

Advocacy Newsletter

Issue No 4 March 2022

HOPE Project news

HOPE Quality Performance Mark

Age Cymru has been awarded the Advocacy Quality Performance Mark (QPM) from the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) for the work it delivers through projects such as HOPE and Dementia Advocacy.

The QPM is the UK's only independent quality performance mark for organisations like Age Cymru offering independent advocacy; an essential service for people who need support to express their needs and have increased choice and control in their lives.

To gain the QPM, the charity's work in this area had to undergo a rigorous self-assessment process and policy review followed by a structured site visit by NDTi assessors who met some of our advocates and the people they support.

Louise Hughes who heads up the charity's advocacy work said: "I am absolutely thrilled with this award as it demonstrates that we are providing excellent services to people often experiencing challenging situations in their lives. It also shows that we have the training and policies in place to help ensure that older people's rights are upheld, and their preferences are heard and responded to."

For further information about our advocacy work call 029 2043 1555, email: advocacy@agecymru.org.uk or visit: www.agecymru.org.uk/advocacy

HOPE Project Funding

HOPE (Helping others participate and engage) has been awarded a further two years funding until the end of March 2025 under the Sustainable Social Services Grant from Welsh Government .

We are delighted to have this extra time to further develop our advocacy work supporting older people (50+) and their carers across Wales. As the pandemic restrictions ease, we hope to be able to work directly within communities as we had planned to support older people with their issues. We will also be continuing to recruit, train and support independent volunteer advocates to deliver this work locally.

HOPE Documents

The HOPE project has produced a couple of useful new documents, please click on the links below to view them:

[Benefits of volunteering for the HOPE project](#)
[Latest HOPE volunteer leaflet.](#)

Advocacy News

Advocacy during Coronavirus survey 2021

In June 2020, a survey was carried out of advocates to gather evidence of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.

This resulted in the [Valuing Voices in Wales: Protecting Rights Through the Pandemic and Beyond report.](#)

A year on from that survey, the advocacy sector in Wales collected evidence of the pandemic's impact on people who are entitled to advocacy, the accessibility and quality of advocacy and on the ability of services to provide advocacy. The 2021 survey sought to understand what had changed over the intervening year, the present challenges and what had worked well in response to the pandemic.

The Advocacy during Coronavirus survey 2021 report sets out the key findings from the forty seven advocates who completed the survey and provides some additional context for these findings.

The report concludes that human rights failures, safeguarding issues, blanket decision making and most of the issues reported in 2020 are as significant if not more so twelve months on.

The impact on the wellbeing of clients has been exacerbated by the lack of care packages and support from other services.

Overall, advocates who responded to this survey felt they had provided an excellent service to those who really needed it during the pandemic.

Advocates have become creative in the way they work and embraced new ways of working and alternative communication options.

Some methods will continue post-pandemic with flexible approaches to best meet the needs of the client.

Covid-19 has highlighted how many people are isolated, and how many vulnerable people were falling under the radar previously and that there is an even greater need now than before for advocacy services.

The number of referrals to advocacy services has returned to pre-Covid-19 levels and beyond.

Whilst a welcome recognition of the importance of advocacy, this is also impacting on services which were already stretched and have had no additional funding.

Whilst most advocates felt their effectiveness had improved, the vast majority felt that their own wellbeing had deteriorated.

The following list reflects key areas that advocates feel need to change in order to improve the situation for clients, advocates and services through the pandemic and beyond.

- Ensure that people's legal rights to advocacy are enforced.
- Enhanced understanding of human rights and domestic law amongst other professionals to ensure breaches of rights are avoided.
- Greater awareness of advocacy amongst other professionals along with training to facilitate this.
- Increased funding to meet increased demand.
- The National Framework for Commissioning Independent Professional Advocacy for Adults be used to co-produce advocacy services.

