

CELEBRATING

30

YEARS

SANDWELL ADVOCACY
ANNUAL REPORT
2022-23



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

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Message from our Chair | 6 |
| Chief Executive Officer's review | 8 |
| Advocacy for Young Carers | 14 |
| Voices and Choices Project | 18 |
| The PAGE Project | 20 |
| Adult Advocacy Support Service | 24 |
| SAVE | 28 |
| Sandwell Together | 30 |
| Caring for Carers | 32 |
| Financial Summary 2022/2023 | 34 |

“

I have found the help invaluable and would not know how I would have coped if I didn't have Sandwell Advocacy by my side to support me. I feel that I have been let down by many people, but never by Sandwell Advocacy. I cannot praise you enough.

SAVE, USER OF VOICES AND CHOICES PROJECT

COMMENT FROM PARENT OF
YOUNG CARER:



"I LIKE THE KINDNESS AND GENUINE COMPASSION THAT IS GIVEN TO ME AND MY SON. I ALSO FEEL THAT THE STAFF ARE VERY PROFESSIONAL AND RECOGNISED THAT WE NEEDED TO HAVE A CARE ASSESSMENT."

“It’s clear that it’s more than a job, they care about everyone they advocate for and the future of the organisation”


[Back](#)

Message from our Chair



It gives me so much pleasure to speak to you about Sandwell Advocacy, to tell you what an amazing organisation it is.

Sandwell Advocacy has a fantastic reputation for providing quality advocacy and support to the people of Sandwell. This reputation has been won through the hard work of our amazing staff led by CEO Dave Bradshaw and includes our professional advocates and support staff.

As someone who was born and lives in Sandwell I can tell you that Sandwell is one of the most diverse and economically deprived areas in the UK and has been throughout my lifetime. This deprivation has been reflected over the years in the range of programmes we have offered to the people of this region, helping them in the most vulnerable periods of their lives. This year is no different, we have answered the call of vulnerable children and adults who need us in Sandwell.

It has always left an impression upon me of how much our team are prepared to do to provide the best service and support to everyone that reaches out

to us, including much needed fund raising activities. It’s clear that its more than a job, they care about everyone they advocate for and the future of the organisation. Thank you Dave and the rest of the team for everything you do for us and for the people of Sandwell.

We cannot deliver this incredible service to our advocacy partners without the army of volunteers who support our professional advocates. They give their time freely to support us and the people they partner and advocate for. Thank you for supporting us and our advocacy partners. What you do is very much appreciated. I would also like to thank my fellow Trustees who also give their time freely and who provide a management structure, working alongside our CEO, to ensure the sustainability of Sandwell Advocacy going forward. We celebrate 30 years of Sandwell Advocacy in 2023, a fantastic achievement, I know we can keep going because we have the best of staff, volunteers and stakeholders and I am so grateful to you all for everything you do.

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 Sandwell Advocacy

[Back](#)

Chief Executive Officer's review



30 years of delivering independent advocacy throughout Sandwell and still going strong!

The period between April 2022 and March 2023 saw us getting back to 'business as usual' as the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic declined. During this period we began to look forward with renewed optimism and enthusiasm as we resumed more traditional face to face operations. We did however incorporate some of the more innovative ways of engaging with those we support that we had implemented during the pandemic.

The Board of Trustees continued to undertake a significant amount of work strategically on our governance arrangements and business planning. Efforts were also made towards promoting opportunities aimed at encouraging more people to join the Board. As ever we remained proactive in terms of our objectives and strategies going forward into this period and we began work on

developing our Business Plan for 2023–2025. The Business Plan was completed and agreed at the beginning of 2023 and subsequently set out our plans and vision for the next three years.

The operational activities of Sandwell Advocacy are underpinned by the extensive work undertaken by our management team, staff, volunteers and beneficiaries to develop clearly set out aims and objectives. To create our vision for the future we understand that it is important to involve as many of those with a stake in what we do as part of our engagement and consultation process. We have held regular Away Days to gather the views and feedback of trustees, staff, volunteers and users to inform our strategic and business development model another of which was held in October 2022.

