

Coram Voice provided 77 advocacy episodes to 68 Children and Young People during the year. 9 young people were re-referred in the same period. There were 45 new referrals and 51 closures.

In addition, 10 children and young people were provided with advocacy funded by Coram Voice Outreach and Always Heard.

In Quarter 4, Coram Voice provided advocacy to 38 young people. There were 17 new referrals and 13 closures.

Service Overview

Independent advocacy advice and support has been 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 and 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 effectively 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 where the advocate will liaise with all 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 risks are identified in safeguarding situations which will need to be shared.

Our entire 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.

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 2021/2022 (2020/2021 shown in brackets)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year to date totals
Number of new cases regarding a complaint where an advocate has been allocated	0 (0)	3 (4)	2 (1)	1 (3)	6 (8)
Number of new cases where representation has been allocated (not related to a complaint)	4 (7)	7 (12)	12 (13)	16 (14)	39 (46)

Outcomes, reflections and projections

Please see attached *Camden Advocacy Final Q4 monitoring Data 2021- 2022*

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

- **Housing:** In Q4, there was a number of young people accessing advocacy due to issues with accommodation where they felt that the accommodation provided did not meet their needs and needed additional support working with Housing through the help of their Personal Advisors. A few care leavers sought support from an advocate as they were facing homelessness. A looked after child reached out to Coram Voice as they were turning 18 years old and were unhappy with the plans in place around moving accommodation.

Housing has been an ongoing issue for young people as reported during the year, in particular, care leavers sharing feelings of dissatisfaction about living in shared accommodation. It seems that, at times, young people's expectations around housing are not met by the local authority's provision, specifically around securing tenancies in fully independent housing. It is important that young people have access to clear information about their rights and entitlements and the route to access independent housing is clearly outlined on pathway plans. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for discussions about housing to start before young people turn 18 years old to ensure that, as they move towards living independently, young people are fully aware of their rights and entitlements alongside their responsibilities.

- **Complaints:** In Q4, two young people experienced delays in receiving an acknowledgement from the Complaints department within the local authority upon submission of a stage 1 complaint. In both cases, advocates had to follow this up on more than one occasion to ensure that the young people had confirmation from Camden that their complaints had been received and accepted.

Over the year, some young people and advocates reported delays in the local authority's responses to complaints. When these occur, it increases young people's level of frustration with Camden's provision, can damage the working relationship between young people and the local authority. It is of paramount importance that Camden meets the timeframes to respond complaints, not only to meet their statutory duties as outlined by the Children's Act 1989 but also to protect the relational aspect of their work with young people.

- **Concerns about SW and PA's:** Looked after children and care leavers sought support from an advocate as they experienced relationship difficulties with allocated social workers and personal advisors, sharing that they didn't feel listened to and wanting to have a more active role in the decision making process about their lives.

Concerns about SW and PAs has been an issue consistently reported throughout the year. At times, young people report difficulties with their allocated worker as, in the root of these difficulties, they are dissatisfied with the offer from the local authority around a particular area of their lives such as finances or housing. Also, on occasion, the issues with allocated workers arise from poor communication and young people not knowing how to contact their workers. It is important that children and young people are provided with clear information about how to contact their worker and that they are made aware that, in the absence of the social worker or personal advisor, young people can contact duty, team managers or IROs. It may be that some young people would benefit from having a plan with their social worker or personal advisor giving certainty of contact that would likely allay their concerns and anxieties. Nonetheless we acknowledge that it could be challenging to implement such plans due to the nature of the work of social workers and personal advisors who often have to deliver crisis intervention work, which could impact on their ability to sustain contact plans with young people.

- **Age Dispute:** In Q4, four young people, newly arrived in the country, accessed advocacy seeking support for ongoing age dispute issues. The local authority accommodated three of these young people under section 20 upholding their rights and entitlements as looked after children. The fourth young person was moved out of the borough under the care of another local authority.

Although age dispute is not an issue that has been identified by a significant number of young people, it is important to note that over the last two quarters there has been a small increase in the number of young people newly arrived in the country seeking advocacy support to ensure that they are accommodated under section 20 and their rights and entitlements are upheld whilst undergoing age assessments.

Young people accessing advocacy

Coram Voice has been 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.

