

**An evaluation of *Just
for Kids Law's* case
work with young
people delivered
through the *Advocacy
Year* programme**

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**CHARITIES EVALUATION
SERVICES**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About Just for Kids Law and the Advocacy Year programme

Introduction

Just for Kids Law's mission is to ensure all children and young people in the UK have their legal rights and entitlements respected and promoted, and their voices heard and valued. Working with and for children and young people, they seek to hold those with power to account and fight for wider reform. It provides legal representation and advice, advocacy and support directly to young people, and promotes further systemic change through strategic litigation, campaigning and equipping others to work for children's rights.

The charity aims to help young people navigate their way through challenging times including support for those facing difficulties at school, immigration problems, homelessness, in need of social care support or those caught up in the criminal justice system.

Just for Kids Law have developed a support model for individual children and young people that combines direct advocacy and development opportunities with legal advice and representation. The model is delivered by a team of Youth Advocates, a Youth Opportunities worker and lawyers in the charity's legal team.

The Advocacy Year programme

In 2016, the charity was awarded three-year funding from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) to set up the 'Advocacy Year' programme. It is a one-year programme for graduates interested in social justice and a possible career in law to be employed and trained as Youth Advocates. Working to deliver Just for Kids Law's model of individual support for young people alongside the charity's lawyers and youth opportunities workers, the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates work in the community, offering support to address the complex issues young people face.

Youth Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme are employed for a 12-month period, which includes an initial month of training. Over the three-year programme, seven graduates have completed their year, with four graduates currently completing their year as a Youth Advocate.

In addition, the programme delivers training, drop-ins and support for community organisations who wish to learn more about how to support vulnerable young people.

As set out in the original BLF application, the outcomes of the programme are to:

- reduce the impact of deprivation
- tackle social isolation
- support young people to be more confident with regards to their future.

Youth Advocates

Youth Advocates work alongside young people, acting on their instruction and at their pace, to design an individual package of support covering multiple areas of need. Working in the community, Youth Advocates attend meetings with young people, including Looked after Child reviews, Social Services assessments, school reintegration meetings, court appearances and immigration hearings. Youth Advocates can access legal advice and/or refer a young person to one of Just for Kids Law's specialist lawyers who can provide a variety of support, particularly related to education, housing or criminal proceedings.

Once clients' lives are more stable, a Youth Opportunities worker helps young people move towards independence by supporting them into education, employment or training.

The nature of the individual case work is holistic, both in the way that it seeks to provide support covering multiple areas of need that a young person has *and* in the way that they are supported by a team of Advocates, lawyers and a Youth Opportunities worker who are co-located to provide a joined-up package of help.

Summary of findings

Support for young people

Between August 2016 and July 2018, under the Advocacy Year programme's remit, 875 cases were supported.¹ This includes support from the Youth Advocates, the Community Care lawyer and the Youth Opportunities worker.²

The evaluation found a high level of satisfaction with how the Youth Advocates supported young people. They saw the Youth Advocates as caring and understanding and reported forming positive and trusting relationships. Young people noted being listened to, treated in a non-stigmatising manner and being seen as capable. This sat in contrast to their experience with other agencies they had been in contact with.

The evaluation found strong evidence that the following outcomes were occurring for young people:

- feeling supported
- having consistency of support
- reduced feeling of isolation
- improved wellbeing
- better understanding of rights and entitlements
- increased ability to self-advocate
- feeling more confident to face the future
- improved social care situation
- improved education, training and/or employment situations
- improved financial situation.

The Advocacy Year programme

The programme predominately recruited recent university graduates who were considering a career in social justice and/or law. They took part in an initial training programme and were offered a variety of support mechanisms over their 12-months as a Youth Advocate.

There were high levels of satisfaction with many aspects of the programme. Furthermore, Youth Advocates experienced the following outcomes that they attribute to their experience of the programme:

- increased understanding of UK social structures and the legal system
- improved communication skills
- improved advocacy skills

¹ Cases are a count of the number of separate issues that a client requires help with. For example, an individual may present with a housing issue and an immigration issue. This would be counted as two separate cases.

² This evaluation does not cover two full programme years as the programme runs from September to September while the Big Lottery Fund reporting is from June to June. Therefore, the number of cases reported in this report is likely to be an underestimation.

- increased clarity on their future goals.

Youth Advocates reported that they did not feel ready to start as soon as they did and offered suggestions for improving their conditions and the support mechanisms in place. It is noted that a number of these have been actioned by the charity, including the provision of emotional support, time away from frontline delivery to reflect on their work and a pay increase.

The external context, such as cuts to mental health services and legal aid and the length of time taken to resolve young people's immigration cases, led to some additional challenges for the Youth Advocates. At some points during their year, they felt overwhelmed by the volume of their caseloads and some were affected by the stories of the young people they were working with.

Community organisation support

Alongside its work with young people, the programme supported community organisations in East London through training, direct support to their clients, and accepting referrals.

Community organisations stated that they were very satisfied with the support they had been offered. This led to organisations having:

- increased ability to support vulnerable young people
- increased knowledge of good practice in supporting vulnerable young people, such as being youth-led and recognising the other factors that young people face
- increased understanding of the rights and responsibilities of young people.

Additionally, some evidence suggests that community organisations had increased their ability to extend their reach and attract new young people to their services. There was less evidence on whether they had made changes to their policies and practices, but a number were planning to.

Conclusion

By allowing the young people to see a Youth Advocate without any time limitation, on any issue they wished and being able to see the same person every time, the programme allowed young people to feel supported in a way they had not felt supported before by other agencies and organisations. This resulted in numerous positive benefits for young people, including less isolation, improved well-being and an increased understanding of their rights. Furthermore, they anticipated being able to self-advocate in the future. Young people attributed this change to their Youth Advocate(s) and described the effect as lasting.

The Youth Advocates learnt new skills, both professionally and personally, which supported their career progression and decision-making. Community organisations were positive about the support they had received and noted that they were in a better position to support vulnerable young people as a result of the assistance from Just for Kids Law.

The Youth Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme deliver a much-needed responsive service to vulnerable young people. Young people noted that the support was high quality and that it has been delivered in a positive, empowering and trusting manner.

Recommendations

To strengthen and improve the programme further, we recommend that Just for Kids Law:

- **Adjust the programme.** The programme could be enhanced for Youth Advocates, including additional support for them before they start case work and extending the overall programme from 12 to 18 months. In turn, this may improve the outcomes for young people.
- **Review programme resourcing.** Support for the Youth Advocates while they deliver their work could be increased, such as through the introduction of emotional support within the charity or a fund for external support. Recruiting a broader range of Youth Advocates, including those who are not university graduates, could further strengthen the programme.
- **Extend the work with community organisations.** This could include offering more training, drop-ins and more regular communication to increase the capacity of more organisations. We recognise that there is no capacity for this as it stands but this could be relevant for a future version of the programme.
- **Adjust the monitoring and evaluating systems.** This would include evaluating more aspects of the programme. Additionally, the annual targets should be reviewed.
- **Seek continuation funding.** For those accessing it, the programme has been an important and valuable support mechanism. Just for Kids Law should seek future funding to develop it based on the findings of this evaluation.

Evaluation

Just for Kids Law commissioned NCVO Charities Evaluation Services (NCVO CES) to conduct an external evaluation of the programme. This evaluation draws on primary data collected by NCVO CES as well as existing monitoring data collected by Just for Kids Law. The evaluation was conducted at the end of the second year of the three-year funding from the Big Lottery Fund. The Advocacy Year programme is funded until September 2019.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of Just for Kids Law

Just for Kids Law's vision is for all children and young people in the UK to have their legal rights and entitlements respected and promoted, and their voices heard and valued. Its mission is to work with and for children and young people to hold those with power to account and fight for wider reform. It achieves this by providing legal representation and advice, direct advocacy and support, and through strategic litigation, campaigning and equipping others to work for children's rights.

The charity's individual casework is delivered through a model which combines direct advocacy and development opportunities with legal advice and representation. The model is delivered by a team of Youth Advocates, Youth Opportunities workers and lawyers in the charity's legal team working together to support children and young people navigate their way through challenging times; whether they are facing difficulties at school, immigration problems, are homeless, in need of social care support or are caught up in the criminal justice system.

1.2 Overview of the Advocacy Year programme

The programme

In 2016, with funding from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF), Just for Kids Law set up the Advocacy Year programme. The programme offered a one-year traineeship for graduates interested in social justice and a possible career in law to work as Youth Advocates delivering the charity's model of individual casework.

Over the three-year programme, seven graduates have completed their year, with four graduates currently completing their year as a Youth Advocate. In the first year it employed three graduates but following additional funding was able to employ an additional Advocate in years two and three.

The programme was set up to work with vulnerable young people with three aims as set out in the BLF application: to reduce the impact of deprivation, to tackle social isolation and to support young people in feeling more confident about their futures.

The programme works to increase the skills of 15 community organisations per year in East London through a free programme of training on topics related to youth advocacy and different areas of law relating to children and young people. The intended outcome for this area of work is to improve the quality of support to vulnerable young people.

The programme runs across seven boroughs in London and is based in the Just for Kids Law office in East London.

