

2020-2021

Annual Report

Rights • Voice • Empowerment





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Welcome to our 2020-21 Annual Report

Each year as I consider our progress as an organisation I continue to be amazed by the consistent performance and development of Sandwell Advocacy, this year is no exception. The innovative and creative ways in which we support the vulnerable people of Sandwell continued during a second year of upheaval brought about by the global pandemic. This report provides details of how we succeeded in doing this.

Our remarkable staff, led by CEO Dave Bradshaw, have adapted to these new circumstances with flexibility, finding new innovative ways to deliver our services in new situations and settings. They have created and developed new ways of communicating with people, ensuring that Sandwell residents are not isolated and have a means of communicating with us. I want to take this opportunity to thank Dave and the team for all their dedication and hard work. They have put Sandwell Advocacy on the map yet again ensuring our valuable contribution to the people of Sandwell is highlighted and recognised by the community, our stakeholders and individuals seeking help and support.

Our volunteers are exceptional and we could not do what we do without their much needed support. Each year they consistently and loyally support our staff and organisation by working with vulnerable children and adults who need our support. I want to thank you all, including my fellow Trustees on behalf of Sandwell Advocacy for all your dedication and hard work.

Finally I would like to thank the many funders, fundraisers and volunteers who provide us with vital funds enabling us to continue to deliver a quality service to the people of Sandwell.

Lesley Donnelly
Chair of Trustees



No report covering the period April 2020 to March 2021 could begin without mention of the catastrophic global COVID-19 pandemic which has significantly impacted on our local, national and international environments. As detailed in this report, the staff team adapted remarkably to these challenges and also stepped up to the mark with the development of some new initiatives. The resilience, dedication and imagination of the team throughout this period has been remarkable and they should be commended for their commitment and tireless contribution.

We expanded some of our operational activities to meet the needs of those we supported during this time. Perhaps most significantly we established Sandwell Together, a telephone befriending service aimed at maintaining contact with those who were shielding and/or in isolation who were lonely and isolated.

Whilst we were keen to get back to more traditional face to face operations as soon as possible we incorporated some of the new and innovative ways of engaging with those we support. We were able to provide a number of data enabled tablets that continue to provide support virtually where appropriate. This initiative has had the added advantage of addressing the digital exclusion some of our users face when they would not otherwise have had an internet connection or access to the technology.

Please take time to read about our operational activities throughout the rest of this report:

- **Our Advocacy Project for Young Carers** continued throughout this period. We are grateful to Sandwell Children's Trust for funding this much needed support for children, young people and their families. We continue to receive positive feedback from stakeholders and beneficiaries regarding the support we provide for young carers.
- **Our Adult Advocacy Support Service** funded by SMBC provides support for individuals in nursing/residential care, Extra Care Scheme's and Day Centre settings. These activities were significantly curtailed with the onset of the pandemic but we continued to develop alternative ways of operating under COVID conditions, again telephone and virtual contacts were put in place.
- **Our Sandwell Advocacy Voice and Empowerment (SAVE) Project** funded by BBC Children in Need continued into its second year. This project provides an advocacy, enabling and support service for children and young people who are experiencing poor mental health and/or behavioural issues.
- **Our Voices and Choices Project** funded by the Lloyds Bank Foundation entered its second year providing vital support for older people with their care and accommodation issues.
- As mentioned earlier one of the key areas we committed a lot of time and energy from the onset of the pandemic was with the introduction of our Sandwell Together befriending service. Volunteers were recruited and trained to offer a telephone befriending service for people who had been shielding and/or self-isolating, many of whom had limited or no access to friends and family. Volunteers provide emotional support and address issues people face as a result of becoming socially isolated such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, fear etc. by allowing people to talk about their feelings thereby reducing the impact of isolation and loneliness.
- Our work with Communities in Sync (CIS) continued throughout this period. 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. Our work with consortia partners continued to deliver **Caring for Carers**, funded by Birmingham City Council, supporting carers through loss and bereavement.