- Advocates be more consistently recognised by Welsh Government as frontline workers and entitled to the Social Care Recognition Scheme Covid-19.
- Increased access to the support services that existed prior to the pandemic.
- The impact of increased involvement by advocates of adults in childcare cases be acknowledged and included in future funding agreements.
- Wider range of care packages in place to support people with hospital discharge.
- Liberty Protection Safeguards Code of Practice published and reflecting the potential increased need for advocates.

Advocacy Networks

A range of regional advocacy provider networks have been developed across Wales to complement the work of the National Network for Adults Advocacy in Wales. The networks are an opportunity for services who currently provide advocacy, and those who would like to in the future, to get a better understanding of the current situation in the region, potential future commissioning opportunities and to have space to network and share information and ideas.

Below are the details of the next round of advocacy network meetings which will take place via Zoom or Teams:

Cardiff and Vale

2/3/22 9am -10am

6/4/22 9am -10am

4/5/22 9am -10am

Powys

16/3/22 10am -11.30am

Gwent

5/4/22 2pm -3.30pm

National Network for Adults Advocacy

14/4/22 10am -12pm

Cwm Taf Morgannwg

28/4/22 10am -11.30am

Neath Port Talbot and Swansea

To be confirmed

North Wales

To be confirmed

3 Counties West Wales

To be confirmed

Changes to the Mental Health Act

By Natasha Fox, Chief Officer and Independent Advocate from Advocacy West Wales.

Last year saw development in the long awaited reforms to the Mental Health Act. The proposed reforms in part stem from the report of Professor Sir Simon Wessely back in 2018. In Wales the 1983 Act, and its amendments in 2007, is supplemented by the provisions of the Mental Health (Wales) Measure.

The Westminster Government issued its White Paper proposals for reform in January 2021. The advocacy sector in Wales took the opportunity to provide a united response to the proposed reforms during the course of the consultation.

In doing so we recognised that the people we support have a range of views. Whilst some will welcome the reforms as an improvement, others will undoubtedly feel that they don't go far enough and that the inequalities and stigma between treatment for physical and mental health will persist.

Cardiff and Westminster governments, have now responded to the consultation responses and there is some clarity around the proposals which will be taken forward:

- Introduction of Advanced Choice Documents, real opportunities for patient choice and challenge around treatment options, patient choice over their nearest relative (proposed nominated person).
- More robust detention criteria which should lead to fewer detentions under the Act, particularly for people with a learning disability and autistic people.
- Enhanced rights of appeal for patients and their representatives, and greater powers for the Tribunal to go behind the detention criteria and examine care planning and treatment.
- Whilst IMHA (Independent Mental Health Advocacy) provision is additionally available in Wales for people admitted to hospital informally as well as those detained under the Act, the key proposal is to make IMHA an opt-out rather than refer-in service, with greater powers for IMHAs to support appeals on behalf of people who lack capacity or are disempowered from applying themselves.

Welsh Government position is that:

“Except for things where we already have provision, any legislation brought forward by the UK Government to reform the Mental Health Act should be extended to Wales.”

There will be opportunities for partners and stakeholders to be involved in that work to ensure change is implemented in a practical, workable way that delivers improvements for patients.”

Perhaps a key take away is that a significant investment in funding, staffing, and culture change, will be required to make the changes a positive reality for people living with mental health conditions.

Mental Capacity and Financial Safeguarding by Tom Evans Solicitor and Court of Protection Deputy from Qualia Law

Qualia Law CIC is a newly established non-profit social enterprise providing free legal advice and support to neurodiverse people, such as those living with dementia, brain injury or learning disability.

Qualia Law's specialist advice covers issues such as:
mental capacity, financial safeguarding, lasting power of attorney and the court of protection. Qualia Law are accessible directly by neurodiverse people or by their family, friends, carers or professionals in the social care or third sectors.

Qualia Law's Court of Protection and LPA services allow vulnerable or incapacitated people's finances to be safeguarded by expert solicitors without incurring the fees often associated with a private sector law firm.

