

Coram Voice provided 43 advocacy episodes to 39 Children and Young People during the year; 4 young people were re-referred. There were 31 new referrals and 29 closures in the reporting period.

In addition, 7 children and young people were provided with advocacy funded by Coram Voice Outreach and Always Heard.

In Q4, Coram Voice provided Issue based advocacy to 25 Children and Young People, with 9 new referrals and 11 closures.

Service Overview

Independent advocacy advice and support provided by Coram Voice advocates via our free phone advocacy support line, face to face in the community in Camden, but also across the country via our national team of advocates.

Our service is designed to be as accessible as possible, via: our free phone helpline, text; website, outreach, referrals from professionals and carers, and promoted with age specific and translated promotional materials. All Camden young people have access to telephone interpretation where English is not their first language. Our specialist advocates for children with disabilities and young people 16+ means our service is well equipped to support children and young people with specific needs. Advocates will also make initial referral visits for young people unable to communicate verbally via our helpline service.

Coram Voice advocacy is wishes and feelings based and led by the young people who request our support, where they have capacity and are able to instruct the service directly. If capacity is lacking on any particular issues, the service uses a non-instructed advocacy model whereby the advocate will liaise with those people who know the young person; visit them in all available settings, ascertain as much as possible about what the young person is communicating through non-verbal communication and present a non-instructed advocacy report highlighting findings and whether all rights and entitlements are being met.

Our advocates aim to empower Camden young people by giving them information on their rights and entitlements in order to make informed decisions, also about ways in which they can engage with Children's Services and speak out about their wishes and feelings. The advocate will not seek to influence the child or young person with regard to their decision-making, and operates a confidential service in regards to all personal information unless safeguarding risks identified which will be shared.

Our advocacy is undertaken in line with the *National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services*. The practice of our advocates depends on the needs of Camden children and young people, but is likely to include phone calls and other correspondence with their social worker, supporting them at meetings and reviews, and helping them through the Children's Act complaints process if they request this. As our advocacy is child-led Coram Voice advocates always explore how the child or young person would like this support to take place.

Coram Voice advocates work in an open and transparent way, so will always tell children and young people about any conversations they have had with professionals. However, they also understand that there may be times when it would be harmful, or inappropriate, for them to share particularly sensitive information, which the professional needs to take time and care to communicate.

We have restructured our advocacy helpline service. Our helpline advocates are now focussing on providing initial support and information to children and young people who self-refer for Coram Voice advocacy. Professional referrals are, in most cases, assigned to our local services. This means that our helpline team can focus on provided one to one support to children and young people and take any urgent steps that may be required, such as responding to safeguarding concerns.

Our advocacy helpline operates Monday to Friday from 09:30-18:00 with out of hours support at all other times. Young people who do not have English as their first language have access to Language Line interpreters when talking with our advocates and we can provide BSL interpretation online where needed. In the next month, we will adopting a digital first approach for professional referrals, with social workers and others making advocacy referrals using an online referral form. This will be more convenient for professionals and will make sure that our team gets all the information they need to process referrals. We will update our commissioning and referral partners when this is ready for launch.

Types of Advocacy Cases

All young people are supported to explore options for resolving their concerns via informal resolution and representation or via the complaints process. Cases have been marked as complaint cases where substantive advice and complaints work has been undertaken and there are instances where a complaint has not been submitted due to issues being resolved informally or the young person changing their mind.

Period 2023/2024 (2022/2023 shown in brackets)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year to date totals
Number of new cases regarding a complaint where an advocate has been allocated	4 (2)	1 (1)	0 (1)	3 (1)	8 (5)
Number of new cases where representation has been allocated (not related to a complaint)	2 (6)	6 (10)	9 (11)	6 (12)	23 (39)

Outcome s , reflections and projections

Please also refer to *Coram Voice Camden Advocacy Final Q4 monitoring Data 2023- 2024*

Based on the reports of young people and advocates, over the year the main issues identified were:

- **Housing:** care leavers have continued to access advocacy for support with housing related issues. Assistance around housing is of paramount importance because not only shelter is obviously a basic need but housing can be very complex. Young people need support to understand all the available options and their rights & entitlements, which depend on age, immigration status and other support needs.
- **Concerns about SW/ PAS:** social workers and personal advisors are focal points that ensure that children and young people have access to the right level of support they need. At times, children and young people reported difficulties in these relationships needing advocacy support to have their wishes and feelings listened to regarding housing, family time or inconsistent contact with social worker/ personal advisor.

