

# Sandwell Advocacy

Annual Report  
2023 – 2024



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# Chair's Statement



Every year I am invited to address you, to tell you about Sandwell Advocacy. I never tire of telling everyone what an amazing organisation it is. We are a small organisation with a large reach.

I am astounded by what we can deliver to the wonderful people of Sandwell. We have a reputation that is second to none. I get to hear feedback from the people of Sandwell, they tell us how what we do has been life changing for some of them. This makes me so proud of our amazing team led by our CEO Dave Bradshaw.

Operating successfully in a diverse and economically deprived area like Sandwell means we need a flexible and diverse skill set, and our team certainly have that. This means we can reach out to people from truly diverse backgrounds to meet their needs and support them in many unique ways. We are always seeking new programmes to deliver to support vulnerable adults and children. This year is no different. The team have worked hard to seek new sources of funding and deliver programmes that the people of Sandwell desperately need.

The team at Sandwell Advocacy engage in activities ranging

from management of projects, professional advocacy, volunteer recruitment and management, through to fund raising. Our staff demonstrate every day that this is more than a job and they genuinely care about those they advocate for or provide support in a myriad of ways. Our beneficiaries are at the heart of everything we do as an organisation. Thank you, Dave and our wonderful team, for everything you do for the people of Sandwell and sustaining us for yet another successful year.

We are a successful organisation, and this is made possible by our fantastic volunteers who support our beneficiaries during difficult



and challenging periods in their lives. We are grateful to them for giving their time to work with our professional advocates and for delivering advocacy and befriending to those we support. Thank you so much!

I would also like to thank my fellow trustees who provide management and support, alongside our CEO, to Sandwell Advocacy. I appreciate all the time that you give us, ensuring

our continued sustainability, best professional practices and decision making that is always in the best interests of Sandwell Advocacy. Finally, I would like to thank all the organisations who fund us, those who raise money for us and those who support us. Thank you!

**Lesley Donnelly**  
Chair of Trustees

# Chief Executive Officer's Review



I am pleased to present our Annual Report for the period between April 2023 and March 2024, this was another busy year for Sandwell Advocacy. This year was particularly significant for Sandwell Advocacy because we celebrated our 30th Anniversary. We are naturally immensely proud that we have been providing advocacy throughout Sandwell for so long. This is testimony to our resilience and expertise and demonstrates that we continue to ensure that people's voices are heard and their rights are safeguarded.

We continued our efforts to recruit new members to our Management Board and this year we were delighted to welcome Yvonne Murray. Yvonne brings with her a wealth of experience working in the charity sector and will be an asset to the Board. Our Trustees are pivotal in shaping our governance structures and playing a key role in guiding our strategic developments. In terms of furthering our objectives going forward, our Business Plan was completed and agreed at the beginning of 2023 and subsequently set out our plans and vision for the next three years.

We held our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in November of this year,

combined with our Annual General Meeting. The event was well attended and included the screening of a film we made where members of the team spoke about what was important to them about advocacy and the work we do. We also organised an 'advocacy quiz' which made the occasion fun and enjoyable. And who can forget the lovely vegan cakes that were made especially for the occasion complete with Sandwell Advocacy edible logos!

Our Advocacy Project for Young Carers continued during this period. We are grateful to Sandwell Children's Trust for funding this project for children, young people and their families

for a further 12 months. Helen Charles (Senior Independent Advocate) and Sharon Wilson (Independent Advocate) continued to provide one to one person-centred advocacy support. Additionally, we also organised some group activities as we continued to engage and consult with our User-Engagement Group. A hugely popular well-being and activities workshop was arranged during the summer, and we were delighted to partner with 'Believe to Achieve' to deliver this. A further event was held over the Christmas period at the Dorothy Parkes Centre where children and young people, along with parents and carers, came together to take part in a gift making workshop, we combined this with another of our consultation exercises. We thank the staff and volunteers who were involved with these initiatives.

