

South West Advocacy Network

2020 Review

“I am so proud of the resilience and commitment of the team, to keep going and adapt, meeting both demand and client needs – during a global pandemic.”



“Advocates have continued to uphold people’s rights, challenge decisions and ensure they are person centred, whilst balancing their own needs through a global pandemic.

It hasn’t been easy, but the teams have continued to impress with their care, thought and attention, not only to their clients but to each other.

More effort has been emphasised on keeping in contact, on well-being and trying to support those feeling isolated. The role of an advocate has always been a remote one but COVID forced us to think differently about how to keep in contact with each other.”



An introduction from the Chair of Board of Trustees, Ken Howard



Ken Howard

2020 has clearly been an exceptional and unpredictable year with enormous challenges for individuals and organisations at all levels. As you will see from this review SWAN has responded to those challenges with incredible energy, flexibility and commitment to enable the continuing delivery of key services to our clients while safeguarding the people who work in SWAN and securing the future of the organisation.

I thank and congratulate the staff and volunteers of SWAN for this achievement.

SWAN will continue to change and develop to meet new demands. COVID itself has highlighted the fragility of human rights in some care settings and has demonstrated the need for advocacy and other services to help protect those rights and support vulnerable people. Growing societal and financial pressures resulting from COVID and other underlying social and economic change will also increase the need for traditional and new innovative services. SWAN is committed to doing all it can to meet this need. I am confident SWAN will continue to adapt and strengthen its services to meet the requirements of the people we serve.

Looking back with the CEO, Vikki Holloway

The year 2020 presented extreme challenges, and it is hard not to sound trite or insincere, when I express my gratitude for the effort and enthusiasm demonstrated by everyone at SWAN. When I look back over the year, I can see that, despite everything, we achieved a great deal. We restructured the organisation to ensure it is fit for purpose; implemented new services; diversified into different areas of business and despite the difficulties, continued to deliver innovative services to the people who need us.

We have proven our ability to deliver in the most difficult circumstances. We have made a huge leap forward in terms of digitalisation and are achieving things now, that even a year ago, we thought were impossible. Furthermore, we have continued to recruit and welcome new team members.



Vikki Holloway

I am particularly proud of the work done to support our advocates as they continued delivering services even whilst dealing with the impact of the pandemic on themselves, their families and their communities. The introduction of virtual Wellbeing Wednesdays, Feel Good Thursdays and even a Festive Friday helped people to stay in touch with each other and feedback told us that this was appreciated and went a small way to ensure people still felt connected and part of the bigger picture.

The year challenged us on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels, it tested our values, battered our strengths and exploited our fears. We had to re-prioritise our lives and take a stance on what really mattered. All those things required us to dig deep into our personal energy reserves and we all know how exhausting it was. Whilst we can speculate, we do not yet know what the long-term impact of the pandemic will be, but whatever happens we have shown that we can adapt, we can learn, and we can change the way we do things.

Who are we?



Founded in 1999, South West Advocacy Network is an independent advocacy charity working in the South/South West of England. We deliver independent services supporting a diverse range of vulnerable people. We have developed a model of advocacy which ensures everyone, including the most vulnerable members of our communities, have the same rights and opportunities as their fellow citizens. Our services are free at the point of delivery, confidential and non-judgmental.

We work with people from all walks of life and have supported thousands of the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in our communities, helping them to have their voices heard and their choices respected by those that are making decisions about their future.

Statutory, Community and Victim of Crime Advocacy, support for people struggling with debt or personal finances, and a Living Well Advocacy Service for individuals with degenerative or long term conditions including dementia.

See the next 5 pages for further detail...

What do we do?





Our Services

Victim of Crime Advocacy Service (VOCAS): provides enhanced adult advocacy alongside practical and emotional support to victims of crime and anti-social behaviour across Avon and Somerset. VOCAS empowers and enables individuals to cope and recover from their experience as a victim of crime. Victim Advocates speak up for people who, for whatever reason, feel unable to do so for themselves. The service is centred around the needs of the victim and the overarching principle that all support and advocacy is victim directed. VOCAS is available for adults eligible for an enhanced service under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, including those who have barriers or additional support requirements linked to the protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010. Referrals come from a variety of sources including Lighthouse Victim and Witness Care, other victim services providers (such as Victim Support), health & social care professionals, and from victims themselves. VOCAS offers one-to-one support which can be delivered by outreach – in the victim's home or in accessible community venues, or via phone, text messaging or virtual meetings. We work within a multi-agency setting, embedding our service in established pathways, ensuring victims receive the right support, by the right agency at the right time.



