The trustees are pleased to report on a successful year in which we were able to provide tailored powerful and sensitive support to enable people to have a strong voice and real rights. Combining high quality advocacy services with innovative new approaches, which have been designed together with people who use our services, we have been able to help people create real change in their lives, their communities and their support services.

VoiceAbility’s work is underpinned by a commitment to quality. This was recognised by the renewal of our award of Quality Performance Mark, the only externally audited quality system specifically for advocacy. The way we work is also fundamentally shaped by our values. Through examples and people’s stories, this report brings alive how these values determine what we do and how we do it every day. We hope that you enjoy reading these.

As we expected, it has been a challenging year financially as we continued to invest in our quality and development and adjusted to an increasingly demanding financial environment. The trustees are confident in the plans which are being delivered to maintain the robustness of our services to people and the charity’s financial position.

We and the trustees would like to express their heart-felt thanks to the members of staff and volunteers who have achieved so much over the past year and for their commitment and hard work. We would also like to recognise the huge value brought by the many people who use our services who have helped to shape our provision, to the agencies who we have worked in partnership with and to our commissioners and funders.

Peter Letley
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Jonathan Senker
Chief Executive

Vision, Mission and Aims

Vision:
A society in which everyone’s voice, rights and choices are heard, understood and respected.

Mission:
Strengthening voice, supporting rights, changing lives.

Strategic Aims:
To support everyone to have:
- The right to be heard and respected
- The right to the same choice, control and freedom as any other person
- The right to be safe from violence or abuse

To strengthen our ability to achieve these rights
Our Performance

**Advocacy**
- 50,876 issues worked on
- 39,698 referrals
- 29,318 people supported individually
- 1,528 people supported to speak up in groups

**Quality**
- 1 major quality award renewed

**Outcomes**
- 89% of people reported positive changes in their lives after advocacy support

**Co-production**
- 342 people worked with a peer advocate
- 173 people with a learning disability co-developed a digital diary - ‘Daybook’
- 40 mystery shoppers influenced services

**Influencing**
- 6 areas of public policy influenced

**Resources**
- 3 safeguarding resources published in Plain English
Derek's Story

Derek is a gregarious man with a strong independent character. He has a great smile and always lets people know when he is feeling on form, by moving around and tapping his fingers. Though only 26 years old, Derek has been living in an Assessment and Treatment Unit for 7 years. He has felt ready to move on for four years and wanted to move closer to his parents and to live a more independent life. The professionals involved agreed. But it didn’t happen.

There may have been all sorts of reasons for this, but Derek just saw that the local authority was not taking action and nothing changed.

Derek’s advocate contacted his social worker prior to the next Care Programme Approach (CPA) meeting and briefed him that the matter would be raised, and that further action needed to be taken. The advocate then supported Derek to raise this himself in the meeting, and ensured that it was taken seriously with specific actions timetabled for progress. The professionals attending the CPA agreed that Derek was ready to move and in fact had been for some time.

The advocate continued to regularly contact the local authority for updates and applied a reasonable amount of pressure to ensure action was taken.

After four long years, the advocate has been able to bring about positive change within a few months. A new placement has been agreed, chosen by Derek, in an area which is much nearer to friends and family.

The purpose of this placement is to provide him with a support which he needs to live where he wants and to enhance his independence.

We asked Derek if he was happy to be moving now:

“Yeah, it’ll be well good. I’m gonna eat really big breakfasts when I move. And kebabs.”
Face-to-face Individual Advocacy

We accepted 39,698 referrals last year and provided support to 29,318 people compared with 30,662 in 2015-2016. Some people were referred more than once.

There are some areas in which there have been marked changes from the previous year.

**Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy** (IMCA) referrals increased modestly, mainly because more people who are deprived of their liberty under the Mental Capacity Act needed advocacy support. You can read about how we are working to shape the proposed Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards legislation, on page 16.

The number of people who received our support to make complaints about health care under our **Independent NHS Complaints Advocacy** services remained fairly similar to the previous year.

**Independent Mental Health Advocacy** (IMHA) work with people under the Mental Health Act reduced compared with the previous year, as we provided services in a greater number of areas in the previous year.

We have worked hard to increase understanding of the Care Act and the role of **Care Act Advocacy** so that the person’s rights are properly respected and they have a strong involvement in all decisions. We are pleased that the number of people who received a service from us more than doubled from the previous year. We do however know that nationally still far too many people miss out on this important legal entitlement and are continuing to work to address this.