The Advocacy Feedback Support Service was now grant funded by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. Carol Turley (Advocacy Support Officer) delivered this service in Nursing, Residential, Extra Care settings and those who attend Day Centre Units throughout Sandwell. This service enables residents in these settings to have a voice, share their experiences and give opinions as

to what they would like to see happen in their care settings. We acknowledge the support of a small team of trained volunteers who have assisted us on the delivery of this service.

**'And who can forget the lovely vegan cakes that were made especially for the occasion complete with Sandwell Advocacy edible logos!'**

The Sandwell Advocacy Voice and Empowerment (SAVE) Project saw an end to funding from BBC Children in Need, we remained committed to the continuation of this project which has subsequently been funded by a number of grant making Trusts. 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, it empowers them to ensure that their rights are respected and their views and wishes are heard. Our independent advocates Helen Charles and Sharon Wilson provided person-centred support for children and young people on this project.



We moved into year two of our Voices and Choices project funded by the Albert Gubay Foundation. Helen Charles, our Senior Independent Advocate has taken the lead on this project, supported by members of the team and volunteers.

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 can 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.**

Our Sandwell Together telephone befriending service went from strength to strength throughout this period. This service recruits and trains volunteer befrienders to provide emotional support and a listening ear for lonely and isolated residents of Sandwell. Our Business Support Officer,

Sharon Jenkins, took temporary responsibility for managing this service until we welcomed Louise Jones as our Volunteer Co-ordinator in September 2023. Louise quickly got to grips with all aspects of managing this project with specific attention on:

- **Formulating a volunteer recruitment strategy.**
- **Dealing with volunteer enquiries and managing the application process.**
- **Promoting the service to a broad range of stakeholders.**
- **Reviewing our volunteer policies and handbook.**
- **Training volunteer befrienders.**
- **Managing referrals into the service and matching these with available volunteers.**
- **On-going support and supervision for volunteers.**

We were particularly successful with our volunteer recruitment efforts during this period, this has enabled us to expand the range and delivery of this service and increase the support we provide to lonely and isolated residents of Sandwell.

Our Caring for Carers project, funded by Birmingham City Council, continued throughout this year providing support to carers who were experiencing 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. Jade Vaughan continued in her role as Health and Wellbeing Officer until she left us for pastures new as this project ended in September 2023. This project was subsequently replaced by the Birmingham Bereavement and Wellbeing Service, again funded by Birmingham City Council. The support provided was similar to that of the Caring for Carers project but was extended to include anybody who was experiencing loss and bereavement. Helen Charles took over from Jade to deliver this service as Senior Bereavement Officer.

Our Parents Advocacy, Guidance and Empowerment (PAGE) Project continued into its second year. The PAGE Project is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund to support parents with a learning disability and/or autism who are subject to, or at risk of interventions from Children's Services, by offering a range

of support options including independent advocacy and independent living skills training. We worked closely with Ideal for All, another Communities in Sync (CIS) partner organisation, to deliver this project. PAGE aims to ensure that parents with a learning disability understand proceedings, that they explore their options and avenues and that they are placed at the heart of the decision-making process. Kirsty Kemp continued in her capacity as Independent Advocate.

**We were particularly successful with our volunteer recruitment efforts during this period, this has enabled us to expand the range and delivery of this service and increase the support we provide to lonely and isolated residents of Sandwell.**

We commissioned Brand Creative Media to upgrade our website during this period to produce a much more modern user-friendly site. Work was completed towards the end of this period, and we were delighted with the final product. The website has

now streamlined and improved accessibility to the range of support we provide by adding all relevant information and referral links into all our projects.

Sharon Jenkins continued to provide administrative support to the staff team throughout our many projects. Sharon is often the first point of contact for callers and visitors to Sandwell Advocacy, she manages these with confidence and expertise. 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 year, including payroll and budget monitoring. Steve provides management accounts and cash flow projections for our Board meetings.

