



Sandwell Advocacy

Annual Report 2021 – 2022



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A message from our chair



As we close another year I remain in awe of Sandwell Advocacy and what we have been able to achieve, each year more successful than the last. The pandemic may be over but the long term consequences are still being felt by the people of Sandwell. They have received continued support from us in a myriad of ways, including some new programmes and this report outlines and demonstrates how we succeeded in delivering quality advocacy to Sandwell people.

This has all been made possible by our fantastic team led by our CEO Dave Bradshaw. I want to thank you all for the professional and consistently high standards you have demonstrated and your innovation and compassion for the people you advocate for. You always make everyone that comes to us feel like they have a stake in the future of the organisation and you always value their voice and contribution. Thank you so much.

Over the decades that we have worked in Sandwell one thing has always stood out for me and

that is the quality and dedication of our wonderful Volunteers. We have been truly blessed. You have given others your time and energy to improve the lives of others when they needed it most. Thank you for supporting us and the people of Sandwell.

I would like to thank my fellow Trustees for giving their time to support our CEO in the management of this fantastic organisation. We are grateful for all the wonderful management and creative skills you bring to Sandwell Advocacy that helps us continue and remain sustainable going forward.



Chief Executive Officer's review



The period between April 2021 and March 2022 saw us gradually emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic as we looked to return to some semblance of normality. As with most organisations in the voluntary sector, Sandwell Advocacy had faced an extremely challenging time. But, as ever, the team responded to whatever came their way with great resilience, creativity and dedication. It is a true indication of how resourceful and innovative a team of people can be when faced with their greatest challenges, as ever, the team at Sandwell Advocacy were not to be found wanting.

As things began to recover from COVID lockdowns we implemented a structured reset and recovery plan to make sure we were well prepared for a return to what was referred to as the 'new normal'. Whilst we were keen to get back to more traditional face to face operations we incorporated some of the more innovative ways of engaging with those we support that we had implemented during lockdown.

The board of trustees continued to undertake a significant amount of

work strategically on our governance arrangements and business planning. We agreed and put in place a Business Plan for 2020-2023 with clearly set vision, objectives and strategies for taking the organisation forward. As part of this work we were keen to build on the work we had completed on our trustee recruitment strategy and the development of a Trustee Welcome Pack. We were therefore delighted to welcome Leah Haynes to the Board as part of our on-going recruitment strategy.



Thank you everyone for another wonderful year.

Can I take this opportunity to thank all of our funders, stakeholders, fund raisers and supporters who provide us with vital funds to enable us to keep supporting the people of Sandwell. Thank you everyone for another wonderful year.

Lesley Donnelly
Chair of Trustees

Sadly we bid farewell to two long-standing Board members in Andy Lester and Jodie McCaughan during this time, both departed with our best wishes.

Our Advocacy Project for Young Carers continued throughout this period. We are grateful to Sandwell Children's Trust for funding this much needed project for children, young people and their families for a further 12 months. Helen Charles, Juanita Williams and Sharon Wilson continued their work on this project providing one to one person-centred advocacy support. We continued to enhance the one to one model of support through a number of engagement events and activities with groups of children and young people including:

- Virtual Talk Therapy Workshops.
- Balloon crafting workshops.
- Engaged with Healthwatch Sandwell as part of their Carers Consultation.
- Healthy Eating and Cooking sessions in partnership with Ideal for All.

The team focussed on a targeted campaign of actively promoting the service and developing closer links with a number of local schools throughout this period. This proved hugely successful and as a result we were able to set up outreach advocacy surgeries and attend a number of parent's evenings.

Our Adult Advocacy Support Service was arguably worst impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic but continued against very difficult odds utilising a range of virtual methods. Carol Turley delivered this project to support individuals in nursing/residential care, Extra Care Scheme's and Day Centre settings using creative and flexible approaches within government COVID-19 guidelines. Gradually physical visits to care providers were able to resume as restrictions eased, which made way for face to face interventions where residents were given a vital opportunity to share their experiences and have a voice.

Our Sandwell Advocacy Voice and Empowerment (SAVE) Project funded by BBC Children in Need continued into its final year of the current funding cycle.