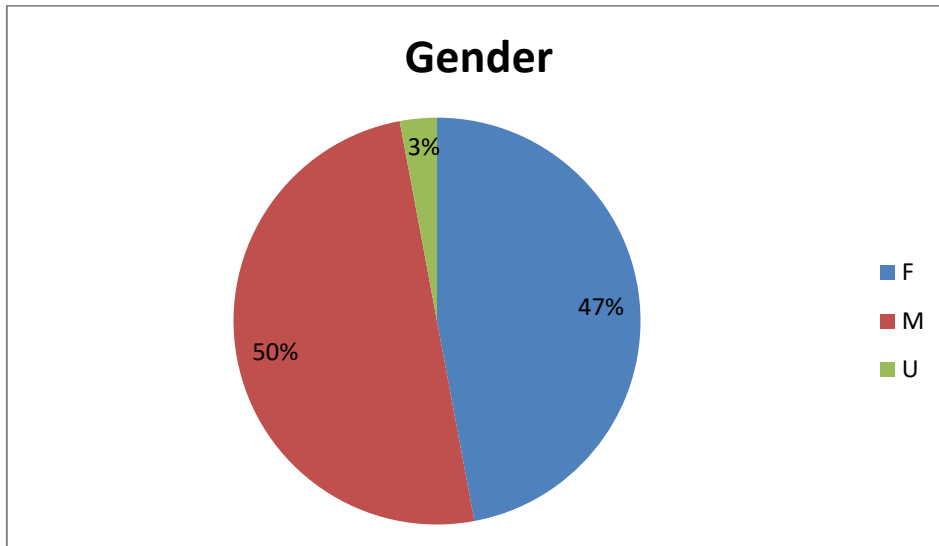
In Quarter 4, 38 young people were open to advocacy with 17 new referrals and 13 closures.

In the year 2021 – 2022, there were 77 advocacy episodes open, 45 new referrals and 51 closures.

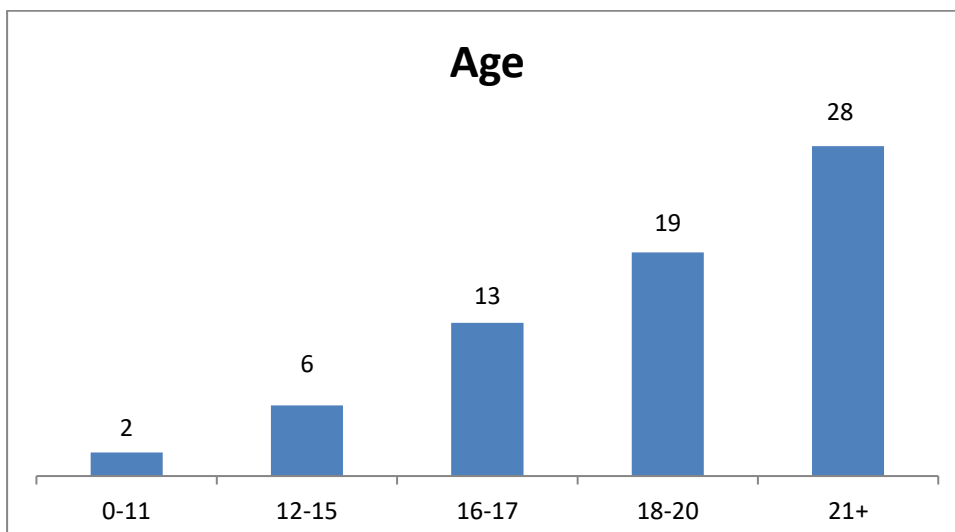
We provide the following annual data to allow us to work with Camden to ensure that we can identify areas where we need to develop our local model of service to ensure that ours is a truly representative service.

The annual graphs exclude the 9 re-referrals.