Like many organisations in the voluntary sector we certainly noticed an increased demand for our services throughout the pandemic. In the new year of 2021 we realised that the current staff team were struggling to balance the increased demand on our operational activities with their administrative duties. In response to this the board made the decision to recruit a Business Support Officer to provide much needed support to the team.

I have worked closely with our board of trustees to undertake a significant amount of work strategically on our governance arrangements and business planning. Our Business Plan for 2020 – 2023 clearly sets out our strategic priorities and implementation plan for the next three years. The pandemic has created many challenges for us all but it has been inspirational to see so many new volunteers come forward during this time to support people in a time of great need.

Our volunteers get involved for many different reasons, but all do so because they want to make a meaningful difference to people's lives. Our board of trustees also give their time freely as volunteers to ensure that Sandwell Advocacy is steered in the right direction and once again it has been a pleasure to work alongside them as a team.

These have indeed been very challenging times, however it is testament to our staff and volunteers that we have continued to operate throughout this crisis. Their resourcefulness and innovative approaches have enabled us to provide much needed support through very difficult times. We look forward to better times ahead when it is hoped that we can deliver our services using a combination of traditional face to face approaches and those we have developed under COVID restrictions.



Dave Bradshaw
Chief Executive Officer



The Universe and Me



“Covid hasn’t just made me scared for me, but for my dad and sisters. What if I bring it home to them?”

The nightmare has just begun for many of the estimated 800,000 young carers living in England many of whom live here in Sandwell.

11-year-old Faye cares for her 3-year-old brother, her nan and mom, when she is not in hospital. Faye takes her caring responsibilities in her stride and tries to cope the best she can - and then comes Covid19. Faye like others in her situation worry constantly anyway, regardless of an epidemic or not. The pressure of school is concerning.

It has been estimated that the extra pressure on young carers has been overwhelming, many are struggling with their mental health, more stressed than ever, and constantly playing this juggling act of balancing home life with school and society.

15-year-old Stan is so worried about his dad’s health and the impact of Covid that he asks **“when can I get the vaccine? I’m scared that I will catch this disease and pass it on to my dad”** That is a concern echoed across the spectrum.

“I can never get my homework done in time for school, I’m always late. I get up, fix the breakfast, prepare my lunch, help to get my brother ready, he’s itching again because of his eczema, fix my hair, it’s a mad rush.”

Many young carers have been robbed of their childhood. Though many will argue that it hasn’t all been doom and gloom as they benefit from being trusted, having a good understanding and kindness towards a family member or friend with an illness or disability, they feel closer to the individual and take pride in having all the responsibility the caring role brings.

“Everything gets better, Nan is disabled, I help her. I’m happy because she helps me too, she lets me be me.”

However, it cannot be denied that our young carers are brave, kind, courageous and selfless, they give of themselves more than they can afford physically and emotionally.

“I do the same things over and over again; I miss out on meeting up with my friends, I miss it a lot.”

For many the following is the norm:

- Time off school, and college leading to poor attendance
- Missing out on seeing friends, going to events, difficulty completing group task outside of school or college

Many young carers will often tell you that they feel anxious, overwhelmed, worried and tired. They don’t seem to get enough sleep or they sleep too much. They may be gaining or losing weight.

During our user engagement forums young carers have told us:

“I have a body image problem; I hate the way I look.”

“I feel like I can sleep all day and I don’t want to interact with anyone.”

Many get irritated easily or get angry. Losing interest in activities they once enjoyed. Feeling of sadness, frequent headaches and bodily pains and yet they carry on, it’s not a choice but rather a commitment to the ones they love the most.

Then out of the blue comes Covid -19 another barrier, another obstacle to overcome. For many this period has been frightening, isolating and daunting. Their mental health has been compromised, but still the world goes on and so do they.

