



Annual Report 2019-20

Helping vulnerable people
find a voice and gain
control over their lives



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Annual
Report
2019-20

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An introduction from Dave Woolley, CEO

2019/20 was a year of big changes for YVC. After many years of residence at 'the Old Bank' on Swinburne Street we left with many happy memories of the staff and clients who had passed through our doors over the years. Excited for the next chapter in our story, we settled into our new office on West Street in Gateshead (also an old bank!) putting us right in the heart of the Gateshead community.

We're more visible now and this has made it easier for clients and professionals to drop in and see us. It has also been a great space for hosting our Gateshead drop-in and some of our other activities as we've now got a dedicated meeting room, community areas and private meeting rooms for 1-1 appointments.

This year we made some significant changes to our Board and our leadership team. We recruited a Co-Chair of our Board of Directors to work alongside long-standing Chairperson Lisa Kelly and we were delighted to welcome Christina Gates into the role. Christina has a wealth of experience helping to guide and develop organisations to achieve their full potential and is determined to ensure that our beneficiaries themselves remain at the centre of leadership of our organisation. Lisa and Christina already make a fantastic team!

We also created a role to support our Board over a twelve month period to explore new and innovative ways of making our Board meetings accessible for people with learning disabilities and our other beneficiaries, putting the people who use our services at the heart of our governance.

Alongside this, we spent some time looking at the structure of our organisation. We realised we wanted the work we do with our learning disabled clients to be more joined up, so we brought together our Help First and Group Work activity into one programme which we now call Communities. We strengthened our

leadership team and created new roles that better support our new structure. The new leadership team is looking forward to working with the Board to develop our new five-year strategy in the coming months.

I continue to be incredibly proud of the work that our staff and volunteers do despite the increasingly challenging environment our clients are facing. This year has been no exception and the need for our services continues to grow. We supported 1124 people through our Advocacy services, a significant increase on last year. We continued to grow our offer to people with learning disabilities and opened a new regular drop-in session in Boldon. We created more paid roles for people with lived experience and were delighted to work with South Tyneside Council to employ a learning-disabled Commissioning Officer to work in their joint Commissioning Team.

WE SUPPORTED
1124
PEOPLE THROUGH OUR
ADVOCACY SERVICES

As it did for everyone, the end of the year saw unprecedented change for the organisation and our clients as we responded to Covid-19. I want to take the opportunity to thank the whole staff team and all our volunteers for the way that they have responded to the crisis. We've worked closely with our partners, most notably our funders and commissioners, to adapt our offer to ensure that the people we support have the help they need during the challenging weeks and months ahead. It's a testament to our resilience and ability to adapt that we were able to change what we do so quickly and effectively.

There's no doubt there will be difficult times to come, but I'm confident that the changes we've made this year stand us in good stead to meet any challenges head on. The support we provide is needed now more than ever before, but our fantastic teams have already demonstrated the difference that they can make when our clients need their support.

Dave Woolley,
CEO



A message from our Co-Chairs.

Your Voice Counts is an amazing organisation and I feel proud to be part of it. Since I joined the Board, I have seen Your Voice Counts develop, evolve and build on our strengths. The staff response to the challenges that Covid has given us has been amazing.

Dave as our CEO is an inspiration and works incredibly hard to keep YVC at the top of its game. Working alongside Lisa as my co-chair has been a joy and the other members of the Board also give a lot of time, energy and experience to support the organisation to be at its best. We look forward to the next year and continuing to develop and challenge ourselves to keep providing the best services that we can.