VOCAS services are available across the geographic regions served by Avon & Somerset Constabulary.



Despite the pressures of COVID-19 in 2020 VOCAS successfully delivered advocacy and support to 350 individuals. Much of the advocacy was delivered remotely, by phone, by text and online. Risk assessed face-to-face visits continued where it was important to do so i.e. court visits, accompanying vulnerable clients to solicitor appointments etc.



"The support I received from VOCAS helped me to cope with the impact of the incident and recover. The information, advice and support I received helped to improve my mental health and relationships with others. It also helped me reduce my social isolation and increase my feelings of safety. Thank you." **VOCAS client**

Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA):

Our IMCA service provides independent advocacy for people who are deemed to lack capacity because of disability or ill health and have no-one else to support or represent them in decisions being made about their life. This might include where they live, what medical treatment they receive, what care and support they need or as part of 'protective measures' to ensure they are safe from harm or neglect. IMCA advocates also work with people who are subject to a Deprivation of Liberty Order (DoLS) ensuring that when it is necessary to deprive someone of their liberty it is done to ensure care and treatment and to keep them safe from harm. The advocate will check that the restrictions on the person are necessary, and that mental capacity assessments and best interest decisions have been made fairly. If the person is objecting the advocate can request a review or support the person to take their case to the Court of Protection.



In 2020 we delivered IMCA services in Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire.



We supported 732 individuals providing 3364 hours of Mental Capacity Advocacy and worked with 1626 people who were subject to a DoLS providing 10,419 hours of Advocacy.



"The IMCA report was really, really helpful. It was interesting, broad and with a good understanding of everyone's viewpoints. I really took from the report that the person does not want to move. Reading the report made me confirm that a change in accommodation would not be the right decision." **Social Worker, South Gloucestershire Council**

Community or Generic Advocacy:

Community advocates work with individuals who have difficulties being involved in decisions that affect them, such as those with learning difficulties, physical health issues, mental health issues, acquired brain injury and dementia. Community advocates can support people:

- With benefits assessments, medical appointments, employment issues, gaining access to care and support, working with their care provider
- To have their voice and views heard by others, including making complaints where appropriate
- To gain access to relevant information or professional advice and guidance
- To consider all available options, to make decisions and to act on given information
- To be afforded fair and equal treatment



In 2020 we provided community advocacy in Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire.



We supported 530 individuals providing 4,112 hours of Community Advocacy



"I could not recommend the advocate or SWAN enough. I simply could not have gotten through to the council without the advocate's support and persistence." **Feedback from a client who was supported to access services**

Independent Health Complaints Advocacy (IHCA):

This service is provided to anyone over the age of 18 who has a complaint about any NHS funded service. The complaint issue needs to have happened within the last year or has only become known within the last year. We support people to consider the outcome they would like from making the complaint or to suggest an improvement in the way the NHS service can be delivered. We adapt the level of advocacy support required during the complaint process to suit the person who is making the complaint. We can provide a range of self-advocacy tools for people to pursue their own complaint if they feel able to do so, we can support via email and phone calls or we can provide full face to face support including writing draft letters and attending meetings. Health complaints can be long and complicated with many cases staying active for more than 12 months.



In 2020 we provided IHCA in South Gloucestershire and Somerset.



At points in 2020 the NHS put their complaints process on hold as they concentrated their resources on COVID-19, however we continued to support 191 individual complaints, providing over 1,743 hours of support.