Amongst other areas covered during the day we looked at:

1. Governance
2. People
3. Operations
4. Information and Communication technology (ICT)
5. Finance



The day was well attended and the findings and feedback from our Away Day formed an integral part of our Business Plan.

Our Advocacy Project for Young Carers continued throughout this period. We are grateful to Sandwell Children's Trust for funding this much needed project for children, young people and their families for a further 12 months. Helen Charles (Senior Independent Advocate) and Sharon Wilson (Independent Advocate) continued their work on this project providing one to one person-centred advocacy support.

We continued to focus on a targeted campaign of actively promoting the service and developing closer links with a number of local schools throughout this period. This proved

highly successful and as a result we were able to increase the number of outreach advocacy surgeries and attend a number of school events.

The Advocacy Project for Young Carers has a strong user engagement and peer support focus and as such this group of young people participated in a number of initiatives throughout this period.

Our Adult Advocacy Support Service gradually returned to more typical operational activities with the relaxation of COVID restrictions within nursing and residential care homes, although many of the infection control measures remained in place. Carol Turley (Advocacy Support Officer) delivered this independent service in Nursing, Residential, Extra Care settings and those who attend a Day Centre Units.



We have provided this service since 2013 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 acknowledge the support of a small team of trained volunteers who have assisted us on the delivery of this service. We are grateful to Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) for continuing this service and were happy to learn that it would be extended for a further 12 months at the beginning of this period. This service would continue as a grant funded service rather than a contracted service and, following successfully applying for the grant, we were informed that we would continue delivery throughout 2023-2024. This service would then become known by its revised title of the Advocacy Feedback Support Service.

We were really pleased to receive news from BBC Children in Need that our Sandwell Advocacy Voice and Empowerment (SAVE) Project would be awarded a 12 month funding extension.

The SAVE Project provides a vital 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 at all times. Along with the one to one support provided we also organised a number of workshops and group activities aimed at improving the emotional wellbeing of those accessing the service, it also provided a crucial means of peer support.

Despite having received funding support to deliver this vital service from BBC Children in Need for the previous four years, we were bitterly disappointed to learn that they would not continue to support this work beyond March 2023. Despite this the Board of Trustees agreed unanimously that there was huge continued need for this service from young people in Sandwell and that it would therefore continue beyond that date. We resolved to make a concerted effort to secure funding from other sources to ensure this work continues.

“We understand that it is important to involve as many of those with a stake in what we do...”

We were equally disappointed that we were unable to secure continuation funding for our Voices and Choices Project following conclusion of funding from the Lloyds Bank Foundation over the previous three years. Sadly our Voices and Choices Project Officer, Linsey Robinson, left us to move on to pastures new in April 2022. Nevertheless we regrouped and doubled our efforts to secure the necessary income to continue this work and were delighted to be awarded funding to do so from the Albert Gubay Foundation for a period of three years commencing September 2022. Helen Charles, our Senior Independent Advocate, stepped in to take the lead on this project with the support of Anika Khalid.

This project supports older people with long-term health conditions to:

Ensure that older people wishing to remain/maintain living independently in their own homes with appropriate support are able to do so.

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

Our Sandwell Together telephone befriending service continued to go 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. Whilst this service had been established at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic we made the decision to continue providing this service in spite of the relaxation of lockdown measures. We felt that loneliness and isolation would remain and residents more generally were still in need of a listening ear and someone to talk to.

Juanita Williams continued in her role as Volunteer Development Officer with Sandwell Together until her retirement in July 2022. We thank Juanita for her

“A major development in our history came to fruition during this year...”

dedication and hard work on this and other projects during her time with Sandwell Advocacy and wish her well in her retirement. Our Business Support Officer, Sharon Jenkins, took temporary responsibility for managing this service for the remainder of this period.