As well as providing free advice and support, Qualia also delivers free training sessions for social care and third sector professionals in order to raise awareness about financial abuse and the options available to vulnerable people.

Qualia Law has delivered a number of sessions for the HOPE project and will continue to support the HOPE project through 2022.

Qualia Law is a member of Advice UK and is funded by the Charities Aid Foundation the National Lottery, and UnLtd.

Its expert solicitors are qualified and regulated by the solicitor's regulation authority. To find out more visit www.Qualia-Law.org. For free advice or to discuss Qualia's free training services, email info@qualia-law.org or call 07961 507940.

The Big Event 2021

Kath Hughes, Training Officer HOPE Project presented the report below:

In June 2020, a survey was carried out of advocates to gather evidence of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. This resulted in the **“Valuing Voices in Wales: Protecting Rights Through the Pandemic and Beyond”** report. During October and November 2020, the first virtual Advocacy “Big Event” was held and hosted by the HOPE advocacy project for the adult advocacy sector across Wales.

This coincided with the running themes from the “Valuing Voices in Wales: Protecting Rights Through the Pandemic and Beyond” report.

The event was held virtually due to the Covid19 restrictions, however provided an extremely successful opportunity for advocates from across the sector to come together and meet for an extremely worthwhile development opportunity and for advocates to share their knowledge and experiences.

Following the success of this event, HOPE held the second virtual Advocacy “Big Event” in November 2021 and the intention was to repeat the success of the event held in 2020, for the second year running.

The Advocacy during Coronavirus 2021 survey was distributed and the advocacy sector in Wales collected evidence of the pandemic’s impact on people who are entitled to advocacy, the accessibility and quality of advocacy and on the ability of services to provide advocacy.

The 2021 survey sought to understand what had changed over the intervening year, the present challenges and what had worked well in response to the pandemic.

This report sets out the key findings from the forty seven advocates who completed the survey and provides some additional context for these findings.

The report formed the basis for the structure and the themes of The Advocacy “Big Event” 2021, with workshops covering the key elements from the report.

The events focused on:

- Future of the Advocacy Sector.
- Advocacy and Your Well-being.

- Advocacy and Liberty Protection Safeguards.
- Advocacy and Ending the Abuse of Older People.

The “Big Event” was an opportunity to share the findings of the report, to invite key speakers to present to the advocacy sector, to open up discussions and networking opportunities with the wider advocacy community and to consider the recommendations made.

We would like to thank all the advocacy network members in Wales who have supported this work enabling us to explore and discuss key issues at The Advocacy “Big Event” 2021.

A conference report will be available soon, aimed at summarising the key conversations from the workshops.

It will also provide a useful resource for those advocates who weren't able to attend all of the sessions.

We hope it provides a reflection upon the key conversations at the event.

If you would like to receive a copy of The Advocacy “Big Event” 2021 report, please contact: advocacy@agecymru.org.uk

Wellbeing

As we step into 2022, we could describe 2021 as a difficult, turbulent and challenging year in all areas of life, sociologically, economically, professionally and personally. However, now can be a good time to reflect on the past year, including the challenges, the losses and the gains.

It can support our wellbeing if we hold space for the difficult thoughts and feelings. Try “sitting with them” and give yourself permission to accept all thoughts and feelings and allow yourself to let go of any negative thoughts that no longer serve you. It can feel quite uncomfortable to sit with or reflect on difficult events or emotions.

However, if we can help ourselves to learn to sit with uncomfortable and difficult emotions, feelings and thoughts and find contentment with this and if you can “let go” and accept what is done is done and practise moving on. This is similar practise to Winter Solstice!

A New Year is a time of opportunity and hopes and desires. At this time, we can consider our plans, we can also consider any wisdom gained and lessons learnt over 2021 and of course, remembrances.

We can create positive statements or intention that we truly desire for 2021, which begin with two simple words.