We continued to offer student social worker placements throughout this year. Placements commence in September for 70 days. This year we welcomed Yumna Hussein to the team who joined us and successfully completed her placement.

Of course, we cannot ignore the fantastic contribution provided by our dedicated team of volunteers.

We would not be able to function in the way that we do without the commitment of our volunteers who freely donate their valuable time, skills and experiences. We recognise and value the contribution of all our volunteers and value the difference they make to so many lives of the people they support.

I would finally like to express my appreciation and thanks to our accountants Neal and Co Business Services Limited for their support, advice and guidance.

We will continue to ensure that independent advocacy is made available and accessible for those who are socially excluded and marginalised within our community. Central to the core value of advocacy is the desire to stand up for the rights and wishes of those who have been ignored, sidelined or discriminated against – as ever, Sandwell Advocacy remains committed to this value.

**Dave Bradshaw**  
**Chief Executive Officer.**

# I am still a Young Carer...



**The negative impact that caring responsibilities can have on the physical and mental well-being of those who undertake the awesome task of caring for a loved one are well documented. Here at Sandwell Advocacy we take pride in making sure that advocacy is at the forefront of everything we do when supporting children and young people to navigate some of these issues.**

**We are passionate about supporting children and young people to understand their rights and options, make informed choices and decisions about themselves and their caring roles, and to be heard when they are facing challenges within educational, health and social care settings.**

## Case Study One

H is 16, fresh out of high school and has started college. He has recently taken on more of a caring role due to his father's health deteriorating. H has deadlines to meet at college, he has issues with his finances and is dealing with a broken washing machine. With his advocates support they approached the pastoral team at his college, his deadlines were extended, his father had a care assessment, and the advocate successfully applied to BBC Children in Need Emergency

Essentials Programme for a new washing machine. Advocacy support enabled H to realise he was not on his own, that some of his issues could be resolved, and that he didn't need to keep all of his worries to himself.

## Case Study Two

W lives with her mother; she is her main carer. W's life revolves around her caring responsibilities and school. She has very few friends and her mother worries that W is not socialising with children of her own age.





W worries about her mother's illness and what might happen when she leaves her alone; this has not only affected her friendships, but her schoolwork and attainment have suffered.

W struggles with her self-esteem and self-confidence. Her advocate liaised with her mother, supported W to participate in our young carers activity days and worked

with W to identify how she could spend quality time with her friends whilst being able to call her mom to check she is okay.

Like many young people in the same position, taking a break from their caring responsibilities for H and W is often a luxury they can ill afford. Whilst advocacy support is often provided in a one-to-one person-centred way, there are a

number of other ways in which our interventions can be effective and powerful. Sometimes the element of peer support and group activities will significantly enhance our one-to-one support, young people we have supported have told us that they value this as both an exercise in taking part in activities along with sharing experiences and emotional support with others in a similar situation.

Following consultation with the young people we support we identified that they would like to get involved in sports and the outdoors as a way of improving resilience, enhancing social skills, boosting self-confidence and self-esteem while injecting an element of fun!



**Comments made by young people and volunteers:**

**“I think that it’s fun here. I struggle talking to new people however you all are nice. I like the different activities you do. You are very nice people”**

**“Wow it has been a long time since I have run around like I have today. It’s been great to see everyone engaged & working together”**

