



# Annual Report 2017-18

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

[yvc.org.uk](http://yvc.org.uk)





# Annual Report 2017-18 Contents

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# Patron's statement

I very much applaud the ongoing work of YVC and recognise the important needs that they meet for some of the most vulnerable people in our local communities.

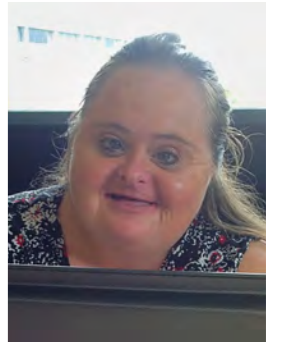


This is a time of considerable change for YVC and I look forward to seeing the organisation go from strength-to-strength. I especially look forward to seeing and formally opening the new office premises. I commend YVC's ambition to open their doors to the community and to become the front door of support to a great many people in need.

I hope to be actively involved in a number of these upcoming changes and can't wait to see what the future will hold and the impact this innovative and dedicated organisation can have.

- **Baroness Joyce Quinn**

# Chair's statement



"I'm so proud of all the fantastic work that our staff and volunteers do to help people and I'm proud to be the Chairperson of this amazing organisation!"

Your Voice Counts is here to help people be able to speak up for themselves and have a voice. What I think makes us special is that we make sure the people who use our services are in control of the help they receive. This is why we have Experts by Experience on our Board of Directors and why we have a person with learning disabilities chairing the Board meetings!

This year, people in Gateshead and South Tyneside have been really struggling to cope with changes to benefits and the support they're

entitled to. Through our Help First drop-ins, and our excellent staff and volunteers, we've been able to respond to these needs very quickly and have helped lots of people. We need to make sure we get funding so that we can keep doing this important work.

Next year I want us to get better at telling people about the fantastic work we do. I'm going to help Your Voice Counts speak up about how much people need the help we provide."

- **Lisa Kelly, Chairperson**

# CEO's statement

I've worked for Your Voice Counts for over 11 years but I am continually inspired by the passion and dedication of our staff and volunteers. Their willingness to go the extra mile is often what makes the difference in the lives of the people we support.

This year has been no exception and I am proud to say that we were able to help a total of 1481 vulnerable people - the most people we have ever helped in a single year.

Our organisation is built on an ethos that the people we support are best placed to shape the services and solutions that meet their needs. There is great evidence of this in our ongoing development of self-advocacy, but also in our exploration of new and innovative ways of helping people to find a voice and gain control

of their lives. We continue to have a majority of service-user representatives on our Board which is something I'm incredibly proud of, and we're looking to strengthen this 'user-led' approach further by creating more opportunities for our beneficiaries to guide the work we do.

As well as continuing to deliver excellent advocacy services across the North East and to develop and grow our Help First service for people with learning disabilities, we have established several new projects this year.



We launched our new website ([www.yvc.org.uk](http://www.yvc.org.uk)) and we now employ 3 people with learning disabilities as Personalisation Champions to promote the use of personal budgets and direct payments in South Tyneside. We've established YVC Training, our new training arm through which we deliver high quality training packages to help improve the delivery of health and social care services in the region, and we secured funding from the Lloyds Bank Foundation to run an advocacy pilot to explore the

impact of advocacy for people with learning disabilities leaving hospital. Next year promises to be an exciting year!

- David Woolley, CEO

WE WERE ABLE TO HELP A TOTAL OF  
**1481**  
VULNERABLE PEOPLE





# Our purpose and values

## Our purpose – why we exist

At *Your Voice Counts*, we help those who struggle to be heard find a voice and gain control over their lives.

Many vulnerable people feel voiceless and at risk of being silenced. Having a voice is essential to the quality of our lives, so we help vulnerable people find a voice and we provide a voice for those who cannot speak up for themselves.

We are specialists in empowering

vulnerable people to attain the same opportunities, break down barriers, and maintain choice and control over their lives. We run advocacy services, community-based drop-in support sessions, and we support self-advocacy groups. We currently work with people with learning disabilities, mental health problems, and elderly people.



## Our values – how we operate



### We are person-centered

We ensure that the person we are supporting is at the centre of everything we do. We listen to what they want and help them to speak up.



### We are positive

We focus on the best possible outcomes, promoting the value and abilities of the people we work with. We are committed to the people who access our service having a voice in guiding our work and our future direction.