The support offered to young people

The Advocacy Year programme is part of Just for Kids Law's model of individual casework with children and young people – combining direct advocacy, support and development opportunities with legal representation for individual children and young people. The support is provided by Youth Advocates, Youth Opportunities workers and lawyers in the charity's legal team.

The Youth Advocates work in the community, offering support to address the complex issues young people face. They do this by listening to and being led by the young person's wishes and feelings, working at their pace and designing an individual package of support to cover all areas of need. They work to

ensure the young person's voice is heard, to help them understand their rights and entitlements, and to improve communication and support from professionals and other services. In doing so, the Youth Advocate aims to facilitate a path from crisis to stability.

A Just for Kids Law Youth Advocate will:

- attend meetings with a young person to ensure their wishes and feelings are heard, for example at looked after child reviews, school exclusion meetings or child protection conferences
- provide written and telephone advocacy on the young person's behalf
- inform young people of their rights for support from, for example, social services, housing and being in care
- provide urgent support if the young person is homeless
- access specialist support, for example, mental health support
- access legal advice and representation.

Youth Advocates ensure that young people know their rights and entitlements, and help them to understand where they can access information on them. With the support of the Just for Kids Law legal team, Advocates can directly access specialist legal advice and representation relating to:

- school exclusion and Special Education Needs
- the duty of care, including housing and social care, owed by local authorities
- attending a Police Station, court proceedings, and criminal records (spent and unspent convictions)
- the immigration system and processes for regularising status.

The Youth Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme have access to a community care lawyer who has 2.5 days per week dedicated to supporting them and other specialist lawyers in the Just for Kids Law legal team.

Underlying these actions are a set of principles that young people should:

- be supported on any issue that they face rather than on a single issue only
- see the same Advocate every time, without a specific time frame or maximum number of sessions
- be provided with support in a non-stigmatising way
- be seen by Youth Advocates as able.

Once young people feel able, a Youth Opportunities worker helps them move towards independence by supporting them to enter education, employment or training.

1.3 About the evaluation

Just for Kids Law commissioned NCVO Charities Evaluation Services (NCVO CES) to undertake an external evaluation of some aspects of the programme from 2016 to 2018. In addition, Just for Kids Law collected data for monitoring and evaluation of the Advocacy Year programme. This report aims to synthesise the two data sources.

The support of NCVO CES involved two phases. The first, in 2017, included feedback on Advocacy Year's evaluation processes and data collection methods, a survey and interviews with community organisations, as well as a reflection meeting. The second stage included primary research by NCVO CES and analysis of

data collected by Just for Kids Law, specifically looking at the cases supported by Youth Advocates.³

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- assess the impact of the programme on various stakeholders and determine whether agreed outcomes with the funder have been achieved
- assess how effectively Just for Kids Law's model of individual casework has worked for the young people, the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates on the 12-month programme, and community organisations
- identify lessons learned and highlight potential areas for improvement.

Methodology

The evaluation drew on data from the following sources:

- qualitative semi-structured interviews with a sample of the beneficiaries
- a focus group with the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates
- a survey with the community organisations
- Just for Kids Law's own data.

Semi-structured interviews

In July and August 2018, NCVO CES carried out 16 semi-structured qualitative interviews with young people who had accessed individual casework support from Youth Advocates as part of the Advocacy Year programme. Two of the interviewees had only accessed support twice but all the others had accessed support for a longer period.

Consent was sought before the interviews then re-checked at the start of each interview. The interviews were carried out by phone and most took between 20-40 minutes. Two were done through an interpreter. Some of the questions were not answered by the young people for various reasons: they had limited time, did not fully understand the question (including some due to lower levels of English) or did not wish to respond.

The interviews were fully transcribed and coded using qualitative analysis methods.

Focus group

NCVO CES conducted a focus group with five of the Youth Advocates in June 2018. One additional Youth Advocate fed back with a written response at a later point, so the views of six of the Youth Advocates were included. Two of the individuals had moved on from the programme and the other four were current Youth Advocates.

The focus group session took two hours, with a moderator and note-taker from NCVO CES. An information sheet was sent ahead of the session and consent was sought at the start of the session.

The focus group discussion was fully transcribed and coded using qualitative analysis methods.

Community organisation survey

A survey consisting of 15 questions was sent out in September 2018 to East London-based community organisations. Ten community organisations responded. These were organisations that had received

³ Cases are a count of the number of separate issues that a client requires help with. For example, an individual may present with a housing issue and an immigration issue. This would be counted as two separate cases.

support and/or accessed training provided by the Advocacy Year programme over the past 12 months. These organisations were charities focused primarily on children and young people.

Just for Kids Law's own data

In addition to the primary data collected by NCVO CES, Just for Kids Law provided the following data for this evaluation:

- *Big Lottery Fund end-of-year reports.* These contained data from case notes, records of numbers and profiles of young people accessing the service, and feedback forms distributed at the end of every training session with community organisations.
- *A 24-question client satisfaction survey.* This was conducted by volunteers and staff in summer 2018 and involved a sample of approximately 10% of the beneficiaries of the entire organisation. The questionnaire could be completed by clients or by their parents/carers. We extracted the data specifically relating to young people supported by Advocacy Year Youth Advocates. This involved 32 young people. Where comparable data from this survey exists, it is presented in the report in order to compare or contrast the findings from the interviews.

Issues to consider with the data

There are some issues to consider when reviewing the findings of this evaluation:

- Just for Kids Law's model of individual casework is delivered by Youth Advocates working *alongside* the charity's lawyers and Youth Opportunities workers. Seven of the interviewees received legal representation from the charity's legal team and eight were supported by the Youth Opportunities worker. This report therefore presents an evaluation of the casework of Just for Kids Law *through* the Advocacy Year programme.
- This report presents findings from the annual client survey conducted by Just for Kids Law. From this, responses from young people who had received support from the Youth Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme has been extracted. Those young people will have received support from *all* Just for Kids Law's staff working to deliver the individual casework model, including lawyers and Youth Opportunities workers. Therefore, it is not possible to attribute findings to the specific work of the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates.
- In interviews with young people, as agreed, Just for Kids Law deliberately sampled those who had a longer relationship with Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme in order to explore how the programme had impacted upon their lives in a meaningful way. This results in a bias towards those who have accessed Youth Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme several times, as opposed to the other beneficiaries who may have accessed them once. This has been mitigated by comparing our findings against the data that Just for Kids Law collected in their annual survey as this was based on a sample of 10% of *all* the beneficiaries of its individual casework.
- Due to a changeover in database, it was not possible to access raw monitoring data from the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates. This report has drawn on the end-of-year Big Lottery Fund reports in order to be able to report on this.
- This evaluation has focused on the work carried out by the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates, the work with community organisations, and the outcomes for young people. While the holistic nature of support is noted, some aspects of the work conducted by Just for Kids Law was out of scope for this evaluation.

1.4 About this report

This report has seven sections:

- Section 1: an overview of the charity, programme and evaluation methodology.
- Section 2: what activities were delivered and the young people's perspectives on these.
- Section 3: outcomes for young people.
- Section 4: the programme, activities, satisfaction and outcomes for Youth Advocates.
- Section 5: work with community organisations, including activities, satisfaction and outcomes.
- Section 6: conclusions from the evaluation.
- Section 7: recommendations for the future of the programme.

2. Findings – support for the young people

In this section, we describe the individual casework model that Just for Kids Law delivers and that the Advocacy Year programme is a part of. It explores how young people were supported and their feedback on service quality. This section draws on evidence from our interviews with a sample of service users, data from the annual client satisfaction survey and from the two Big Lottery Fund end-of-year reports.

2.1 Who Advocacy Year supported

Over the last two years, the individual casework delivered by Just for Kids Law's legal team, Advocacy Year Youth Advocates and youth opportunities worker, has totalled 875 cases. Following refinement of how data was collected, data from 2017-18 shows that the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates worked with 248 individual clients.

The initial Big Lottery Fund target was for Advocacy Year to work with 535 cases each year. Over 3 years this totals 1,605 cases. However, this was reduced to 490 each year or 1490 cases over three years to take into account the one month of training where the Youth Advocates would not be seeing clients. The programme will continue until September 2019.

Young people supported by Advocacy Year Youth Advocates either self-referred or were referred by a charity, parent or professional in the statutory sector or from within Just for Kids Law.

Profile of young people

The young people accessing the service were mainly aged between 10 and 24 years old (93%). There were more males (60%) to females (40%), indicating that young men are over represented compared to the overall population.

This over representation may be due to the way that the programme prioritises who to work with, focusing on some of the most vulnerable young people in London. However, it likely reflects the discrimination faced by certain groups and their increased likelihood to require services provided by Just for Kids Law.

Compared to current census statistics,⁴ there was an over representation of young Black people supported by the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates:

- 68% were Black, African, Caribbean or other ethnic minority groups
- 17% were white UK or other white backgrounds
- 10% were from Asian/Asian UK backgrounds
- 5% were from other mixed backgrounds.

Those with disabilities were also over represented: 24% had a disability, compared to recent government statistics showing that 7% of children are disabled.⁵

⁴ Office for National Statistics. 'Ethnicity facts and figures - age groups'. www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/british-population/demographics/age-groups/latest (Accessed December 2018)

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions. 'Family Resources Survey 2015/16'. assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600465/family-resources-survey-2015-16.pdf (Accessed December 2018)

2.2 How Advocacy Year Youth Advocates supported young people

The model of support for young people at Just for Kids Law holds that young people:

- can see their Youth Advocate for as long as they wish. If this spans more than the one programme year, they will be assigned a new Advocate to support them.
- can see their Youth Advocate as often as they like and on any issue they face.
- should have consistency and see the same Youth Advocate on each occasion. This last aspect is reported on under outcomes for young people.