**Christina Gates,
Co-Chair**



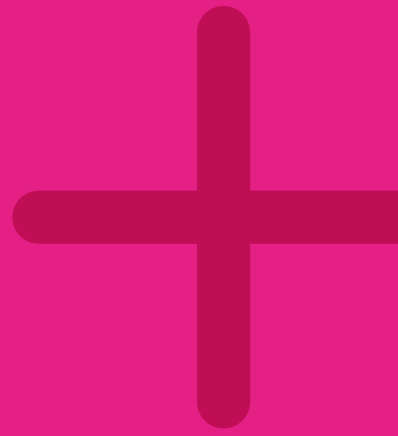
It's been great having Christina join the Board and working alongside me, and now I'd be lost without her. I'm pleased that Your Voice Counts have helped so many people with learning disabilities to get into employment.

We are helping to put people in the centre and giving them the chance to have their voices heard and have equal opportunities. I'm looking forward to networking as a leader and seeing what good things the future brings.

**Lisa Kelly,
Co-Chair and
Expert by Experience**



Our numbers in 2019-20



189

People attended our drop-in services



37

People attended activities organised in the community



86

Appeals, Tribunals and Mandatory Considerations won on behalf of clients



22

People volunteered with us



7

People with learning disabilities and or autism joined our staff team



37

People with learning disabilities and or autism attended our supported employment recruitment day



£110K

In backdated benefits payments for people we supported through Appeals, Tribunals and Mandatory Considerations



36

Care and Treatment Reviews arranged for people with learning disabilities in South Tyneside



23

People found volunteering, paid employment or training through the Wise Steps programme



1124

People were referred to us for our Statutory Advocacy services



£3,531

Raised for us by a generous Marathon Des Sables runner



16,753

Hours spent supporting people through our advocacy services



Communities

Key achievements in 2019-2020

- + We started a peer-led cooking group Cooking with Confidence to share skills to and accessible recipes. 8 clients have achieved a food hygiene certificate and many have used these skills at home, even bringing in home bakes to our Gateshead office!
- + Over the summer, clients and volunteers ran the Sunshine Café at the Jarrow drop-in. As well as building cooking skills, it served healthy meals for £1 per person, fed clients and volunteers, and made a profit to go back into activities for our community in Jarrow.
- + We established a new project; 'Step Up' in partnership with Blissability and Age Concern Tyneside South and funded through the National Lottery

Communities Fund. This is a social prescribing project that links people with people and activities in the community to support their health and wellbeing in a non-clinical way.

- + We have worked on building community and support networks beyond our staff and volunteer run sessions, building relationships with people running activities in the communities and helping them to understand our client groups, as well as encouraging independent community activities, for example offering support to establish travel routes to build.

confidence and independence.

- + We launched a peer led group 'Gamers Together', led by one of our Peer Enablers for people who love gaming but who find themselves isolated, encouraging independence and building of genuine friendships.
- + We ran a weekly Women's Group in Gateshead, organising activities such as flower arranging, craft sessions, film nights and meals out.





- + In October we launched a brand-new drop-in in Boldon and Cleadon.
- + Through our Help Through Crisis Gateshead and Help First South Tyneside services, we supported 86 people to gain new or increased benefits through applications, mandatory reconsiderations, appeals and tribunals. For successful appeals, people were awarded backdated benefits totalling £110,468, and this does not include annual income going forward for people.

- + Through our Wise Steps programme, 23 people with learning disabilities found volunteering, paid employment or training broke down barriers to employment. They went on trips to improve their confidence and reduce social isolation. They also took part in a wide range of courses, from Peer Mentoring and Digital Inclusion, to DJ-ing and Pet Care! This programme is led by the Wise Group and funded through Lottery's Building Better Opportunities programme.

- + We supported people with learning disabilities and or autism to attend a Mindfulness for Life course, running practice sessions in conjunction with the course to ensure people accessing it got as much out of it as possible. The weekly sessions have included guided meditation and have enabled people to discuss what is happening in their daily lives and share positive ways of coping in a safe and friendly environment.
- + We employed Experts by Experience to be part of the Confirm and Challenge Group, working alongside commissioners,

- clinicians and policy makers. They are part of shaping the Community Model in Gateshead which aims for people with learning disabilities, autism or mental ill health to have support to live a good life within their communities.
- + We have supported a number of health and wellbeing initiatives including raising awareness of the flu jab, Warm in Winter, Breast Cancer Awareness, Be Cancer Aware, and Sepsis Awareness, including training and awareness sessions led by people with learning disabilities.