As an organisation our advocacy role is even more in demand. Many of our young carers struggle to voice their concerns; for some they will say it is ok for the teacher to mark me absent does he/she know when my day starts and ends? “If they only understood but I am too tired to even begin to explain ...tell them how I am feeling”

“My advocate listens, has my back, they seem to get it”

Sharon Wilson
Independent Advocate



“I May as Well be in Prison”

It was December, nearing Christmas and during a pandemic, when R, a 65-year-old male with a diagnosis of ‘mild’ dementia, found himself alone, in emergency residential nursing care, without any real understanding of how the situation had come about.

One day living with his partner and her two children, one grown, one an adolescent, the next, in a dementia unit, confused and angry and asking to get out. R would exercise daily, but now he was unable to leave the facility unless accompanied by a staff member, which was difficult as many of the staff were off work due to the pandemic.

“I may as well be in prison.”

R was referred to Voices and Choices, an independent advocacy project for people with long-term-health problems by his social worker following a safeguarding alert, raised by R’s partner. She believed R was becoming aggressive, especially towards their younger child and that she was no longer able to cope with R’s needs.

“He can’t do anything. I have to do everything for him.”

The safeguarding report expressed that R was incapable of making decisions and was unable to live independently due to his poor memory and lack of cognitive function and skills.

The social worker conducted a mental capacity assessment and found R to have capacity to make decisions about where he lived. She expressed that she found R very alert and not presenting anything like what had been documented in the safeguarding report. The social worker also wanted to ensure she had made the correct decision and wanted R to access an independent advocate to ensure his views and wishes were taken into account.

We contacted R by telephone, this would normally have been done face-to-face but due to the pandemic, this was unable to take place. R spoke well on the telephone and acknowledged he did have problems remembering certain things, information, or instructions, but he would help himself by writing things down when he could.

We explained the role of an advocate, and told him that his advocate would be on 'his' side and work by his instruction to ensure his voice was heard in terms of where he lived.

The advocate articulated R's wishes to the social worker – that he wanted and needed the opportunity to live independently and with the correct support despite other's opinions, we believed he could achieve this.

There were many challenging situations, especially with a pandemic, and other professionals not having the same confidence in R. However plans were made for R to move to his own supported living flat, benefits applied for, and a generous package of care provided to help him settle in.

However, on the day, there was a problem with his bank account, there seemed to be a block on it and R was unable to pay his deposit. The advocate worked extensively with other agencies and support staff to support R to gain access to his bank account. It also became apparent that R had no furniture, bed or bedding in preparation for his move, the advocate liaised with other agencies to source what he needed.

R has been living independently for some time now. Much of his care has been withdrawn as he no longer needs it, or ever really did. He regularly goes shopping to buy food which he cooks for himself. R has a volunteer advocate for ongoing support and to identify early on if there are any issues. The volunteer has supported R to access a new energy supplier and supported him to set up his direct debit for this. R is managing so well independently and deserved to be heard and listened to. Without advocacy, this situation could have been very different.

**"I'm over the moon,
thank you!"**

Linsey Robinson
Voices and Choices Project

Sandwell Together

– Supporting One Another

At the start of the lockdown Sandwell Advocacy worked in partnership with Sandwell MBC and SCVO (Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations) to provide telephone befriending to the most vulnerable and isolated residents in the borough.

Volunteers came to us via SCVO as a result of their recruitment campaign and referrals came in from Sandwell council employees who were supporting residents who had expressed a need for support. This help could be in the form of food parcels, shopping, delivery of medication as well as telephone befriending. As many people were furloughed and others were working from home, they found they had time on their hands and wanted to volunteer to do what they could to support others less fortunate than themselves.

Initially it was assumed that the calls would be made to elderly residents but it soon became apparent that this service was needed across all walks of life. Lockdown presented issues for all of us and the opportunity to talk through any issues was welcomed by everyone. Parents home schooling their children, grandparents missing their family and friends, couples who weren't used to spending so much time together and even parents whose children were in foster care – everyone struggled in some way and Sandwell Together was just the thing to lift spirits and talk about anything and everything including the hours many spent binge watching television serials and films.