## Volunteer Comments

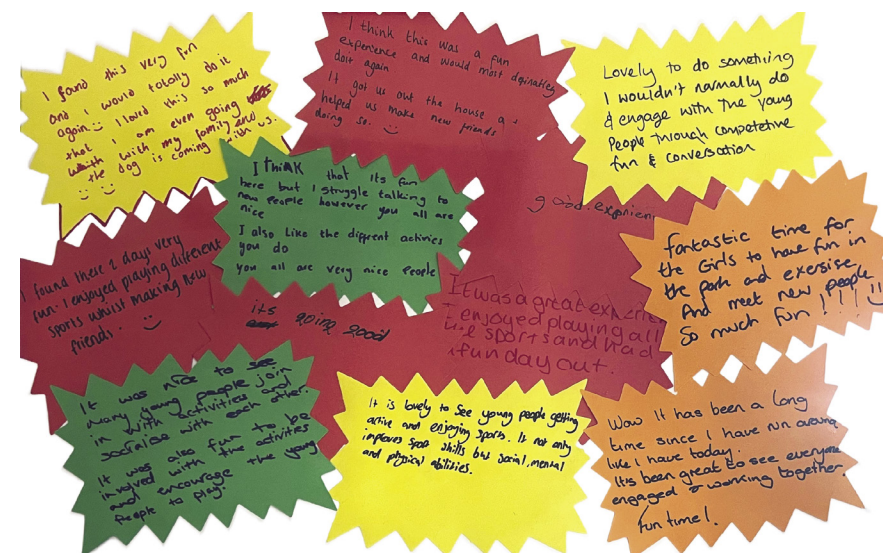
As Christmas approached, we consulted once more with the young people we support regarding what activities they felt they would like to get involved with. Most were keen to come together once again to make friends, take a break and share emotional support. Young carers and their extended family were invited to take part in Christmas gift making combined with another of our User Engagement Forums. Their creative minds flowed, new friendships formed, there was rekindling of old friendships and of course the 'laughter bug'.

**The comments made by those who attended were most favourable:**

**“I enjoyed decorating the mugs, and we get to keep them”**

**"My son and I enjoyed mixing the scrubs, decorating the jars and spending time together"**  
**"Enjoyed the hand scrub, mugs and tea lights"**

**“Definitely the mugs were best, you can express yourself, it’s personal”**





# Advocacy Feedback Support Service



The Advocacy Feedback Support Service provides the opportunity for adults receiving care services, in the Sandwell area, to provide feedback. The service has been commissioned by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council since 2013, and forms part of their monitoring of standards of care.

It is a privilege to have delivered this service for another year for adults living in residential and nursing homes, extra care housing schemes and attending day centres across the Sandwell Borough. During our visits we listen to peoples' views, ensure people have a voice and ensure they feel confident they have a say in their services and can do so confidentially.

**"Getting things from the horse's mouth."**

Residents Comments

Staff members and a team of trained volunteers provide support to anyone wishing to participate, in the completion of a monitoring questionnaire relating to their care services. The information is collated and reports are submitted

to the Quality and Safety Team at Sandwell Council.

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

Sometimes it is not always possible to speak to the person receiving services for a variety of reasons e.g. where an individual may not have capacity to take part. However, we always welcome views of family members and friends to ensure as many people as possible can contribute to the process.

A family member may well feel they wish to include their comments on behalf of a relative who is unable to do so.

**"I think it's imperative, especially in a care situation, it's even more important."**

**"It's nice the Council takes an interest in us."**

Residents Comments

What is important for one person may be very different to someone else and our questionnaires cover a wide range of areas. Someone may like to have support to continue practicing their faith, another to have the opportunity to take part in a wider range of activities or be able to have a greater choice of meal options. The feedback we receive, (with the person's consent), is discussed with the service provider manager who we also work closely alongside. This ensures a discussion takes place regarding any follow up actions that may be required. Many of the people we talk to are very happy with their services and simply enjoy having the opportunity to tell someone about their positive experiences.

**"You can tell people how you feel about things."**

**"I think it's a good thing if it's followed up."**

Residents Comments

The service is well established within the Sandwell area and it is always so rewarding to hear the feedback we receive which reflects how valued individuals feel and how important they feel the service is.