Communities Case Study: Clara

Clara accessed support from Your Voice Counts through one of our drop-ins. Although confident, friendly and straight-talking, she was struggling with stress and panic attacks, and needed support with moving house, and with relationships with her family. Our Enabler supported Clara at a meeting about housing, to ensure her voice was heard and that she maintained choice and control over where she lived. She built friendships with peers at the drop-in who were able to give advice about her relationships based on their own experiences.

Communities Case Study: Kamila

Kalima came to us through the Step Up project, and first asked for help with isolation and being connected to her community. We worked with her closely to find out what her aspirations, hopes and dreams are, as well as the barriers she was facing to achieve these. We supported Kalima to move colleges to make sure she gets the education she wants and needs. We linked her up with a community nurse to help manage multiple health problems that were previously putting pressure on her relationship with her mum. We supported Kalima to attend activities in the community and to make friends, to reduce feelings of isolation.

Instead of being unhappy at college and staying in her room all week, Kalima now has an active community life, optimism about her future and friends who understand her. Next for Kalima is to look at life beyond relying on Mum and building her independence.

Communities Case Study: Michael

Michael was introduced to our Jarrow drop-in by his Mum who also has a learning disability. He had been evicted from his property in Newcastle following the loss of his job and move on to Universal Credit. Michael was quiet and withdrawn for a few months. Michael needed support with job interviews and showed interest in our Cooking with Confidence sessions due to past employment in catering. He was also struggling with Metro fines, and shared he was struggling with his mental health linked to grief, leading to suicidal thoughts.

We supported Michael to access a food bank, apply for suitable benefits and get a concessionary travel pass to reduce the financial pressures on him. We helped him to speak up at the doctors to make sure

he got appropriate support for his mental health, as well as arranging a formal assessment of his learning disability which meant he could access the help he was entitled to more easily. We also supported him to attend a computing course 2 days a week, as well as volunteering with us to help run Cooking with Confidence sessions for his peers.

Michael's mood and confidence has improved greatly since we first met him. He says **"I'm ok. I'm doing my computer course on Mondays and Fridays.... I like doing the cooking sessions. I want to get a bike so I can do a sponsored ride for Your Voice Counts because you've helped me a lot."**

Statutory Advocacy

Key achievements in 2019-2020

- + We supported 1124 people affected by dementia, mental health problems, learning disabilities and physical disabilities in Newcastle and South Tyneside through our independent advocacy service.
- + We supported over 200 people with change of accommodation decisions.
- + We supported 100 adults with safeguarding issues.
- + We provided advocates for over 30 serious medical treatment decisions.
- + We worked with over 200 people subject to the Mental Health Act.
- + We helped 70 people under the Care Act with assessment of need, planning support and reviewing services.
- + We continue to support and work with over 500 people living within the framework of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.
- + We continue to support and work with over 50 people from BAME communities.
- + We have changed the way we share out RPR cases, maximising time for face-to-face contact with people and reducing our carbon footprint.
- + We have continued to work in partnership with community and inpatient settings to raise awareness of advocacy and rights.



- + We delivered training and raised awareness of our services and advocacy in general and specifically, to advocates, volunteers, and staff within clinical and community teams in Newcastle, South Tyneside, Northumberland, Sunderland, and Middlesbrough.
- + We employed an Advocacy Project Administration Apprentice.
- + Going forward, we want to continue to support the growing numbers of people living with mental ill health, dementia and disability to have a voice, to exercise their rights and enjoy inclusion in decision making and to have their decisions respected and to access essential services to meet their needs.
- + We also want to explore ways to fill gaps in non-statutory advocacy, so many people who need help aren't left unsupported with their needs un-met.