In reporting and discussing the themes arising in our advocacy with children and young people, the local authority is provided with rich detail of their day-to-day lived experiences in Camden. This offers a valuable opportunity to listen, reflect and respond to what they say about their relationships with local authority staff; the homes where they live; the planning around the care and support they receive; the resources provided to them; etc. Advocates reflections on Camden's policy and practice in the borough also provides independent feedback on their experiences with empowering children by giving them information about their rights & entitlements; getting their voices heard about decisions being made about their care and having these taken into account by the local authority.

Young people accessing advocacy

Coram Voice is committed to providing an advocacy service that meets the needs of the full diversity of the children and young people in Camden eligible for the service.

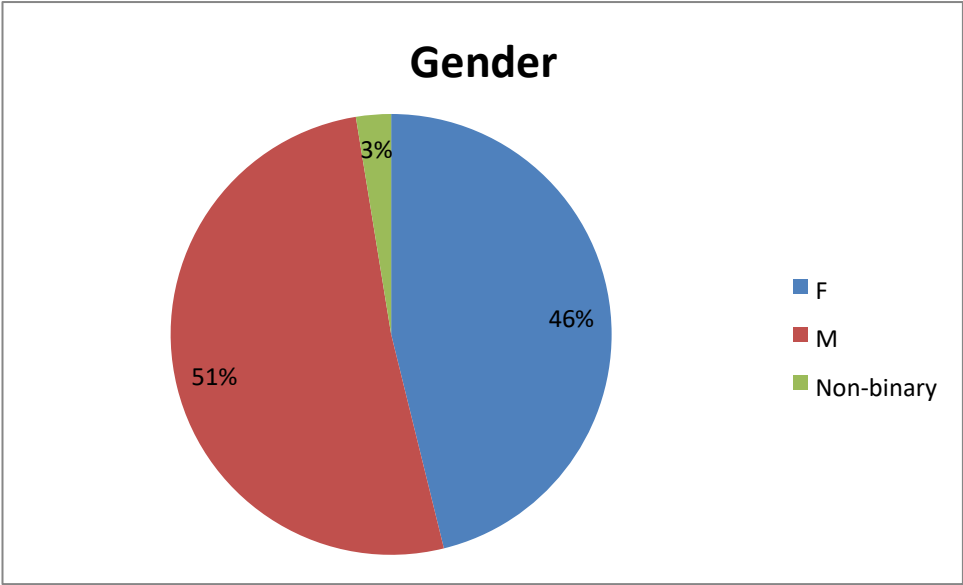
In Q4 2023/24, 25 young people were open for advocacy with 9 new referrals and 11 closures.

In the year 2023 – 2024, there were 43 advocacy episodes open to 39 Children and Young People (4 re-referrals), 31 new referrals and 29 closures.