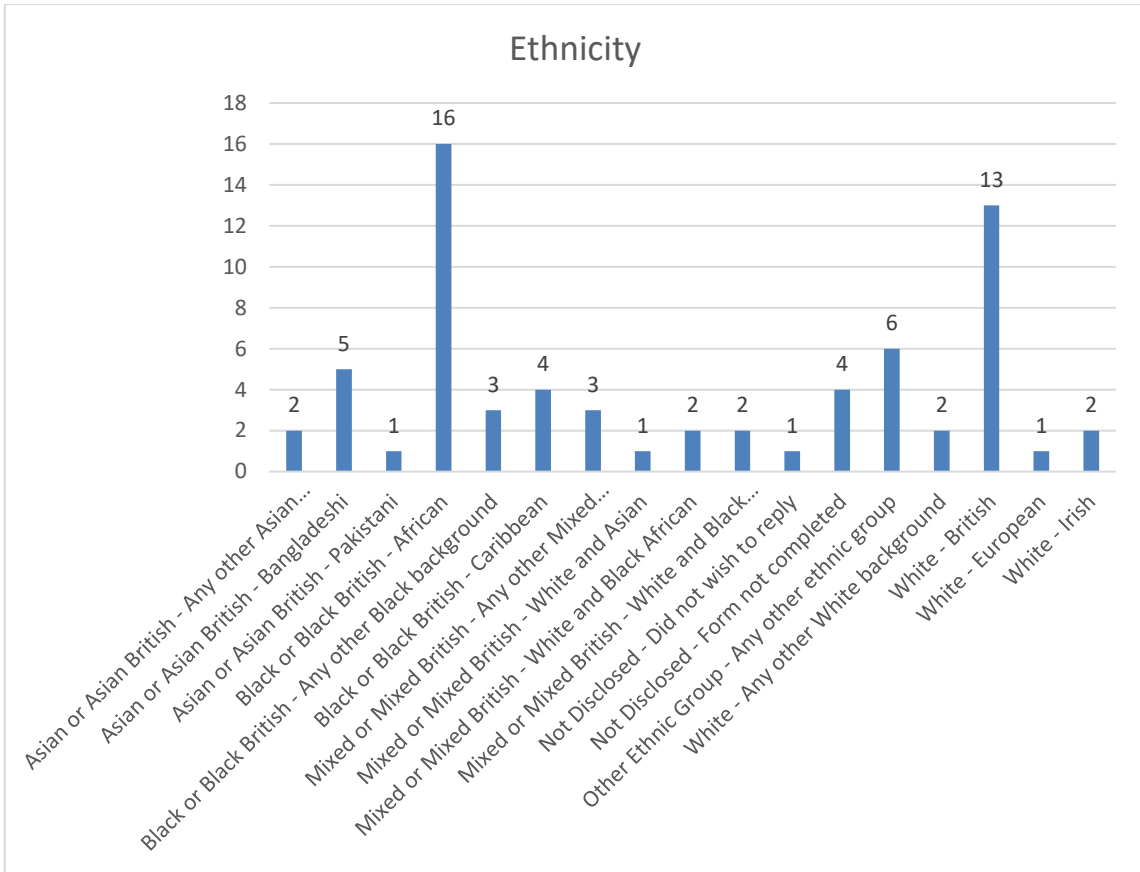
Gender: The gender breakdown of children and young people accessing the service was **50% male** (34), **47% female** (32), and **3% Undefined** (2).



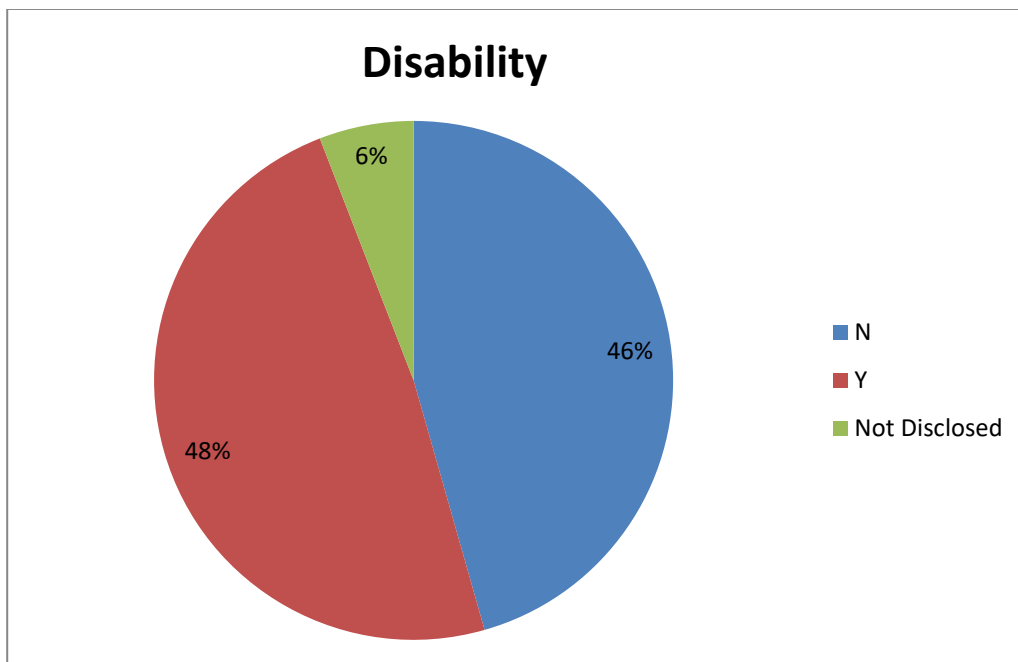
Age: The data on age breakdown of children and young people accessing the service shows that the majority of children and young people accessing advocacy are in the 18+ group, making up 69% of the referrals received.