The SAVE Project provides an advocacy, enabling and support service for children and young people who are experiencing poor mental health and/or behavioural issues that empowers them to ensure that their rights are respected and their views and wishes are heard at all times. Helen Charles and Nazia Yousaf provided independent advocacy support on SAVE. Continuation funding was sought from Children in Need towards the end of this period and we were delighted when a further 12 month extension had been confirmed. We bid farewell to Nazia Yousaf during this period and Sharon Wilson replaced her as Independent Advocate.

Our Voices and Choices Project funded by the Lloyds Bank Foundation entered its final year of the current funding cycle during this period. Linsey Robinson provided advocacy support for older people with their care and accommodation issues. This project supports older people with long-term health conditions to:

- Ensure that older people wishing to remain/maintain living independently in their

own homes with appropriate support are able to do so.

- Ensure that older people and their families/carers/friends who are considering options around a move into care provider accommodation have access to relevant information and are supported to make informed decisions about their care options.

It was extremely disappointing that, despite great efforts to secure continuation funding for this much needed project, we were not successful in securing the funding required. It was therefore with great sadness that we had to say farewell to Linsey Robinson as she moved on to pastures new.

We built on the magnificent success of our Sandwell Together telephone befriending service throughout this period. This service had been established at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic and whilst the direct impact of the pandemic diminished as we emerged from lockdown, volunteer befrienders continued to provide emotional support for people who remained isolated and lonely. In spite

of the relaxation of lockdown measures loneliness and isolation would remain and residents more generally were still in need of a listening ear and someone to talk to. Juanita Williams continued in her role as Volunteer Development Officer and implemented a more structured approach to involving volunteers in the service including: volunteer recruitment, volunteer training and on-going volunteer support. We commissioned an independent evaluation of this service which took place over July and August of this year and published towards the end of 2021. The evaluation highlighted the many positive aspects of the service, not only for those who received the calls, but also for the volunteers themselves who reported on the significant benefits that they got from their role.

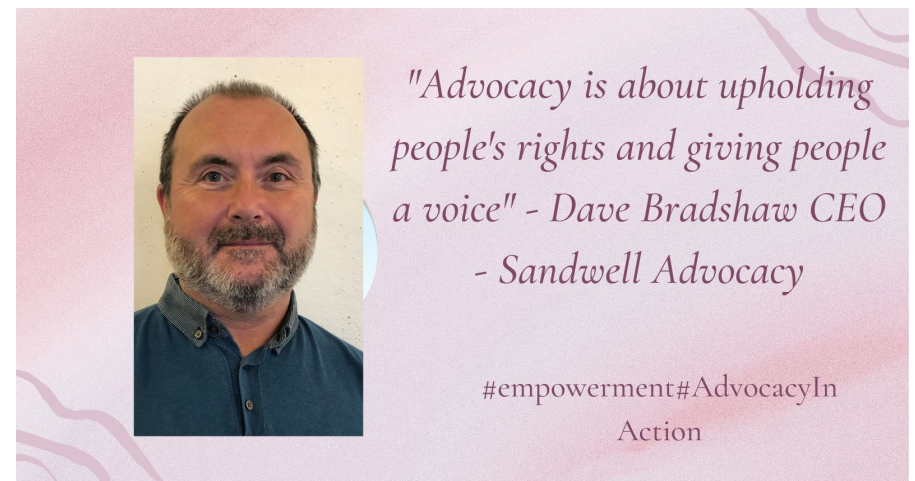
Our Caring for Carers project continued throughout this period supporting carers through loss and bereavement in Birmingham. This work is delivered in partnership with a number of local health, social care and well-being providers as part of the Communities in Sync consortium. In

addition to the one to one support provided by this service, 'Compassionate Communities' group work was also introduced. This provides training to enable individuals to become Compassionate Communities Connectors to improve social connectedness and improve the wellbeing of people in their communities.

In February of 2021 we welcomed Sharon Jenkins as our new Business Support Officer. Sharon provided valuable administrative support to the staff team throughout our many projects. Sharon has become a vital part of the team and brings immense skills and experience to the role.

Steve Leighton continued to manage our finances throughout this period, including payroll and budget monitoring. Steve continued to provide management accounts and cash flow projections at meetings of our trustees.