"Can I just take this opportunity to say what a wonderful asset the advocate is to your organisation. She has really helped me so much at a very hard time in my life. She always updates me without any prompting, she is very empathetic and knowledgeable, and I know that without her support I would have really struggled." **IHCA client in Somerset**

Community Money Advice South Wiltshire:

This service, which was conceived as a result of the impact of COVID-19, provides free, non-judgemental support for people who are struggling with money or are in debt. We listen, and provide support, guidance and advice to help people find the best solutions to their money issues. The service is affiliated to the national Community Money Advice Service.

The service was set up to operate on a face-to-face basis and launched on 1st November 2020, the week that England entered its second national lockdown.

All the processes and systems were designed for face-face contact, so changes to the service had to be made immediately, enabling the service to be offered via telephone conference calls, postal service, email and with Zoom and Microsoft Teams being available if a client had the required technology.



This service is currently provided in South Wiltshire.



This is a volunteer led and delivered service. We currently have 10 volunteer Money Mentors and 1 volunteer administrator.



"Thank goodness this service has opened – we have been desperate for something like this for a long time – this will really help my patients" **Community Care Co-ordinator, Wiltshire**

Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA):

This service support people who are detained under a mental health section, under a Guardianship or Community Treatment Order, an informal inpatient at a mental health hospital or a carer of a qualifying patient. IMHAs help people to understand what their rights are in relation to their legal situation, their medication, and their right (or not) to leave the place of detention either permanently or temporarily. They can help the person communicate with the appropriate professionals and support the person to raise their own issues or complaints. Advocates offer support to people at ward rounds, at care plan meetings, appeals and tribunals. Advocates can assist the person in accessing their health or local authority records and legal support.



In 2020 we provided IMHA services in Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire.



We supported 870 individuals and provided 3,146 hours of advocacy.



"Every day we watch the news and see people being hailed as heroes, then through two lockdowns we experience a different side of our care system. To us, you will always be our personal hero. Without your hard work and dedication, we would be finding ourselves in the darkest of all places, with no hope for the future" **IMHA client and family member in Somerset**

Independent Care Act Advocacy (ICAA):

Local Authorities have a legal responsibility under the Care Act of 2014 to arrange for an independent advocate to represent and support a person who has a 'substantial difficulty' in understanding the Care Act process & has no one else appropriate to support them. The substantial difficulty may be as a result of a learning disability, or a physical or mental health condition. The aim is to enable people to be involved in the relevant Care Act process and to be supported as fully as possible in understanding what is happening, why and what it may mean for them. Where necessary the person can be represented by an advocate who speaks on their behalf and ensures that their wishes, feelings and needs are at the heart of the process.



In 2020 we provided Care Act Advocacy in Bristol, Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire.



We supported 512 people and provided 3,507 hours of Advocacy.



"Very prompt feedback after each meeting. Flexible and creative in supporting the service user during lockdown." **Social Worker, Bristol City Council**

The Living Well Advocacy Service (LWAS):

In 2016 SWAN launched a Dementia Advocacy Service working with people who had a diagnosis of dementia, helping them to make records of their life achievements, the things that mattered to them and their wishes for the future – A Living Well Plan. In 2019 the project became the Living Well Advocacy Service (LWAS) in recognition that Living Well Plans can benefit a wide range of people, not only those living with memory loss or dementia. The service is now available to individuals with any degenerative/long term condition, e.g. Multiple sclerosis, Stroke, Parkinson's disease, Motor neurone disease. The service aims to complete a Living Well Plan as early as possible in the individual's health journey so that when the plan is lodged within the individual's GP record it moves with them throughout that journey. The service also offers community advocacy and self-advocacy, assisting individuals to access services, benefits and other community support.

A Living Well Plan is created and owned by the person, a document they can share with family, friends, carers and professionals. It documents important memories, achievements and current situations enabling anyone reading the plan to get a real understanding of who the person is. It contains factual information about the illness, diagnoses, prognosis and medication, and details all the support and health services involved. It can also address how people feel about their life, their wishes for the future and for their end-of-life care. Every Living Well Plan is different, because everyone has a different story to tell and a different reason for wanting to plan, the plan concentrates on capturing the individual's views and voice. It is a very personal document and the advocates work with the individuals over a number of visits, usually in the client's own home, in order to complete a very personal and unique record of that individual's life and wishes.