Length of support

There is evidence from the interviews and annual client survey that the young people accessing Youth Advocates were able to have support for as long as they desired, with many being supported over long periods.

A majority of interviewees (9/16) had accessed support for longer than one programme year, with one receiving support for over two years. Some had accessed support over the entire period, while others had returned because they had encountered further issues. Seven had accessed support since September 2017.

Nearly all the interviewees had had contact with their Youth Advocate(s) several times (range 2–40+), and had received telephone, email and face-to-face support. In two of the cases, the young person had seen their Youth Advocate only twice as their issue was resolved or they were receiving support from other agencies. The majority of interviewees had seen their Youth Advocate 7+ times.

According to client survey data, for those respondents who were still being supported by Youth Advocates (22/32), the average length of support was 10 months (range 4–20 months).

The issues young people were supported on

Youth Advocates support young people on any issue – often multiple issues simultaneously. Of the 16 young people interviewed, the most frequent issues were housing (10 respondents); employment, education and training (7); support on social care (7); finances (4); and receiving support over their immigration status (3).

The housing cases often involved conducting challenges against social services or the council regarding unfair decisions. The cases were often complex – such as involving overcrowding or leaving care – and were compounded by having a baby, other dependents or not speaking English.

The issues faced by the 32 young people who responded to the annual client survey included:

- education (2)
- housing (9)
- social service support (4)
- opportunities/education (4).

2.3 What young people thought of the support

Seeing the same Youth Advocate every time

On the whole, the young people were able to see the same Youth Advocate as long as they needed, within the confines of the programme year. If they needed additional support into a second programme year,

they were assigned a new Advocate. This is reported on below in section 3.2.

Support on any issue

The young people interviewed who responded to this question (13) felt they could ask for support on any issue. They were supported directly by the Youth Advocate, helped to access a lawyer in more complex cases or referred onto other services when this was beyond the scope of the Youth Advocate.

Resolution

It is clear that Advocacy Year Youth Advocates had managed to resolve several cases and that the young people felt that the work had made a significant impact on their issues.

Of those interviewed, nine of the young people had cases that were ongoing. For seven, their cases had been resolved. For the young people with housing issues, five had had successful resolutions. The others were waiting. For the three young people who had insecure immigration status, their cases remained ongoing.

In the annual client survey, young people were asked what difference Just for Kids Law support had made on the issue they were facing. The vast majority (31/32) said they had made a difference, with 24/32 stating *a lot* of difference. Some respondents (7/32) noted that they had only made *some difference* and one person said *not a lot*.

Non-stigmatising and seeing the young person as able

Every interviewee that responded to the question (12/12) felt they had been treated in a non-judgmental manner and that their Advocate had recognised their ability. One interviewee noted:

When you come to them with a case like my own they don't look at you like you are a certain person. They ... just help you really quickly and sit down with you and make sense [of things together].

One interviewee described how her Advocate had encouraged her to lead: 'She hasn't done anything for me [in a positive way], I have to do it myself.' One interviewee compared the help from her Youth Advocate to the support she received from other agencies:

Normally when you go for support, they use words like 'oh you are destitute.' They talk down to you, that you are worth nothing. [With Advocacy Year] ... they remind you about the person you are, and your personality, that you are an amazing person, you are not worthless, you are a good person. It's encouraging and builds your confidence. Now I understand that if someone talks down to me, it's their personal opinion. I don't get angry. I have to remind myself that is not me. It takes a while ... It's just words that people use to make you feel in a bad way.

How the young person got on with the Youth Advocates

All the interviewees reported getting on well with their Youth Advocate (n=16). They reported feeling listened to, respected, and that the Youth Advocates were caring, offered extra help, and went 'the extra mile.' Two mentioned that they found their Advocates to be professional yet friendly. There was one instance where a young person had had more than one Advocate and had not got on with one of her Advocates.

Importantly, they felt that they were able to speak freely with their Youth Advocate. In some cases, this took time as 'it takes a while to open up to a new person.' Young people felt that their Youth Advocate was friendly, approachable and relatable. Four out of the 12 young people interviewed noted the

empathetic nature of the Youth Advocates and how they were 'able to come down to my level and know what I was feeling.'

Reflecting on the relationship with their Youth Advocate, one young person described the effect of this style:

She is good, she is an amazing person, a polite person. She made me not feel worthless. She never spoke down. She was always at the same level. I would never feel insecure to speak to her about anything. She always reassured me, even if she couldn't help, she would find somebody. I never felt like I couldn't speak to her about anything.

Some young people mentioned that they felt like they were friends. In one case, the Youth Advocate attended a school leaving ceremony and the young person had been invited to watch a football match with the Youth Advocate.

Being listened to

The young people interviewed felt that they were listened to by their Youth Advocate in all of the cases where the interviewee responded to the question (13/16). They felt that their ideas were first sought and then taken on board: 'I feel like my voice is heard. They don't take decisions without asking me, without finding out what I want.' Youth Advocates observed how young people were surprised to be listened to and that someone was taking them seriously.

Overall satisfaction

In the annual client survey, 31/32 young people stated that they would recommend Just for Kids Law to a friend. All of the young people said they would use Just for Kids Law again in the future and the vast majority (30/32) were happy with the service they had received. One was not satisfied with the service but did not state why and one did not respond. Positive comments included:

Just for Kids Law give young people their confidence back.

Brilliant firm with caring staff members.

Just for Kids Law went above and beyond for me.

Completely different to any other; to see the contrast is astonishing.

2.4 Improvements

There were very few suggestions from young people as to how the work of the Youth Advocates could be improved. The only areas suggested involved privacy, improving the referral process, and always receiving consent for actions.

Privacy

One young person said that he would have preferred a private room when he was meeting with his Youth Advocate to describe what his issues were. At the time there was limited private space in the offices at Just for Kids Law.

When I was describing my problem, there were other people in the room at Just for Kids Law. They knew the problem and they weren't judgmental, but I felt uncomfortable.

Referral process

One interviewee felt that the referral process could be improved by not having to type out your issues on an online application:

When you are trying to do the referral that can be a bit daunting because you have to explain everything why you want to work with the service ... Second time, someone got in touch very quick. This could be improved. When you are sitting there and you desperately need help, to write on a blank screen is hard ... You don't know who is going to read it ... and trying to explain everything that is going on.

For the Advocacy Year programme, an online referral process has only recently been introduced having previously always been taken by phone. It is possible that the above comment related to another Just for Kids Law project, *Let us Learn*, which has used an online referral system for longer. Irrespective of the project, there is learning to consider: writing and/or speaking about a traumatic event was uncomfortable for this young person.

Becoming attached to the Youth Advocate

In the interviews, when discussing improvements, one young person described the close relationship they had formed with their Youth Advocate:

Even when they leave after a while, you miss them, you get close to them. At least if that is going to happen, you know when they are going to leave. It's still good you know this, they tell every client.

Young people are made aware that their Youth Advocate has a fixed-term post at the start of their support.

Youth Advocate acting without permission

One of the interviewees described how she had multiple Advocates as she had needed support for more than one year. She had different experiences with the Youth Advocates and, in one case, the Youth Advocate acted on her behalf without seeking consent:

She'd go away and do it even if I didn't want her to go and do it. She didn't explain the reason. If you don't know what the person is doing, and it has to do with your life, you can feel uncomfortable. It's very hard to come across. One time I had to message her, I felt rude, I was just telling her 'don't do that, you have to ask me first.' It was in my right to do but it felt a bit awkward.

While it is noted that Just for Kids Law requires Youth Advocates to act only with the client's permission first through its policies and ethos, there may be occasions when this is not fully realised in practice.

3. Findings – outcomes for young people

In this section, we explore the outcomes for young people who have accessed the support provided by Advocacy Year Youth Advocates. It refers to the outcomes as set out in the original Big Lottery Fund application as well as additional or unexpected outcomes. This section draws on findings from the interviews, the annual client survey and the two Big Lottery Fund end-of-year reports.

3.1 Young people experience reduced deprivation

This section relates to outcome one: ‘A reduction of the impact of deprivation on young people.’ The associated indicators included whether young people using the services reported:

- an improvement in their general wellbeing
- an improvement in their financial and social care
- an improvement in their education, training and employment.

Young people have improved wellbeing

Across all the data collected by NCVO CES and Just for Kids Law, feedback indicates that young people’s wellbeing improved as a result of the support they received.

In the interviews, three quarters of the young people (12/16) reported positive change in their wellbeing, with five seeing significant positive change. A quarter (4/16) noted that they had serious mental health issues. One young person reflected:

Before I got help ... I attempted to take my own life because I couldn’t access any help, I felt like I had no options. They came and helped me and showed me that I actually do.

As a result of the support they received, young people felt better able to cope:

Both issues caused me massive amount of stress. With the help of Just for Kids Law, all the issues disappeared, especially my wellbeing, because I was kind of breaking down.

