

2019-2020

# Annual Report



Rights • Voice • Empowerment







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## A Message from Our Chair

# Welcome to our 2019-2020 Annual Report



What a strange but amazing year we've had! I say strange because some of that year we were pushed outside our comfort zone to find new, creative and exciting ways of delivering this amazing service for the people of Sandwell in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report outlines how our staff team and amazing volunteers rose to that challenge. We have been able to deal with what is an unprecedented situation in terms of a national crisis and we have not let down those people who have needed our support.

We have also risen to the challenge of setting up and delivering new programmes of work to reach a wider section of the community, as well as building on existing programmes, helping those who are the most vulnerable and in need. Our reputation in Sandwell and beyond is growing each year and this year especially so. We appreciate the relationships we have with all our stakeholders, formed over the years that allow us to deliver this unique service in Sandwell. I am so proud of what we do and that we always deliver on our promise to everyone, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

Well done everyone and thank you!

**Lesley Donnelly**  
Chair of Sandwell Advocacy

## Project Co-ordinator's Review



**Well what another busy year for everyone associated with Sandwell Advocacy. It has been another period which has seen us go from strength to strength as an organisation.**

For me advocacy is about passion and commitment. It is about being passionate about ensuring people are listened to and have a voice, that people's rights are taken into account and that prejudice and discrimination are challenged. It is about having a commitment and understanding of these core principles in order that marginalised, isolated and excluded individuals are able to take more control over their lives and play a fuller part in society.

This year has seen our paid and volunteer advocates continue to show fantastic dedication

and commitment to making a difference to so many people's lives in Sandwell. One of the most common things we hear when we make initial contact with those we support is "it feels like I am banging my head against a wall". Advocacy is really important when people feel that they are not being listened to by those that plan and deliver health and social care services. It is important when the balance of power needs to be redressed when people feel they have been disempowered. We often find that we are supporting individuals with negative experiences of services and are therefore reluctant to access them, it is essential that people have access to advocacy that is independent from these services in such circumstances.

**During 2019/2020 Sandwell Advocacy provided support to more than 700 people and collectively delivered more than 11000 hours of advocacy interventions.**

I think that these figures are phenomenal when you consider that we are a small grass-roots community-based organisation. But for me it is more than the numbers of people we have supported, it is more than the number of hours of advocacy delivered, the most important thing is that we are making a difference to the lives of those we support and that we enable people to develop their skills and confidence to speak up for themselves.

There are reports from all of our operational areas in this document, these reports provide a flavour of what we have done and achieved throughout the year. We have continued with our established projects in our Young Carers Project, Adult Advocacy Support Service and Living Memory Project. We have also seen the introduction of new projects in our SAVE, Voices and Choices and Caring for Carers projects. Towards the end of this period we also worked in partnership with Sandwell Council and SCVO to identify the best way we could support residents through the emerging COVID-19 pandemic.

We set up Sandwell Together to offer an informal model of telephone befriending support aimed at residents who were shielding or isolating. This service offers a vital lifeline and emotional support to address issues people face as a result of becoming socially isolated such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, fear etc.

The commitment and dedication of all involved with Sandwell Advocacy is a constant source of inspiration for me. We all share a vision where the injustice of discrimination and inequality are challenged and where people who seldom have a voice are empowered to have a say, choice and control over what happens in their lives. Where people are encouraged and supported to live as independently as they possibly can with dignity and respect AND an equal stake in society. These are the same values and principles that should intrinsically underpin the concept of advocacy and this is a vision that Sandwell Advocacy will continue to embrace.

**Dave Bradshaw**  
Project Co-ordinator



### Why Me?

**“I used to think why me all the time but now that I have talked to the other young carers I know that it's not just me”**

That is the question posed by many of our young carers who we come across on a daily basis here at Sandwell Advocacy. It is estimated that there are a staggering 700,000 young carers in the UK, the real figure is likely to be more than this when taking into account those that do not identify as young carers – the so-called ‘hidden young carers’.

Many struggle with their emotions as they try their hardest to juggle a caring responsibility. The hospital visits, sleepless nights, cleaning, shopping, worry, school work. Then there are the child protection meetings, the doctors, nurses, police, psychologists, safeguarding officers and the social workers, who are all by the way trying to make things better. But the lack of

self-confidence, fatigue, low mood, panic attacks and mental ill health all prevail for the young carer.

Many children and young adult carers are asked at school why they are so tired, why they are not completing the task, refusing to engage, lashing out, quiet, subdued and some just simply say “I’m tired”. Many struggle to tell their teachers that they have been up since 4am in the morning unable to shut off just in case they are needed during the night...