2020 posed some very real difficulties for LWAS. The service had been deliberately created to be a very personal, one to one service working largely with older people who really appreciated the face-to-face contact and the time to set their own pace.

Lockdown and social distancing meant rethinking the service:

- Creating Living Well Plans over the phone, virtually and by sending out templates to be completed by the person themselves
- Using social media to keep communication open, Facebook posts become a regular feature
- A move to virtual networking: using carers cafes, community forums and online groups
- Telephone calls to support current clients who were isolated or shielding in their own homes
- Widening the remit of the service to support people with relatives in care homes, homeless people, people with financial difficulties, people needing access to foodbanks
- Attending virtual Health and Social Care Forums and virtual Carers Support and Parent Carer Group meetings
- Sending mental wellbeing postcards to clients who were isolated and alone
- Supporting people with low mood and poor mental health



"My wife has dementia and made a Living Well Plan in 2019 in the early stages of her illness. She would often get the Living Well Plan out herself to reminisce and look at pictures of her father. When she had a stroke in 2020, I realised the Living Well Plan would be useful to have with her in hospital. She has done the rounds of 4 different wards and used her Living Well Plan with staff on each ward. It gives them something to look at and talk about together with her and it is lovely to have the photos and the family history. She has undergone surgery, battled Coronavirus and is still in hospital. I have just requested 6 additional copies of her Living Well Plan as it is proving more useful than I imagined".

Living Well Case Studies:



An 87-year-old woman who is recovering from a stroke wanted to complete her Living Well Plan with her advocate but with no help from family members as she wanted to show them how independent she could still be. She requested copies of her Living Well Plan for all of her great grandchildren so that they can see that she had an interesting life.

A 47-year-old woman referred herself to the LWAS after hearing a talk by a Living Well Advocate at an online Carers Support café. She was keen to make a Living Well Plan as she is also a carer and felt it was important to make decisions about the future and to feel content that people would know her wishes.



A Living Well Plan for a 26-year-old man, who had epilepsy and asperges and was considering a move to a supported living complex. Completing the plan enabled his wishes to be heard during this process and to allow him to self-advocate with new members of staff without the need for the assistance of a family member.

An 82-year-old woman was referred via a Community Connector to complete her Living Well Plan. She had become lonely and isolated during the COVID-19 lockdown and valued the telephone calls with her advocate. She wanted to ensure that those around her were aware of her religious beliefs, and that these would be respected in the future. On completion of the plan she felt relieved that she had recorded her wishes.



A Living Well Plan for a 90-year-old woman who was living in a supported living complex and who had become isolated from her family during lockdown. She requested copies of the plan to share with her children and grandchildren and felt that these would allow her to reconnect with her family after the time that they had spent apart.

Volunteer Perspective:



"I volunteer at the Living Well Advocacy Service, which involves working with a person on a 1:1 basis over a period of weeks, to support and enable the person to create a truly bespoke and personalised holistic life document called the 'Living Well Plan' – this covers their life history, their present life and their future wishes.

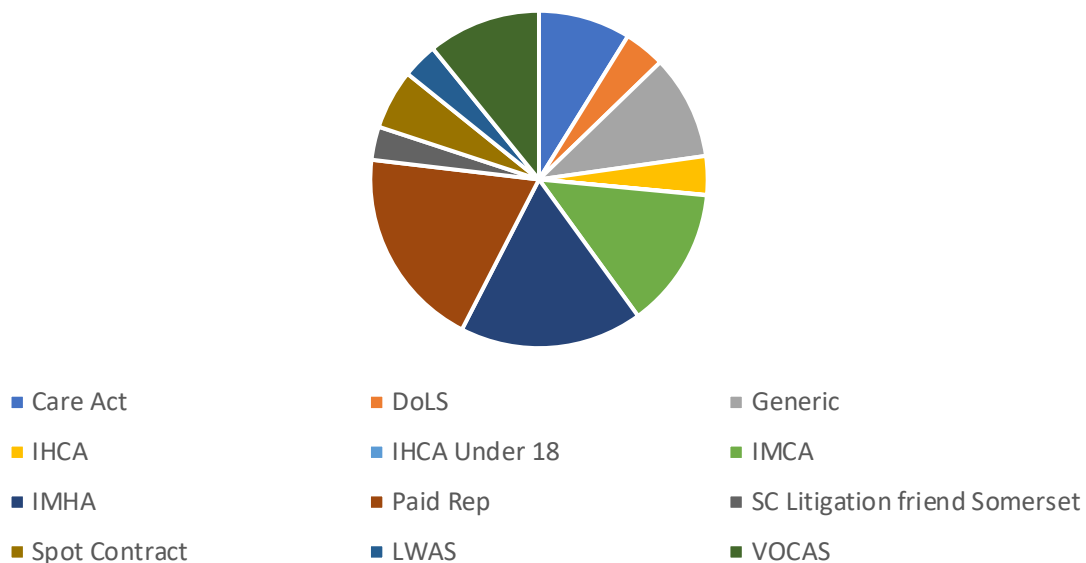
It is totally person-led, so anything which they say is included in their plan, provided of course they want it to be! Effectively, my role is to listen and record – the person has the voice.