Young people explained that Youth Advocates made them feel supported, that they had options and provided hope - even when their situation had not been fully resolved.

For some young people, their state of wellbeing was linked to the progress in their case. Two stated that their wellbeing fluctuated as their cases had not been resolved yet. One said they did not feel any positive change as they were in limbo with their case, while a further young person noted that they did not feel stressed by their situation in the first place.

In the annual client survey (n=31), young people were asked how much the situation affected them *before* and *after* receiving support from Just for Kids Law. Before working with Just for Kids Law, the vast majority (25/31) felt the situation was affecting them *a lot* with few (4/31) stating it was affecting them *a little*. They described feeling down because of the situation, having feelings of frustration and anxiety, and in one case, that it had triggered flashbacks of a stressful life period. Following support, a majority (18/31) felt *significantly better* about their situation. Few respondents (4/31) felt it was affecting them *a little* still, while some felt there had been little progress (9/31).

The Big Lottery Fund reporting cycle runs from June to June, whereas the delivery of the Advocacy Year programme runs from September to September. In the BLF end-of-year reports, Youth Advocates recorded 383 cases in year 1 (September 2016 – June 2017) and 432 cases in year 2 (July 2017 – June

2018) where young people reported an improvement in their wellbeing.⁶ In each year, the target number of cases was 475.

Young people have improved financial and social care situations

In the BLF end-of-year reports, Advocacy Year recorded 412 cases in year 1 (September 2016 – June 2017) and 432 cases in year 2 (July 2017 – June 2018) where young people had reported an improvement in their financial and social care situations. In each year, the target number of cases was 365.

In the interviews, just under a third (5/16) of the young people stated that the support they had been given had improved their financial situation. This included support to access new benefits (4), money to cover travel expenses (1), support to access funding for whitegoods in new accommodation, and support to access funding from school to apply for university. For eight of the young people this was not relevant as they did not need financial support.

Regarding social care, just under half (7/16) of interviewees had had disputes with social services that Youth Advocates helped with. This involved challenging social services regarding accommodation. Outcomes included successfully diverting eviction (1), support related to a new baby (3), securing the provision of a personal advisor, and gaining access to personal records held by social services in order to resolve an ongoing issue. For six of the young people this was not relevant.

Support with children

Three mentioned support regarding young children, including securing appropriate accommodation and accessing items for a new baby. A further respondent mentioned gaining a special access order to care for her younger sister.

The 2018 report on the Advocacy Year programme to Big Lottery describes how a young woman who had been supported for a year was able to advocate for herself in a family group conference. She was successful in preventing her unborn child's case going to child protection. In addition, Youth Advocates assisted a young pregnant woman who had no recourse to public funds with accessing clothing and equipment for her soon-to-be-born child.

Young people have improved education, training and employment situations

The Big Lottery Fund outcomes for the Advocacy Year Programme were also to improve young people's education, training and employment opportunities. There is evidence that for those for whom this was relevant, this did occur.

The Big Lottery Fund end-of-year reports recorded 127 cases in year 1 (September 2016 – June 2017) and 183 cases in year 2 (July 2017 – June 2018) where young people reported improvements in their education, training and employment against an annual target of 105.

In the interviews, just under half (7/16) of the young people had improved education, training and employment situations as a result of the support they had received from Just for Kids Law. In response to open-ended questions in the annual client survey, young people noted how Youth Advocates had supported their engagement with formal education. One respondent described how home tuition allowed her to continue education:

I had trouble with education. I wasn't going to school. They [Just for Kids Law] fought for some

⁶ NB cases are the count of how many times a person has been supported rather than the count of individuals being supported.

tuition and took pressure off me going into school when I didn't want to, which helped me with my [mental] health. I was also away but could still do my exams.

In another situation, the Youth Advocate supported a young person to understand their options:

When we went to meetings [the Youth Advocate] would say 'you don't have to do this' even though the school might have said that we did, she gave options and told us of things we don't have to follow.

One parent felt that the school changed how it behaved towards their child once Just for Kids Law were involved: 'The school started contacting and accepting her calls once the law firm got involved.'

A quarter (4) were directly supported to access a training, college or university course. One mentioned that she had attended a training course run by Just for Kids Law to help young people into employment. This included updating her CV and interviewing skills, which she found useful.

One young person had support to challenge poor practices in her workplace. She had been working extra hours beyond her agreed contract and was not given this time back. The Youth Advocate approached the employer, challenged the excessive hours and managed to secure the young person time off to study.

For half of the interviewees (8/16), this was not relevant to them. One had not been offered this support.

3.2 Young people are less isolated

The section relates to the second Big Lottery Fund outcome: 'Vulnerable young people in East London will be less isolated'. The indicators were whether young people using the service reported:

- feeling less isolated
- experiencing consistency in the support of the programme staff
- an increase in their external support network.

Young people feel less isolated

There is evidence that young people using the service felt less isolated as a result. In the interviews, the vast majority of young people (14/16) reported that they felt less alone in dealing with their problems. This included having someone to share the burden with or having someone to talk to when they needed it: 'I know if I start to get down, there is help there for me.'

For young people, the visibility of having a Youth Advocate had a positive effect:

Just for Kids Law being able to support me by being at my meetings and making sure they are there as it allows other organisations to know that I am not fighting by myself.

The Big Lottery Fund end-of-year reports recorded 389 cases in 2017 and 430 cases in 2018 report where young people had reported feeling less isolated. The Big Lottery Fund target was 475, meaning that the programme fell short in both years.

Young people have consistency of programme staff support

One of the objectives of the programme was for young people to have consistency of support. Following the different data sources, there is mixed evidence from the interviews that this has happened.

Interviewees appreciated being able to see the same Youth Advocate:

I think it is a good approach especially when you've been in care as so used to loads of different

people, for example constantly changing social workers. Having one person working with you that's consistent, that does help. It allows you to feel a bit more secure and allows you to want the help more.

A minority of the interviewees (5/16) had seen the same Youth Advocate over the course of their support term. However, over two thirds (11/16) had seen more than one Youth Advocate. Of these, nine required support for longer than one year. While this is a set part of the programme design, this could suggest that cases run longer than the 12-months that their Youth Advocate is in place.

For some, there were valid reasons necessitating a change of Youth Advocate: in separating from her partner, one young person was given a new Youth Advocate to ensure her and her partner (who was also receiving support) were not supported by the same person.

One interviewee noted that, 'It's really good that you don't have three different people dealing with your case and it's not a clash of personalities.' Another reflected how having multiple individuals involved would have made her less likely to access support: 'It would scare me away having to email someone new.'

Young people feel more supported

Another objective of the support provided by the Advocacy Year programme was for young people to have a sense of being supported; that they were not alone in dealing with the issues they faced. There is strong evidence in the interviews that this occurred.

In the interviews, all of the young people felt that they had been well supported by their Advocate. The support involved, 'just having someone there at your side,' securing a lawyer, having the Advocate present at meetings and in contact with external agencies and helping the young people to understand what the options were. Even in the cases where there had not been a resolution, having an Advocacy Year Youth Advocate at their side gave the young people a sense of hope.

3.3 Young people are more confident to face their future

This section relates to the outcome: '*Vulnerable young people in East London will be more confident in facing their future.*' The indicators were whether young people using the service reported:

- an improvement in the understanding of their rights and entitlements
- an improvement in their ability to self-advocate
- feel more confident in facing life challenges.

Young people have a better understanding of their rights

Through the support provided by Youth Advocates it was intended that young people would better understand their rights. In the interviews, half (8/16) mentioned that they better understood their rights and that this had made them more confident in speaking up.

I am more familiar with my rights. I know when I can speak up. In the beginning, I wasn't very sure what was happening, so I was scared, and I found I don't have any power. My life was in other people's hands. Just for Kids Law helped me understand that is not entirely true and that I do have rights and I can use my rights.

[Through Advocacy Year support] you learn your rights. It helps me feel more ... I understand my rights. [Advocate's name] gave me some websites to look up about my rights ... I feel a bit better.

In the annual client survey (n=32), young people reported a significant change in their understanding of their rights. Before they received support, 28/32 said they had *no or not much knowledge at all* about their rights. Following on from the support, this had increased significantly, with 28/32 saying they now had *some or a lot of* increased understanding of their rights. One survey respondent reflected how this changed their approach to self-advocacy:

I didn't know how to challenge the education system through the law. But upon contacting Just for Kids Law, I then had a strategy, which worked.

The BLF end-of-year reports recorded 391 cases in year 1 (September 2016 – June 2017) and 399 cases in year 2 (July 2017 – June 2018) where young people had reported an increase in understanding their rights and entitlements. In each year, the target number of cases was 475.

Young people have an increased ability to self-advocate

As a result of the support provided by the programme the intention was for young people to have an increased ability to self-advocate. There was evidence that this has occurred.

Three quarters of the interviewees (12/16) felt that with Just for Kids Law support they had been able to speak up and express their wishes. Crucially, they felt that they would be more able to do so in the future:

They remind me of what rights I have; that if I feel intimidated, I have right to complain. It has helped me to develop my own confidence to speak. It might not have happened without (them).