Our Caring for Carers project 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. Helen Charles and Juanita Williams delivered this project throughout this year and we were really happy to welcome Jade Vaughan to the team in December 2022 following Juanita's retirement. We were pleased to receive notification that the funding for this project from Birmingham City Council had been extended until November 2023.

A major development in our history came to fruition during this year with the introduction of our Parents Advocacy, Guidance and Empowerment (PAGE) Project. We wanted to establish the PAGE Project 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 extensively with partners in the Communities in Sync (CIS) consortium to develop the service specification for this project and under the auspices of CIS we agreed to work with another CIS partner organisation, Ideal for All (IFA are a local user-led charity providing a range of support services for disabled and disadvantaged people), to source and secure the necessary funding to establish this project.

We were absolutely thrilled to discover that our three year funding bid to the National Lottery had been approved and subsequently the PAGE Project commenced in September 2022. Sandwell Advocacy would provide an Independent Advocacy Practitioner to develop a trusted relationship which is user-led and will aim 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. IFA would provide the Independent Living Skills Officer to provide community based living skills support through a range of practical and hands on one to one and group sessions with an emphasis on early help and prevention. We welcomed Kirsty Kemp who joined us as Independent Advocate on this project in September 2022.

Thanks to funding from The Eveson Trust we were also able to introduce a pilot advocacy service for young adult carers aged 18-25 during this year. We subsequently named this our Flourish Project. The Flourish Project will enable us to test the demand and effectiveness of providing a small-scale advocacy service for young adult carers who are in transition from children's to adult services. We hope to use the data, feedback and lessons from this pilot to scale up to a larger scale project over time.

Sharon Jenkins continued to provide much needed administrative support to the staff team throughout our many projects during this year. Sharon has made the role her own and can always be relied upon to support me and the rest of the staff team with various meetings and administrative duties. As previously mentioned Sharon also ably stepped up to take on the management of our Sandwell Together befriending service for the majority of this year.

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

We continued to offer student social worker placements throughout

this year. Placements commence in September and continue for 70 days. This year we welcomed Pauline Hector to the team who joined us and successfully completed her placement.

My review would not be complete without sending a message of appreciation to our wonderful dedicated team of volunteers. Our volunteers devote their time freely to support vulnerable and marginalised individuals within our community and ensure that residents have a voice when planning and/or delivering services. Our team of volunteers are an inspiration to the Board and staff team here at Sandwell Advocacy and it is heartening to see that they make a meaningful difference by giving so many people a voice.

I would also like to thank the support from our generous funders, for their financial support during this period.

As always Sandwell Advocacy is dedicated and committed to continuing our work, to build on our strengths and to support people to develop their confidence, feel more empowered and find a voice.

Dave Bradshaw
Chief Executive Officer


[Back](#)

Advocacy for Young Carers



Engaging Young Carers – a Family Approach

A new dawn has approached – Covid restrictions have more or less disappeared and families are beginning to emerge from isolation. We continued to offer one to one support for our advocacy partners at school, home and any other areas of their choosing. It was refreshing to able to venture out into schools again and work in partnership with welfare officers and pastoral teams to continue our outreach programme in identifying hidden young carers.

Based on consultation and feedback from our young people and their families Sandwell Advocacy took the opportunity to embark upon a series of activities that would appeal to both children, young people and their families. Our activity sessions provide an opportunity to consult with those we support as well as enhance the one to one advocacy provision. We wanted to make sure that the activities would be interactive and enjoyable, with the operative words being...

“getting out and having fun”

Some of the issues we asked young carers to consider:-

Question: What could help to make your caring job easier ?

“I never even thought that I had any problems with being a young carer until I spoke to you. It is something that you just do. You don't think about it that much but you have told us that there is help out there to support my family.”

Young Carer

Question: List the main difficulties that you think your child faces as a Young Carer?

“Looking after my sister mean I don't get to go out as much with my friends, I don't get to go anywhere really.”