The very common feedback I receive at the end of the process is that clients greatly value the opportunity to be able to just talk – to talk at their pace, in any order they wish and without pressure or prejudice. Being able to trust a person with such sensitive and personal information, some of which may not have been shared with anyone else, is priceless and, for me, is a huge honour.

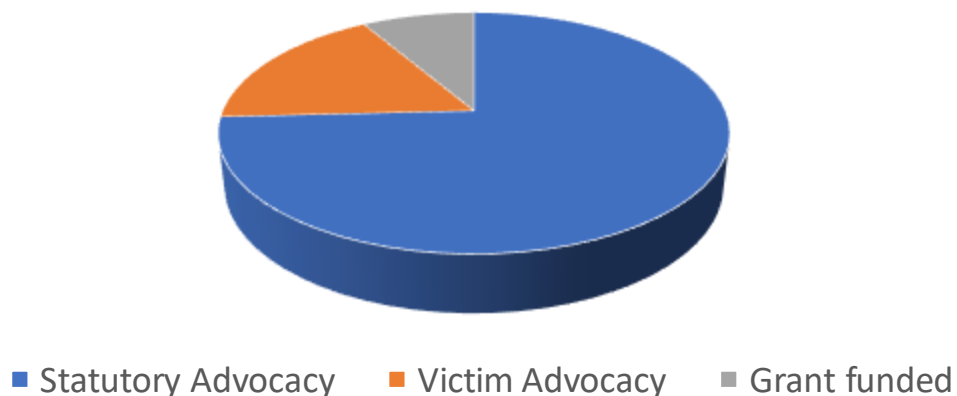
People's lives and wishes are then captured in a single document, which can prove hugely beneficial and logistically helpful at a future time." **Justin, Volunteer Living Well Advocate**

The slightly boring bits:

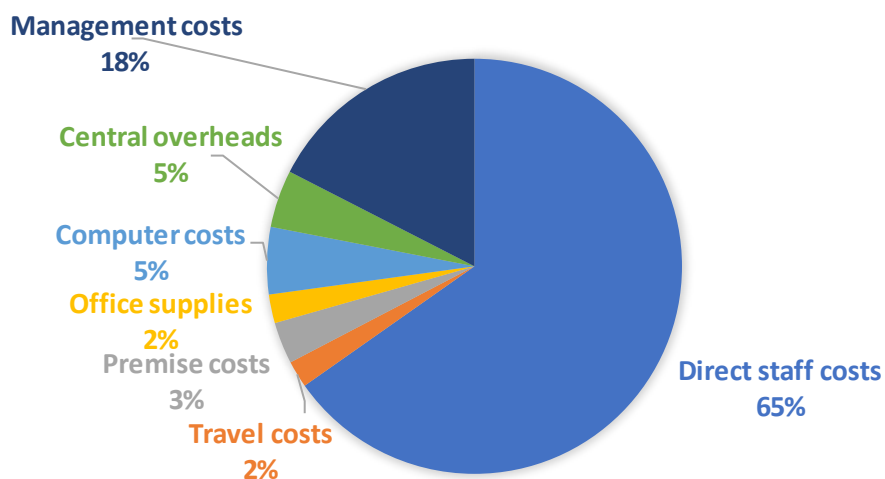
Our services as a percentage of our total delivery



Where we get our income



and how we spend it...