**“The biggest challenge about being a carer is doing the chores or like when dad goes into hospital or mom going to the doctors or me going to the doctors, Its really stressful .... You feel like you want to be the person injured and not them.”**

With all the ups and downs, child protection meetings, school and home visits, case review panels we have managed to reconnect with our young carers and their families in a meaningful way throughout

**The biggest challenge about being a carer is doing the chores or like when dad goes into hospital or mom going to the doctors or me going to the doctors, Its really stressful .... You feel like you want to be the person injured and not them**



# Why Sandwell Advocacy?

2019. Young carers and their families remain at the heart of what we do, we support them in the most innovative of ways. We look beyond the label of 'Young Carer' and see a young person with talent, expertise beyond their years, compassion and bravery.

Throughout 2019 Sandwell Advocacy as an organisation have implemented and delivered innovative ways of engaging with families, children and young people to provide a route to escape and live a wholesome life, whilst embracing all the struggles and challenges that they are presented with in a caring, non-judgement environment.

Children and young people accompanied by other family members were able to enjoy a coveted day away at Compton Verney during the summer. For many this was a luxury. For one family in particular this trip may have been the last they spend together as a family due to court proceedings. This was escapism at its height.

How about the fabric manipulating activity during the summer, as

children and young people engaged fully in the experience as they used fabric to create their own bags?

As autumn approached it was time for the magic of Halloween and here again they were involved in using paint to create images and learning the art of applying make up to create fascinating work of arts.

Listening is key to everything we do here at Sandwell Advocacy as we engage on a one-to-one basis with the children and young people, we encourage their involvement in our youth forums to enable them to find their voice and work through difficult issues with their peers.

And so it is, we don't pretend that the life of a child in a caring role is easy or that we can wave a magic wand and make everything perfect, but we use all the resources available to us to ensure that every child coming through our doors can have a voice.

**Sharon Wilson**  
Independent Advocate



"You are the only ones that listen, everyone else including school just tell me to get on with it. They don't know what it's like for me"



### “I Just Want to Go Home”

**96-year-old Margaret was discharged from hospital to a local nursing home following a minor fall at home.**

Margaret and her family were led to believe this was for rehabilitation before returning home. After several weeks of very little or intermittent rehabilitation and numerous requests from Margaret and her family to return home, it soon became apparent that social care professionals did not share the same opinion. By this time, Margaret's physical and mental well-being had deteriorated significantly, she had lost 5kg in weight, became doubly incontinent and mentally subdued. Margaret had stopped

asking to go home and began asking to die.

Out of sheer desperation, Margaret's daughter Pauline called Sandwell Advocacy. She spoke with Linsey Robinson, Project Officer on our Voices & Choices Project, an independent advocacy project set up in 2019 to give older people with long-term health conditions a voice and to know their rights around care and accommodation.

**Pauline expressed “you are the first person who has listened to me and understood, thank you”**

Pauline felt concerned that Margaret was being pressured by professionals to stay in residential nursing care, despite repeated requests to go home. Pauline felt no-one was listening to Margaret or her family.

Linsey visited Margaret to gain consent to work on her behalf, and listened to her wishes, views and concerns. Linsey said she would do her best to support Margaret in her wish to return

**“We would never have got mom home if it wasn't for Linsey and Voices and Choices.”**

home, Margaret held her hand and said “Give it all you got!”

There were many challenges, especially with social care professionals, but together, along with the family, Linsey was able

to give Margaret and her family a voice and ensure that her wishes were taken into consideration. Eventually Margaret did return home to her happy place.

**Our Voices and Choices Project works to support older people with long-term health conditions throughout Sandwell.**

#### **Key aims of this project are:**

- To ensure that older people wishing to remain/maintain living independently in their own homes with appropriate support are able to do so.
- To 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.
- To provide longer-term support delivered by a team of trained volunteers to address loneliness and isolation and ensure that vulnerable older people are safeguarded from harm and abuse.



## Sandwell Advocacy Voice & Empowerment

### SAVE

**Providing 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.**

Parents, carers, other adults and professionals can sometimes believe that they know what is best for those they support and those that they love. This is not always the case.

**“They are all talking, but they are not talking to me, and yet it’s about me.”**

Independent Advocacy is not a box ticking exercise, or a means to fill in a section that asks ‘what is the child’s voice?’ It is not a tokenistic gesture; it’s about taking action!!!! Providing options to enable young people to make informed decisions.