**"I think it's a fantastic thing to do."**

**"Yes, very important. It makes you realise someone is caring for you."**

**"Yes, if I was being badly treated, I'd want to tell someone."**

Residents Comments

**Carol Turley**  
Advocacy Support Officer

# Birmingham Bereavement and Wellbeing Service



The Bereavement and Wellbeing Service is a consortium of third sector organisations including Sandwell Advocacy, Communities in Sync, Ideal for All, Crossroads and Sandwell African Caribbean Mental Health Foundation. We work together to provide support for Birmingham citizens. The service is part of the Birmingham City Council Prevention and Communities Grant.

During the last 12 months we have seen many changes to the service. The criteria changed from supporting older carers who had lost the person they cared for, to supporting Birmingham citizens aged 18+ who have been bereaved and are struggling with their loss and grief. The changes have led to many more referrals to the service for citizens who need our support.

We provide each citizen with 12 weeks of bespoke one-to-one bereavement sessions to help identify support needs, talk through the loss of their loved one and the thoughts and feelings that are often associated with grief including anger, sadness, guilt and relief. Bereavement officers have supported citizens to integrate back into their local community and provided Information, advice and guidance including referrals

into more specialist services in Birmingham.

## The Living Memory Project

Citizens had the opportunity to create a story of their loved one and of their life together, through the Living Memory part of this service. The information was used alongside a set of their selected photographs, videos, and audio recordings to produce a beautiful, professionally colour printed booklet to keep. These booklets can help keep the memory alive of the person that has passed. Some of these books can be viewed at: <https://communitiesinsync.info/our-services/bbws-3/>

# A Bereavement Journey

D was referred for bereavement support following the death of her husband. His death was quite sudden and under very distressing circumstances. There were no children, and she spent most of her time on her own.

D found his death extremely difficult to process. Her husband was everything to her, he paid the bills, was the head of the household, they had no worries when he was alive; they loved one another so much. It has been extremely difficult to provide the support that D requires.

She has gone from being able to talk quite rationally, to being extremely upset, then to shouting at me and then being quite rude. She was angry that I couldn't bring her husband back, that is all she wanted; she could not see a way forward without him. I became D's soundboard. She offloaded her thoughts and feelings without feeling she was being judged. D is now open to a possible house move and we are looking at supported housing options.

**"Everyone on this wheel I'm on keeps saying what they will do but they don't do anything. You are the bereavement support I want. You let me let off steam and ramble. You are not on the wheel; you are on the outside of it, helping me to get off"**

Comment from D

**Helen Charles**  
Senior Bereavement Officer





## Parent, Advocacy, Guidance and Empowerment



The PAGE project was launched in October 2022. PAGE offers an Independent Advocacy and Independent Living Skills service in Sandwell for parents with a learning disability. The project is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

We adopt a person-centred and outcome focussed approach that provides holistic support. We work closely in partnership with Ideal for All to enable us to deliver this project which is provided by a qualified Independent Advocacy Practitioner from Sandwell Advocacy alongside an Independent Living Skills Officer from Ideal for All.

### The Independent Advocacy Practitioner's key responsibilities include:

- Providing Independent Advocacy support to parents with learning disabilities.
- Managing client caseload and ensure accurate case management and record keeping.
- Providing information, support or signposting to clients, so as to inform or empower individuals on any issues that are affecting them.
- Proactively work with key stakeholders and referral agencies in the promotion of the project and recruitment of participants.
- Advocating for individuals within a variety of meetings relating to their parenting or wider support needs.
- Maintaining up-to-date knowledge of relevant policy, legislation, case law and good practice.
- Working collaboratively with project partners to facilitate participant forums and feedback mechanisms.