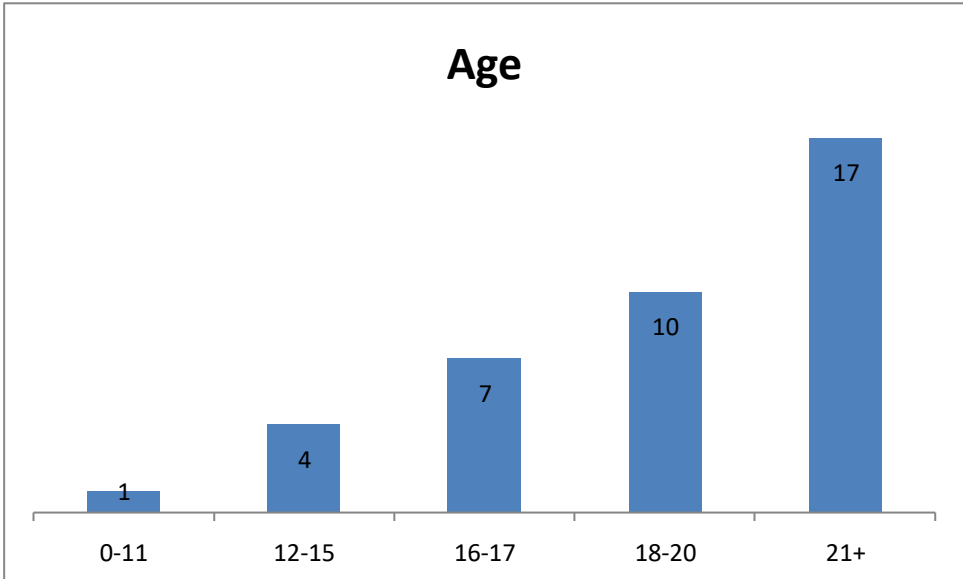
We provide the following annual data to allow us to work with Camden to ensure that we can identify areas where we need to develop our local model of service to ensure that ours is a truly representative service.

The annual graphs exclude the 4 re-referrals.

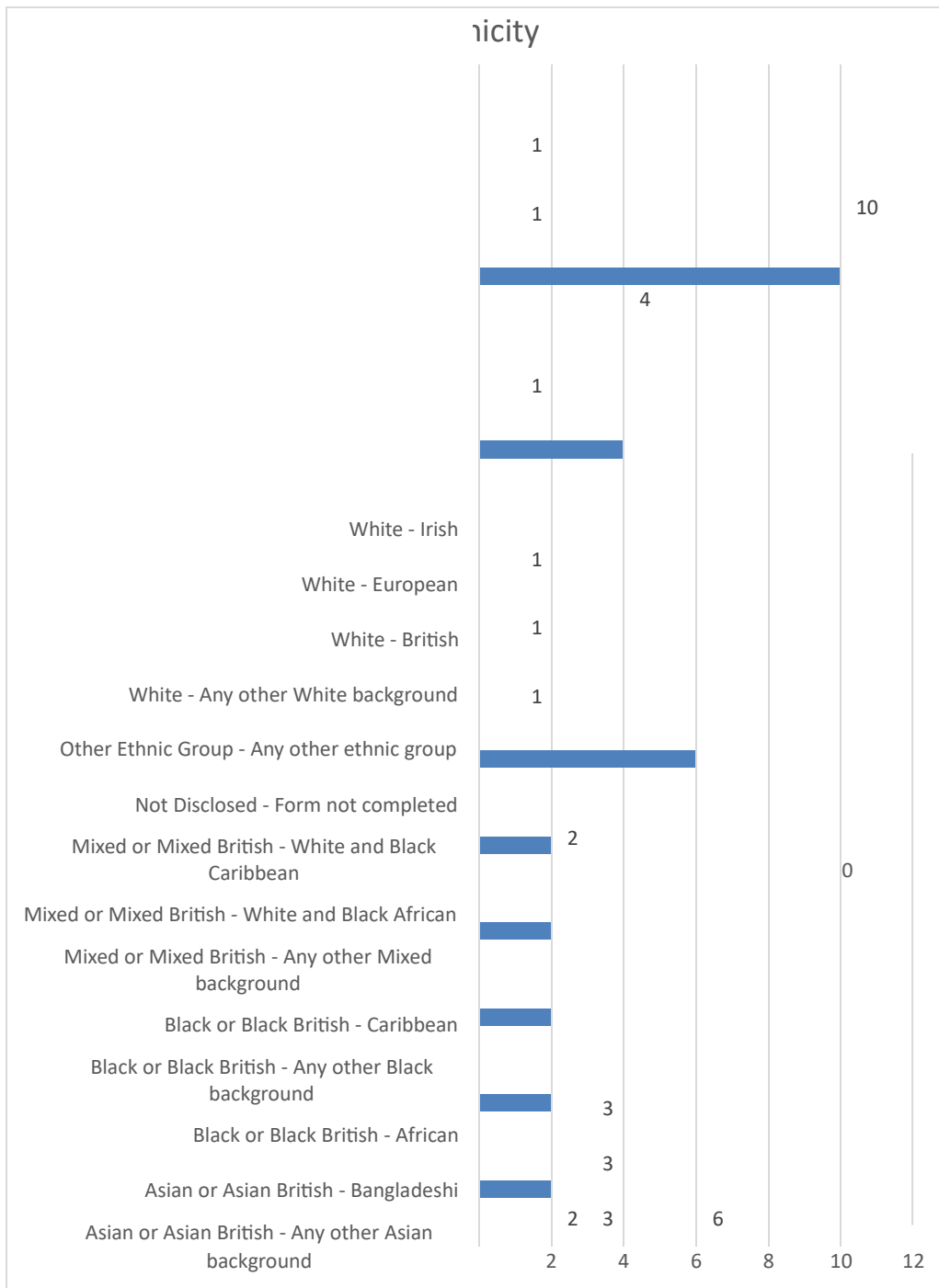
Gender: The gender breakdown of children and young people accessing the service was **51% male** (20), **46% female** (18), and 3% Non-binary (1).