### Jade’s Story

Jade\* was referred into the SAVE project presenting with poor mental health and behavioural difficulties. There was a history of Children’s Social Care involvement that left the family mistrusting of services and other professionals. A meeting was planned with Jade, her mother, two school staff and the advocate. This was not the first time a meeting had taken place; however, it was the first time Jade would have the support of her advocate.

**“Do you have any idea what it feels like being in the middle of something and yet not be a part of it, not included? Yet they think they know what is best for me. They don’t know what is going on in my head, my life, my home!”**

Prior to the meeting discussions took place between the advocate and all concerned to clarify the outstanding issues. These included poor attendance, refusal to co-operate, involvement of the attendance and prosecution service and not having the support from the parent.

The atmosphere was hostile, Jade and her mother defensive, and school staff feeling at a loss as what to do next. The advocate liaised with school staff to consider the issues they had raised. This was then addressed with Jade and her mother to formulate what they felt would be a suitable resolution. It transpired that the young person had medical issues that had been a major factor with her poor attendance. The mother felt that the school was not taking it seriously, which left her frustrated with staff. The advocate arranged and attended a GP appointment with Jade and referred her for mental health support. Information was provided to the school; this was the evidence they needed. Targets were set and agreed by all parties to improve school attendance, with support from the mother, and build a positive relationship with school staff. This is a work in progress. The young person remains in school and is being supported by school staff, her parent has not been prosecuted. Jade felt that she was finally being listened to

and that her views and wishes were being taken into account when agreeing strategies going forward.

**“That is the first time they have spoken to me and my mum like that. When we didn’t have you (advocate) in the other meetings with us they spoke down to us, and didn’t even try to help. Now they want to help because I have you there. With you they explained things better, so that we could understand it.”**

SAVE advocacy support is enabling the child/young person to have a voice and a choice in the decisions that are being made about their lives. It is a positive step-forward in becoming self-directed, choosing to do the things, but also considering the consequences of the actions they take and working towards more positive goals in life.

*\*Name changed to protect the privacy of the individual.*



**SAVE!**  
SANDWELL ADVOCACY VOICE & EMPOWERMENT

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**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

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SANDWELL ADVOCACY PROVIDES INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY THROUGHOUT SANDWELL, PROMOTING RIGHTS, VOICE AND EMPOWERMENT

“Do you have any idea what it feels like being in the middle of something and yet not be a part of it, not included? Yet they think they know what is best for me. They don't know what is going on in my head, my life, my home!”





# What do you do with pilchards?

That simple question from one of our young carers forums inspired staff to think about the food distributed in food banks and how families use it.

We put our heads together and applied to The People's Postcode Lottery for funds to set up the Caring Cooks project, an initiative that was co-produced with the children and young people we support. They have told us that many of their families rely on food banks and that they wanted to be able to plan and prepare healthy food with food bank ingredients.

They also told us that they wanted to learn about locally grown healthy food and showcase their journey through various mediums.

The Well Food Bank in Tipton were really keen to get involved and Black Country Creative supported us with the creative side of making this crazy idea come to life as well as enabling us to take a cheeky trip to the BBC Good Food Show for ideas about marketing, presenting and actually meeting some celebrity chefs including Nadiya Hussain and Ainsley Harriott.

**“They have told us that many of their families rely on food banks and that they wanted to be able to plan and prepare healthy food with food bank ingredients.”**



The project achieved so many life-enhancing outcomes including:

- Developing skills around planning and preparing healthy meals.
- Understanding how healthy food options are produced and accessed locally.
- Growing fresh organic food.
- Improving technical skills around film making.
- Improving technical expertise around the use of digital platforms.
- Producing recipe cards that were distributed via local Sandwell food bank networks.





**Joe Monaghan, an advocate and professional colleague of many years evaluated the project and was quite blown away by the enthusiasm and success of it all.**



The project lasted for 12 months during which time those who took part learnt how to cook, learnt how to photograph and film sessions and get it out there on social media as well as creating amazing recipe cards to hand out. Joe Monaghan, an advocate and professional colleague of many years evaluated the project and was quite blown away by the enthusiasm and success of it all. It's fair to say the young people really enjoyed learning new cookery skills as well as finding out what it was like behind and in front of a camera. Thank you to everyone who plays the Postcode Lottery, you really helped an amazing cause in Sandwell.