**Supporting parents with a learning disability as part of the following processes:**

- **The Early Help process.**
- **Where there is an agreed Child in Need plan.**
- **Where matters have been escalated to a child protection plan and subject to a Section 47 enquiry.**
- **Where matters have progressed to court proceedings.**
- **Where a child or children have been removed and are subject to interim care orders.**

**The Independent Living Skills Officer key responsibilities include:**

- **Undertaking initial assessment of project participants to develop a person-centered independent living skills support plan with tailored goals and outcomes.**
- **Delivering tailored and personalised one-to-one and group independent living skills sessions and training to parents with learning**

**disabilities on both a face-to-face and online basis.**

- **Conducting regular reviews of support including impact assessments of the support being delivered.**
- **Proactively work with Sandwell Advocacy and other key stakeholders and referral agencies in the promotion of the project and recruitment of participants.**
- **Work collaboratively with project partners to facilitate participant forums and feedback mechanisms.**
- **Ensuring all monitoring requirements and relevant policies/procedures relating to Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding are implemented and adhered to.**



## Case Study

Those we have supported have shared that they often feel Children Services do not listen to them, and they get confused about the process they are going through.

C was referred to the PAGE project for Independent Advocacy Support by a local law firm. She was trying to navigate her way through children's services as her child was under an Interim Care Order. There were ongoing care proceedings where C and her partner were being assessed to see if their child could be safely returned to their care. C and her partner have older children who are in Foster Care, they have regular contact with them. During the proceedings C had a Cognitive Functioning Assessment. The result of the assessment confirmed she had cognitive deficits in her verbal reasoning and language skills. C also suffered with poor mental health (anxiety and low moods).

C received regular Advocacy support to attend meetings, court hearings with children services and solicitor visits. Through support and encouragement C was able to build trust in her advocate; she was not often able to let her guard down

and tell someone of her struggles; this was a real turning point for her. She discussed the issue of having a lack of funds to purchase basic essentials and often went without. To help her get through this particularly difficult period the advocate provided a foodbank voucher for her to present at a foodbank close to where she lives. The advocate collected the first one with her as she felt ashamed to be receiving such support.

Ahead of court hearings the advocate would go through the court documents with her, breaking them into sections and explaining the jargon that is so often used in these cases. C began to feel that she had some control over what was taking place and what she wanted for the future. The advocate helped C to express her needs, wants and aspirations to those making the decisions about her child's future. She was more controlled in how she spoke and would take time to stop and think before she responded to questions.

C and her partner took all the opportunities available to them to improve their parenting skills. They completed a parenting programme and actively engaged with mental health services.



C is now accessing a weekly Food Bank Pantry that she was referred to, this in turn is having a positive impact on her finances by keeping within her budget each week.

The family's case has been de-escalated from an Interim Care Order to Child Protection Plan and is now a Child in Need Plan. The child has returned home to be with both parents.

**“You gave me confidence to attend my meetings and in court. I wouldn't have known what was going on**

**if you hadn't explained it to me. You read through my documents and helped me understand them and what was going to happen next. You helped me when I couldn't afford food and other stuff, you never judged. We can now be all together, as a family”**

Comment from C

**Kirsty Kemp**  
Independent Advocacy Practitioner





# Sandwell Together



**The Sandwell Together telephone befriending service was set up in response to the COVID pandemic when many people found themselves lonely and socially isolated. At that time, we worked in partnership with Sandwell MBC and SCVO (Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations) to set up and deliver a telephone befriending service to the most vulnerable and isolated residents in the Borough.**

The pandemic is now over but sadly loneliness and social isolation remain a major issue for many people in Sandwell and this is unlikely to change for the foreseeable future. Sandwell Advocacy remains committed to continuing to provide the Sandwell Together service and this vital lifeline for those it supports.

During the period April 2023 to March 2024, we continued to receive referrals from a range of local health and social care professionals and people also self-referred. Those who access the service are varied in both age and social circumstance although the majority are elderly. The service is delivered by a team of trained volunteers who maintain contact appropriate to individual need on an on-going basis.

The main aim of the service is to maintain a level of contact with those who require it and provide emotional support. This support addresses issues people face as a result of becoming socially isolated such as loneliness, anxiety, depression and fear. By allowing people to talk about their feelings we aim to reduce the impact of loneliness and isolation.