**Professional, non-statutory advocacy**, is any advocacy that does not fall under a particular legislation. Our referral figures were markedly lower than the previous year and there are two main reasons for this. Some people have now been redirected to advocacy services under the Care Act, one of the primary purposes of which was to place on a statutory footing what as previously only discretionary. Unfortunately, this is not the only reason, as some Local Authorities have also withdrawn funding from services which they are not duty bound to provide, including non- statutory advocacy. We are deeply concerned about the number of people who fall outside any legal duty to provide advocacy, and yet where the need for advocacy and potential gains from have been proven to be great. These
include, for example many parents who have learning disabilities. We are working with several local authorities to try to address this.

We have increased our support through peer advocates, peer supporter and peer mentors and continued to offer participation and involvement support to a similar level of people as last year.

**Group Advocacy**

VoiceAbility’s advocacy groups enable people to meet together, identify common issues, share their experiences and take action. Sometimes talking about issues and getting support and empathy from other people who have been there is enough. Others have taken action and developed campaigns that have helped to shape services and solve community issues.

Our Doncaster group, for example, reported that several members had been having issues with the local bus company, with drivers not giving people with disabilities or mobility difficulties enough time to sit down, leading to falls. Others had experienced harassment and bullying at bus stops as well. Managers from the bus company were invited to attend one of the meetings and they heard the issues. Together, members of the group and the bus company agreed to run dignity and diversity training with drivers, which members of the group would deliver. The managers also committed to helping to create independent travel plans with people who wanted one and to add new routes to support isolated communities. The group will continue to work closely with the bus company to ensure that they deliver on their commitments.

In addition to the people who accessed individual advocacy last year, 1,528 people attended group advocacy sessions, which ran in 27 different groups (some of which were one-off meetings, others regular monthly events). Many of our groups have incorporated co-production projects and developed ways to increase the skills of members in order to share learning and experience across the community. You can read more about this on pages 12-14.
Who we work with

In line with previous years, the largest number of people using advocacy services are experiencing mental health problems. A large proportion of the people with whom we work are people with a learning disability and people with dementia. These three groups make up over three quarters of the people to whom we provide a service.

Advocacy Issues

Between April 2016 and March 2017, we’ve provided advocacy support to 29,318 individuals, many of whom come to us with several issues they want help with. In total, we worked to address 50,876 issues.

When we start working with each person, we ask them what they want support with and what outcome they want. We get a clear understanding of the specific issue which they want to be addressed as well as any general changes they want to make. At the end of our advocacy support, each issue is evaluated, looking at how well the outcome was met. We found last year, 91% of the specific changes people wanted were either completely or partly achieved.
VOICE Outcomes

As well as the ‘issue outcomes’ above, we also measure VoiceAbility Outcomes for Inclusion, Choice and Empowerment (VOICE Outcomes). VOICE Outcomes are a series of aims that we try to achieve for everyone we work with. They are important because our work is more than about solving a specific issue – however important that is. We also support people to develop the skills and confidence they need to be more able to live the life which they want and to advocate for themselves independently.

The 10 Outcomes, which link in with the Adult Social Care Outcome Framework (ASOF), are:

- I am involved in decisions about my life
- I can understand my rights and entitlements
- I can speak up for myself more
- I have better support (quality)
- I understand support options available
- I have more choice
- I live more independently
- I understand how to keep myself safe
- I am more confident in keeping myself safe
- I know who to tell if someone was hurting me

Out of 12,005 people who were able to feedback to us, 10,641 reported that one or more of their VOICE outcomes had got better, or a lot better.
During 2015 we consulted with people who use our services, carers, members of staff and leading external professionals to review our vision, mission and overarching aims. We used what they told us to set a new strategy for 2016-2021. The organisation has begun to work to deliver the strategy this year, and this will continue in the years ahead.

By 2021 we will have:

- Increased our social impact supporting the rights, voices and choices of 40,000 people and demonstrating powerfully the difference that we are making

- Introduced new support services which meet our social mission, including wider support for people who have dementia and delivery of preventative services

- Developed strong partnerships with organisations who share our values and drive

- Excellent user involvement at every level of the organisation

- Consistently excellent staff and volunteer engagement

- Viewed as an insightful and influential partner with the respect of central and local government, NHS bodies, policy makers and health and social care organisations

You can access our full strategy on our website: [www.voiceability.org/ourstrategy](http://www.voiceability.org/ourstrategy)
In the sections below we describe how we have lived our values over this year.

**Passionate**

“We’re passionate about strengthening voice, championing rights and changing lives. We’re passionate about our independence and our professionalism. And we’re passionate about our commitment to being the best at what we do.”

**Quality Performance Mark**

We successfully renewed our Quality Performance Mark in July 2016. This is a huge achievement and fully reflects on the professionalism and quality of our staff members across the organisation.