### We are professional

We are independent, transparent and non-judgemental. We respect confidentiality, we challenge appropriately and we always do what we say we are going to do.

# Our community in 2017-18



291

people with learning disabilities attended our Help First drop-in centres



37

employees



1008

people were assisted by our statutory advocacy team



6

people with learning disabilities found employment and 1 commenced on accredited training



22

practising advocates have been through our accredited training programme



71

people with learning disabilities have engaged with our Personalisation Champions project



12

trustees



23

people with learning disabilities engaged with our Wise Steps programme



28

volunteers



13

learners have attended our new non-accredited training programmes



87

self-advocates (Equal People – 14 members, Talk 2 Us - 12 members, Gateshead People – 25, Women's Group 16, Larchfield 20)



89

people with learning disabilities supported through Help Through Crisis



# Our activities and achievements



We offer a range of services to help provide a voice to people with learning disabilities, mental health issues, and the elderly. Our main programmes are:

- + **Help First**  
Weekly drop-in sessions for people with learning disabilities, providing intensive one-to-one support, improving social networks, and helping people to access opportunities.
- + **Wise Steps**  
Intensive coaching for people with learning disabilities, supporting them into employment or training by breaking down barriers and improving resilience.
- + **Help Through Crisis**  
Practical, issue-based support for people with learning disabilities who are dealing with crises.
- + **Personalisation Champions**  
A team of employees with learning disabilities working to help make care more about the individual.
- + **YVC Training**  
Accredited training in Independent Advocacy for practising advocates and awareness-raising courses for other professionals.
- + **Statutory and case advocacy**  
Statutory advocacy services including Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA), Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA), Care Act advocacy, Relevant Person Representative (RPR), and case advocacy.
- + **Self-advocacy groups**  
People with learning disabilities advocating on their own behalf.

# Help First

We provide weekly drop-in sessions for people with learning disabilities, intensive one-to-one support, and helps people to improve their social networks and access opportunities in the Gateshead and South Tyneside communities.



## Key achievements:

- + We have supported a growing number of people to overturn cuts to their benefits at assessment and tribunal stages.
- + We have focused on engaging those people who are harder to reach - 41 % of people we helped at our Jarrow drop-in were unknown to services.
- + We have delivered learning disability awareness training to key partners such as Gateshead Jobcentre to improve their communication with clients.

“Before, it used to feel like I was a one-man band. You don't feel like you're on your own with the staff at Your Voice Counts. They get results”



## Key challenges:

- + We have faced increasing demands to support people with welfare benefits. Our specialist support is needed as other advice and information services lack crucial skills and knowledge around learning disabilities and the barriers people face. We have received training and support from Citizens Advice Gateshead (one of our Help Through Crisis partners) to understand key benefits changes (e.g. Universal Credit).



## What we've learnt this year:

- + Social isolation is a growing problem for people with learning disabilities in Gateshead and South Tyneside, particularly for those who live fairly independently. We are working with our volunteers and clients to help tackle this issue and to help people develop stronger support networks.

## Case Study

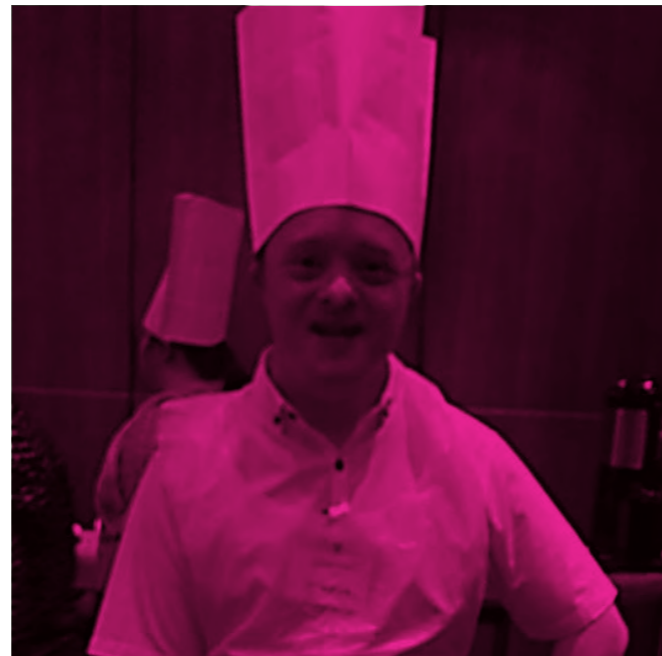
Sean has autism and was at risk of isolation. He doesn't understand forms and he can't read long words. He attended a drop-in session with his with Occupational Therapist and Community Nurse to discuss benefits issues. The Help First volunteers and other clients made him feel welcome, so he decided to come back next week. He now attends regularly.