## Adult Advocacy Support Service

**“Yes because nobody would speak up otherwise.”**

**“It’s always good to have independent people.”**

**‘It shows they are interested in your wellbeing’.**

**These are just some of the comments made by residents and service users, who were visited by Sandwell Advocacy staff and volunteers, as part of the Adult Advocacy Support Service, during the past year.**

This unique independent advocacy service is now in its 7th year, and has been commissioned by Sandwell MBC since 2013, as part of their monitoring of standards of care.

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

Residents, relatives and service users are invited to complete monitoring questionnaires which focus on the quality of the care provider and of the care they receive. We provide assistance to those that need it to enable people to have a voice, share their

experiences and give opinions as to what they would like to see happen in their care settings.

**We visited a total of 42 different care settings during April 2019 and March 2020.**

We talk confidentially to those receiving care, who are able to and/or choose to do so. Each person decides whether they want their comments and feedback to be anonymous. We listen, empower and enable people to have a voice and contribute in the completion of a monitoring questionnaire. This covers a whole range of areas around care, choices and independence to name a few, which provides valuable feedback to the local authority Contracts and Monitoring Team.

During our visits, we can also provide information, and signpost to, or make referrals to other services. We also follow up any actions raised during our visits, to ensure this is resolved to the satisfaction of the individual or their family members.

We always work within a safeguarding agenda to ensure individuals are safe and free from harm or abuse.

## Living Memory Project



**LIVING  
MEMORY**  
Photography and Life Stories  
from across the Black Country

Mel Tomlinson's artwork  
'A Place With No Name'

**The Living Memory Project is in its very final stage of delivery and we have been busy preparing our final events, exhibitions and the launch of the book.**

Over the last 12 months, artists and filmmakers have been working across the borough of Sandwell and the wider region delivering creative workshops with community and groups around personal photographs and life stories. The artists have all made new artwork that we are really looking forward to sharing with the public in our final exhibition that will be held at New Art

Gallery Walsall. This exhibition will also include some of the life stories and photographs that we recorded over the last 2 years.

The accompanying photographs show some of the work produced as part of our art programme. Mel Tomlinson's house comes from her project 'A Place With No Name' which is based on her nan's connection with a pub in Tipton.

Mel ran over 10 hands-on making sessions with participants from Tipton and Dudley. In the third photo is one of the leaves made with Iranian-born artist Farhad Berahman who worked with participants' stories and family photographs which were painstakingly printed onto leaves.



Participants work at artists making session



Farhad Berahman's leaf photography depicting participants' photographs



## Caring for Carers

### A new venture in Birmingham delivered in partnership with the Communities in Sync consortium

In May 2019 we embarked on an exciting journey when our application to become members of Communities in Sync (CIS) was formally approved. CIS is a consortium of local health, social care and well-being providers working together in partnership to improve the lives of people in the local community. We were pleased to join a number of other well-respected local providers to explore opportunities for a more joined up partnership approach. We were delighted therefore when in November 2019 a bid to Birmingham City Council was approved which enabled us to introduce a service supporting carers through loss and bereavement. Other partner providers delivering this project are: Ideal for All, Crossroads Care, Sandwell African Caribbean Mental Health Foundation and West Bromwich African Caribbean Resource Centre.

Staff members Helen and Juanita joined this new venture as Health and Wellbeing officers

offering advocacy support. Despite the national lockdown in March staff were able to work with their consortium colleagues and Birmingham City Council suggested that instead of just covering the Perry Barr constituency we cover the whole of the city. This has increased the number of people we are able to support and we have enabled a number of carers to navigate this journey in extremely difficult times. The service goes from strength to strength using whatever is available to help those in need. Other strands of the service offered are a Healing Garden for those green fingered people and Living Memory for people wishing to share their stories using photographs and their own words to describe their lives together.



## Funding and Finance

We gratefully acknowledge the financial contribution received from a variety of sources throughout 2019/2020, 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
- Lloyd's Bank Foundation
- BBC Children in Need
- Birmingham City Council
- People's Postcode Lottery
- Alfred Haines Charitable Trust
- The Cadbury Foundation
- National Lottery Awards for All
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- GM2LF Big Local Fund
- The Black Country Living Museum
- The Arts Council England
- The Garfield Weston Foundation
- The Tipton and Coseley Building Society Charitable Foundation
- The Tipton Civic Society (Tree of Light Appeal)
- The Greggs Foundation
- Creative Black Country
- The Asda Foundation
- SCVO's EPIC Grant Programme

### Sandwell Advocacy Financial Summary 2019/2020

Our income for the year totalled:	£277,309
Expenditure for the year was:	£271,888
Fund balances at 31/3/20 were:	£89,821





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