The QPM is the only national quality standard for independent advocacy. The assessment was a rigorous process, which included Assessors reviewing case work and interviewing people who use our services, members of staff at all levels, trustees and volunteers. The Assessors reviewed processes and policies and made sure that every quality standard is met.

VoiceAbility met every assessment criteria and received commendations for our consistent focus on the people who use our services; the way that each individual’s views and wants are kept at the centre of all of our work, our independence, our ability to challenge other agencies and the way that we provide advocacy to different client groups, changing our approach to suit each individual.

Find out more about the QPM and read our report: [www.voiceability.org/ourquality](http://www.voiceability.org/ourquality)

**Continuing Professional Development**

We pride ourselves on the quality of our work and constantly seek to further improve this. Training and development for our staff team is a core element to this. Our advocates receive training throughout their career with us. Last year 67 colleagues completed 169 professional advocacy qualification units. In addition, we have set up new ways to generate and embed learning across the organisation, including a continuous professional development group. Key members of staff come together on a regular basis to develop their own skills and share learning, which is then disseminated across the organisation.
Diversification of Services – Helping well people leave hospital in Lewisham

Strengthening our social impact by ‘developing new services which will amplify people’s voices and secure their rights and choices in the future’ is a key aspect of our five-year strategy and one which we progressed this year in Lewisham.

Our pilot service in Lewisham is available for people who are in a Lewisham Hospital ward, and whose discharge from hospital is at risk of being delayed, often for a complex mix of reasons. It is extremely rare that anyone wants to stay in hospital longer than needed and the longer the unnecessary stay the greater the risk to the person and poorer the health outcomes. Delayed discharge can mean lengthy stays, additional expense for the local authority and frustration for the individual and their families.

VoiceAbility have worked to enable people to move on from hospital in a positive and timely way. We do not yet have enough data to reliably see the impact on delayed discharge, but in the meantime we have measured effectiveness through referral times, outcomes met, value for money and positive impacts for professionals.

Results

- Since the project began in September 2016, we have worked with 34 individuals and in 83% of closed cases individuals achieved their care and support outcomes (a further 8% were signposted to family support).
- 100% of individuals felt that we had helped them meet one or more of their VOICE outcomes.
- Advocacy made it possible for:
  - people to be discharged back to their homes with the appropriate package of support
  - individuals to be more involved in decision making in quicker timescales than before
- Teams on the wards were very confused about who could receive advocacy and what advocacy could do. Having an advocate on hand to explain their responsibilities and the different legislations helped professional understanding.

Listening to Mr Bockarie brought him home

84-year-old Mr Bockarie had lived in his home for many years, but was admitted into hospital after neighbours raised concerns about his health and welfare.

Professionals decided that Mr Bockarie should remain in hospital, despite being well enough to be discharged, until they could find a ‘suitable’ new home for him – something that Mr Bockarie strongly objected to.

“All I want is to go home.”

Decision makers at the hospital reported that Mr Bockarie lacked capacity to make decisions about where he should live, and asked for an advocate to talk to him.

Mr Bockarie was not pleased to meet his advocate, as he felt that professionals – his
advocate included – were trying to force him to do something he didn’t want to do. It took several meetings for this impression to give way to trust in the advocate’s integrity.

Like many people Mr Bockarie had a tendency to talk around a subject, rather than addressing it directly. Perhaps a lifetime as a career diplomat had left its mark in a reluctance to deal too directly with questions, or maybe it was just because he was an elderly gentleman with the good manners and time to indulge a questioner.

Whatever the reason, it wasn’t simply that he did not understand and could not formulate a response because he was too confused – which is how his behaviour had previously been interpreted. Mr Bockarie took longer to talk around subjects than many other people, but would answer to anyone who listened long enough.

With a firm understanding of what Mr Bockarie wanted and how he explained himself, our advocate requested a multi-disciplinary meeting. At the meeting he helped Mr Bockarie to explain that his home, which the advocate had visited and found to be warm and clean, was the right place for him and that he was capable of living there. The advocate used the information that he had gathered from Mr Bockarie to get agreement for him to return home. Mr Bockarie was thrilled with the decision and said:

“I was very happy that you met and listened to me. I wish you came to support me much earlier when I was admitted and telling these people that I can look after myself properly in my own home.”
Led by the people we work with

“We put the people we work with at the heart of our work, and our organisation.”

Co-production has been a key feature of work this year. We’ve supported people we work with to shape the services they use, and peer advocates and volunteers have worked hard to make a difference in their communities.