The Help First drop-in has given Sean somewhere welcoming to go. Through attending the drop-ins, he has made new friends, he receives regular support with reading his post, and he has taken on particular responsibilities at the drop-in – welcoming others and being a 'peer advocate,' using his own experience to help others.



# Wise Steps

We help people with learning disabilities into employment or training by breaking down barriers and improving resilience.



## Key achievements:

- + We have supported six people with learning disabilities into employment and one into accredited training.
- + A large number of our participants have visibly increased in confidence and self-esteem, taking part in a number of community activities including a poetry group and a history group.



## Key challenges:

- + Navigating Wise Steps MIS
- + Engaging with employers
- + It is an ongoing challenge to enable participants with learning disabilities to focus on their abilities.



## What we've learnt this year:

- + People with learning disabilities are very keen to work but are not - and historically have never been - encouraged to look for work.

“Wise Steps has changed my life.”

- Nicholas, now working as a Kitchen Porter

## Case Study

Gary has a learning disability. He is not confident about travelling independently, has never had a salaried position and has been a volunteer all of his working life. In February 2017, he signed up to Wise Steps. Through this programme, he gained several digital qualifications and became a member of User Voice. After attending

workshops in Leeds and York, he was offered a paid role – followed swiftly by two other paid roles!

Gary is very excited about having a paid job for the first time in his life. He says that meeting with his Wise Steps employment coach on a weekly basis gave him the motivation and confidence to apply for a paid position.

# Help Through Crisis

We provide practical, issue-based support for people with learning disabilities who are dealing with crises. This project is run in partnership with Citizens' Advice Gateshead, Gateshead Foodbank, and Oasis Aquila Housing.



## Key achievements:

- + Supported 10 people with benefit appeals at tribunals, achieving a 100% success rate.
- + Developed and delivered training on working with people with learning disabilities to Jobcentre staff, volunteers, and the Gateshead Employment support team.
- + Built strong links with Community nurse team, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Oasis Aquila Housing, Jobcentre, and other agencies.
- + Solved a range of issues for people with learning disabilities, from £3,000 electricity bills to benefits appeals to getting support at home.



## Key challenges:

- + Understanding and navigating the new benefits system: this has been the key issue for our clients, and we've had to build our skills and knowledge in a very short space of time.
- + Managing issues without the support of Social Services.



## What we've learnt this year:

- + People with learning disabilities are very keen to work but are not - and historically have never been - encouraged to look for work.





# Personalisation Champions

The Personalisation Champions are new team of employees with learning disabilities who are working with the CCG and Local Authority in South Tyneside to help make care more about the individual and to help people have more choice and control over the support they receive.



## Key achievements:

- + The Champions have worked with the Transformation of Care Board to co-produce a vision for people with learning disabilities and their families in South Tyneside.
- + The team have delivered outreach workshops to new groups of people, including those with mental health needs and younger people.



## Key challenges:

- + The Champions have worked with the Transformation of Care Board to co-produce a vision for people with learning disabilities and their families in South Tyneside.
- + The team have delivered outreach workshops to new groups of people, including those with mental health needs and younger people.



## What we've learnt this year:

- + Even when they understand the ground-rules, many professionals need regular reminders in order to ensure their day-to-day practices are learning disability-friendly.

"It was great to see how the Champions approach made people feel comfortable and to hear so much feedback coming from our group members, who are often very quiet."

I've found out a lot about what's most important to people and what makes a good life for them. It's good that we can feed this back to the health and social care professionals."

- Lisa, 'Open Door' support worker in Jarrow:

# YVC Training

We provide accredited training in Independent Advocacy to practising advocates and awareness-raising sessions to other professionals.



## Key achievements:

- + We delivered both core and specialist units of the Certificate in Independent Advocacy to our first two cohorts of learners.
- + All tutors have achieved the Level 4 Certificate in Education and Training (CET) and the Level 3 TAQA (Assessor) qualification.
- + We delivered a 'Get to Grips with DOLS' session and a DOLS awareness-raising session to the Rehabilitation Team at the RVI.



## Key challenges:

- + We have struggled to market our training effectively and may benefit from expanding our target market.