We continued to offer student social worker placements throughout this period. Placements commence in September and continue for 70



days. This year we welcomed Anika Khalid to the team who joined us on placement. Anika subsequently remained with us following her placement to provide paid sessional work. We were also able to offer a work experience placement as part of the government's Kickstart Scheme. This scheme provided a paid work experience placement for 25 hours per week for a total of six months to provide work experience and improve the employability of young unemployed individuals. We were pleased to welcome Halimah Shazady to the team as part of this scheme, Halimah went on to secure full time employment following on from her placement with us.

A special mention goes out to the team of volunteers who devote their time and commitment to supporting our work. Volunteers have always been a cornerstone of Sandwell Advocacy without which we truly could not function as an organisation. We really do recognise and appreciate the time, skills and experience that our volunteers bring to Sandwell Advocacy. I would like to formally acknowledge the work of all our volunteers for making a meaningful difference to people's lives.

Dave Bradshaw
Chief Executive Officer

I am still a Young Carer...

“I can’t change the direction of the wind. But can adjust my sails” – Anonymous

The quote above speaks volumes for the thousands of children and young people who selflessly take on a caring responsibility for a loved one.

Covid and the aftermath changed the way services had to be delivered going forward. As an organisation, we too had to adjust in the way we engaged with young carers. Positive interaction became more valuable and precious than diamonds and gold. Schools were still out; home visits still not an option – meeting face to face not an option full stop.

As an organisation, delivering a very sensitive service contact became even more vital, so we had to think differently and adjust rapidly to the circumstances we all found ourselves in.

Young carer: “Thank you for the tablet. It has helped me knowing that I can contact you when I

do not have any credit on my phone. I know you have been messaging me and have called but I do not have any money to buy credit. I can take part in the sessions as well and do not have to rely on mum’s phone. I can even do my schoolwork on it. I’m really happy about it”

Our children, young people and families required even more reassurance as they struggled to adapt, conform and protect themselves and loved ones. Despite all the barriers and obstacles, we found ways to communicate effectively so that vital messages could be passed on and acted on.

Parent of young carer: “I’ve got him to book his Covid Jab.





We did not know he could have it because he is a young carer until you told him. He asked me to tell you thanks from him too. I cannot wait until we are all done and dusted...”

Support Officers, schools, social workers and pastoral teams expressed their relief and appreciation that our presence at important decision making meetings was still possible.

Children, young people and their families were reassured that we were still there for them in an advocacy capacity, they were never on their own.

Parent Support Officer to the advocate: *“I was so relieved to see you in the CP meeting that you are still working with the (B) family. Everything had gone so quiet I was hoping that they still had you so you could keep a watchful eye on them”*

So how do we party at Christmas? Well we host an interactive virtual party with a difference. It was a relief to see the smiles on the faces of the children and young people as they interacted, socialised from a distance having fun and being able to express themselves.

Young Carer: *“I really enjoyed the Christmas forum, activity and quiz. It was nice to change my name in the group to what I wanted it to be, it was funny. It is so hard stopping in and not being with friends. You helped me to have some time, it was also good as at the end, you gave us time to talk about how we are feeling and if we had any worries now we have broken up from school”*

It goes without saying despite all the struggles, changes, barriers, fears and concerns, we managed to maintain a safe environment for our children, young people and their families as we all adapted to a changing world.

Voices and Choices

Into the second year of the pandemic and Covid-19 restrictions when, (M), a 61 year old male had received information that he was going to be evicted from his social housing home, due to anti-social behaviour. (M) has mental health difficulties and was deemed vulnerable; he had difficulty understanding the impact that his behaviour had on other tenants. He required a smaller property but felt reluctant to move. The advocate spent an extensive amount of time with (M), building a rapport and trusting relationship.

In conjunction with one of our volunteer advocates, the advocate spoke on his behalf, and engaged with the anti-social behaviour team and housing support team. Evidence was gathered from his GP and other professionals regarding the gentleman's needs. The information was presented to the housing and anti-social behaviour team to support the decision to allow him to remain in the property, until suitable accommodation was found.

“I am very pleased with the service. I give Linsey 10 out of 10. Before contacting Sandwell Advocacy, I'd been pushed from pillar to post – Linsey resolved that”

“No-one will listen to me, please help me!”