Young Carer

So to kick off proceedings:-

Easter – we went bowling

Young Carers and their parents, grandparents and other extended family members all enjoyed a game of bowling at a local complex. This also gave us the opportunity to combine a forum style session with the bowling activity and to engage families in discussion around various issues.

“The work that has gone into making the protest art is amazing. I never knew that my child felt that way. So much has been said with so little words”

Parent



Summer Project

The summer came along and we decided to embark on another project, this time the ARTs! In conjunction with Jubilee Arts we invited our young carers, their families and friends to take part in a project which uses art to convey a message – known as Protest Art.

Young Carers and their families went on a day trip to Birmingham Art Gallery. This was to start the discussion on the power of art to convey messages without many words. This led to a series of workshops whereby pieces of art work were designed and developed by all who participated.

Festivities

Before we knew it Christmas was fast approaching so we invited our families to ‘get crafty’ and to design and make their own Christmas Hampers. This activity was well received and enjoyed by all.

All in all it has been quite a busy year for our families, there was something on offer for everyone.



“It’s been a bit busy here today, lots of young people and families but it was all good.”

Parent

When asked how Sandwell Advocacy could improve what we do, one parent told us:

“I don’t think you can improve. You make other services look like amateurs.”

Voices and Choices Project



Voices and Choices

Our Voices and Choices Project works to support older people with long-term health conditions (physical and mental health) around their care and accommodation throughout Sandwell.

The key aims of the 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 care provider accommodation have access to relevant information and are supported to make informed decisions.**

Case Study

Cameron, the husband of Daphne, contacted the office to make a referral for his wife.

“They are keeping Daphne in a care home against her wishes, she should be home with me.”

Daphne is residing in a rehabilitation unit after being taken there following a fall at home. She had a short stay in hospital and then went to the unit. What followed led to a best interest meeting as professionals believed that Daphne was not able to make the decision to return to her home due to having onset dementia. The advocate made several visits to the unit and spoke to Daphne on each occasion, asking her questions on where she wanted to live, what did she like about living in the unit, how was it better at home? We also looked at some of the areas that professionals said Daphne could not do on her own or had no understanding of what was needed. Over time a case was built and read out at a best interest meeting. The information provided by the advocate showed that with care and support Daphne had stated that she wanted to return home to her husband and daughter. The advocate spoke of what she had observed; Daphne, on these occasions, was able to understand and recall what had been asked of her. She carried out tasks that others believed she could not do and spoke to her advocate about her needs and wishes. At the end of the meeting Cameron was informed that his wife could return home with a package of care being put in place.

Names changed to protect anonymity.

[Back](#)



“I am sick and tired of telling people my wife wants to come home. They won't listen to me. I am hoping that they will listen to you.”

Many people facing having to make decisions about moving into a care provider setting do so as a matter of urgency and with limited or no information regarding what is available to suit their needs. This can be a bewildering and frustrating experience. Research indicates that once a person moves into care accommodation they

are unlikely to move again so it is important that people make the right decision.

We ensure we are actively involved in this process and that people have voice, choice and control when it comes to making important accommodation decisions.

[Back](#)

Parents, Advocacy, Guidance and Empowerment



“We aim to ensure that people in these situations are better supported and feel more able to make informed choices.”



‘The PAGE Project promotes rights, voice and empowerment’

The Parent’s, Advocacy and Empowerment (PAGE) project was launched in October 2022 and is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. This project offers Independent Advocacy and Independent Living Skills service in Sandwell for parents with a learning disability and/or autism who are subject to Children’s services intervention. The project is person centred and delivered by a qualified Independent Advocate who is focused on ensuring that parent’s views and wishes are being articulated.

As well as independent advocacy we are working in partnership with another voluntary sector organisation based in Sandwell called Ideal for All. Ideal for All provide an Independent Living Skills Officer who works alongside the advocate to provide practical ‘hands on’ support (one to one and groups) for independence, positive health & mental wellbeing and ‘skills for life’.