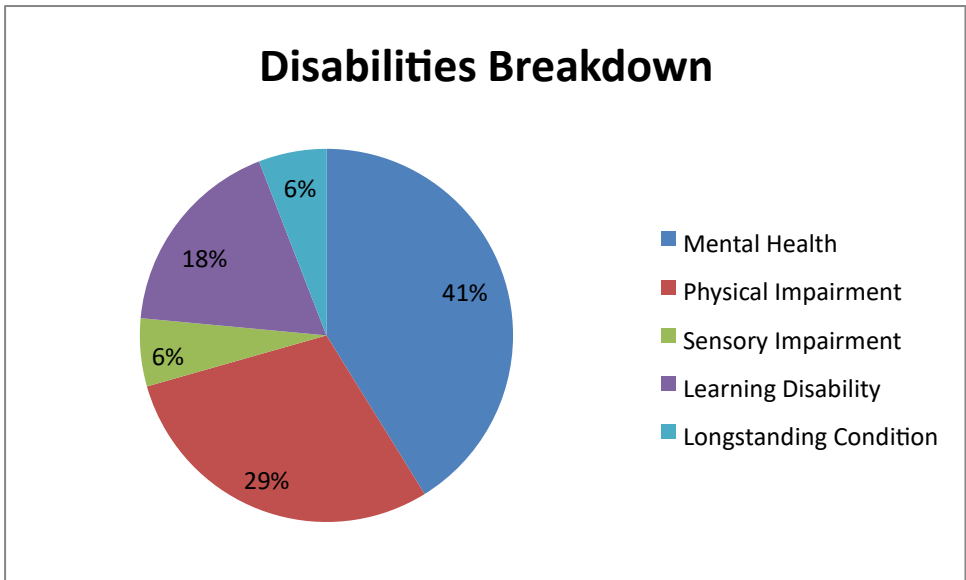
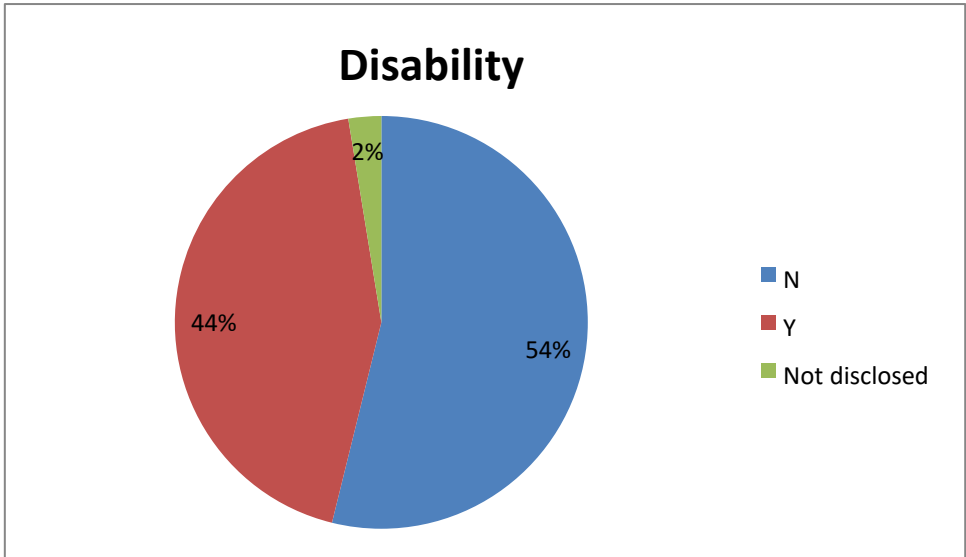
Age: The data on age breakdown of children and young people accessing the service shows that the majority of children and young people accessing advocacy are in the 18+ group, making up 70% of the referrals received.