**Peer Mentoring Recognition in Camden**

A peer mentor is a trained volunteer who has had similar experiences to the people they are supporting and so have a greater understanding of the situation and challenges. They listen, provide emotional support, share their experience and insights, advice and encouragement. Peer mentors have a strong track record of enabling people, many of whom have learnt not to trust professionals and who feel professionals cannot understand their situation, to open up, find support and develop their own solutions.

**Lee’s Story**

Lee didn’t think that mentoring would benefit him. He felt ignored by the system and thought that his past history was something that he just couldn’t shake off. Nothing was going to work for him and he felt overwhelmed and hopeless.

This was what he told his mentor after they met. Despite his initial reservations and a feeling of alienation towards professionals, Lee began to open up when his mentor shared his own similar life story.

Lee lived in a hostel that has a curfew, which means that he couldn’t get the night shift work that he was qualified to do. He also experienced angry outbreaks and didn’t know how to stop himself from exploding.

Together, Lee and his mentor worked on some mindfulness techniques and Lee made some breakthroughs. Lee’s mentor witnessed several occasions where Lee was able to regulate his temper more easily; “in the McDonalds queue when someone barged in front of us, normally Lee would have reacted aggressively and a fight may have erupted, this time he took a deep breath and smiled and said ‘on you go mate.’”

Lee and his mentor have also attended appointments at the Housing Association and Lee has now been transferred to hostel without a curfew so he can start applying for jobs.

During his mentoring journey the quality of his life had improved immensely and he now feels comfortable and welcome in his home. Lee has told us that having someone that was on his side for a change has made a huge difference.

“I feel like you have given me a new lease of life. The past won’t drag me back anymore.”
Our hugely successful peer mentors were honoured this year with the team award in the prestigious Camden Volunteer Awards Ceremony, celebrating the invaluable contribution of volunteers to Camden.

The peer mentor programme was set up in 2015 and over the past 2 years has gone from strength to strength. The team are now working with other teams across the country to share learning and their experiences of how their work has become so widely recognised.

One of the team, Dean Moriarty, has been recognised individually in Camden recently, winning the Linda Nolan trophy for his exceptional work with other service users. He has also won a VoiceAbility ROAR (Recognising Outstanding Achievement Reward) for his extraordinary contribution to individuals in Camden.

You can find out more about the team and their work on their Peer Mentoring page.

**From Quality Checkers to Eye Care Trainers**

Our Quality Checkers are Experts by Experience supporting providers to give the best service to people with learning disabilities. Our Quality Checkers in Northamptonshire have added another string to their bow – becoming trainers in eye care.

Adults with learning disabilities are ten times more likely than others to have serious sight problems. If they have the opportunity to learn how to protect their eyes, and to understand when they need to visit an optician, it can reduce the number of people who suffer preventable sight issues.

The Northamptonshire team have joined SeeAbility’s Peer Educator Network across the UK, learning how to be effective trainers. They are now able to train others in Northamptonshire about eye care and why it is important. They aim to deliver at least three eye care sessions a year, reaching at least 50 people.

**ChAD (Choice for All Doncaster)**

In 2016, members of ChAD (a service user group facilitated by VoiceAbility) took action to improve a range of health and community facilities, so that they are more accessible to the whole population, including people with learning disabilities and people with physical impairments. The work ranged from reporting on the adequacy of hospitals wards and whether they allowed for privacy and dignity, to improving access to GP practices for people with learning disabilities and pushing for better physical access to shops.

**Autism Awareness Training Sessions for Argos in Wakefield**

Wakefield Autism Voice for Everyone (WAVE), an autism peer support group led by a VoiceAbility advocate, facilitated two Autism Awareness training sessions for staff and management at the local Argos Distribution Centre. Argos staff members were supported to understand what differences they can make in their own working practice, and in the store environment to
make the shopping experience safer and more enjoyable for people with Autism. The group received excellent feedback for the sessions. The team are now looking to capitalise on their success and are approaching other companies in the area.

**Service User and Community Engagement – Suffolk**

Wellbeing Suffolk is a partnership of different local organisations, including VoiceAbility, who work together to offer a wide variety of services that support people to make the necessary changes to improve their wellbeing and quality of life. VoiceAbility works with people to identify where they need additional support and helps them gather and understand information about different community activities that they might enjoy. The team then help them access the options they choose, which is often support groups, new hobbies or volunteering opportunities.

Our work this year has highlighted how social issues such as debt, housing and isolation impact on wellbeing. This has helped the service evolve, and now the team offer practical support to help solve these social issues. They have found that this additional support helps people feel able to join social groups and enjoy the benefits that these bring.

