacy issues raised. Contact issues refer to any issues that a young person raises relating to their contact arrangements with either relatives or friends.

The nature of the advocacy within this theme includes the following:

- Young people requesting contact with family members and friends; this was mostly raised by young people new to care or those who living out of area.
- Supporting young people to explore their feelings about seeing a relative.
- Young people wanting further clarity from Children’s Services to understand any restrictions on seeing family and friends.

## EDUCATION

There were 5 advocacy requests throughout the year in relation to education. Some examples include:

- Supporting a young person to visit their new school before attending.
- Supporting a young person to raise their views that they felt their school was not listening to them or taking their needs into consideration.
- Supporting a young person to access information in relation to their entitlements regarding attending university.

## ACCESS TO SUPPORT/SERVICES

This was one referral from a young person in relation to access to support/services. The young person requested support to understand their care leaver entitlements once they left care. The young person was supported to access the Local Offer for Care Leavers and was signposted to her Pathway Worker.

## OTHER

Requests falling under the category of ‘other’ account for 9% of advocacy issues raised. There were 8 requests overall that didn’t fit any of the common themes. Below are three examples of referrals within this theme:

- Supporting a sibling group to make a complaint in relation to unhappiness around funding.
- Supporting a young person to raise with college and police an ongoing issue regarding bullying and harassment from another young person.
- Supporting a young person who felt they were experiencing discrimination with their workplace.

## COMPLAINTS

Complaints from children and young people come to the attention of Speak Up in 2 ways. Sometimes it is apparent within the original referral that a child or young person would like to make a complaint, and sometimes a complaint is an output of existing advocacy support.

In the year 2019/20, Speak Up supported 13 young people who wished to make a complaint. One complaint was made by a sibling group of 3, so there were 11 complaints in total. In the year 2018/19, Speak Up supported 5 complaints so it’s clear there has been a marked increase in the number of complaints in 2019/20.

The detail of the 11 complaints, including the reason for complaint, investigation route and outcome has been provided within Appendix A. All 11 complaints were accepted as formal complaints, investigated at either stage 1 or stage 2. There were 6 complaints in relation to unhappiness with the social work service, 3 in relation to placement, 1 in relation to contact and 1 complaint in relation to funding.

Whilst the service has seen a marked increase in young people wanting to make a complaint, it is apparent that via advocacy young people are receiving the necessary support to enable them to exercise their right to make representation via the complaints process. Evidence exists to suggest that they are listened to by managers, with all of the 11 complainants reporting that they were satisfied with the outcomes of their complaint at the point of closure, as detailed in Appendix A. One young person provided the following feedback on their evaluation form:

*“The complaint was dealt with straight way and with the right amount of reaction without sweeping it under the rug.”* - Taken from Appendix B

## OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE

Direct feedback is sought from children and young people who have accessed advocacy in order to evaluate and improve the service. This is done on the closure of advocacy support. In addition to this, feedback from professionals is also sought, as well as feedback from advocates. This helps to gain varying viewpoints about the service provided.

The evaluations included within this report relate to any cases that have been closed between April 2019 and March 2020. In this time, Speak Up received 31 evaluations from young people and 16 from professionals. Last year Speak Up received 13 evaluations from young people so this is a significant and positive increase. Speak Up has also gained more feedback from professionals this year; this is an increase of 2 from 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 31 evaluation forms completed by children and young people. On the evaluation form, young people are asked to score out of 5 whether they would recommend Speak Up to other young people: 1 being not likely and 5 being very likely. On average, young people scored the service 4.5, and all scores for this question were 4 or 5. This is very positive feedback about the service.

The evaluation form then provides statements asking young people to score out of 5 whether they agree with a series of statements, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The average scores from young people are in the tables below:

Because I had an advocate:	Average score out of 5
I feel more listened to by professionals (not my advocate)	4.2
I felt involved in decisions	4.5
I feel more confident in raising concerns I might have	4.4

About the advocacy service:	Agree
My advocate listened to me	5
My advocate helped me understand my rights	4.7

Feedback from young people is overall very positive. Most young people report feeling listened to by professionals, feeling more involved in decisions and feeling more confident in raising concerns. Scores for these statements mostly ranged from 3-5. There was only one lower score of 1 from a young person indicating that did not feel more confident in raising concerns.