This includes support to develop independent living skills.

The Independent Advocate and Independent Living Skills Officer work in partnership in an attempt to prevent any cases being escalated and ensuring they are receiving the right support and interventions helping them to move forward.

Partners have shared that they often feel Children Services do not listen to them, and they get confused in regards to the process they are going through with Children Services. We aim to ensure that people in these situations are better supported and feel more able to make informed choices.

Case Study

(M) was referred to the PAGE project for advocacy support by the Children’s Social Worker. The child was subjected to an ‘Interim Care Order’. There was ongoing care proceedings where (M) and his partner were being assessed to see if their daughter could be safely returned to their care. (M) and his partner have older children whom are in Foster Care, they have regular supervised contact with them. During the proceedings (M) had a Cognitive Functioning Assessment. That Assessment confirmed that (M) has cognitive deficits in his verbal reasoning and language skills. (M) also suffers with mental health (anxiety and low moods).



[Back](#)

“The PAGE Project aims to build strong relationships in and across communities.”

The advocate supported (M) at meetings with Sandwell Children’s Trust to ensure that he understood proceedings and to articulate his views and wishes. This case is now closed to the PAGE project, as the families case was deescalated from an ‘Interim Care Order’ to ‘Child Protection Plan’ and is now a ‘Child In Need Plan’. The child has returned back home with both parents, a 12 month supervision order is in place for the child. Both parents have met all actions required by Sandwell Children’s Trust, which included completing a parenting program, PAM’s assessment, engaging with mental health and counselling services. This has helped the family move forward having positive outcomes for the child and her future.

(M) shared that having an Independent Advocate has improved his confidence in speaking up for himself, and voicing his wishes and feelings during meetings with Children Services, this has had a positive impact on his mental health.

The PAGE project aims to build strong relationships in and across communities, this is the heart of this project. The advocacy support for parents with learning disabilities aims to help build relationships with statutory services and agencies such as: child protection teams, education and family service providers, the police and the courts. It supports the individual to be better understood and empowered to have a voice, be heard and be able to speak up/voice their wishes and feelings.

Supporting parents with learning disabilities and/or autism who are subject to, or at at risk of interventions from Children’s Services by offering a range of support options that includes the provision of independent advocacy and independent living skills training.

To make a referral please contact:
 Tel: 0121 520 8070
 Email: sandwelladvocacy@btconnect.com

Parents Advocacy, Guidance and Empowerment



Adult Advocacy Support Service



This unique independent advocacy service is now in its 10th year, and has been commissioned by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 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 womens' refuges.

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

We can provide information, signpost and make referrals to other services.

We also follow up any actions raised during our visits. This could also include raising any concerns with the appropriate adult social care department as part of the safeguarding agenda.

Our visits for this period started once again with strict Covid-19 guidelines remaining in place. This included wearing PPE at all times inside care settings, and showing evidence of a negative lateral flow test prior to any visits taking place. Visits were also often restricted to a specific designated space. However, as the year progressed, restrictions slowly lifted and by the end of this period, visits had returned to the pre pandemic times. It has been positive to observe the return of many activities for residents and service users that were curtailed or cancelled during the pandemic. However, as I am sure many of us are aware, Covid has left lasting consequences in terms of recruitment of staff in certain sectors.

Good practice means that we continue to closely liaise with, and strive to maintain good working relationships with care providers at all times. The questionnaires we complete cover a wide range of topics and the questions are all relevant to the setting in

[Back](#)



question, whether it be a day centre or a care home. As part of our service, with the consent of residents/service users, we agree to raise issues they would prefer someone else to do on their behalf, with the service provider. This could range from expressing a preference for a particular food or drink to the time someone gets up or goes to bed at night. From wanting to engage in more activities to needing a haircut. Whatever the query, it is important to that individual and can impact on their day to day experience, their choices and control over their lives.