Ethnicity: The chart below illustrates the wide range of ethnicities of the young people accessing the service.



Disability: 17 young people accessed Advocacy in the year that self-identify as having a disability, representing 44% of all the services users. 21 young people (54%) identified as not having a disability.



Quality Assurance

All advocates working with Camden young people have casework supervision on a monthly basis. Coram Voice also undertakes casework and supervision audits to ensure that both are compliant with our internal expectations and with those required by this contract. Advocacy is monitored on the hours used for each case as well as hours recorded against total available hours to ensure we become as efficient and effective as possible.

Outcomes for Young People

Coram Voice recognises that the issue based outcomes wanted by the young people cannot always be achieved, might be unrealistic, may change or even be beyond the scope of an advocate. As a result, they are not always reliable indicators of high quality advocacy. We therefore measure the impact on young people of having advocacy support by measuring how far they “travel” whilst the support is in place.

Young people self-assess against a range of indicators of how they felt at the start and then at the end of the advocacy relationship. This helps provide a sense of what the young person has gained because of advocacy.

The indicators we use are:

Motivation I feel that I can achieve the aims and ambitions I have in my life **Safety**

If something happened I was not happy with I would be able to tell someone

Wellbeing I feel positive about my life.

Being Responsible I feel able to make decisions for myself

Relationships I feel I have a good relationship with the professionals and carers in my life

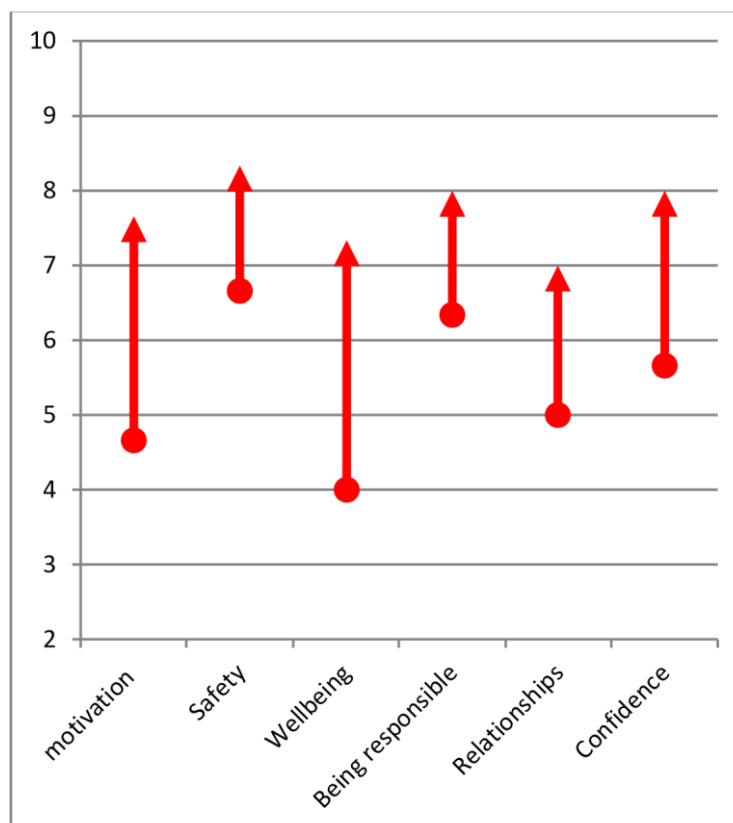
Confidence I am able to speak up for myself in meetings

Young people score themselves out of 10 concerning how they felt at the start of the advocacy relationship and again at the end.