All young people who completed the evaluation forms reported that their advocate listened to them and most felt their advocate helped them understand their rights. This is great feedback for the service and suggests that Speak Up can be confident that the service is following the National Advocacy Standards, including ensuring that advocacy is led by the wishes of children and young people, championing the rights and needs of children and young people, and listening to the views and ideas of children and young people.

The evaluation form includes 2 free text questions which enable Speak Up to capture qualitative feedback from young people.

*What changed as a result of using the advocacy service?  
 Could your advocate have done anything different?*

The full responses to these questions have been included within Appendix B and include some of the following themes:

- Young people feeling more listened to and more confident to express their views;
- Young people feeling that their views have been taken seriously by professionals;
- Young people acknowledging that advocacy helped them find out more about their rights and entitlements;
- Young people feeling that their advocate and other professionals have helped them;
- All young people who completed evaluations did not feel there was anything their advocate could have done differently, which is a real positive.

It is very encouraging to hear directly from young people about the positive impact the service has had for many of them.

**FEEDBACK FROM PROFESSIONALS**

There were 16 evaluations completed by professionals. Professionals are asked to state their level of agreement with 2 statements; the results below are their collated views.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I believe the young person was more listened to throughout the decision making process	0	0	5	11
I believe the young person was more involved in the decision making process	0	0	5	11
I believe the person is more confident to express their views in the future	0	0	6	10

Professionals also have the option of sharing qualitative feedback by responding to an open questions.  
*Did you feel advocacy made any difference to the young person?*

The full responses from professionals include some of the following themes:

- The benefit to young people of the independence of the advocacy role;
- The benefits to young people of being able to develop a trusted relationship with an advocate
- Advocacy has been able to support young people to navigate complex systems and identify the right channels through which to raise concerns;
- Advocacy has enabled young people to make informed decisions;
- Advocacy has provided valuable support to young people who would like to participate in reviews/conferences but find this challenging due to their own needs and experiences.

## NON-INSTRUCTED ADVOCACY EVALUATION

There was just one advocacy case closed in the year 2019/20 where the type of advocacy used was non-instructed. In these cases, feedback is sought from carers and professionals in light of the young person not having the communication capacity to be able to share their views.

Although there is just one evaluation from a professional, this is due to the fact that there are an extremely limited number of cases in which non-instructed advocacy will be used. Speak Up has only been offering non-instructed advocacy for around 18 months. Non-instructed advocacy should only be undertaken when the child has no recognized communication system or where they do not have the capacity or understanding to express their views. Non-instructed advocacy should be a last resort when all other communication techniques have been explored. Non-instructed advocacy is rights-based, child-centred and usually involves observations of the child in multiple environments.

On the evaluation form, the professional strongly agreed that:

- A person-centred approach was taken by the advocate;
- Advocacy promoted the young person's civil, human and welfare rights;
- Advocacy promoted consideration of relevant aspects of the young person's life in the decisions taken.

The professional also felt that non-instructed advocacy made a difference to the decisions made for the young person.

## AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

### AWARENESS OF THE SERVICE

Speak Up has continued raising awareness of advocacy with social care teams and partner agencies. The significant increase in referrals for this year would suggest that progress has been made in raising awareness and this message also reaching young people.

Awareness raising will likely always be an area in need of development, with Speak Up considering more targeted focus on some agencies. For example, 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. Speak Up has continued to receive a high number of referrals directly from young people so it may be that foster carers and/or education providers are contributing by ensuring that young people have the information to self-refer. Nevertheless, further attempts should be made to engage foster carers with support from the Commissioning and Supporting Placement Team and York Area Foster Care Association. Speak Up has made better links with secondary schools but referrals from these settings

remains low. The current coronavirus outbreak has had an impact on many settings and services, so considering how to promote advocacy with schools at this current time may be more important than ever, and particularly when children and young people start to return to school. Speak Up should consider how best to do this given the current and changing situation.

The number of advocacy referrals for children subject to Child Protection Plans was an area for development in the previous report, and it is positive that in this report we have seen a significant increase in referrals for these young people. Speak Up should continue to raise awareness of advocacy for children subject to CPPs with the social work teams as this seems to be having a positive impact.

The fourth national advocacy standard is "advocacy is well-publicised, accessible and easy to use". Speak Up is continually working in line with this standard, and awareness raising is naturally built in the role of the service. However, due to external factors such as changes in staffing in other teams, this will likely always be an area of improvement.

## EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE

The number of evaluations from young people this year, and particularly in quarter 4, was a significant improvement on previous years, but this always remains any area of improvement for Speak Up.