A lot of the people we have supported are housebound for various reasons and they tell us that this service is vital to maintain their contact with the outside world. We are told that they enjoy the weekly call from a friend to discuss any emotional issues they are facing but also current affairs, what's on television or anything else at all!





We have had wonderful feedback from those we support to include:

**‘ \_\_\_\_ is a credit to you, she’s brilliant.’**

**‘... she’s a lovely person, it helps to have someone to speak to.’**

**‘... without \_\_\_\_ I wouldn’t have got to where I am now, she’s built up my confidence, I’d give her 5 stars, a perfect match.’**

**‘... she’s been a great friend to me she always rings and never forgets.... we’ve got a friendship together.... helps me with a lot of things’**

**‘... she’s been a really good help; I’ve been on a journey with her from where I really didn’t want to be here.’**

Sandwell Residents Comments

We are aware that Sandwell Together would be nothing without its volunteers many of whom have supported Sandwell Together since its inception. These volunteers have provided immeasurable support to those they befriend, and we know that they are hugely valued by those they support and by ourselves.

We have been extremely fortunate in being able to recruit a number of new volunteers this year many of whom are already engaged in supporting Sandwell’s residents in their befriending roles.

During Volunteers Week this year (1st -7th June) we attended a number of events to promote

volunteering through Sandwell and its many benefits both to the volunteer and the recipient. We also took advantage of National Befriending week to promote Sandwell Together with the help of SCVO. Whilst Sandwell Together was intended to be a short-term measure to support people through the COVID pandemic there is a continued need, and we have been pleased to continue with the service to build a stronger community with an ability to protect those who find themselves in vulnerable situations.

**Louise Jones**  
**Volunteer Coordinator**





## Sandwell Advocacy Voice and Empowerment



The children and young people who access the SAVE project struggle with their emotional health and wellbeing. Whilst some can manage reasonably well and develop coping mechanisms, for the majority it creates barriers, labels and stigma. The role of an advocate is crucial in supporting these children and young people to attempt to break down some of these barriers.

Our advocates travel the journey with those who access this service through many processes and professionals such as: Child Protection, Child in Need, Child We Care For, Safeguarding, Welfare Officers, and Pastoral Teams. As part of our intervention we make sure that the journey is child focussed and that their rights and wishes are respected and taken into account.

Advocates ensure that discussions and decisions are understood by the child or young person and that they take an active part in the process by ensuring that their voices are heard.

### Case Study 1

M struggles to stay focused, has frequent blackouts, panic attacks, constantly crying, angry outbursts and mood swings. They find it hard to concentrate in lessons and find it difficult to ask for help. They feel the magnitude of work overwhelming and they think they would cope better with smaller chunks of work i.e. workbooks.

The Advocate and M met with the pastoral team and Head of Year regarding measures that could be put into place to assist with learning and alleviate some of the issues they were facing.

The advocacy intervention resulted in a change to his timetable and





The advocate provided one-to-one confidential support. It took a while for V to overcome their barriers and trust the advocate, the process took time and patience. V and the advocate worked together to devise a plan that outlined simple and achievable goals. The advocate was eventually able to build a trusting relationship with V and reassure them that there were options available to try and improve their situation. Over time, the advocate and V eventually started to engage with the school welfare team and in-house counselling sessions were arranged. The advocate also supported V to discuss the

difficulties they were experiencing with their Head of Year, where more realistic academic plan was agreed which focused on the core subjects.

**“I have these voices screaming inside my head. I open my mouth but there are no words coming out, but the screaming continues. I can see an image of a head; mouth open wide with a silent scream. I know it is me, I feel the despair, fear, anger; I am tired”.**

M felt that it was working, they now find it easier to concentrate. The advocate also discussed other options that were available to M that might help to improve their mental health and wellbeing. M subsequently agreed to the advocate making arrangements for them to access therapeutic support. At the conclusion of our intervention M told us that they were feeling much more positive than they had at the outset and that they would not have been able to navigate the pathways they had without the support of the advocate.