Young people felt that by having Youth Advocates with them at meetings, their voices were better listened to by other professionals. In order to prepare for these meetings, young people described meeting and discussing the points they wanted to cover with their Youth Advocate. One young person described how this felt:

In meetings, I get nervous, it's quite intimidating. [Name of the advocate] makes sure my voice is heard. I get a chance to speak. I mention to her in the meeting and she will make sure my points are heard.

The BLF end-of-year reports recorded 307 cases in year 1 (September 2016 – June 2017) and 365 cases in year 2 (July 2017 – June 2018) where young people had reported an increased ability to self-advocate. In each year, the target number of cases was 370.

Young people feel more confident in facing the future

Young people feel more confident to speak up about their rights in the future and do, more generally, feel more confident in facing the future.

Three quarters of the interviewees (12/16) reported feeling more able to speak up for themselves if they had a similar situation in the future. Some stated that they were confident before the situation arose but for most, it had been a learning curve. They stated that they may be able to resolve future issues themselves, but they would return to Just for Kids Law if there was an issue or they needed to check their legal rights. On using Just for Kids Law in the future, one young person noted:

Yeah definitely. I will only go to them if it something beyond my control or if I can see that the council is turning me down. If I know something isn't right, I'll go back to them and see if what they are doing is correct.

Some young people (5/16) reported a renewed sense of hope and noted how important this was to their confidence and self-esteem. One of the young people noted how the support had affected him:

I've been able to go out more; work harder in school. I felt like there was still hope. Last year, this time, I felt there was no hope. I'm still capable of achieving what I want to achieve. There are no obstacles ahead of me ... It was me trying to better myself through my education all because of the support they gave me.

One interviewee stated that the support had made her more positive:

Only that it has been amazing, and they should keep helping people like me and other kids. Carrying on doing what they are doing, it does help. There might be someone feeling like I did ... It's made me so positive. It's amazing that in a short time, they can turn your life around.

In the annual client survey (n=30), 23/30 respondents reported that they did not feel positive about their future before accessing support. Following support, the results had reversed: 24/30 were positive, with 6 feeling *okay* about their future. Two did not respond.

The BLF end-of-year reports recorded 368 cases in year 1 (September 2016 – June 2017) and 430 cases in year 2 (July 2017 – June 2018) where young people reported feeling more confident to face the future. In each year, the target number of cases was 475.

3.4 Getting support elsewhere

Comparing models of support

Nearly two thirds (10/16) of the interviewees had accessed support from elsewhere; six had not (n=16). They raised a number of issues in accessing others' support, including competence, the slow pace of other agencies, and the difficulty with trying to challenge social services while being supported by them. This section also draws on data from the end-of-year reports to the Big Lottery Fund.

Competence

One mentioned that his experience with the local authority had not been helpful:

Local Authority advocacy services, not helpful whatsoever. Terrible! It was good to have a service that was genuinely caring (Advocacy Year). The others are fake.

Speed of resolution

Three mentioned that they had had support from other external agencies but that these agencies had not managed to resolve their cases. On receiving support from Just for Kids Law, their issue had subsequently been resolved significantly more quickly. As one young person noted: 'They get things done. Things are sorted a lot quicker.' One young person described waiting for three years with an issue that Just for Kids Law had rapidly resolved.

One described how with a social services advocacy programme, the staff kept changing thereby delaying the resolution of their case.

They were bad because one would leave, and it would make my case go longer. It just took a hell of a lot of time. It's because it's in-house (within social services).

Passing judgement

Two mentioned that they felt unable to speak honestly with social services out of fear that the information would be 'used against them'. One young person felt that this had happened to her. In

comparison, Just for Kids Law was non-judgmental.

My social worker, no I wouldn't ask them for support, especially with the second problem. If I want to talk about social services, they always use it against me. I know Just for Kids Law are ready to help without judging or presumptions. This is why I wanted to come to Just for Kids Law.

Accessing other support

Nearly one third (6/16) of the interviewees mentioned that they would have found support from somewhere else but of these, five stated that they expect it would not have been as good as Just for Kids Law (n=16). One mentioned that she would have had to pay for it, which she could not afford. Many were not sure where else they could have turned to for support with one person stating: 'I don't know. I wouldn't know how to [look for other support].'

In the annual client survey, nearly one quarter (7/32) of the young people had accessed support from other advocates, mentors or solicitors. These included other charities such as the British Red Cross, Children's Society, another law firm and local authority advocacy services. Three quarters (25/32) had not previously accessed any other support.

Three interviewees were receiving other support that they had found to be positive and that these agencies had or were helping to resolve their issues alongside their Advocacy Year Youth Advocate.

Without Just for Kids Law support

Broadly speaking, three quarters (12/16) of the interviewees had a pessimistic view of how their lives would be if they had not accessed support from Just for Kids Law. Some thought that their issues would have been resolved, but that it would have taken much longer and been more challenging. Just under a third (5/16) felt they would still be in their initial problematic situation or that they would have had a different, less positive outcome to their issue.

One described having the confidence to challenge decisions made by others:

Since I've had them involved, I haven't had to go to my home borough. I haven't had to be afraid of fighting or putting myself back into unsafe situations.

3.5 Other factors influencing the outcomes

While the data set indicates that the young people have experienced benefits due to the work of Youth Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme, it is important to recognise that other factors may have contributed to, or impeded, change.

Enablers of outcomes

Two thirds (11/16) of interviewees stated that where there had been a positive change, they attributed this to Just for Kids Law. One person described how even though she had a lawyer, her Youth Advocate continued to play a vital role:

She supported me with every meeting, she's the one who got me the lawyer. She done most of the work, even though the lawyers write up the notes, send out the letters, she would always make sure they have done what they needed to do.

One interviewee said that they were stuck and could see no positive outcome in their case. One young person reflected that while Just for Kids Law had added weight to her case alongside other agencies, she

could not say the change was down to the organisation.

Barriers to outcomes

The Youth Advocates mentioned that there were external challenges which meant that some outcomes were harder to achieve. For example:

- lack of mental health support for young people except those with the very highest needs
- a lack of legal aid for young people which meant the Youth Advocates, and the lawyers working with them, struggled to find means to support them.

They were keen to emphasise that self-advocacy was not possible for all. Some had very young clients or those who did not speak fluent English. In such cases, small steps were seen as great achievements. One Youth Advocate reflected:

You can have a 12-year old client whose got needs, will hardly talk to you and is hardly going to talk on behalf of themselves at any kind of meeting. And they're silent, but then you can't then turn around and say like they didn't really get the whole like understanding of self-advocacy. Them turning up to the meeting themselves is an achievement or them even wanting an Advocate.

It was noted that immigration cases can take a long time to be dealt with by the relevant authorities, which impacts upon the ability of the Advocates to resolve the issue.

4. Findings – the Youth Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme

This section explores the experience of the Youth Advocates on the Advocacy Year programme, describing how they were supported, their overall satisfaction, what they thought of the programme, their outcomes, and suggested improvements to the programme. The data is taken from a focus group of five Advocates and one additional person feeding in with a written submission.

4.1 Overview of the Advocacy Year programme

The Advocacy Year programme recruits graduates who are considering a career in social justice or law to work for a year as a Youth Advocate. The competitive recruitment process aims to attract the ‘best and brightest’ graduates who are committed to making a difference. The programme initially aimed to recruit nine graduates over the lifespan of the project. Following additional funding from Clifford Chance Law firm, Just for Kids Law recruited a fourth graduate in both year two and three of the programme.

The graduates are trained to provide the Just for Kids Law model of advocacy which is part of its overall model of direct advocacy, support and development opportunities with legal representation and advice for individual children and young people. After an intense four-week training period, they take on a caseload of young people to support. They may be supporting between 10 and 15 young people at any given time. They have a range of support options, including a supervisor to discuss cases, regular supervision meetings, a manager, a buddy and access to the support of the Just for Kids Law legal team.

The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates who started in 2017 were offered a trainee salary of £17,745 per annum in addition to a London travel card.

Other than the total number of Advocacy Year Youth Advocates the programme should have, there are no Big Lottery Fund targets for this part of the project.

4.2 The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates

At the time of writing, there had been seven Advocates. A further four had recently been recruited for the final programme year. This means that Advocacy Year has exceeded its targets (9) in terms of number of Advocates.

The Advocates had studied a range of subjects including law, arts and humanities, politics and psychology. Some were recent graduates and others had a few years’ work experience. Two were studying a law conversion course simultaneously.

4.3 How the programme was delivered

The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates were offered a range of support. This included:

- an initial training programme
- an Advocacy Year programme manager for administrative support
- an Advocacy Year supervisor for supervision and pastoral support
- a Just for Kids Law buddy for additional informal support
- a mentoring scheme

- a leadership training programme
- further training within Just for Kids Law with encouragement to attend training by external agencies
- access to support from a dedicated community care lawyer and access to other Just for Kids Law lawyers
- a network of graduate alumni from the programme with occasional meetings and the possibility to get in touch.

Since the writing of this evaluation, a new role of Advocacy Co-ordinator has been added. This replaces the previous supervisor role. This person will provide both supervision and pastoral support. Further changes include that the manager will now offer career guidance and the leadership training is no longer offered.

Role clarity

Most of the Youth Advocates felt that they had not fully understood the Advocacy Year programme before they started. Specifically, they stated that the role involved less legal practice than they had anticipated. Some would have preferred more of the legal work than they had been engaged in; others were glad that it was not as legal as they had anticipated.