Staff at Sandwell Advocacy all took responsibility for a number of volunteers and referrals and matched callers together. There were all sorts of stories to come out of the calls, some happy, some sad but the most telling was how everyone rallied around to support their community. As restrictions eased and we dealt with “the new norm” some volunteers returned to work and had to give up their calls, likewise as people were able to have their own support bubbles, they resumed some of their relationships with the outside world.

What was clear to us was the need for telephone befriending. As advocates we wrongly thought that telephone befriending was a light touch approach to people’s lives, that belief changed as we saw the massive difference it made to peoples mental health and wellbeing. It was then we embarked on a fundraising campaign to ensure the project continued long after restrictions were lifted.

We have successfully secured funding to continue with this valuable work and were able to recruit a Volunteer Development Officer who recruits, trains and manages the volunteers. We have a crack team of volunteers who update us on their calls and deal with whatever comes their way and we have a newly retired professional who is making sure that everyone on our ever increasing waiting list gets a weekly phone call.

We receive a steady flow of referrals every week from many professionals who value the excellent work our staff and volunteers do and we work closely to make sure the callers are well supported by the voluntary and public sector of Sandwell.

Juanita Williams
Volunteer Development Officer.



**Sandwell
Together**
0121 520 8070
Supporting one another

Referrals

Telephone befrienders are here to call lonely, vulnerable and isolated people.

- Do you know someone who you think would benefit from a friendly chat?
- Are you a family member who thinks that your relative would really appreciate someone to listen to them?
- Are you a professional who knows someone who would benefit a regular phone call to check they are ok?

Contact us for a chat to find out more

Call 0121 520 8070

Email sandwelladvocacy@btconnect.com



Partnership with

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND



**Sandwell
Together**
0121 520 8070
Supporting one another

Volunteers

We are looking for volunteer befrienders to make regular calls to people who are lonely, vulnerable and isolated.

Do you have?

- Good communication skills – ability to listen and engage well with others
- Patience, sensitivity and kindness
- An ability to keep brief records and an understanding of confidentiality
- A willingness to undertake training and develop your skills

Contact us for a chat to find out more

Call 0121 520 8070

Email sandwelladvocacy@btconnect.com



Partnership with

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND





Sandwell Advocacy

Voice and Empowerment

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

We are now in year 2 of this much needed project and goodness me what a year it has been. Following Government and Public Health guidelines schools were closed except for children of key workers and vulnerable young people.

Many children and young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health before lockdown have found the pandemic has certainly exacerbated this. We saw an increase of children with anxiety, feeling isolated with a loss of coping strategies and motivation.

Advocates were quick to respond and continued to provide support throughout the pandemic undertaking visits outside of the family home and using digital platforms to virtually meet with children we support. We provide a confidential area here at Sandwell Advocacy to meet with young people and their parents in a Covid secure environment. Some children took to writing letters, poems and drawing pictures to their advocate as a way to explain the difficulties they faced.

We were granted funds from the BBC Children in Need Covid19 Booster Fund to purchase Samsung tablets including a data package. This enabled us to provide the equipment to children who were most in need and to those who did not have the means to have access to their advocate.



Over the Christmas period advocates delivered Christmas parcels using donated gifts from our local ASDA store. These were topped up with art and craft materials for the families to enjoy. We were also part of Safety Plans put in place during the holiday period to support the most vulnerable children.

Case study – name changed

Ben is now 17. He spent years hiding in his bedroom whilst his father physically and verbally attacked his mother. His parents eventually separated but he remains impacted by the abuse he so often heard. He tried hard to move on with his life but found it almost impossible and used self-harming as a coping strategy. He rarely attended school but he reluctantly enrolled onto a college course fearing the financial implications of losing the families child benefits. Unfortunately Ben was not able to attend college, he felt so physically unwell that he was not able to leave his home unless accompanied by an adult - he was stuck. His advocate worked extensively to support and enable Ben to access a range of mental health agencies including NHS IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies). The advocate also explored and supported him to complete a Personal Independent Payment (PIP) application form. Ben had been known to his GP for some time so the advocate helped Ben to gather the evidence required to send with his application. Ben was delighted to be awarded PIP he felt the financial burden had eased. He is now accessing therapy in the hope that one day he will feel well enough to leave his home and access education.