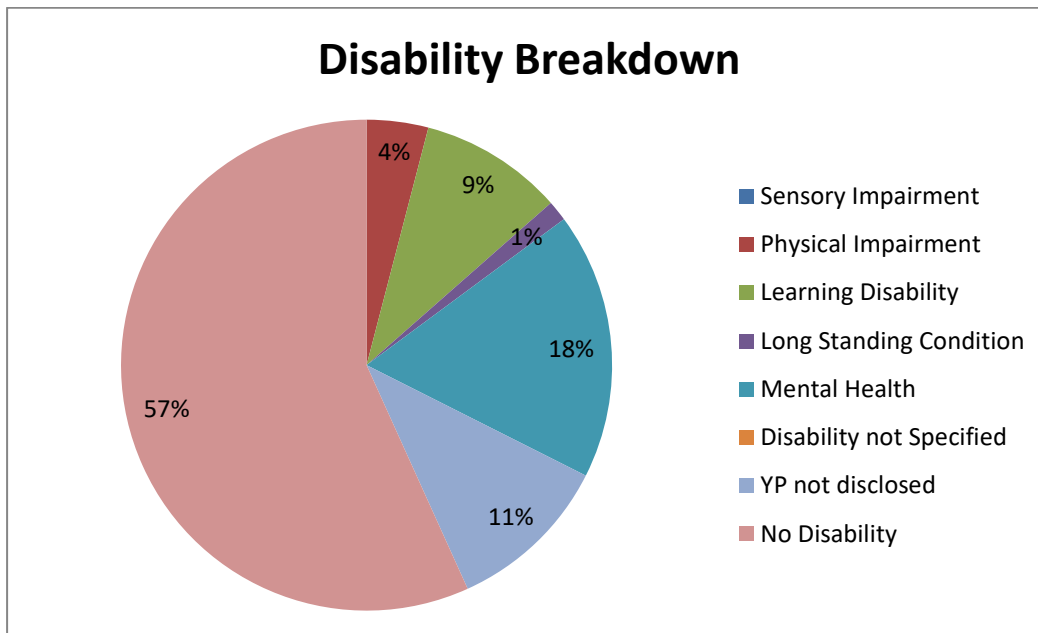
Ethnicity: The pie chart below illustrates the wide range of ethnicities of the young people accessing the service.



Disability: Advocacy was accessed by 33 young people in the reporting year that self-identify as having a disability, representing 48% of all the services users. 31 young people (46%) identified as not having a disability.



The pie chart below illustrates the different types of disabilities identified by the young people:



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. Advocates are also 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 each young person 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 both us and the user a sense of what the young person has gained as a result 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