Continuing to gather feedback from carers and 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 invaluable. Speak Up could further develop the process of seeking feedback from carers and this may in turn help with further awareness raising of the service with carers.

## DEFINING REFERRAL REASONS ACCURATELY

Speak Up categorises advocacy using a set of referral reasons, originally developed in 2014 by the service. These referral reasons are largely fit for purpose, but Speak Up will be making some amendments so that the nature of advocacy requests can be better captured. Speak Up would also like to ensure that the language used in these referral reasons reflects young people's feedback about language used within Children's Services. Show Me That I Matter has launched their 'Mind Your Language' campaign and it is important that we support this as a service.

For example, one of the existing advocacy reasons is 'views about placement' but, as young people would rather the word 'placement' not be used, this advocacy reason will now be referred to as 'views about where you live'. The full list of new referral reasons is below and these will be in use from April 2020. Speak Up has also produced a document which provides further detail about the specific requests which will be categorised under each referral reason.

- Support to have voice/rights heard within decision making and planning
- Unhappiness with the service received from Children's Services
- Views about where you live
- Views about seeing family and friends
- Views about education, employment and training
- Other

## MIND OF MY OWN

The City of York Council is currently rolling out the Mind of My Own app which is an app children and young people can use to share their views, wishes and feelings with a trusted professional.

All advocates within Speak Up have completed the Mind of My Own training and are able to support young people to use the app. As the roll is still ongoing, not all young people are yet able to use the app but Speak Up will seek to embed the promotion of the app into all advocacy case work once this is possible. Speak Up is actively encouraging the use of the app with those young people able to access it, and will continue to promote it as it becomes more widely accessible to other young people.

One of the benefits of the app is that it will encourage and help young people to develop self-advocacy skills, which is often a key element of advocacy support.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has provided an overview of the advocacy service and the casework that has taken place during 2019/20. A number of recommendations have been made which can be taken forward by Speak Up to further develop the service and reporting mechanisms. These have been fully detailed within the areas of development and summarised below:

1. Continue raising awareness of the service, with a focus on raising awareness with foster carers, schools and social work teams that support young people subject to Child Protection Plans.
2. Continue to seek evaluations from young people, carers and professionals, as this provides valuable feedback which can help further develop the service.
3. Implement the new advocacy referral reasons, which reflect the preferred language stated by young people, as part of the practice and processes within Speak Up.
4. Speak Up to continue to promote the use of the Mind of My Own app.
5. York Advocacy Hub to be approached regarding the spot purchase of advocacy for young people who have an entitlement to advocacy under the Care Act and 16-17 years olds' who present as homeless.
6. The time period of this report covers up to end of March 2020 when the UK had just been in lockdown for a week due to the global coronavirus pandemic. This has undoubtedly had an impact on service operation within advocacy and across Children's Services but the effect of this is not yet seen with the cases explored within this report. Speak Up needs to ensure consideration is given to the dynamic and changing situation and it is likely that this will be explored within the quarterly reports of 2020/21.

## REFERENCES

Adoption and Children Act (2002)

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

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (2019) *Advocacy for Children*

Coram Voice Always Heard 2019 –

[https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Always\\_Heard\\_2019\\_compressed.pdf](https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Always_Heard_2019_compressed.pdf)

## APPENDIX A: COMPLAINTS MADE BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE SUPPORT OF AN ADVOCATE 2019/20

Appendix A provides a summary of complaints made by young people with the support of an advocate; this information is based upon advocacy cases closed within the year 2019/20, and although many complaints will have been raised and resolved within this year, there may be some that were raised earlier. All of the concerns described in column 2 are the direct views of young people.