## What we've learnt this year:

- + There is a relatively small pool of potential advocates in the North East who may wish to access our accredited training. We are exploring running additional short courses in Independent Advocacy and related issues to a wider range of people.

“Your Voice Counts has very knowledgeable tutors who make it easy to participate freely”



# Statutory and case advocacy

We provide statutory Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA), Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA), Care Act advocacy, Relevant Person Representative (RPR), and case advocacy services to clients in Newcastle and South Tyneside, ensuring a quality, person-centred service.



## Key achievements:

- + We were awarded the Advocacy Quality Performance Mark (QPM) for services that can demonstrate they provide excellent services in line with the advocacy charter.
- + We have supported a growing number of people to raise challenges to COP with positive outcomes.
- + We have invested in our advocacy team, increasing our advocates' range of advocacy specialisms through training.



## Key challenges:

- + We are experiencing an ongoing lack of understanding about the services we provide and other professionals not understanding the legal requirements around advocacy.
- + Our referral numbers have fluctuated significantly – including inappropriate referrals that we're unable to pursue – but we have not yet been able to track trends that would allow us to respond to these fluctuations more strategically. We're working on tracking trends better.



## What we've learnt this year:

- + Issues in vulnerable people's lives are becoming increasingly more complex, which is creating an ever greater impetus to have a joined-up approach to health and social care.

“The work that Your Voice Counts does to help support vulnerable clients is second-to-none. To know that we have the support from advocacy services such as Your Voice Counts is of great benefit to us. Thanks again for all your hard work and for your dedicated and committed team.”

- Russ O'Brian, social worker in Newcastle

# Statutory and case advocacy

## Case Study

Sarah has had multiple admissions to psychiatric hospitals and despite previous voluntary admissions, her recent time in hospital involved being detained under the Mental Health Act (MHA). Having had previous bad experiences with services and feeling mistrustful of professionals, Sarah was unwilling to engage with the inpatient clinic team. Sarah was also vehemently opposed to being subject to the MHA and this caused her extreme distress and agitation.

With the support of YVC advocate, Sarah's views and wishes were clearly

been articulated to the inpatient clinic team. The team had intended to extend the use of the MHA via a Community Treatment Order (CTO). However, we were able to demonstrate that this would likely cause Sarah further distress and would make her extremely unlikely to engage with her outpatient team. As a direct result of this intervention, Sarah was discharged from her section whilst the community team spent time getting to know her and exploring how they could work together to achieve a mutually beneficial relationship.



## Case Study

A client in his mid-40s had a diagnosis of acquired brain injury as a result of sustained alcohol and drug abuse throughout a period of his adult life. He was admitted to hospital for treatment of HIV which had become problematic as he had not been taking his medication as a result of his chaotic lifestyle (he had been living in hostels and rough sleeping). Whilst in hospital, he agreed to go to a care home and became subject to a deprivation of liberty safeguard (DOLS). He very soon realised that the restrictive environment did not suit him and he frequently became angry and frustrated by being in the care home.

YVC was asked to work with him as his paid Relevant Person's Representative (RPR). We helped him to appeal against the DOLS and to be assigned a solicitor. We helped him make an appeal to the Court of Protection. We worked alongside other professionals to find alternative accommodation and managed to find him accommodation in a residential home which was more appropriate. He has since moved and is much happier in the new environment, which allows him to go out every day and is a less restrictive environment. He is now negotiating with his social worker to move into his own supported living flat, due to significant improvements in his mental health and cognition.



# Self-advocacy groups

We support a number of groups for people with learning disabilities across Gateshead, South Tyneside and Teesside, helping them to advocate on their own behalf. These groups are Equal People, Talk 2 Us, Gateshead People, Women's Group, and Larchfield.



## Key achievements:

- + We have successfully increased joint working across self-advocacy groups. In particular, Gateshead People and Talk2Us have been working together on safe places and training.
- + We have helped to shape the local agenda by presenting on the challenges people with learning disabilities face due to welfare reform to the Regional Transforming Care Board (Equal People) and by facilitating a Learning Disability Strategy workshop for Gateshead Council (Gateshead People).
- + We have created a range of important resources including an Easy Read leaflet on Safeguarding for South Tyneside Hospital Safeguarding Team (Equal People), Best Practice Guidelines when involving people with learning disabilities (Gateshead People) and files on Hate Crime and Mate Crime with Gateshead Community Safety and NEXUS (Gateshead People).