Feedback from young person:

"I think I was giving up, it's easier to sleep and not get up, not deal with things because you think you can't be helped. I'm glad you called me, mum is too. Some of the pressure is off. Let's hope the therapy works"

Feedback from a School Safeguarding Officer:

"Having an advocate is really beneficial. Young people are comfortable talking about their feelings and issues rather than bottling them up or venting in a less constructive way. You are non-bias and demonstrate a holistic approach by listening to the child, being their 'voice' in difficult social environments where they feel unable to speak for themselves. It is definitely beneficial, effective and positive to vulnerable children, and it's a free service. I wish that I had someone like you to turn to when I was at school, especially when I needed it most!"

Helen Charles

Senior Independent Advocate





SAVE!
SANDWELL ADVOCACY VOICE & EMPOWERMENT

Sandwell Advocacy
28 Wood Street, Tipton
West Midlands
DY4 9BQ

**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

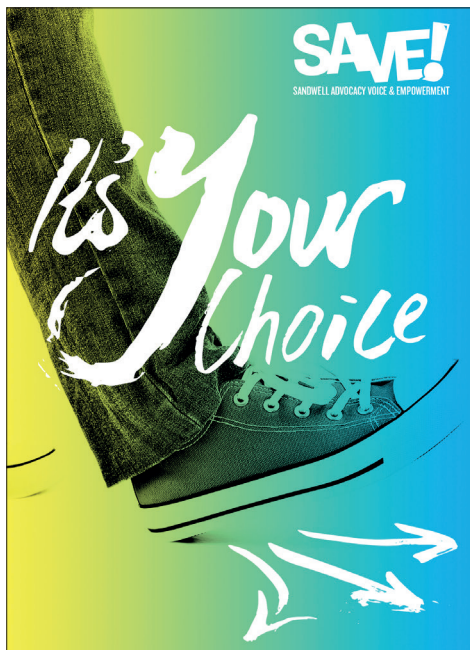
Tel: 0121 520 8070

Email: sandwelladvocacy@btconnect.com

For more information go to:
www.sandwelladvocacy.org

Follow us on Twitter
@YCadvocacy

Charity number 1019779



SAVE!
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Adult Advocacy Support Service

This unique independent advocacy service is now in its 8th 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 provide support to complete monitoring questionnaires. Information is collated and reported as feedback to the local authority 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.

We will raise any concerns with the appropriate department in adult social care as part of the safeguarding agenda.

How many of us will ever forget the images and footage taken within care homes during 2020/21? Residents confined to their bedrooms, waving to family and loved ones through windows, and being unable to have those most dear to them during times of illness and most cruel of all at end of life for so many.

Just prior to the announcement of the national lockdown in March 2020, all future planned adult advocacy visits to care providers within the borough were suspended with immediate effect. This was frustrating, as like no other time previously, the majority of adults living within care settings were isolated from the outside world.

The Adult Advocacy Support Service was the only project delivered by Sandwell Advocacy that ceased the majority of its activity during this time. However, the time was spent in part to update the questionnaires we use. There were a number of very productive virtual meetings held with colleagues at Sandwell Council to achieve this. The majority of the time however was spent supporting the new Sandwell Together project, a telephone befriending service which was set up urgently at the start of the pandemic by Sandwell Advocacy.

We were delighted, when it was agreed with our colleagues at Sandwell Council, to resume the Adult Advocacy Support Service in January 2021. The challenges we faced were how to reach out to residents and service users to gain feedback about the services they received, without being able to physically visit them.