The Youth Advocates who took part in the evaluation felt there could be some improvements in terms of role clarity:

And the more kind of banal everyday stuff, like sitting in the housing office and presenting at social services, weren't bigged up as much. They're the kind of bread and butter of our work.

They had not fully appreciated what advocacy looked like in terms of the relationship with the young people, supporting them on multiple issues and potentially over a long time period. One person noted: 'I didn't think we'd have such intense relationships with young people.'

Training

Initial training

The Youth Advocates were offered a two-week training programme to develop relevant knowledge and skills in advocacy and law. Topics included advocacy style, child safeguarding, and basic legal knowledge on the areas affecting Just for Kids Law clients: social welfare, education, youth justice and immigration. The graduates learnt about Just for Kids Law, how the Advocacy Year programme worked and about other external support organisations. A range of staff members from within Just for Kids Law and external agencies led the sessions, with young people taking part to act as mock case examples (the examples were not based on the young person's own experience). Advocates were trained to be client-led and to be able to advocate on behalf of the young person.

Following the training, the graduates commenced case work and were active working as Youth Advocates for 11 months. They were able to refer the young people to Just for Kids Law opportunities team who specialise in supporting young people to access education, training and employment as well as the legal team.

Since the start of the evaluation, the training has now evolved to be a four-week programme.

Ongoing training opportunities

The Youth Advocates were encouraged to attend ongoing training, both within Just for Kids Law and

externally. Courses attended had included youth mental health first aid and supporting people who had no recourse to public funds.

There was some discussion on whether they had money allocated for training and the Advocates felt some clarity on this would be useful.

Satisfaction with the training

The graduates felt the initial training was an essential feature of the programme and that there were many aspects that they found useful and enjoyable. They described it as high quality. They noted that the training was two weeks rather than one month as they had expected.

The particular topics they mentioned enjoying were young parents (2), youth justice (2) and understanding vicarious trauma and personal triggers (2).

They enjoyed that the training involved multiple facilitation techniques and felt this appealed to a range of learning styles. They mentioned enjoying having external speakers (3), role plays (2), the training packs (2) and learning about the other work of Just for Kids Law such as Children's Rights Alliance England (2).

There was mixed opinion on whether Advocates felt prepared for the work after the training; four felt they were not. They mentioned that the training had been great for background understanding but actually dealing with young people so soon after the training was challenging:

I felt equipped in terms of background knowledge and resources ... However, I did not feel that prepared to go out and meet young people on my own, especially new clients. This was still quite daunting, particularly as we were meeting young people remotely and not sure of vulnerabilities and were completely new to the job.

One respondent felt that no amount of training could fully equip you with the skills required to support the young people: 'I don't think anything can really equip you to be quite frank.'

Some felt that the pace of the training was intense and that they had covered a lot of new information in a short space of time. They felt it was too high an expectation of them to be able to 'digest and process and understand all of that information!'

Management support and graduate supervision

The Youth Advocates described the management support and supervision given to them as useful. They mentioned that the way they were being managed and supported had changed in late 2017. A new staff member, the Advocacy Manager, took over from the previous supervisor. In terms of amount of support available, the Advocates noted that the previous manager was full-time and the new head was only available two days per week. Despite this, it was emphasised that the Advocacy Manager had offered a great deal of support to the Advocates and they found this role to be 'extremely useful.' He also offered pastoral support and career advice to the Advocates.

Challenges in supporting the graduates

There was widespread agreement that this was an emotionally challenging role. The graduates described the 'complex emotional journey' they went through supporting vulnerable young people. Some reported feeling that they were not 'very good at the role' and others stated that they did not have any mental capacity left after work to help friends who might be having issues.

Two people described how it affected them outside of work:

I have quite a few friends who have recurring mental health problems and whereas I would have

been really there for them previously, at the end of the day, sometimes the idea of seeing them ... I've bailed so many times. Like I don't want to talk about your mental and emotional issues. I've got enough on my mind that sometimes I want to go home and watch crap TV and that's the sort of thing that I think you don't think about.

Another described telling friends what they had dealt with in a day but their friends being unable to support them back as they hadn't experienced such situations before.

The graduates had mixed views about the extent to which they could share these feelings with their manager. Some felt that they could easily speak about this; others felt they couldn't express these feelings. One mentioned that she felt she had to show herself to be strong and 'infallible.'

Advocates are able to access subsidised counselling and the group now have reflective supervision every three weeks facilitated by an external therapeutically trained practitioner.

Advocacy team meetings

The Youth Advocates held monthly team meetings that were considered very useful. It was felt by one person that these meetings sometimes ended up focusing on organisational issues, whereas they would have preferred to focus on client cases.

The buddying scheme

Each Youth Advocate was paired with a member of staff from the legal team in Just for Kids Law. This was an unstructured, informal support mechanism. Some met over lunch, coffee or after work. There were no set requirements of the scheme.

They experienced this differently. Some met reasonably frequently, meeting monthly and having informal chats in between; others had only met with their buddy once or twice. Some had buddies who were too busy to meet.

Where it had worked, there was significant development for the Youth Advocates:

I found the buddy system really really good. That's actually probably where, in terms of my like development, my career development, and my emotional wellbeing, that's been really key for me at times, having a buddy within the organisation who's within my team. She's about 10 years older than me and like she's really nice. And it's kind of the perfect set up because she's ahead of me in her career and can really give leadership on that.

Some of the Advocates mentioned that they had not managed to have much contact with their buddy and therefore had missed out on the learning the others had experienced.

The leadership programme

The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates had felt that to date, the leadership programme had been piecemeal. They felt that there was not much clarity on what this was or its worth. They had attended a small number of out-of-hours events over the year that were related to leadership but had not felt they were relevant to them. As noted previously, this is no longer offered to Youth Advocates.

Advocate conditions

The Advocates reported challenges living in London on a low wage. They mentioned struggling and feeling that they should be paid more for their role. They suggested a salary increase, a travel card for zones one to six in London, and a fund to access counselling outside of work.

Those who were studying in addition to being on the programme felt too busy. It was suggested that potential new recruits should be made aware of how demanding the role was and that it was not really possible to do alongside studying.

4.4 What the Youth Advocates thought of the Just for Kids Law model

The Youth Advocates described the Just for Kids Law model of holistic individual casework as 'unique.' This had attracted some of them to apply for the Advocacy Year programme in the first place. However, they described how busy and challenging their roles were when working within this model.

Supporting young people on multiple issues

The Advocates felt that working on multiple issues with young people was challenging, especially if the young people had no one else to support them:

I think it is great to be holistic and I wanted to work here partly because before, I was working somewhere which only did employment support and that was like a tiny thing out of a huge web of chaos. But being realistic can mean, especially with people who don't have any family, you're the only person that knows everything about them. And that can be an enormous burden because you feel you've got to co-ordinate all the kind of departments of their life and if you don't, no one will. And I found that really upsetting at times.

Creating dependency

Some of the Youth Advocates (3) were concerned with creating a new dependency or attachment to them. One noted:

We don't want to give the impression that we will be there forever, because then I think that creates new dependencies as well as dealing with other types of dependencies, like you know, you create a different sort of dependency.

Some Advocates preferred not to close cases; they felt that this was central to the nature of Just for Kids Law. However, three people argued that there was danger of creating dependency.

Maintaining professional boundaries

A number of Advocates struggled with professional boundaries. They were aware that they should not become an emotional support worker, nor being a 'shoulder to cry on', but, as one described, she could not help but have an emotional investment in the young people. One described herself as more of a mentor. The young people sometimes described their Advocates as friends.

The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates were aware that they should signpost when crises arose, but they described being a trusted and known person to a vulnerable individual and that sometimes external support was not available.

One Advocate believed it was the emotional support that had helped her client to progress:

One of the girls I'm working with, I'm basically like her support worker, counsellor, you name it, like she calls me all the time, literally five times a day, but I wonder if we would have been able to achieve [what she has without it] ... she's absolutely smashing education at the moment, her social care is getting there.

Suggestions for improvements to the model

The Youth Advocates had a number of ideas as to how the model of advocacy could be improved:

- **Introducing Advocate specialisms.** It was suggested that the introduction of specialisms (eg, social care, education or gender) within the Advocacy Year programme would increase the depth of knowledge gained by Youth Advocates. However, this is something that Just for Kids Law management felt was contrary to the ethos of the support model.
- **Shadowing an experienced Advocate and/or pairing up with another graduate on the Advocacy Year programme to offer the initial support.** This would allow the Youth Advocates to feel more supported to take on their own case work. Just for Kids Law management have noted that this has been implemented since the evaluation took place in summer 2018.
- **Being more selective about who to work with.** Two people suggested that if there was a young person who had multiple intersecting needs, such as a mental health issue in addition to limited English, then perhaps these cases should go to Youth Advocates at Just for Kids Law *not* on the Advocacy Year programme. Just for Kids Law have measures in place in order to filter which of the cases will go to the Youth Advocates. This will be reflected on over year three.
- **Fewer cases.** One Advocate suggested reducing the number of cases that they took on to allow for the type of in-depth support required from the role.
- **More support on working with younger clients.** The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates worked with young people ranging between 10 and 24 and felt they needed more support to understand how to work best with the younger cohort. This has been added as a feature of the training in year three.
- **In-house support worker.** Having an in-house Just for Kids Law support worker for the young people was suggested as means of managing some of the blurred lines between being an Advocate and a support worker. The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates felt that if they could readily refer a young person in-house, this could ease some pressure. However, this was not something that Just for Kids Law management felt was the role of the charity nor the best use of existing resources.

