

Case Study highlighting how Advocacy can help a young person

The NYAS Helpline received a phone call from a young person saying that he was with his Pathways Advisor and was using his phone. He told the Helpline Advisor that his social worker has said that he had to leave his emergency placement to return to a children's home where he said he had been bullied. The young person said that he was homeless because he would not return to the children's home. He told the Helpline Advisor that he had run away from the children's home earlier that week. He said he had since taken an overdose and been taken to hospital where he had spent the last few days before being sent to an emergency placement. The young person said that he had felt safe at this new placement which was nearer to his family and school. He said he had liked it, and wanted to be allowed to stay there.

The Helpline Advisor assessed the young person as needing immediate help to get his wishes and feelings about his situation listened to and appropriate action taken about his situation. She reassured the young person and told him that an advocate would contact him as soon as possible. The young person had given the Helpline Advisor the wrong phone number for his Pathways Advisor and she spent some considerable time contacting various people in Children's Services to get the correct number so that the young person could be called back. The Helpline Advisor immediately contacted the Senior Advocate for the area, who happened to have worked with the young person previously and had a positive relationship with him.

The young person remembered the Senior Advocate because she had visited him in two different children's homes in the previous few weeks. The young person confirmed what he had told the Helpline Advisor, and told the Senior Advocate he felt so desperate that he would take another overdose if he was returned to the children's home as he did not feel safe there and it was too far away from his family. The young person's Pathways Advisor confirmed that a CAHMS Worker was involved with him and had concerns about his mental health.

After agreeing an action plan with the young person the Senior Advocate liaised by telephone with his social worker and her manager to make them aware of his wishes and feelings and her concerns about him, and asked them to consider an alternative option for the young person if he refused to return to the children's home by the end of the day, which the senior manager refused to do. The Senior Advocate highlighted the fact that it was the day before a four-day Bank Holiday weekend and that wherever the young person was placed would have to be somewhere where he was unlikely to abscond from. The Senior Advocate highlighted the young person's wish to be allowed to return to his emergency placement.

The Senior Advocate made a safeguarding referral to Children's Services to make the appropriate professionals aware of the potential of the young person to seriously self-harm and his allegations of bullying at the children's home.

At his request the Senior Advocate made a complaint on the young person's behalf asking that his current placement where he felt safe and closer to his family was frozen in line with complaints guidance until his complaint was resolved.

The young person was offered an alternative placement with a foster carer within an hour of the complaint being received by the senior manager. The young person was very pleased with this.

Outcomes:

- The young person's wishes and feelings about not having to return to a placement where he did not like and did not feel safe were listened to;
- The young person was safeguarded;
- The young person was supported in exercising his right to complain;
- The young person was listened to and was offered an alternative placement that was acceptable to him;
- The young person's social worker and manager were made aware that there may be bullying issues at the children's home thus safeguarding other young people;
- NYAS was able to raise the issue of alleged bullying with the children's home Manager and other young people at the home, giving them the opportunity to express their wishes and feelings about this.

The NYAS Helpline Advisor played a crucial role in being the first point of contact for the young person. The Helpline Advisor listened to the young person, calmed him, and reassured him that he would be helped. She was able to assess his situation as urgent and get the right help and support for him within minutes of his call to NYAS.

NYAS Helpline Advisers work as part of a team with Coordinators and Senior Advocates so that young people who contact the Helpline are responded to in a young person-friendly, prompt and professional manner.

Feedback:

The young person said that NYAS had been "really, really helpful" in supporting him to get his wishes and feelings listened to about having a placement he liked and where he felt safe and close to his family.

(Case study extracted from *Listen to Me* A National Children's Advocacy Consortium Report July 2012)