We are proud of this service and the number of Sandwell residents who we are privileged to visit over the course of a year. The feedback we receive reflects how valued individuals feel when asked if they wish to contribute towards having their say.

Carol Turley
Advocacy Support Officer

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

“It’s nice to have someone find out how you’re getting on.”

“People need to be heard.”

“At least I’m not forgotten.”

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

“It’s nice to have someone independent come out.”

“Because at least they’ve got feed back about how we feel about things.”

(Quotes from service users)

Sandwell Advocacy Voice and Empowerment



Providing independent advocacy for children aged 5-18 who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health and or behavioural issues.

We are now in year 4 of this project and the demand for the service and issues faced by the children and young people we support are as pertinent as they were at the start.

One of the main issues affecting children and young people we support centres around poor school attendance, poor educational attainment, a decline in their mental health and behavioural issues. We work to build a trusting relationship to directly support children and young people and ensure that their needs, rights and wishes are articulated when accessing, planning and delivering their

support and care services. Users of this service are empowered to articulate their views and placed at the heart of the decision making process when engaging with other services and professionals.

Case Study

Milo and his brother were separated from the family home and brought to live with another family member. Both were very close to their mom and sisters. The family was now on a Child Protection Plan. Despite all the upheaval both had witnessed at home, for them home was home. They were soon faced with the prospect of having to choose between which parent they would prefer to live with. Life for both became unbearable. Their situation at school posed another set of issues for both. One brother disclosed the torment he goes through on a daily basis, due to his physical differences, the other brother spoke about his sexuality and the abuse he was encountering on a daily basis from his peers. It became apparent that bullying was a major factor for both.

[Back](#)

SAVE!
SANDWELL ADVOCACY VOICE & EMPOWERMENT

Sandwell Advocacy
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SAVE!
SANDWELL ADVOCACY VOICE & EMPOWERMENT

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

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

Tel: 0121 520 8070
Email: sandwelladvocacy@btconnect.com

For more information go to:
www.sandwelladvocacy.org

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EVERETT BRISTOL

Their behaviour in school had deteriorated and their attendance and attainment fell well below the expected level. Both had exemplary records in school prior to the change in their circumstances

Desperate for them to have their voices heard both boys were referred to SAVE by a social worker for independent advocacy support. The advocate was able to support the boys during Child Protection meetings, meet with each separately, allowed them to voice their concerns, fears, worries and their perspective on decisions being made about and for them. The advocate was able to intervene on their behalf and voice their fears and concerns to their parents and other professionals.

Both felt that no one was listening to them. They both had a lot to say and wished that adults would listen more and welcomed the opportunity to speak openly and freely with their advocate.

We worked closely with the school to make them aware of the bullying incidents and they were able to intervene with positive outcomes. The two boys were no longer suffering in silence. The journey for both has been difficult and things have changed in many ways.

Despite this both are now enjoying their childhood again and striving. In this situation SAVE did SAVE.

Names changed to protect anonymity.

Sandwell Together



The Sandwell Together telephone befriending service was originally started as the country entered the COVID pandemic. We worked in partnership with Sandwell MBC and SCVO (Sandwell Council for Voluntary Organisations) to set up and deliver a telephone befriending service for the most vulnerable and isolated residents in the borough.

During the period April 2022 to March 2023 we continued to receive referrals from a range of local health and social care professionals and the service continues to provide a vital help line for so many people who experience social isolation. Those who have accessed this service are varied in both age and circumstances.

When we first make contact with residents who are referred into this service many of them tell us that although the pandemic is officially

over, they are still frightened of going to public spaces and many have lost their old friendship circles. Although some of the old clubs are reopening again, many of those we support have lost their self-confidence but have used this service to prepare to go back out in the world, which, again, has been a success. It is interesting to view how the service is developing as it grows and how it is responding to the needs of Sandwell residents.

The service offers a vital lifeline which is provided by a team of 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, fear etc. by allowing people to talk about their feelings thereby reducing the impact of isolation on an individual's psycho-social wellbeing.