Therefore, with careful and detailed discussions with the provider managers, and with their support, we set up Zoom meetings where appropriate, and completed questionnaires over telephone calls to residents. In many instances, forms were taken out to care providers, who distributed these to residents, service users or their family members or friends to complete and return. Although face to face visits are always the preferred method, this gradual return of the project allowed a safe way to resume our services and once again give people a voice regarding the services they receive.

“Shows someone is thinking about us and we’re not in the back of beyond.”

(quote from a care home resident 2021)

Carol Turley
Advocacy Support Officer



Caring for Carers

On Thursday 19th March 2020 all staff were called to an important meeting in the office and we were told we would be working from home for the next two weeks. If only that had been true!

As detailed in many of the other reports our work had to be revised and adapted to enable us to continue to deliver services. All face to face work ceased and we soon became dab hands at virtual meetings. We kept in contact regularly with the carers we were supporting: as well as grieving their loved ones they were coping with a lonely life in isolation. Many had not had the usual support given to the bereaved as they had not had usual funerals or visitors, some had not been with their loved ones when they passed. This was an extremely difficult time and the regular contact was appreciated more than ever.

Staff were called upon to organise support for funeral arrangements under new Covid rules, GP consultations, counselling and welfare rights advice to list but a few.

On a positive note new ideas were created and developed to support carers, some of this work coming from the clients/partners themselves.

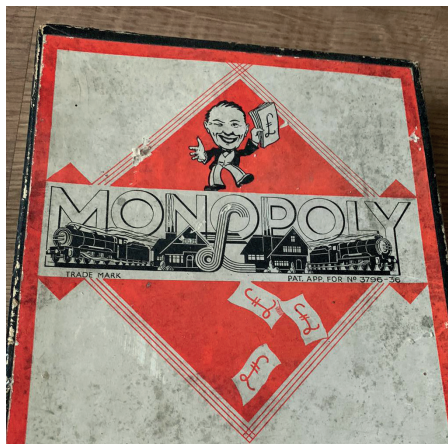
Memory in an object: Working closely with the Wellbeing Officer one carer delivered sessions where participants each brought along an object that held a happy memory. Objects included a pair of roller skates, a painting overall with tissues and lighter in the pocket, a bible with sermon notes written all over it, a necklace and love heart with a message and signature engraved on it and a tiny Tour de France cyclist wearing a spotted jersey. Everyone had time to recall and share their memories.

There wasn't a dry eye in the house but everyone said how much they enjoyed it. Afterwards people talked about their loved ones and asked questions of each other, some of the questions they didn't want to ask their family.

The Healing Garden: Ideal for All were part of this project and when restrictions lifted we were able to deliver soil, pots and seeds to carers. Initially we were planning to offer gardening therapy at two allotment sites but this was not feasible so sessions were delivered online. Later in the year some of the carers attended the allotments and found it most therapeutic.

Living Memory: This project continued throughout lockdown and photographs and stories were shared via the internet. Virtual interviews took place and stories written to describe the wonderful lives that some of the carers had shared with their loved ones. They say there is a book in everyone and this is certainly true of this project. What a rich tapestry of stories were weaved.

Juanita Williams
Wellbeing Officer



Funding and Finance

We gratefully acknowledge the financial contribution received from a variety of sources throughout 2020/2021, 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
- SCVO Vision 2030 Community Grant
- Children In Need COVID-19 Booster Programme
- Lloyds Bank Foundation COVID React Fund
- SCVO Vision 2030 COVID-19 Response Fund
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Heart of England Community Foundation
- Gavin Bevan sponsored Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge
- West Midlands Police Community Initiative Fund
- Alfred Haines Charitable Trust
- The Asda Foundation
- Tipton Civic Society
- The Tipton and Coseley Building Society Charitable Foundation
- Baron Davenport's Charity

Sandwell Advocacy Financial Summary 2020/2021

Income for the year totalled	£239,183
Expenditure for the year was	£212,800
Fund balance at 31/3/21 was	£116,204



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