

Sandwell Advocacy Voices and Empowerment (SAVE) Project

Project Outline

This project has been made possible with the support of a three year grant from BBC Children in Need.

Project Aims

To provide 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.

Provide one-to-one support for children and young people as required that is child centred and ensures that integrated support is offered to children and young people who are experiencing poor mental health and/or behavioural issues.

To adopt a multi-agency and holistic approach to meet the needs of children and young people effectively and appropriately by developing positive partnerships with all key stakeholders involved with the planning and delivery of their services.

Addressing the disadvantages that children and young people are experiencing

The children and young people we support often tell us that they feel disadvantaged because they feel they aren't treated with respect and their views and wishes aren't taken into account. They feel powerless and marginalised and this negatively impacts on how they engage with schools and services. They become reluctant to access support because of these negative experiences. They also tell us that they often don't know where to turn for support and feel frustrated and isolated. Our advocates will look at issues through the eyes of the child.

This service will address these disadvantages by supporting children and young people to:

- Build confidence and skills to enable them to speak up for themselves so that they feel listened to and involved in decision making.
- Have choices regarding accessing appropriate support services. Build relationships of trust with other professionals.
- Address power imbalances and challenge services that think that they know best.

Our advocates adopt an outcome focussed approach that takes time to build trusting relationships outside of education or service provider settings. In times of turmoil and change our advocates are often the only consistent thread running through the lives of children and young people.

Meeting the Need

All advocacy interventions are fundamentally underpinned by the concept of empowerment and enabling individuals to have more ownership and control over what happens in their lives. This is especially important when children and young people feel that they are not being listened to or their views are being ignored, this can be a very frustrating and disempowering experience. We are uniquely placed to address this as we operate independently from services and are able to promote the needs and wishes of those we support free from potential conflicts of interest.

Users of this service will receive support from a designated advocacy practitioner who will provide a one to one person-centred approach that develops an advocacy pathway with a clear focus on achievable goals. Users of this service will report that they feel better positioned to articulate their wishes, have the confidence to speak up and feel that they have been placed more at the heart of the decision making process in their lives. As a direct result of our involvement children and young

people will report that they have more of a voice and feel more in control of what is happening around them.

We already provide an advocacy service for children and young people who are young carers and they report improvements to their coping mechanisms and emotional control as a result of accessing our service, this has a direct impact on improving their emotional wellbeing. We are able to directly support children and young people as part of the advocacy process to develop their skills and ability to engage more meaningfully with those around them and to feel that they have been listened to.

We will support children and young people using a one to one approach, alongside group and peer support activities where appropriate, to develop mechanisms where users are able to explore ways in which they can cope with and change their behaviour when dealing with challenging situations. This will include strategies for dealing with anger, frustration and aggression so that issues are managed and addressed more constructively and in a more controlled manner. Our users will report that we have improved their emotional intelligence, are better able to manage issues which they would previously have struggled with and that they feel more in control of their situation.

Project Outcomes

- Children and young people will feel more empowered to speak up for themselves and feel more in control.
- We will improve the emotional resilience, coping mechanisms and resolution skills of children and young people.
- We will support children and young people to access appropriate support services and/or improve their partnerships with services and professionals.