4.5 Outcomes for the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates

The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates reported a number of positive outcomes as a result of their work. For some, this had been transformative:

I think it has been like really ... learning professionally has been very transformative. I am doing things that are different from what I have done before, just completely changed my ambitions. I have learnt so much more about the law that I knew nothing about, and about the structures, the institutions, the social institutions, in our country. That's in the take-home learning knowledge for me.

Improved knowledge

The Advocates highlighted that they had learnt several skills related to advocacy, including on specific topics such as housing and education.

Improved communication skills

The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates described how they had significantly improved their ability to communicate with young people, other professionals, and more senior colleagues. One person described

their role as a translator between professionals and young people; another described how he had managed the communication between a barrister and an excluded 11-year-old:

I mean biggest take-away skill is that you can go from talking to a child who has missed lots of school, been kicked out of education, to then speaking to a barrister in the same breath. And I think to communicate on that many levels ... honestly, they drive you bonkers, but (the barristers) spew out all of this language and it's like how on earth are you going to get an 11-year old to understand what you're talking about? So I think being able to then go from that level to that level in a really short space of time is very very good.

More clarity on future career

Most of the Advocates mentioned having more clarity on their future direction. Through their work, they had decided upon their next steps (or had already taken their next steps). The Advocacy Year programme had given them an understanding of that:

Through the course of doing it and because there's this constant barrage of things that you have to work out where your strengths lie and what you have an interest in. And also I think it helps you place that in a bigger picture, yeah, I think I knew what I wanted as an individual, but in terms of sort of structuring what I'm interested in, I think I'm definitely more attuned to that now than I was.

One Advocate admitted that she did not know what advocacy really was prior to starting. By the end of the programme, she fully understood and was convinced how important it was; she had moved into advocacy as a profession once she left Advocacy Year.

A number of the current Advocacy Year Youth Advocates mentioned that they would like to stay with Just for Kids Law or with a similar organisation. One person said she was considering public policy or continuing to work on the same issues but from a different angle.

Those who had moved on stated that this experience had helped them to get their next jobs and that their learning had been significant. One had decided to pursue advocacy instead of law and her experience had made this clear.

5. Findings – work with community organisations

This section explores how the Advocacy Year programme worked with community organisations to improve their capacity to support vulnerable young people. This section is based on an anonymised survey of ten organisations who had accessed Advocacy Year support, alongside data from the two end-of-year Big Lottery Fund reports.

5.1 Overview of the support for community organisations

The Advocacy Year programme offered external organisations a range of support options:

- free training for organisations working with vulnerable young people
- advice and information drop ins within organisations
- accepting referrals from organisations.

The training is delivered by members of the legal team where it involves legal issues and the Advocacy Supervisor where the topic is advocacy. Advocacy Year primarily supported children's and young people organisations.

The 2017 end-of-year Big Lottery Fund report stated that Just for Kids Law staff had met with 45 organisations. In the 2018 report, it had trained 14 (against a target of 15) and visited 49 community organisations. In each year, the target was to work with 50 community organisations.

5.2 Community organisation satisfaction with Advocacy Year

Overall, the ten organisations who took part in the survey were very satisfied with the work of the Advocacy Year programme.

- All of the organisations were satisfied with the advice they had received on how to refer clients to Just for Kids Law.
- Nine were satisfied with learning about the Just for Kids Law offer (and informing Just for Kids Law of what they do in return). One person was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- Eight were satisfied with the advice and guidance that had been given to the staff in their organisation. Two had not accessed this support.
- Eight were satisfied with the training. Two had not accessed this support.

Likelihood to refer young people in the future

Nine of the respondents stated they were likely to refer young people to Just for Kids Law in the future, with six stating they were very likely, three likely and one neither likely nor unlikely.

They stated that:

[Just for Kids Law] has expert knowledge of education law, and great empathy with the client.

The workers are very young-person-focused and approachable. Also very knowledgeable.

5.3 Outcomes for community organisations

One of the objectives of the Advocacy Year programme was to achieve positive change with community organisation in terms of their ability to support vulnerable young people.

Community organisations have improved ability to support vulnerable people

The intention was that community organisations would be in a better position to support young people following their support. We found some evidence that this was the case.

- Nine had a better understanding of how to meet the needs of their young people. One respondent neither agreed nor disagreed.
- Seven were more willing to challenge decisions of other services, for example, with the local authority or schools. One neither agreed nor disagreed, one disagreed and for one, this was not relevant.
- Seven had increased their ability to reach new young people. Three respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Just for Kids Law distributed feedback forms at their trainings and reported on this in the 2018 end-of-year report. Attendees reported a positive increase in their ability to support young people.

Community organisations have increased knowledge of good practice related to the support of vulnerable young people

Additionally, the intention was to increase community organisations' knowledge of good practice in how to support young people. There is some evidence that this occurred.

- Nine were better able to recognise that young people face life issues that may affect their ability to access support. One stated this was not relevant to them.
- Eight had a better understanding of the importance of being young person-led. Two neither agreed nor disagreed.
- Four intended to change their practice to be more young person-led. Five neither agreed nor disagreed. For one, this was not relevant.

According to the 2018 end-of-year report to the Big Lottery Fund, as a result of the training, community organisations better understood how to work in a way that was young-person-led, how to listen to young people's opinions and how clients could access other services.

Community organisations have an increased understanding of the rights and entitlements of young people

One of the programme's aims was that the community organisations they worked with were to have a better understanding of the rights and entitlement of young people. There is evidence that this occurred.

Nine of the survey respondents agreed that as a result of their work with Advocacy Year programme they now had a better understanding of the rights and entitlements of young people.

Comments made by the respondents included that:

- They now had a better general understanding of young people's perspective.
- The parents they worked with now had a clear understanding of the legal obligations of schools and more generally, that parents were now aware of the support on offer and the rights of their child.
- They were now in better position to help young people with mental health issues such as ADHD,

who have been left behind by schools and local authorities.

In their 2018 end-of-year Big Lottery Fund report, Just for Kids Law noted similar findings that following the training, participants better understood the rights and responsibilities of young people.

5.4 Improvements

There were only a small number of improvements mentioned. Respondents wanted:

- more support through additional workshops. One group mentioned wanting more support for parents. Another wanted more immigration support.
- more communication, for example a bulletin, from Advocacy Year programme.
- more drops-ins within their charities.

6. Conclusion

This section draws out the key points from the evaluation and reflects on some of the success factors.

6.1 Overall conclusions

This evaluation indicates the effectiveness of Just for Kids Law's casework model as delivered through the Advocacy Year programme. It has had significant impact upon vulnerable young people in London. It had many positive benefits for the Youth Advocates and the community organisations it supported.

Evidence of need

The evaluation has shown that Just for Kids Law's way of delivering individual casework – as delivered through the Advocacy Year programme – is much needed. Many of the young people had not been able to access support elsewhere or if they had, that they were often unsatisfied with it. Prior to being supported by Just for Kids Law, they were often distressed and pessimistic about their future.

Those being supported had multiple intersecting issues: there was an over representation of ethnic minority and disabled young people being supported. Some were also young parents. Most of the interviewees had multiple issues that they were being supported on and required support for longer term periods. They felt pessimistic about how things would have turned out had they not received support from Just for Kids Law.

This evaluation notes meaningful, positive changes for young people who have accessed the support via Just for Kids Law; but in some areas, the number of young people reporting changes in outcomes has not been as extensive as outlined in the original Big Lottery Fund application.

Challenges have been noted regarding the alignment of the BLF reporting cycle and that of the programme delivery. This evaluation has not reviewed month-by-month numbers to review achievement against targets. To fully understand whether Just for Kids Law has achieved the original targets as funded by BLF, a review of the final, total numbers will need to take place in September 2019. The original targets agreed did not account for a month of training for Youth Advocates at the start of each programme year. In any future funding, this should be reviewed, with a more realistic target agreed.

The holistic casework model

Just for Kids Law's holistic casework model – getting the support from the same Youth Advocate, regarding any issue, without a time limitation and being delivered alongside legal advice, representation and youth opportunities support – has contributed directly to the achievement of several core outcome areas. The young people reported that the support they had received had a significant impact on their cases, with many being resolved or progressed. Where cases did not progress, such as immigration, some of these young people were at least given some hope by having the support.

This relationship with their Youth Advocate is seen as a key element in the programme's success. The young people described how being well supported, particularly through seeing the same Youth Advocate each time, was an empowering process. This significantly enhanced their confidence. They talked about being listened to by caring Advocates who were non-judgemental and 'went the extra mile' for them. Because of this, they were able to open up more. This had not been the case with some of the other organisations they had worked with.

The Advocates' journey

The Youth Advocates found the role challenging but were, overall, very pleased with the programme and reported a number of positive outcomes. They described both professional and emotional journeys. They had gained many new skills, learned about the work place, and better understood themselves. They experienced many outcomes, including clarity on their future career.

The Youth Advocates benefited from a strong training programme, on-going support from their Advocacy Manager, as well as through the buddying system.