# Self-advocacy groups



## Key challenges:

- + Our main challenge this year has been lack of funding, and the time it has involved making applications, but we're very pleased to have recently secured some additional funding which has eased the situation.
- + We've also dealt with several membership challenges including struggling to recruit new members, some safeguarding issues, and the fact our existing members want to do more things than there's time for in the day!

"I like doing something that benefits other people and I like been on front of the book cover."

- Sheila, Gateshead People



## What we've learnt this year:

- + We've really witnessed the benefits of partnership working this year, and hope to build on this for the years ahead. Group members have learnt how to provide greater peer support, which has also led to them making more arrangements to meet together outside the sessions without staff support.

"Your Voice Counts helps us with our confidence and to get our voices heard."

- Equal People

"We like having an advocate to help us get what we want."

- Larchfield





# Plans for 2017-18



Move to a new office base.



Establish a multi-year strategy for the organisation.



Challenge the sometimes limited offer of statutory advocacy provision.



Work with partners around the Transforming Care agenda to see where the voluntary sector can add most value.



Create more opportunities to learn from our beneficiaries about what a good life looks like for them so we can better understand how services like ours (and those of our partners) can help make this a reality.



Grow our offer so that we are not just addressing the needs that people present to us with but also the underlying issues/ barriers affecting their lives.



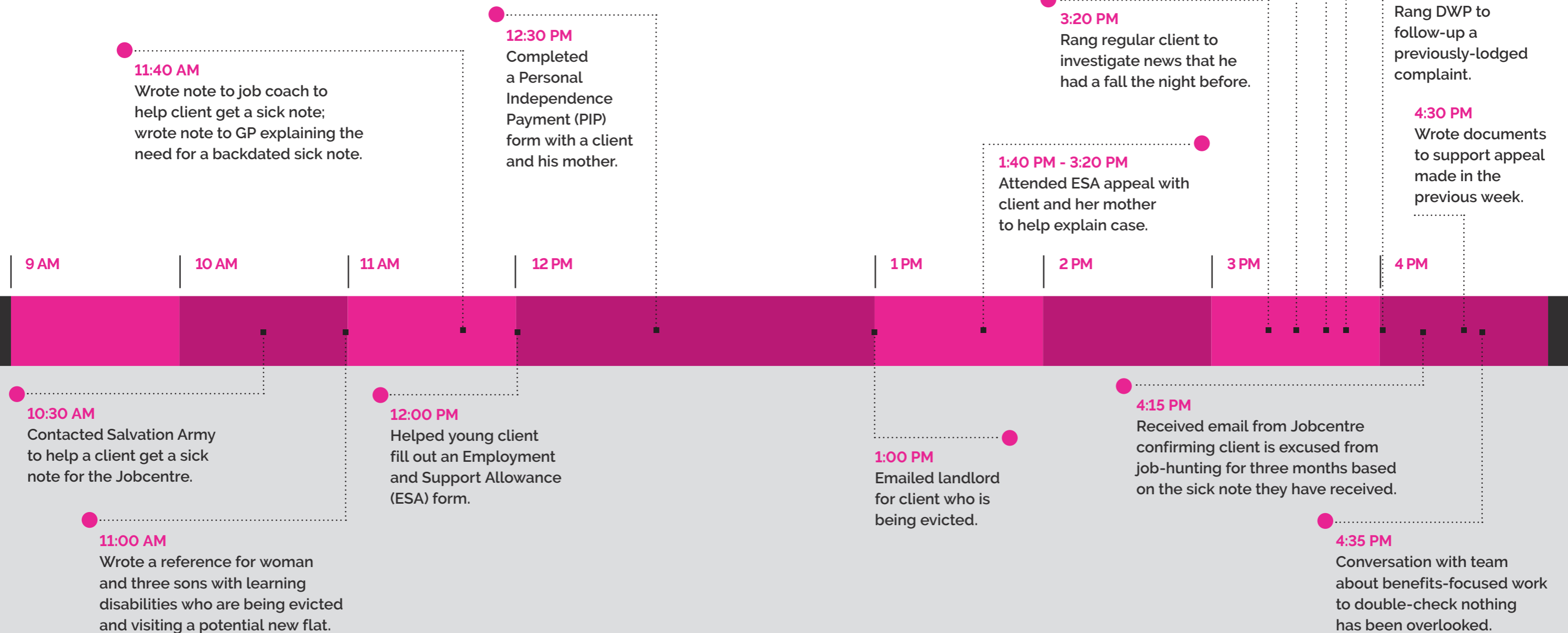
Explore the part that advocacy plays in ensuring new models of care and support create good outcomes for people with learning disabilities.