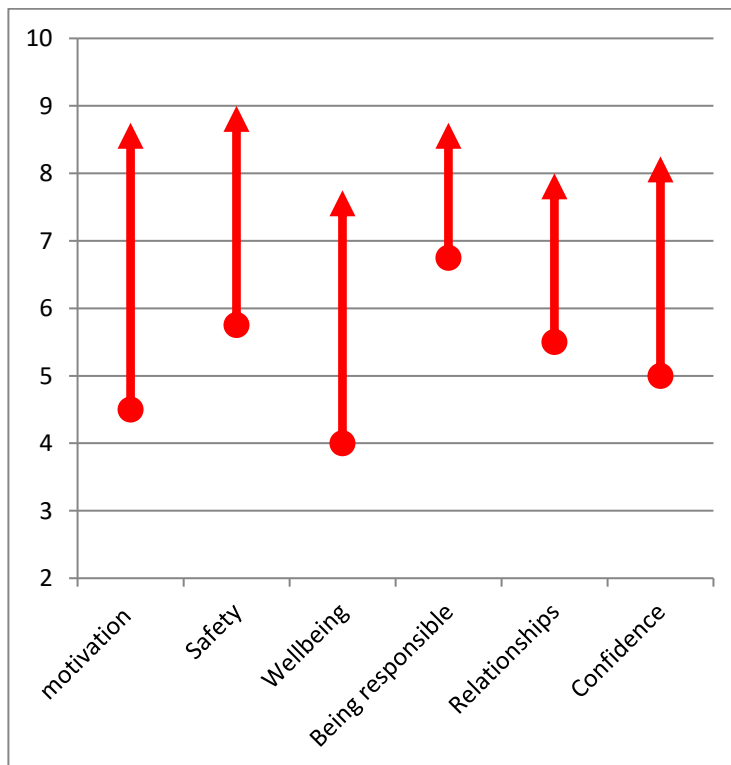
Confidence

I am able to speak up for myself in meetings

Young people are asked to score themselves out of 10 in regard to how they felt at the start of the advocacy relationship and again at the end.

Of the 51 young people who closed during the year, 4 young people completed the outcomes chart. The reasons for non-completions are shared quarterly. It is important to note that, as stated above, outcomes charts measure soft outcomes and that information about advocacy issues outcomes is provided in the data monitoring sheet *Coram Voice Advocacy Q4 2021-22 Camden data*.

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



Feedback and evaluation

Quarterly reports collate and share feedback gathered throughout the year. A selection over the year includes:

Young person, feedback to Advocate,

"I feel so much better now that I've spoken to you. Thank you so much for listening to me. You guys do really great stuff."

Young Person, feedback to Advocate,

"I'd like to say that the service provided by the advocate was amazing and really made the viability assessment a lot easier to comprehend as well as having the extra clarification provided by the advocate made me feel like I understood everything I was being told. She would contact me regularly to keep me up to date and check if I had anything to add. She would also provide help when she can. Overall, I feel that she has advocated for me greatly."

Young person, feedback to Advocate,

"Thank you, you have really helped me."

Young Person feedback to advocate, closure summary

"Thank you for all your help."

Young Person, closure summary

"It was nice to talk to my advocate as I felt it wasn't her job to talk to me and she had loads of time for me to help think things through."

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

"I feel more positive about things and I think I could speak up a bit more and be confident in that now."

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

"Cleared up stuff about by family and feel firm about my decisions."

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

"If it wasn't for my advocate in the first place this whole thing wouldn't have kicked off and to be honest I can't put into words how much you've helped me because I can't express how grateful I am even though you might not know it."

Young Person feedback to local authority, closure summary

"Young person feels that the leaving care service should have been more communicative (particularly when PA went off on long term sick - he was not notified about this)."

Young Person feedback to local authority, closure summary

"No negative comments from my side just that they need to give out more information on how to self-refer or reopen a case."

Young person, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

"I don't think Camden have handled my complaint well. They have taken a long time getting back to me, and this has caused me more anxiety while I've waited to hear a decision. We had to do quite a lot of chasing to get updates, which I feel I shouldn't have had to do. I feel that, although it was my decision to accept the offer of being paid for a year of therapy instead of going ahead with stage two, I didn't feel I had much of a real choice because of the way the investigation had gone. I wanted it to be over as soon as possible because of the impact on my mental health - if it hadn't taken almost a year to get to where we left things, I would have wanted to continue with the investigation. I feel that the lack of evidence that led to the LADO closing my case was due to a failure of proper practice by social services."

Young person, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

"I was left with nothing and Camden didn't help me even though I had a twin with the exact same case and he went into care and got his care leaver rights. I was left homeless for 6 years and I didn't know what to do or about my rights or anything. I've been seriously failed by Camden and it's really set me back in my life. Even now, they told me they'll only give me a studio when I'm actually entitled to a one bed and now I've just gone with Islington because they're actually helping me and giving me what I am entitled."

Young Person, closure summary

"It was nice to talk to my advocate as I felt it wasn't her job to talk to me and she had loads of time for me to help think things through."

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

"I feel more positive about things and I think I could speak up a bit more and be confident in that now."

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

"Cleared up stuff about by family and feel firm about my decisions."

Young Person, Outcomes Chart

"If it wasn't for my advocate in the first place this whole thing wouldn't have kicked off and to be honest I can't put into words how much you've helped me because I can't express how grateful I am even though you might not know it."