Statutory Advocacy services Case Study: Moira

We met Moira when she was referred to us for statutory advocacy services. She lived on her own, self neglects, has significant health issues and struggles to access help and support from her GP.

It was decided in her best interests that she should be moved into a residential setting for her own safety and to allow time for decisions to be made about her longer-term living arrangements.

Knowing that this would cause her distress, we attended a safeguarding meeting with the social worker to find out more about measures that would be taken should Moira refuse to move. Measures included being restrained

and handcuffed, so we expressed concerns to the court. The move was postponed, and at the hearing the Judge agreed that the potential use of handcuffs was disproportionate, unnecessary, and unjustified given and that there are less restrictive alternatives that can be tried first.

The move has since gone ahead, and although Moira was distressed about the need to leave her flat, ambulance workers were prepared and skilled at supporting her, and successfully linked her to move her into the wheelchair without use of restraint and force. We will continue to support Moira through our Relevant Persons Representative service.

What have people said about our Statutory Advocacy services?

“You have done an amazing job and worked to make a difference in his life. His whole situation has improved a lot since you first started to work with him.”

“I just wanted you to know as you were so good with him and genuine in your support. Please be assured you are well thought of and are doing a marvellous job. Thank you for your support and kindness.”

“She is very lucky to have you as her advocate, I’m not sure she would be at home now if it was not for you, and I wanted to say what a fantastic job you have done supporting [her] and helping to enable her return home.”



Supported Employment

Key achievements in 2019-2020

This year we launched 2 pieces of work around supported employment

1. Workplace Quality Checkers

- + This project, funded by the People's Postcode Lottery, aims to make workplaces more inclusive for people with learning disabilities and/or autism, and to establish new employment opportunities for these groups. We are doing this by providing workplace assessments, expert advice and training, all delivered by people with learning disabilities.
- + We held a very well attended recruitment day which showed that people with learning disabilities and or autism in the region are keen to get into employment. There was so much talent in the building it was a difficult task for the peer and staff observers and a second recruitment day was set, narrowing the applicants down from 37 to 16. Finally a team of 4 was recruited.
- + The Quality Checkers meet every Monday to develop the process and tools for them to examine and help businesses be a more inclusive place to work for people with learning disabilities and autism, including:
 - + Interviewing peers about their experiences of looking for and applying for work and being employed
 - + Secret shopping
 - + Developing questionnaires for managers and supervisors, and for employees who have a learning disabilities and or autism
- + The team have also trained as NHS Quality Checkers and have carried out a check on a local medical practice.



2. Commissioning Officer Role for people with learning disabilities in South Tyneside

- + Building on the successful experience of employing a young person within the commissioning team in South Tyneside, Sarah Golightly: Joint Commissioning Lead took the ground-breaking step of creating a Commissioning officer role for somebody with a Learning Disability.
- + Your Voice Counts are delighted to be part of developing this role with Sarah. We share her belief that it is impossible to develop services that truly work for the people who need them without creating opportunities for people with lived experience at the heart of their design and delivery. It's great to see South Tyneside leading by example!

Interview with Matthew, Commissioning Officer

Matthew, what do you think about the role you are doing?

"I love my role, it's a new role of its kind. It helps to get the voices of people with learning disabilities heard and have a better understanding of how they feel about the decisions that are being made. Plus, it helps to give them a better life and not be labelled and left out."

Why did you want the job?

"I wanted this job to give people like myself a voice that is heard and not just passed by, to help others and find other charities as well as other groups of people who would be left out of the decisions that are being made."

What you did in the job before lockdown?

"I worked alongside Amy Broughton from Your Voice Counts and the Commissioning team on the South Tyneside Vision. We talked to lots of people with a learning disability and their carers about the Vision and asked them what mattered to them and what could be better in their lives. We still have more people to talk to!"

How important do you think the role is for people with Learning Disabilities in South Tyneside?