(K) had difficulties with her mental and physical health. She was a carer for her husband who had physical and mental health difficulties. He would turn carers away and when (K) was no longer able to care for her husband he was placed into a temporary care home. (K) was a hoarder and the home was a health hazard. She alleged her husband had verbally and physically abused her; she was scared and felt that no-one would believe her; she feared for her own safety should he return. The advocate, inviting the social workers for both parties, arranged meetings for



these concerns to be raised. (K) had not reported the incidents of domestic abuse, it was her word against her husbands. (K) was supported by the advocate to engage with the mental health team and her GP. The advocate asked for information to be provided regarding the husbands conduct at the care home he was residing in. It was reported that he was verbally and physically aggressive to care staff and would often refuse to receive care. Although there was nothing that they could do to stop the husband returning home, a risk assessment, psychiatric assessment and a safety plan would need to be put in place before his return could be considered. An assessment was conducted and a decision made for him to remain in care.

“Your help and support has been absolutely fantastic”

Many people facing having to make decisions about moving into a care provider setting do so as a matter of urgency and with limited or no information regarding what is available to suit their needs. This can be a bewildering and frustrating experience. Research indicates that once a person moves into care accommodation they are unlikely to move again so it is important that people make the right decision. We ensure we are actively involved in this process and that people have voice, choice and control when it comes to making important accommodation decisions.

Adult Advocacy Support Service



This unique independent advocacy service is now in its 9th year, and has been commissioned by Sandwell MBC since 2013, as part of their monitoring of standards of care.

Our staff and volunteers visit a variety of care settings within the Sandwell area including; care homes, day centres, extra care housing schemes and women's refuges.

We listen, empower and enable people to have a voice and contribute in the completion of a monitoring questionnaire relating to their care services. Information is collated and reported as feedback to the local authority's Contracts and Monitoring Team.

We can provide information, signpost and make referrals to other services. We also follow up any actions raised during our visits. This could also include raising any concerns with the appropriate adult social care department as part of the safeguarding agenda.

This past year has seen a gradual transition from remote working to the return of physical visits to care providers. It has involved even closer working with care providers, to ensure that this has been achieved in the most careful and considered way, and in line with all guidance and requirements.

The Adult Advocacy Support Service resumed activities in January 2021, after a lengthy period of suspension. As care providers remained closed to visitors at this time due to Covid-19, remote working was required moving forward. This was a challenging time, utilising other methods to reach out and gain feedback from those in receipt of care services. This included postal methods, Zoom meetings and telephone calls to residents in

care homes and service users in extra care housing schemes. This proved to work very well in some instances but could never replace the benefits of face-to-face visits.

However, in August 2021, the first steps were made to resume physical visits to care providers. This was achieved with robust risk assessments in place, lots of co-operation and communication with care providers and the willingness of residents and service users. Those first few tentative steps back to visits were so positive, even in a world of wearing PPE and social distancing, in terms of the sheer willingness of people to want to talk to someone. It was evident that many craved the opportunity to talk to someone from outside their immediate circle of contacts and were assured they had a voice and that their feedback was so important.

“Yes because we can tell you if there’s something we’re not happy with.”

Many had endured months of isolation in their rooms, with limited activities, or day-to-day services such as hairdressing, chiropody services etc. taking place. Our visits have taken place in visiting pods or other areas made available to us including hairdressing salons!

“Yes I think it’s excellent. It’s a wonderful thing.”

“It’s nice to talk about what’s on my mind.”

The service continues to work closely with other projects delivered by Sandwell Advocacy, in particular Sandwell Together and Voices and Choices and referrals are made to other services as appropriate.

We are delighted that visits have resumed as part of this very important service to residents living in care settings in Sandwell.

Carol Turley
Advocacy Support Officer





SAVE!
SANDWELL ADVOCACY VOICE & EMPOWERMENT

A voice for young people who need support with mental health or behavioural issues

Sandwell Advocacy provides independent advocacy throughout Sandwell, promoting rights, voice and empowerment

Tel: 0121 520 8070
Email: sandwelladvocacy@btconnect.com
For more information go to: www.sandwelladvocacy.org
Follow us on Twitter @YCadvocacy
Charity number 1019779

Supported by **BBC Children in Need**

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SANDWELL ADVOCACY

SAVE – a voice for young people



This project provides independent advocacy for children and young people aged 5 -18 who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health and or behaviour issues. Funded by BBC Children in Need.