No.	Nature of complaint	Investigation route	Outcome	Young person's views of the outcome
1	Unhappiness with the way in which Children's Services was dealing with a situation in which the young person had a disagreement with their foster carers. To seek to resolve the issue the social worker met with both parties together and felt this was sufficient action. The young person however felt the issue was not fully resolved and decided to make a formal complaint.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 1.	The young person received a written response from the service manager explaining why Children's Services took the action that they did.	The young person was satisfied with the response they received.
2	Concerns raised by a young person in relation to their foster carer; the concerns included allegations that the foster carer broke the young person's confidentiality and made derogatory comments about them.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 1.	The young person received a written response from a service manager, and also met with them to discuss the response. Raising the concerns resulted in the young person moving placement.	The young person was satisfied with the outcome.
3	Unhappiness with multiple aspects of the social work service including disagreement with decision making, the view that information shared at a meeting was inaccurate and poor quality, and unhappiness with the limited support from their social worker which included non-attendance at important meetings.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 2 by an external investigator.	An adjudication meeting was offered but the young person chose not to attend. Some elements of the complaint were upheld.	The young person reported that they were satisfied with the outcome.
4	Unhappiness with changes to rules and expectations within the young person's out of area placement. The young person felt the rules changed without a reason and that the staff in placement were not always honest.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 2 by an external investigator.	Mediation took place between the young person and staff in their placement to help resolve the issues. An alternative placement was subsequently identified for the young person.	The young person was satisfied that the issues were no longer relevant, due to moving to a new placement and chose not to pursue the issue further.
5	Unhappiness with the support from the Child In Need Service and poor communication from social workers.	Accepted as a formal complaint and	The young person received a written response from a service manager.	The young person was initially unhappy with the response at stage 1. The young person was supported by

		investigated at stage 1.		their advocate to meet with a service manager and the complaints team, and following that meeting felt that their views and feelings had been acknowledged.
6	Unhappiness raised by a young person subject to a Child Protection Plan due to having multiple changes of social worker in a short time period.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 1.	The young person received a written response from a service manager.	The young person was satisfied with the response they received.
7	Three siblings made a complaint to challenge a decision made in regards to funding.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 2 by an external investigator.	An adjudication meeting was offered but the young people chose not to attend. The young people received a written response from the Assistant Director for Children's Services. Most elements of the complaint were upheld.	The siblings were satisfied with the outcome.
8	Concerns raised about the young person's previous foster carer's alleged behaviour.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 1.	The young person received a written response from a service manager.	The young person was satisfied and felt that their concerns had been followed up.
9	Concerns raised by a care leaver in relation to contact arrangements with their younger siblings.	Accepted as a formal complaint and initially investigated at stage 1, then investigated at stage 2 by an external investigator.	The young person received a response from a service manager (at stage 1). They were unhappy with this and so the complaint was escalated to stage 2. All elements of the complaint were upheld or partially upheld.	The young person was happy that it was acknowledged that things could have been done differently and looked forward to the recommendations taking shape to improve quality of contact arrangements.
10	Unhappiness with the social work service due to multiple changes of worker in a short time period, poor communication from social workers and unhappiness with the language used by one social worker.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 1.	The young person received a written response to their complaint, which included assurance that issue around language was addressed with the particular social worker.	The young person reported that they were satisfied with this outcome.
11	A young person made a complaint about the service they were receiving from their social worker. Part of the complaint was also that the young person had requested a change of worker twice, due to their unhappiness with the service they were receiving, but this had not been approved both times.	Accepted as a formal complaint and investigated at stage 1.	The young person met with a Group Manager, and also received a written response from this them. The request for a change of worker was supported, and although this couldn't happen immediately, the reasons for this were explained to the young person.	The young person felt the Group Manager listened to their concerns and they were happy with the outcome. They have since developed a positive relationship with their new social worker.

### What changed as a result of using the advocacy service?

- *Things have been taken into consideration and more seriously*
- *Finally got a little more of the answers I needed*
- *More confident in raising my worries and better at making decisions for myself instead of letting other people make them, school listen to me now*
- *Things I needed help with and decisions made in my LAC review*
- *York council started hiring permanent social workers*
- *New IRO*
- *I felt more supported*
- *Council finally listened to my complaint*
- *that when I put a complaint in about our bedrooms because we were wanting our privacy and our time alone*
- *Got our views across to others*
- *People actually listened to what I wanted and how I felt.*
- *I got listened to a bit more. I got to go to meetings.*
- *I was able to talk about my feelings and thoughts what I wanted to talk to the social worker more about*
- *Things started to get done*
- *The complaint was dealt with straight way and with the right amount of reaction without sweeping it under the rug*
- *Social worker knows what I want and listened. Better communication with sister.*
- *Everything*
- *Everything went really well*
- *I got peace and quiet*
- *I found advice on university and learned what I'm entitled to with moving forward, I also gained information for the taster flat and managed to put my name down for the list.*
- *I got more listened to*

### Could your advocate have done anything different?

- *No (this response was given by 20 young people)*
- *Not left or left gradually*
- *No she's done everything very very well and been extremely kind to me*
- *I think they just need to keep going and talk about our complaint to make them understand how frustrated we are aswell and see how they can make it easy for us*