"This job helps get people's voices heard in South Tyneside, straight to the Commissioners to give them a better life and part of the decisions being made in South Tyneside. That's why I love my job and can't wait to get back to work properly once the lockdown is over."

Statement from Amy,
South Tyneside Involvement Worker
at Your Voice Counts

“Part of my Involvement worker role is spent offering support to Matthew so he can be the best Commissioning officer he can be. There are so many reasons why working with Matthew has helped me in my role. He is a local resident which helped a lot when spending time introducing ourselves to people, organisations and finding out what is going on in South Tyneside.

We’ve thought and planned in ways I wouldn’t have done working on my own and his knowledge and lived experience has really helped me understand some of the issues people are facing.

As a Commissioning Officer, doors were opened to Matthew that helped both of us create excellent working relationships with statutory professionals and residents; this would have taken me much longer on my own. The work we do together has made listening to the voice of people with learning disabilities and autism in South Tyneside so much more meaningful and really helps me the rest of my involvement role.”





What is Self-advocacy?

- + Self-advocacy's main aim is to work towards equality and inclusion for group members and all people with learning disabilities and/or autism in their communities. We do this through group work, which helps us to become more aware of our rights and gain confidence to speak up.
- + It provides people with learning disabilities and/or autism the chance to meet for support and advice from their peers and to work together to come up with creative ways to tackle issues that are important to us.
- + This includes consulting our peers and feeding back to health and social care commissioners and providers and other services such as local transport and housing.
- + By leading on this work, as experts by experience and as facilitators delivering training; we challenge misconceptions and raise expectations amongst the wider community about the potential of people with learning disabilities.
- + Many of our self advocates get paid as experts by experience, trainers, consultants and researchers using the skills they have learnt through self-advocacy.

Self-Advocacy

Key achievements in 2019-2020

Your Voice Counts supports self-advocacy Groups: Talk 2 Us in South Tyneside, Gateshead People in Gateshead and groups at Larchfield Community in Middlesbrough.





This year

- + We worked in partnership with other groups and got involved in campaigns with other self-advocates, families and carers locally, regionally and nationally.
- + An example of this was the #WeAreHumanToo campaign.
- + In May 2019, BBC's Panorama programme exposed the horrific abuse of people with learning disabilities and autism at Whorlton Hall. Members of Gateshead People and Talk 2 Us met with other self-advocacy groups from the North East such as Skills for People and Sunderland People First to formulate a response.
- + Our initial response was to try to raise as much awareness as possible about the situation. We took part in a week of protests around the country. The protest at the Monument in Newcastle attracted over 200 people, with some of our members appearing on local news talking about their experience of long stay hospitals.
- + The group started to meet regularly under the name of We Are Human Too. We came up with the idea of developing some safeguarding training for staff and patients in Assessment and Treatment Units. A lot of the patients in places like Whorlton Hall and Winterbourne View were not aware they had been victims of abuse, or even what abuse is. The training we developed looks at what is abuse, the different kinds of abuse and what is good support and bad support. We made sure the training was accessible and interactive and it will be delivered by members of a self-advocacy groups.
- + Self-advocacy groups Gateshead People and Talk 2 Us have made a decision to form one group called Speaking Up Together – without boundaries. Going forward, the group want to include more people with learning disabilities whose voices are not often heard such as LGBT groups, BAME communities, and people in hospitals.