Many of those who have accessed Sandwell Together are housebound for various reasons and this is a vital service to maintain their contact with the outside world. Many of them tell us that they enjoy the weekly call of a friend to discuss current affairs but also any emotional issues that they are facing.

During Volunteer's Week this year (1st–7th June) we attended a number of events to promote volunteering in Sandwell and its many benefits, both to the volunteer and the recipient. The events were arranged through Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and were held at a variety of locations. Sandwell Advocacy continues to recruit and train volunteers for this project and it is hoped that our volunteer numbers will increase as time progresses to meet the continued need.

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

Beneficiary Who Had Been Bereaved

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

Volunteer.

An independent evaluation report of the service confirmed that both the volunteers and those they support benefited hugely from the calls. Volunteers had increased their confidence and skills and those they support confirmed that their mental and emotional well-being had improved. Both parties had benefited and learnt from the process.

Whilst Sandwell Together was intended to be a short-term measure to support people through the COVID pandemic, we recognised that there was continued need and the service has continued in an effort to meet this need. We have seen that the need for this type of community based support will grow rather than diminish and it is hoped that this service can continue to support stronger communities with an ability to protect those who find themselves in vulnerable situations.



Caring For Carers Bereavement and Wellbeing Service



Another year has passed and the service has continued to support older carers who have lost the person they cared for or looking after someone at the end of their life.

This year we have seen a rise in referrals from a range of ages, ethnicities, cultures, and genders, all who are at different stages in their grief journey.

Most of us will become a carer at some point during our life. This can be for someone who has a short-term or long-term illness. Carers can often become disconnected from their communities and lose touch with their friendship groups and family members.

Carers can have anticipatory grief when the cared for is diagnosed with a terminal illness. When the cared-for person dies, many carers become socially isolated which often causes many other issues (e.g. deterioration of health).

Many of us are often too afraid to talk about death, dying or loss. We leave funeral plans to those we leave behind to sort, often not knowing what the person would have liked. This service has provided wellbeing and bereavement officers to help and support those who are referred to look at range of issues being faced. This is done using a wellbeing plan that looks at all areas of the person's life including, hobbies, friendship groups, areas of interest and plans for the future.

[Back](#)


Wellbeing officers have been busy delivering Compassionate Communities programme in Perry Barr and Ladywood. This focuses on training people in frontline roles (e.g. hairdressers, pub staff, and library and school staff) to better support bereaved members of the public. Student support staff and students at Birmingham Universities have taken part in training and found it particularly useful.

'We go to know you so well. You got what we were saying, you understood some of the pain we were going through and the emotions that follow this. Thank you for everything'

Ex-carer

Living Memory

The project has also completed a number of Living Memory booklets for bereaved carers which are created by Geoff Broadway. This involved speaking to the ex-carer about their loved one whilst looking at photographs and reciting the memories behind them. These Living Memories have been well received by the ex-carers and their families, and for many it has been an important part of the grieving process with some saying it had been a cathartic experience.

'I wanted something to remember her by, something that I had chosen that showed happier times. I wrote the poems myself and chose the photographs that mean so much to me. It's beautiful'

Ex-carer

Financial Summary 2022/2023

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|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Income for the year totalled | £226,636 |
| Expenditure for the year was | £205,823 |
| Fund balance at 31/3/22 | £137,998 |

We gratefully acknowledge the financial contribution received from a variety of sources throughout 2022/2023, 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
- The Asda Green Token Scheme
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Tipton Civic Society
- The Albert Gubay Charitable Foundation
- Alfred Haines Charitable Trust
- Arnold Clark Fund
- SCVO Positive Mental Health Micro-Grant
- Edward Cadbury Trust
- National Lottery Awards for All
- The Eveson Trust
- Tesco Community Grant
- The Tipton and Coseley Building Society Charitable Foundation
- Edgar E Lawley Foundation
- Charles Hayward Foundation

[Back](#)

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