Three years into the project and it continues to provide a structured assessment process for every child/young person referred into the service. It is still received and highly valued by parents, children, young people, professionals and schools who access the service.

students since receiving their support. Students have grown massively in confidence and this is evident both socially and academically. The advocates communicate with me excellently and our students are always asking me when they are next in to see them. Their service is faultless and I cannot thank them enough for their ongoing support."

"Our students at the Academy receive regular visits from the advocates. The support they offer our students is excellent. The advocates build a great relationship with them and the ongoing services they provide is really appreciated by our students, particularly staff and myself. The advocates show that they genuinely care for our students and are always there to allow students to offload and offer advice. I have noticed a big change in our

Feedback from a Welfare Officer at a local Academy

Children and young people have had to adjust and cope with situations outside their control as we still lived in a world impacted by COVID-19. It is no wonder their mental health has declined leading to negative behavioural issues as they genuinely struggle in what



has become an alien world. This project has enabled us to engage and reach these children and young people and provided them with a space to explore their emotions and voice their concerns.

"I appreciate what you have done for me; you listened to me and encouraged me to speak up for myself. As long as I self-harm and worry my mom, people will be watching me and it upsets mom, I will have counselling and hopefully, learn to live with what happened to me. Only I

can make the changes. Thank you for helping, it is not going to be easy, I know that. I think I am always going to have to support my brother and mom and they are going to have to do things for me. It is just how it is. It was good talking to you when I was struggling with my feelings, it helped me to say how I felt, and it was easier to talk to mom and the doctors after I had spoken to you. You gave me the confidence to talk for myself"

Young person's feedback

Sandwell Together Supporting one another



The Sandwell Together Service was originally started as the country entered the COVID-19 pandemic, when the organisation worked in partnership the Sandwell MBC and SCVO (Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations) to provide telephone befriending to the most vulnerable and isolated residents in the borough.

For the year 2021 – 2022, as the country moves out of the restrictions of the pandemic, there is still very much a need for the service and those we have supported are varied in both age and circumstances.

When those who are referred into Sandwell Together are initially contacted by the Volunteer Development Officer, many express feelings of frustration, loneliness and that they had been forgotten by society. Many also stated that social clubs and community activities that had been closed by the pandemic lock down, where yet to resume and there was a strong sense of there being an absence of choice and a process of disempowerment, especially for the most elderly of

our partners. In addition, many had lost self-confidence and some had developed mental issues such as agoraphobia during the pandemic, and from speaking to these people on a regular basis it became obvious that the pandemic has had a long lasting effect, both physically and emotionally.

As the time moved on referrals we received were predominantly elderly residents of Sandwell, many have lost their partners or have no children who are local. Many of the new referrals told us that as their old clubs and community activities were not being reopened, they had not only lost a source of friendship but had also lost the organic mutual support that these events provided.





We continue to recruit and train volunteers for this service. We organised an event to mark National Volunteers Week where most of the volunteers got together over tea, coffee and food to discuss their various experiences and how the calls also helped them with their self-confidence and emotional well-being. This was a significant event as it was the first time that many of the volunteers had met each other face to face.

Evaluations actioned throughout the year have demonstrated

that although telephone befriending is perceived as a light touch approach to people's lives, the service very much has a massive impact on our partners lives, with many stating that it is a life line to the outside world and that for many, they might only speak to some-one once a week.

A steady flow of referrals are still being received on a weekly basis, from many health professionals and the service continues to provide a vital help line for so many people who still suffer from social isolation.

“Sandwell Together has been an absolute life saver, I don’t know how I would have coped without the regular calls.”
Beneficiary bereaved during lockdown.

“Firstly, I think it’s a great service and I have had some amazing chats. I have spoken with people that I wouldn’t usually cross paths with, which has been a truly eye-opening experience.” Volunteer

“I really have enjoyed being part of it. I have found it really rewarding. I enjoyed knowing I am helping someone.” Volunteer

“Talking about everyday things with people so that they feel listened to and not so alone.” Volunteer

“It was a very quick turnaround between referral and support starting.” Referrer

Why is it important to support bereaved carers?