Responding to Covid-19

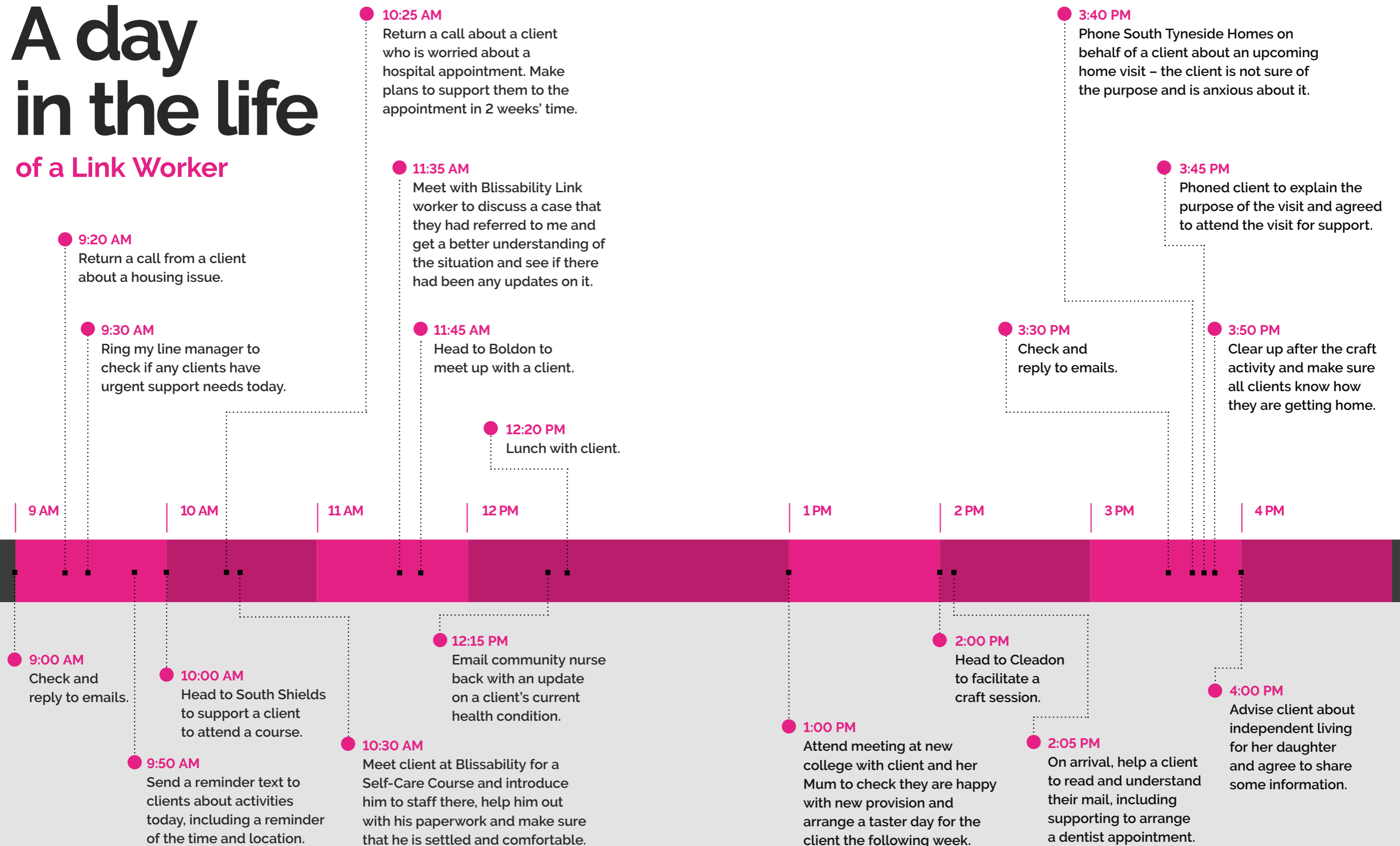
- + The end of the financial year saw the country go in to lockdown in response to Coronavirus, and following advice from public health, we closed our offices and cancelled or postponed all face to face activities, including our drop ins and regular group activities.
- + We quickly came up with a plan to offer continual support the most vulnerable people in our communities over telephone and video call.
- + Our advocates started to meet with clients remotely and as a team continue to work with community and hospital teams to adapt our services and remove barriers to accessing advocacy support.
- + We developed guidance and processes for our RPR, IMCA, IMHA and Care Act advocates on digital communication.
- + We assessed every open case to agree an individualised digital response, looking wherever possible for options to communicate using technology.