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

"This complaints process has involved delays, taking ten months to get from submission of stage one to the point where the case was concluded (essentially half way through stage two, when the young person agreed to receiving compensation as an alternative to continuing with the investigation). The young person turned 25 during the course of the complaints process, and was keen for her case with the Leaving Care Team (and her complaint) to be closed as soon as possible so that she could put her experiences behind her. She continued to receive some support from her PA while her complaint case was open, which she did find to be helpful, as she needed the emotional support. I am relieved that the suggestion of requesting compensation and closing the case was offered by the IO, as it will allow the young person to move on and will ultimately cost the local authority less than a full stage two investigation, but I note that she has mixed feelings about the outcome. This is

one of two Camden cases I have been working on recently that has involved significant delays, so I believe that there is an issue to be addressed.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person did not feel that her worker had effectively explained her rights and entitlements to her. It would be helpful if all entitlements are clearly set out and issued to the young person at the point of transition.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person expressed feeling that she had been racially profiled by police and SW- young person did not wish to submit complaint but new worker allocated - SW in process of supporting young person to submit complaint to police. LA were unclear about young person’s entitlements now that she lived with mother and were not forthright in seeking clarity and securing this.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Local authority gave ample opportunity for young person to express her wishes and meeting was arranged with Head of Service. Placement freeze agreed and additional safety measures put in place.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“It would be beneficial to have a range of accommodation for young people, so that they have other options if things go wrong. Although the LA perceives that the current accommodation for this young person is safe & suitable, his personal experience is very different. This young person might make more progress if he had been given another accommodation option.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority,

“The SW, (Michelle Grant) has been very timely and efficient with responses to the young person’s needs, and has fully supported the young person in getting her full entitlements from CS. The IRO, Sarah Houlihan did an excellent job in chairing the LAC review and encouraging the young person to participate fully when prior to the meeting she was reluctant to do so. Sarah also praised the young person in the meeting for her maturity and understanding and in wanting to engage. In addition, all of the issues raised were discussed with appropriate response, it was a very helpful meeting.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person was left without support from LA from the age of 15. YP’s twin became homeless just before young person and was given full support from LA; however young person remained homeless for 8 years. From the time that young person sought advocacy support, LA were incredibly slow at responding to solicitor requests for an assessment and later implementing the actions. LA have repeatedly cited young person’s advocate at Coram as alleged proof that yp does not require a care act advocate. It is unacceptable for the LA to refuse support on these grounds when it is not within the remit of Coram Voice advocate’s to complete the duties of a care act advocate. Young person has complex support needs and these must be responded to. The care assessment detailed and supported the view that young person needs on-going support; however this continued to be refused with the justification that young person has a Children’s Act advocate. I strongly urge LA to

acknowledge their duties and to take action to implement support in a timely manner. Once Former Relevant Child status was established, Camden then stated that young person was only entitled to studio flat and not one bed as he does not have full care leaver rights. This was challenged via solicitor and young person eventually decided to accept both housing and care leaver support from Islington who offered one bed.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person has had on-going issues with benefits following a complicated immigration history. LA were very reluctant to continue with subsistence payments while benefits appeal resolved. Eventually PA liaised directly with DWP who confirmed young person payments had been received and no further support was required from LA at this point. Young person now has status and access to benefits.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person had on-going issues with PA. Communication had been consistently poor and there were very long delays in issues being resolved. I would suggest agreed calls and appointments so young people have set times to have contact.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person had on-going contact issues with PA. This created a strain on their relationship and had a serious impact with young person's trust with LA. It would be useful to have agreed contact that is confirmed in writing so that there is consistency and clarity in contact. Also, young person was placed out of borough and there was a lot of confusion about young person's housing and what she needed to do to request out of borough accommodation prior to advocacy intervention. It would be useful for LA to agree written actions with young people so all steps are clear.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person's PA was excellent and provided a very supportive service to the young person. Unfortunately when she went off sick long term young person was not advised and did not receive much support.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

‘It would have been helpful if LA had submitted college application sooner so that this could have been processed in time for young person to start in September. Young person on waiting list for specialist college but attending another apprenticeship that he is enjoying.’

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“LA agreed to conduct placement search but only offered one placement. Young person refused this and was told no other options could be sought. LA could offer 2 options to young people so that they have choice over their living arrangements. Young person also had contact issues with PA - this created trust issues as well as confusion around entitlements as young person did not have clear point of contact to clarify issues. It would be helpful for LA to agreed set contact with young person.”

Further information

The Coram Voice lead for the Camden advocacy service is:

Karen Sizeland | Children's Rights Service Manager

020 7239 7501 (Direct)

Coram Voice, Coram Campus, 41 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