It is important to note that outcomes charts measure soft outcomes and that information about advocacy issues outcomes is provided in the data-monitoring sheet *Coram Voice Advocacy Q4 2023-24 Camden data*.

Of the 29 young people who closed during the year, 3 young people completed the outcomes chart. The reasons for non-completion are reported quarterly.

The chart below shows improvement across all the measured areas for the young people that completed the outcomes questionnaires over the year.



Feedback and evaluation

Feedback is gathered from a variety of sources including closure summaries completed with young people by their advocate, day to day conversations during advocacy support provided, outcomes charts completed with young people at the closure of advocacy support and feedback forms. Quarterly reports collate and share feedback gathered throughout the year. The following feedback was received in 2023/24:

Young Person, closure summary

“Young person shared during discussion that she doesn't feel heard and listened to by Personal Advisor.”

Young Person, feedback to Advocate

“Young person has thanked me multiple times for being someone she can speak to and represent her views.”

Young Person, feedback to Advocate

“Absolutely, thank you so much for all of your help you have really made a difference.”

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

“I feel confident to approach social services, however if I need support I can call Coram Voice Helpline. I am very happy with the support provided.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Children's Services and placement staff need to explain to young people in advance that accommodation will be mixed gender and work in a trauma informed way so young people are aware to reduce triggers.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Social worker was very responsive to advocate and child was very happy with social worker.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Camden Children's Services need to respond to requests based on YP instruction in a timely and complete manner to enable YP to be fully supported by advocates.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Local authority responded to complaints adhering to expected time frames and it responded to MP's office in a timely manner with regard to their enquiries.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Local authority need to respond to complaints adhering to expected timeframes and inform yp when there is a delay. Messages need to be replied to in a timely matter by PA. Camden Children's Services complaints department need to ensure responses to complaints are within the identified response time. They also need to make sure responses are not just a list of dates and actions and that the yp's wishes and feelings are taken into account in their response.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Local authority need to respond to complaints adhering to expected timeframes and inform young people when there is a delay.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Messages need to be replied to in a timely matter by Personal Advisor.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Local authority could adopt a more flexible position with young people with mental health issues. Local authority should be able to provide support when young people go away and come back without young people having to call the worker and team manager continuously. Feeling lack of support and professionals not replying to emails and calls can increase young people’s anxieties.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person feels that they should have been supported to secure eligibility to social housing in the local authority that they have spent the majority of their life as this was outside of Camden.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Unsure as to why actions agreed originally in September 2022 care panel not undertaken and there was such a delay in doing so.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Personal Advisor supportive and encouraging of young person and successfully and efficiently identified suitable accommodation. Young person now needs a little time to orientate himself outside of his borough, which he cannot return to, and Personal Advisor will need to support him to register for social housing with another local authority. Personal Advisor is competent and clear with young person about steps he needs to take to achieve this.”

Young Person, closure summary

“I felt supported through mediator and advocate to talk about what I was going through and how I feel and felt heard. In the beginning, I was confused when the assessment was taking place, as unsure who was my social worker and people’s roles, but they did come and see me and Mum which I found helpful as they helped explain things to my Mum and me.”

Young Person, closure summary

“YP said they still feel they were treated inappropriately by social services, as their wishes to seek further medical advice were not explored or taken seriously as social services did not listen to them.”

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

“I feel that I am now able to self-advocate more, had opportunity to say what I want and had people actually listen to me and give me the time to open up and stuff.”