- + Our communities team mobilised an entirely new offer in response to lockdown conditions. We contacted every person known to our services to make sure they understood the guidance around Covid-19, what to do if they felt unwell, how to keep themselves safe, get food, medication and how to use technology to stay in touch.
- + We launched the Keeping People Connected project and developed easy read information, activity packs and continue to provide vital, ongoing telephone and video call support to people with learning disabilities to reduce their social isolation and in some cases help them deal with emergencies. As part of the project we developed a programme of remote activities for our community members to stay active and involved.
- + Self- advocates are now meeting regularly over Zoom to look at issues such as hospital passports, annual health checks being done remotely during lockdown and more recently the Black Lives Matter movement.
- + Members have also taken part in a course with Digital Voice about how to use Zoom and about keeping safe online.



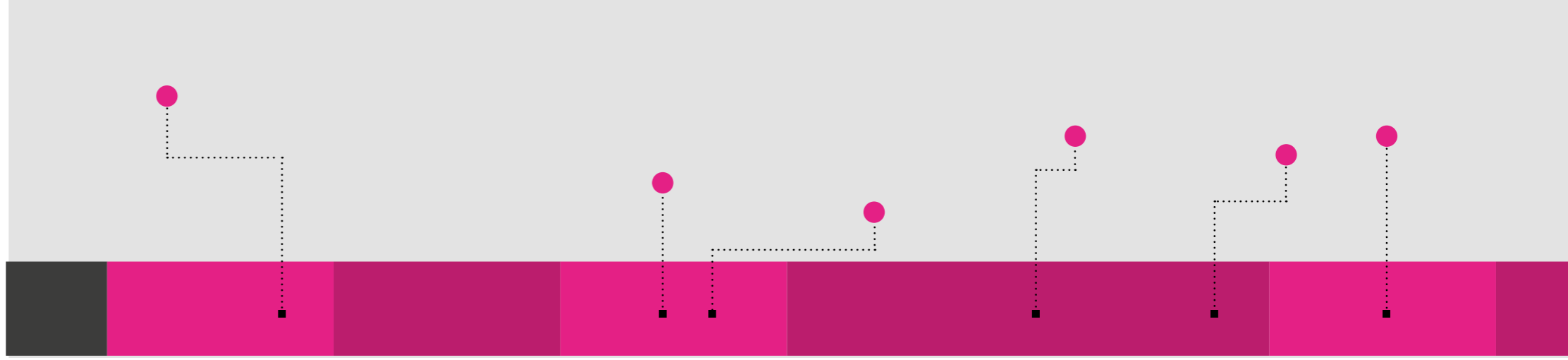
A day in the life

of a Link Worker



A day in the life

of a Statutory Advocate



My day begins with a visit to see a new client in her own home (under the Care Act), to discuss the concerns professionals have about her health, non-compliance with medication and the proposal that she move out of her flat in to a residential / nursing setting while decisions are made about her longer term living arrangements.

This is followed up with a visit to a secure unit to see two of my clients who are detained under section (as their IMHA), one to discuss his forthcoming Care and Treatment Review and the other to discuss the outcomes of his recent tribunal.

My afternoon is then taken up with a review meeting for a client who I have been working with for some considerable time under operation Sanctuary, and a client in a residential setting while suitable accommodation is found for him.

I arrive at my client's flat and with the assistance of the warden, manage to get in to see her. We talk through the concerns that the Local Authority and other professionals have about her lifestyle and health issues; she tells me that everything is alright, and she does not understand why everybody is picking on her. We discuss her not accepting support from her care team; she tells me that she does not need help, she can look after herself.

I talk through what is being proposed by the Local Authority and clarify what she wants me to put forward on her behalf. I also advise that the matter is likely to be taken to court, what this means and how she can put forward her thoughts, feelings and wishes.