COVID-19 Response & Planning for Workforce Wellbeing

Organised virtual advocacy workshops with legal professionals to ensure advocates understood the implication of the 2020 Coronavirus Bill

Provided specific, risk assessed guidance to advocates visiting care homes, or clients in their own homes

Designed COVID-19 risk assessment templates and PPE

Set up Microsoft Teams groups for our workforce to share best practice, problem solve, aid communication and reduce isolation

Used SharePoint to enable easy access to information and legislation, including government issued COVID-19 guidance

Provided access to specialist advocacy webinars provided by different legal teams and training provider, Black Belt Advocacy

Provided 2 metre grid lines in each office as an aid to social distancing

Updated our Pay and Absence Policy to include guidance to employees regarding self-isolation

Completed the 'Staying COVID-19 Secure - 5 Steps to Safer Working Together' for both offices

Developed office protocols which included risk assessments, and visual reminders re social distancing and hand washing. When guidelines permitted, we allocated specific welfare facilities to individuals who would be working in the office, to minimise contact

Undertook an exercise to record all our workforce's individual circumstances in relation to underlying health conditions, caring responsibilities or childcare issues. We used this information to agree phased returns to office working or face-to-face client visits when government guidelines allowed

SWAN already had a small network of trained Mental Health First Aiders who provided support to any employee or volunteer who was finding life stressful, either at work or at home. We recognised that working through a pandemic, remotely, and in isolation, was going to be a huge burden and that people would need a new way to connect with their colleagues and the Mental Health First Aiders and so, using the wonder that is 'virtual meetings' we set up a series of online events that anyone could join.



Screenshot from our Festive Friday

"For me, the Wellbeing Wednesday and Feel Good Thursday gatherings have been useful to take time out from work and connect with people. They have been a great way to connect with colleagues I wouldn't normally meet regularly, and it has been good to have a forum that isn't just about work to do that." **Volunteer Manager**



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID STARTS WITH US

International Day of Happiness

Wellbeing Wednesday

Wednesday 17th March at 12pm

WWI is being held 3 days before the International Day of Happiness which is Saturday 20th. We are going to come together and get talking about what makes us happy.

SWAN All our MHFA events are a hierarchy free zone

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID STARTS WITH US

Join

BREW MON

Monday 18th Jan

On a day when thousands of others are coming together for a cuppa, a chat and to banish winter blues!

Anna, Niki and Sharni are your hosts!

SWAN All our MHFA events are a hierarchy free zone

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID STARTS WITH US

Festive Friday

December 11th at 3pm

It's Christmas Jumper Day at Wellbeing Wednesday!

Anna, Niki and Sharni are your MHFAs on the chat, so bring your Christmas jumpers!

There will be a short Christmas quiz!

Bring your own mince pies!

Niki will personally donate £1 to Save the Children for every person who joins us (so the more the merrier!)

SWAN Wellbeing Wednesday (a Feel Good Thursday) is a hierarchy free zone

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID STARTS WITH US

Feel Good Thursday

Thursday 9th July

This week we will be doing a quiz

So come along with a quiz question you'd like to ask

Meet Your Hosts

Anna

SWAN All our MHFA events are a hierarchy free zone

Some of the posters created for our wellbeing sessions.

What is next for us...?

In 2021 we will:

- Find new ways to support, recognise and reward our specialist workforce
- Launch our new Isle of Wight Vulnerable Adults Advocacy Service
- Co-produce and facilitate our 'Be Heard' self-advocacy programme in all our delivery areas
- Develop our current partnerships, and create new ones with other human rights organisations
- Use outcome data, impact reports and stakeholder feedback to review and improve our services
- Diversify our workforce and Board of Trustees to better represent the communities we serve

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Find us on social media



"I want to hugely thank SWAN - I have felt totally supported throughout the whole pandemic which can't be said for all employers, the support to me as an individual means I have felt valued and appreciated." **Advocate**