I AM. Examples may include:

I AM strong and healthy
I AM loving and kind
I AM loved
I AM successful in all I do
I AM at peace

Or any other intention that you strive towards.
What would your intention be?

5 Ways to Wellbeing

The five ways to wellbeing have been identified through research as simple actions that can have a positive impact on your day-to-day wellbeing. They have been developed and founded by the New Economics Foundation. [5 ways to wellbeing.](#)

We all face challenges in life and will be different for everyone. The following five ways to well-being can support you in feeling happier and feeling more satisfied with life and it is extremely empowering to build up your health and wellbeing.

1. Connect

Feeling close to and valued by other people is a fundamental human need. Social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and can help as a buffer against mental ill health for people of all ages. Good relationships are important for your mental well-being, they can help you to build a sense of belonging and self-worth and can support and enrich you every day. They also give you an opportunity to share positive experiences and can provide emotional support and allow you to support others. Additional ways of being in touch and connected could be:

Connecting with self and loving moments.
Connecting with nature, pets and animals.
Connecting with God or spiritual needs. Play music and enjoy the way it makes you feel.
Check out the link below for a guide to forest bathing: [Guide to forest bathing](#)

2. Be Physically Active

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety. It is essential for slowing age related cognitive decline and for promoting well-being and self-esteem. Exercise causes chemical changes in the brain, which can positively change your mood, it can help you to set goals or challenges and achieve them. Exercise doesn't have to be particularly intense or spend hours in the gym to feel good.

In fact just ten minutes of physical activity has been shown to be beneficial for mental wellbeing and slower paced activities such as walking, tai chi or yoga can be just as beneficial and it's best to find activities you enjoy and make them part of your lifestyle.

[Age Cymru Tai Chi.](#)

3. Take Notice

A lot of us are always busy and our mind is active throughout the day, focusing on our next step and the next task or deadline in hand and we can then forget to take notice, to be aware and mindful of our surroundings. When we take notice, it brings us to the present, the "here and now", strengthening and broadening awareness. This awareness can be called "mindfulness". Mindfulness can help you enjoy life more and understand yourself better. It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

[Mindfulness - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

[A Gratitude Journal](#)

4. Keep Learning

Learning new skills can also improve your wellbeing as this can boost your self-confidence and raise self-esteem. It can help you to build a sense of purpose and can also help you to connect with others. You may feel like you don't have enough time or don't need to learn new things. However, there are different ways that we can bring learning into life: Learn to cook something new. Rediscover an old interest. Don't put yourself under pressure to learn new qualifications or sit exams that don't interest you. Find activities that you enjoy and make them part of your life.

[Eat well - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

5. Give to Others

People who enjoy giving and are open to receiving have improved mental health and wellbeing. Acts of giving and kindness can help improve your mental well-being by creating positive feelings, a sense of reward and giving you a feeling of purpose and self-worth. It can help you connect with other people and can also contribute to the wellbeing of the person whose life you touch. Giving is a two-way process, when you accept what someone gives to you, it also feels good for the other person. If we can become comfortable with the "give and take" of everyday life we build ourselves up as well and give opportunities to others to build themselves up. Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your well-being. Savouring the moment can help to reaffirm your life purposes.

Age Cymru Advice

Age Cymru's advice line can provide free, impartial advice on a range of subjects.

Perhaps they may want advice about how much they should be paying for a loved ones care? Or perhaps they may want to know if they are eligible for Pension Credit and want help with claiming it?

Age Cymru Advice can help with all these issues, and more – call us today

0300 303 44 98

Contact us...

- To subscribe to the e-bulletin or newsletter
- If you have any comments or questions about the articles
- If there's anything you would like to see in the next e-bulletin or newsletter

Email: sue.vaarkamp@agecymru.org.uk

T: 01352 706228

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**Age Cymru
Ground Floor
Mariners House
Trident Court
East Moors Road
Cardiff, CF24 5TD**

T: 029 2043 1555

E: enquiries@agecymru.org.uk

www.agecymru.org.uk

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