We agree a time and date for me to visit her again.

I then travel to one of our hospital sites and go through the airport-style security to get me on to the secure ward to visit the first of my clients, where I am given a panic alarm.

This client is on constant eyesight observation and my meeting with him is held in a room with a glass panelled door and a nurse standing outside watching the meeting. I have visited this client on several occasions. We have a constructive meeting and agree to meet after the review to discuss the outcomes.

My next client is also on a secure unit. Prior to my meeting, my client's key nurse tells me that his mental health has deteriorated since his tribunal and that he has started to self-isolate and to not comply with medication and treatments. My client says he want to see me, and the nurse agrees it is safe to do so.

My client is agitated and distracted throughout the meeting. The trigger appeared to be the Tribunal, although he did not want to be discharged from section as this would result in him having to return to prison; and the outcome was that it was that he was to remain under a section

We had a fragmented discussion about what was troubling him, but I was unable to formulate anything constructive from our time together. My client terminated the meeting and returned to his room. I concluded with a further discussion with his key nurse who updated me as to the actions that were to be taken to alleviate my client's depression and agitation.

I go through security, collect my personal belongings, and leave the unit.



A day in the life of a Statutory Advocate

I have time to return to the office to have lunch, update our client database, make calls and to send / deal with emails and messages, prior to preparing for my next appointment.

I attend a meeting on behalf of a client I have been working with for some considerable time, to discuss and hopefully finalise the arrangements to move her in to her own accommodation. This is a very vulnerable person who has been exploited and abused throughout most of her life; we have developed a very good relationship and I feel confident representing her views; she does not like to attend formal meetings and is happy for me to speak on her behalf. We discuss how the arrangements are going and agree an action plan to maintain momentum.

I take the opportunity to telephone my client after the meeting to go through and discuss the outcomes; all positive.

I then attend my final visit for the day. My client is being required to reside in a residential setting under a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard (DOLS) authorisation 'for his own safety', because of him being financially and physically abused in his own flat in the community. Although my client is happy to communicate, he can be very unpredictable, he is an alcoholic (his alcohol intake is being managed by the home and his GP) and will use narcotics if he can access them.

We discuss how things have been since my last visit. We review the plan that was agreed with his Social Worker

and identify areas where he would like me to seek further clarification; mostly increasing the unsupervised time he can have in the community.

We agree a follow up meeting and I meet with the home manager prior to leaving. She provides an update on my clients behaviours and presentation; she and the care team feel that there is the possibility that given the right support, my client could be helped to change his life style and to achieve his aim to live in his own flat with minimal support, currently this is being hampered by my client being allocated agency social workers who begin the support and planning process then move on.

I return to the office to use the rest of the afternoon to upload the notes from my appointments on to our client database, set tasks, make telephone calls, send emails and to prepare for tomorrow.

My day ends sadly when I receive a call from a lady I'm acting as IMCA support for as she acts as her husband's Relevant Person's Representative, telling me that he has died in the care home he had been moved to when his behaviours meant that he could not be cared for at home; I spent some time offering her my condolences and reassuring her that moving him in to a home was the right course of action.

Our Finances in 2019-20

£

Income
£868,000

£

Expenditure
£960,000

Our expenditure is more than our income as our Board to the decision to invest some of our unrestricted reserves in order to develop our core functions and build the organisation's capacity.

How we spent it

46%

Advocacy

32%

Supporting Communities

2%

Care and Treatment Reviews

1%

Other projects

19%

Core functions and capacity building



Thank you to our funders and partners

	Talk 2 Us		Larchfield Community				
The Collaboration Action Fund			Step Up			Cranfield Trust	Boldon Community Association
	Grange Road Baptist Church			Deb's Café	Jarrow Buffs	Kelly Deli	Irene Storey
Pauline Groundwater	Rob Turnbull at RT Staffing Ltd	Florrie Gardiner			South Tyneside Enabling Partnership		



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