Young Person, feedback to Advocate

“Thank you for your patience, understanding and explaining things properly.”

Young Person, feedback to Advocate

“I want to say thank you so much for all your support.”

Young Person, feedback to Advocate

“I don't trust anyone but myself. But I know you are trying to help me.”

Young Person, feedback to Local Authority

Following pathway plan review meeting, young person said that she “felt listened to and was happy with the plan moving forward”.

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“There was a lot of time spent going back and forth between young person and other professionals as it was not clear what options or routes they could take outside of S20. Local authority felt that there wasn't enough evidence/concern/urgency to accommodate young person under S20, but unsure what this means and why case was not treated and viewed as adoption breakdown when issues first arose between young person and adoptive mother. Young person has been provided a CIN social worker and is being supported to access New Horizons who can provide accommodation when young person turns 18yrs old and young person is happy with this. Social worker has actively sourced and supported young person to find alternative support in being accommodated via another route as an alternative to S20.”

Advocate, reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person has expressed feeling very let down by Camden. He says he left prison and was placed in Camden where he is unsafe. He spent 7 days contacting Camden with no reply. Advocate contacted Personal Advisor, Team Manager and Service Manager and had no reply for almost 5 days when young person was street homeless. Duty number was also off for a full day.”

Advocate, reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Complaints department need to ensure responses to complaints are within timeframes. They also need to make sure responses are not just a list of dates and actions and that young people's wishes and feelings are taken into account in their response.”

Advocate, reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Care leavers are more likely to get into debt if not given the right support, especially transitioning into adulthood. Local authority needs to consider a clear plan of support with young people as they feel supported and not judged.”

Advocate, reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person has been in care since May 2023 and has only been supported to obtain immigration legal advice after advocate challenge in September 2023. Advocate has shared with social worker the importance of this and social worker has replied saying they have issues with capacity with solicitors. Young person is very unhappy with this. Solicitors view is that if legal aid immigration solicitor cannot be found, local authority is responsible for paying for private to not delay immigration claim”.

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

“I think that my confidence has grown. I have learnt a lot from having an advocate about being assertive about what I want to say but just delivering it in a better way.”

Young Person, feedback to Advocate, closure summary

“Thank you for all your help.”

Young Person, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“I feel that the local authority has failed me over the years but at the same time there has been some positives, the main one being that I can and will manage on my own.”

Young Person, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“They're not listening to me and they didn't move me because of any safeguarding concern.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“YP left prison with nowhere to go and felt the local authority placed him at further risk by not helping him find accommodation outside of Camden where he felt unsafe due to gang affiliation.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“It seems that there has been unnecessary delay for YP to receive rent support and social housing nomination. It is not clear why there are delays and continual new issues in social housing nominations.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“The local authority was responsive in addressing yp’s escalated concerns but it should endeavour to respond to professionals when contacted within a reasonable time frame and communicate if there are any barriers or known delays to response.”

Advocate, reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Social worker took almost 1 month to reply to initial email despite prompts.”

Advocate, reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Following safeguarding referrals, both Camden and Hackney Children's Services denied that they were the local authority responsible for the YP, and the YP remained street homeless and at risk during this time, until legal action intervened. A more collaborative approach between the local authorities and transparency in sharing of previous family assessments would have been most beneficial to this YP. However Camden Children's Services, and the SW, has been very efficient, showing good practice and a 'child centred' approach in listening to the YP's wishes and feelings, since accepting responsibility for him.”

Advocate, reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“PA has been communicative and imaginative in her work with this YP and has encouraged him to think of the future and plan for a working life/ progress with accommodation, even though yp needs to live out of borough. YP's housing need will be complex when he is released from custody and if he is not able to continue with the same PA, the positive relationship with the care leaving team could be jeopardised, if the next worker has a different approach.”

Further information

The Coram Voice lead for the Camden advocacy service is:

Grace Maher Children’s Rights Service Manager

07523 039617 (Direct)

grace.maher@coramvoice.org.uk Coram Voice, Coram Campus, 41 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ 020 7833 5792