Support the development of self-advocacy, particularly for those who find it hardest to have a voice – profoundly disabled, those in hospital.

# A day in the life

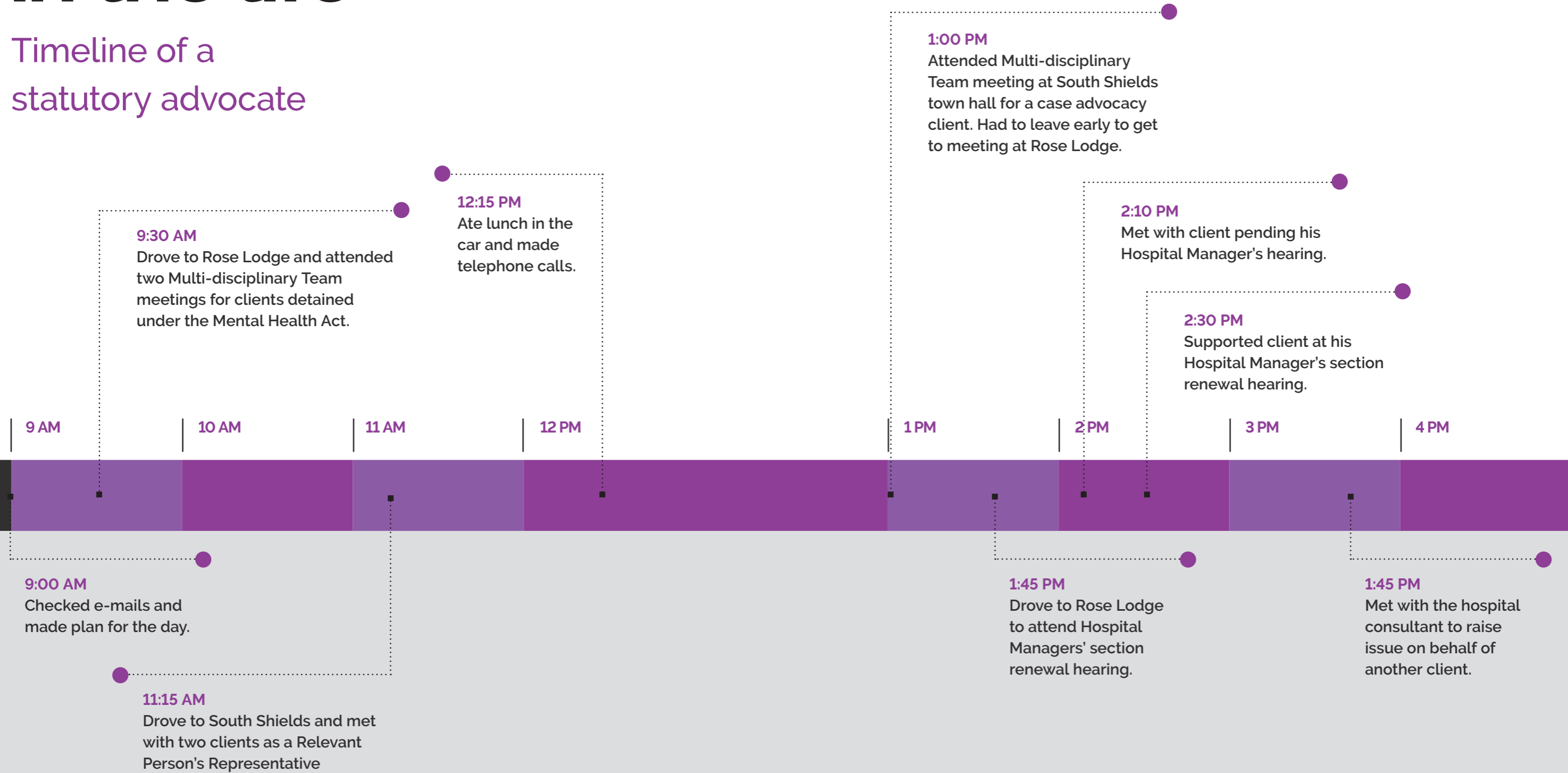
## Timeline of Help Through Crisis/the Help First drop-in.





# A day in the life

## Timeline of a statutory advocate





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