Building skills of community organisations to better support young people

Just for Kids Law wishes to extend its reach by working with children's community organisations to build their skills in working with young people and to help build understanding of how to refer to the charity. In turn, Just for Kids Law wishes to better understand the community organisation's work. The organisations who had accessed support reported high levels of satisfaction and said they were better able to support young people as a result. This part of the programme also allows Just for Kids Law to have a positive influence on the sector, raising awareness of good practice in working with vulnerable young people and increasing understanding of young people's rights and entitlements.

Impact of the service

The evaluation demonstrates that Just for Kids Law's model of individual casework delivered through the Advocacy Year programme has allowed the young people to make their case to different agencies, such as social services, schools, and in some cases, their own families. With an Advocacy Year Youth Advocate at their side, they have made external agencies listen to them and have felt able to challenge decisions.

The work of the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates has had significant impact upon the young people's wellbeing, their understanding of their rights and entitlements, and has increased their self-confidence and capacity to move forwards. Many of the interviewees felt that if an issue came up in the future, they would be able to better self-advocate. They anticipate this to be a lasting effect.

6.2 Challenges in delivering the programme

The evaluation highlights some of the challenges faced by the programme, particularly for the Youth Advocates. In particular, this model of delivery, can, at points, be overwhelming for the Advocates in terms of their emotional and practical capacity. They offered some suggestions relating to the support they receive and the advocacy model itself.

7. Summary of recommendations

The recommendations in this report are intended for consideration when developing the programme, or similar programmes, in the future. These are:

- make programme adjustments
- review programme resourcing
- extend the work being done with community organisations
- adjust the monitoring and evaluating systems

Since the time of data collection in summer 2018, Advocacy Year has made a number of changes to the programme in order to reflect the findings of this evaluation. Where relevant, these have been highlighted below based on discussion with the Just for Kids Law management and programme team.

7.1 Adjust the programme

Just for Kids Law should consider the following adjustments to the Advocacy Year programme, to improve what is already a successful delivery model:

- At the set-up stage, **further clarity could be achieved** by adjusting the job description to explain the Just for Kids Law model of individual case work and how the role of the Advocacy Year Youth Advocate does not involve the degree of legal work that some anticipated.
- During the training, there could be **more emphasis on how to be young person-led** to ensure graduates do not act without permission. This could include advice on how to work with children and be run over four weeks as initially advertised. Some of this time could include practical application of the learning. Just for Kids Law management note that changes have been made in this area.
- At the start of, and throughout, the case work, Just for Kids Law management should remind both the Youth Advocate and the young person of the **initial written agreement** between the two. This is intended to set out expectations in terms of support, approach and principles.
- The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates need **more initial support**. This could involve shadowing and/or pairing up with others on the programme to carry out their first few cases in tandem. While some support mechanisms are in place, it is questionable whether these are sufficient for Youth Advocates.
- The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates **need space to conduct the client meetings** that are safe and confidential. Consider creating a space at Just for Kids Law and/or produce a list of suitable spaces off-site. Since the evaluation, Just for Kids Law has made office space available for the meetings.
- Consider **referring more complex cases to the Advocates within Just for Kids Law** or having fewer cases for the Advocacy Year Youth Advocates. Though a process exists for distributing referrals appropriately (and monitoring the complexity of cases once assigned), Youth Advocates reflected a need for this to be reviewed.
- The **buddying system** is very successful where it occurs. This could be made into more a regular feature for all Advocacy Year Youth Advocates. This would have the added advantage of providing someone else they could speak to about their future career aspirations.
- Ensure real cases are discussed in team meetings to allow the Advocacy Year Youth Advocate

more time to learn from one another. This is on the agenda of each team meeting but needs to be given more prioritisation.

- Advocacy Year Youth Advocates need **more support concerning boundaries and how to maintain them**. This could include regularly focusing on how to best manage young people's dependency. This could include advice on how and where to refer onto when issues beyond the scope for the programme arise, such as emotional support.
- As it stands, the leadership programme does not appear to benefit the Advocacy Year Youth Advocate significantly. Consider altering it to be a regular feature or scrapping it for the Youth Advocates and focusing on the many other successful aspects of support. Since the evaluation started, this has now been dropped.
- The Advocacy Year Youth Advocates need to better understand which organisations can support young people in order that they can refer rather than trying to offer the emotional support themselves.
- **Extend the programme to run for 18 months**. This would mean that the young people receive support from the same Youth Advocate for longer and more complex cases are given more time. A longer programme would mean that they were able to operate at a more professional level for longer.
- Offer clarity on when a case should be closed and if not, advice on how to manage repeat clients when your capacity is low.

7.2 Review programme resourcing

There were several suggestions that would need some additional programme resourcing. These could be considered in any future funding application.

- Youth Advocates **need additional support to manage the stress they experience from working with vulnerable young people**. This could be group or individual sessions on a regular basis. This could be someone coming in-house to Just for Kids Law or via a support helpline. Since the evaluation, Just for Kids Law are piloting a year of therapeutically-informed group supervision, facilitated by an external trained clinician.
- Youth Advocates should be encouraged to better support young people to access support provided by another organisation in either the voluntary or statutory sector. It would seem that many of the young people need help to meet some of their more basic needs which takes up some of the Youth Advocates' time.
- The Advocacy Year **Youth Advocates struggle to live in London on a low salary**. Some are travelling beyond zones 1-4 in order to meet with young people. Just for Kids Law should consider an increase in payment, including a London-wide travel card. Since the evaluation, the Youth Advocates have now been given a pay rise and a London-wide travel card.
- In the future, Just for Kids Law may wish to consider taking on some of the young people who have been supported by the programme as Youth Advocates. Of those we spoke to in the interviews, a number were at university and therefore could meet the current requirements of being on the Advocacy Year programme. Advocacy Year could be turned from a *graduate* scheme into a *trainee* scheme allowing those who may not have attended university (but are highly capable and understand the UK's social structures) to take part. One young person mentioned an

interest in this. Having Advocates with lived experience could further strengthen the programme.

7.3 Extend the work with community organisations

The community organisations reported high levels of satisfaction and a range of outcomes from the support they had received from Advocacy Year. We recommend extending the existing support, by offering more training to more organisations, as well as drop-ins. Some form of regular communication to inform the organisations about the work of Just for Kids Law would be helpful. There was demand for this and would allow Just for Kids Law to have more of a positive influence on the sector. It is noted that under the current programme, there is insufficient capacity to delivery this.

7.4 Adjust the monitoring and evaluating systems

Just for Kids Law could consider making some adjustments to its monitoring and evaluating systems of the Advocacy Year programme in order to be able to better capture the effects of the project.

- By collecting outcome data related to the other aspects of the programme, including the youth opportunities team, the legal support, and volunteering related to the project, this would allow for a more comprehensive evaluation. This could include other staff members, such as the manager and chief executive, as well as more in-depth evaluation with the community organisations.
- The current outcome measures for the Advocacy Year programme were set with the Big Lottery Fund when the grant was agreed. If the grant is renewed for a further three years, the targets should be reviewed to be more *outcome* rather than *output* focused. It should be recognised that some young people may experience seemingly small changes from the outside, but that these represent major steps forward for that individual. The emphasis on being able to self-advocate is a commendable aspiration but for some, this will take more time to achieve this.

8. Appendix

8.1 Case example: Person A

Person A first accessed Advocacy Year in May 2017. She initially requested immigration support. Over the course of this support, she also accessed Advocacy Year help for having a baby, being a young parent and financial support.

She said that before the Advocacy Year intervention she had been suicidal. She could not access help from anywhere else. She felt she had no options.

Before I got help, a few months ... I attempted to take my own life because I couldn't access any help, I felt like no options.

She described feeling afraid in meetings and unable to express herself: 'Before I was more scared. I didn't know how to express myself in an articulate way.'

Person A was supported by two Youth Advocates over two programme years and over 40+ sessions. She described the mechanics of the support she received, including how her Advocates made sure she understood the issue and then followed through on the issue. She reflected: 'They do a lot of going away and coming back and making sure I understand and then helping me to actually do it, too.'

The Advocates helped her to understand that she does have options: 'They came and helped me and showed me that I actually do.'

With this support and sense of hope, the young person had significantly grown in confidence. She described now being able to express her ideas and to set up meetings:

They help you to express yourself. I know when I'm going to meetings, I can contact my case worker by myself ... Before, I don't know how to do this by myself, I'd be like ok can you call or email but now I can call and I can email and I do that for myself now ...

The person had had a baby over the last year and Advocacy Year had given her 'a lot of support' that was really important to her. This had included checking her financial entitlements, helping her to access classes for young parents, and additional support for the baby.

Additionally, the staff had extended their support to her sister and had helped her with a housing issue she was facing.

She described feeling very supported by her Advocate/s and feeling treated as an equal. She said that she could speak to her Advocate about 'anything' and that 'they don't ever turn you away. If it impacts on your life, they help.'

She attributed the positive turnaround in her wellbeing to Advocacy Year: 'It's all because of them.' She said that she can now focus on her child because of this support.

Although her immigration situation had not been resolved, she now felt more optimistic about the future: 'I'm a lot more positive now about the outcomes and I'm not ready to give up. I know if I start to get down, there is help there for me.'

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