## Case Study 2

V was referred for independent advocacy by the Welfare Officer at the academy they attended. It was not an easy relationship to build. V had a mistrust of services and people in general; and was reluctant to let anyone in because of previous negative experiences. V was getting into trouble at school; they would have angry outbursts and display disruptive behaviour and this would lead to being put into isolation. Ironically this was just where they wanted to be, away from anyone and everyone.







V occasionally hears the voices in their head and will approach the Welfare Team for support where necessary. They can still get frustrated but, with the help of therapeutic support, they have learned techniques on how to distract themselves.

**“I am doing so much better now, thanks to all the help and support you have given me. I can seek support when things start to go wrong for me now”.**

Comment from V

**Sharon Wilson**  
Independent Advocate

# Voices and Choices



The Voices and Choices Project works to support older people with long-term health conditions (physical and mental health) who are experiencing issues around their care and accommodation by:

- **Supporting older people wishing to remain/maintain living independently in their own homes, with appropriate support, are able to do so.**
- **Supporting older people in accommodation that is no longer suitable for their needs**
- **Ensuring older people and their families/carers/friends who are considering options around care provider accommodation have access to relevant information and are supported to make informed decisions.**

been on-going for some time, but A had ignored the letters that had been sent and not taken any of the telephone calls he made to her. A had a list of medical conditions that impacted the quality of her life. She felt very isolated and lonely and there were no family around that could support her.

A was known to mental health services following a brain trauma. She had poor mobility, COPD and relied heavily on medication to help her throughout the day.

A consented to her advocate contacting the other professionals supporting her to find out what work had been done and what needed to be done.

## Case Study

A contacted our service for independent advocacy support following her landlord proceeding with a notice of eviction. This had

A and the advocate worked on an action plan and put together a list of priorities. Information was gathered and A admitted she



had purposely withdrawn from important services that had been put in place by her social worker. A felt she was not being listened to, other professionals were ignoring her calls for help, and they were making decisions for her. A understood the importance of having support from an independent advocate, someone who was there for her, not to give advice but provide her with information and ensure that her rights were being upheld.

The advocate called a meeting with the Housing Officer, Social Worker and A. The housing officer explained that the properties

A had looked at did not meet the criteria that they had set for her. The advocate requested information regarding their decision on the level of banding they had placed her in.

Following the meeting the advocate was provided with the information. This did not cover the issue of her poor mobility, poor mental health and would remove her from the area she was born in. The advocate challenged the information, and a new assessment of her needs was carried out.

With the advocates support A was able to view on-line properties and eventually made a bid for a ground floor flat. A had now been placed as top priority for a move and she was thrilled to be given first refusal. A has now moved into the social housing property; she no longer fears being given notice, she is gradually getting to know others in the unit and has accepted care support.

**“I spoke to my advocate for a long time about the complexity of my issues and she really grasped my**

**needs etc. I was so happy that she answered the call that day. She has helped me sort everything out and I was so worried I would be made homeless. Other people stopped helping me, they thought I was being difficult but it’s not my fault”**

Comment from A

**Helen Charles**  
Senior Independent Advocate

# Funding and Finance

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- Sandwell Children’s Trust
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- Birmingham City Council
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- Tipton Civic Society
- The Albert Gubay Charitable Foundation
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- 29th May 1961 Charity
- Heart of England Community Foundation
- Postcode Neighbourhood Trust
- The Cole Charitable Trust
- The Tipton and Coseley Building Society Charitable Foundation

Sandwell Advocacy Financial Summary 2023/2024	
Income for the year totalled	£223,639
Expenditure for the year was	£209,891
Fund balance at 31/3/24 was	£151,746



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