The father of (B's) son was diagnosed with terminal cancer. (B) was also supporting her mother (F) to care for her grandmother. (F) did not want support from the bereavement service as she felt she had enough support from her family. During this time, the Wellbeing and Bereavement officer would speak to (F&K) independently and together. Both were referred for bereavement counselling alongside regular support from the officer. She was supported to talk through her issues with the manager of her work place, as she felt pressured to return to work; she did not feel ready to face people outside of her family unit and believes if she returned she would become very unwell. Her officer has encouraged her to be open and honest with her doctor; she was provided a doctor's note for one month. She feels relieved that at this moment in time she does not have the worry of forcing herself to return to her place of work and can focus on what she needs for herself.

Comment from (F) – “I know that you were helping my daughter and I felt I didn't need the support from you. I am glad you kept in contact with me. I just didn't realise it at the time that I needed someone.”

Most people will become a carer at some point in their life for someone who has a short- term illness or long-term illness. Carers can often become disconnected from their communities and lose touch with their friendship groups.

Carers can have anticipatory grief when the person they care for has a terminal illness. When

the cared-for person dies, many carers become socially isolated which often causes many other issues (e.g. deterioration of health).

Sandwell Advocacy have been an integral part of the CIS run bereavement and wellbeing service in Birmingham since its inception in late 2018; providing two members of staff



for the service which delivers bereavement support to carers who have lost their loved one.

In the past 12 months, we have seen the project continue to grow, with referrals coming through from all parts of Birmingham. The project was also handpicked by commissioners to help deliver the Compassionate Communities programme in Perry Barr and Ladywood. This focuses on training people in frontline roles (e.g. hairdressers, pub staff, and library staff) to better support bereaved members of the public.

The team have been busy setting up training sessions throughout the two target areas, and a number of sessions have been delivered, which is in addition to managing their personal caseloads of bereaved carers. The project has also completed a number of Living Memory booklets for bereaved carers which are created by Geoff Broadway. These Living Memories have been well received by the ex-carers and their families, and for many it has been an important part of the grieving process. The project has recently been

extended for a further 12 months and we look forward to working with more carers over the next year.

Comment from (B) – We all deal with bereavement and loss differently. No-one feels the same, it's personal, and how you deal with it can change minute by minute.

I can laugh, cry, get angry and frustrated, feel abandoned all within a few minutes of one another. I have found that if you give yourself time, speak to other, accept the help when it is offered, go back to feeling rubbish, all of this is normal, I have been told. To talk is to heal, life may not be the same but there is still enjoyment to be had. Take it at your own pace, I am!

Thank you for all of your support.



"There is so much to say but I will end here with a massive thank you, you are making a massive difference in people's lives and also supporting other professionals like myself to do their work."

Funding and Finance

We gratefully acknowledge the financial contribution received from a variety of sources throughout 2021/2022, without which our valuable work could not be delivered or sustained. Funding, grants and donations were most gratefully received from the following:

- Sandwell Children's Trust
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- BBC Children in Need
- Birmingham City Council
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- SMBC Community
- Partnership Innovation Fund
- SCVO Vision 2030 Community Grant
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Alfred Haines Charitable Trust
- Tipton Town Team
- The Asda Foundation
- Tipton Civic Society
- The Tipton and Coseley Building Society Charitable Foundation
- Baron Davenport's Charity

Sandwell Advocacy Financial Summary 2021/2022

Income for the year totalled	£230,445
Expenditure for the year was	£229,464
Fund balance at 31/3/21 was	£117,185



Kirsty Kemp
Independent Advocate -
Sandwell Advocacy

“

Advocacy to me is for people to
be empowered to be able to
express views & wishes

”

#AAW22

EVEN IF YOU HAVE A VOICE IT DOESN'T ALWAYS
MEAN THAT PEOPLE LISTEN TO YOU OR TAKE YOUR
NEEDS INTO ACCOUNT. ADVOCACY TO ME MEANS
THAT THERE IS SOMEONE WHO WILL STAND WITH
YOU, ENSURE THAT YOUR VOICE IS NOT ONLY HEARD
BUT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT; ENSURING THAT YOUR
RIGHTS ARE UPHOLD.

**Helen Charles - Senior
Independent Advocate -
Sandwell Advocacy**

#AAW22

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