**Patty’s Story**

Patty had come to us earlier in the year and we’d given her some information about different groups that she might be interested in. But Patty didn’t join the groups and said they weren’t right for her.

Later on, Patty came back to us and we worked with her more intensively to really understand the issue. Patty opened up to us about recent cancer treatment she had received and the effect it had had on her confidence. She also said that she struggled getting to the groups we had told her about and she wasn’t confident enough to go to them alone.

We put Patty in touch with Macmillan Nurses who have been able to give her extra support. They worked with her to look at her transport options and went to an art group with her to let her find her feet.

Now Patty has a better circle of support and feels more confident about getting out and about. She said she was just sorry that it took her so long to open up about her real needs and feelings and said she felt more positive now.
Resourceful

“We’re about finding solutions, making things better and trying new ideas out. We’re about being creative, looking at things afresh, and about doing the very best we can with the resources we have.”

Adapting to change is the hallmark in the continuing success of any organisation and VoiceAbility is no different.

**Daybook – Our Digital Diary**

Daybook is VoiceAbility’s digital diary for people with learning disabilities. The project grew from SPOOL (Speaking Up Online) which was created to help people who use services communicate what was important to them, and to enable service providers and commissioners to gather that information in a meaningful way.

Our project team ran co-creation sessions with professionals, getting their views on how communication could be improved and made more meaningful. They also worked alongside 173 people with learning disabilities, including 46 people with complex needs and 34 people who don’t access formal services. Supporters and family members have also engaged with the process.

The project found that, with the right tools and support, many more people can express themselves. It also uncovered a wealth of experience, practical skills and interests of people with learning disabilities. It showed the potential for people to become partners in co-creation that can lead to better outcomes which could bring about real and sustainable change.

The result of our co-creation sessions was a simple online diary which records feedback in a way that is meaningful and provides a wealth of information that can be accessed (upon consent) by decision makers, in order to shape service provision. In addition, it allows professionals to better understand and connect with the people they care for, and for individuals to express themselves where they may not have been able to before.

**Hannah’s Story**

Hannah is a young woman with very limited verbal communication. She recently moved into a supported living service and staff have been struggling to find a way to connect and communicate with her.

Hannah was introduced to Daybook when Daybook staff came to run a training session. Hannah watched a demonstration and then chose to make her own entry. Hannah looked at
the topics and made an entry about food. She wrote that she had had pasta with ketchup for lunch, this was tagged with a smiley face to express that she had enjoyed it. The member of staff explained that they wouldn’t have known what she had eaten in the day if she hadn’t made that entry. They were also not aware that she could use a keyboard.

One of the other service users heard what Hannah had for lunch and thought it sounded horrible, Hannah thought this was really funny, she started giggling and smiling.

Hannah then chose to make an entry about ‘home’. Staff had said before the session that Hannah had recently moved there and they would love to know if she is happy, she appears to be but it was hard to know due to the communication challenges. She tagged her entry with a smiley face and then wrote that she really likes her flat, and is really happy. Staff were thrilled.

Hannah and many other people have limited opportunities to say what they think and be heard. Members of staff weren’t able to easily communicate with her and couldn’t say whether or not she liked different things, so couldn’t tailor support to her. She wouldn’t have got the positive interaction with another service user and would have been more isolated. Daybook gave her a way to communicate and a way to have positive interactions that she just doesn’t have elsewhere in her life.

Daybook is now being independently evaluated and the results will be published on our Daybook page.

Meeting Increased Demand

In 2014, the Supreme Court effectively lowered the threshold for cases requiring Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) authorisations and triggered a ten-fold rise in applications. The number of people that need a DoLS advocate has risen accordingly and, to ensure that we are meeting that need, our teams are having to find creative ways to make sure that those people who need us, see us.

In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the solution has been to train and develop existing colleagues from other departments into sessional advocates. Successful applicants were given training, and a programme of shadowing and reverse shadowing followed. A buddy scheme was set up with experienced IMCAs to ensure the new recruits were properly supported. The existing team have been really pleased with how quickly and professionally their new advocacy colleagues have taken to the role, some of whom are now leading on cases.

With the support of these colleagues, every person who has needed a DoLS advocate from our service has had skilled support from one.

One of the new recruits said:

"It's been a fantastic opportunity learning on-the-job with one of our most experienced IMCAs. I have an immense amount of respect for the work our advocates do, so it's great to be able to contribute and turn my knowledge into practice."
Volunteering

Volunteering programmes are incredibly important for us as an organisation, for the people who we work with, and in many cases for the volunteers themselves.

Volunteers help us bring in different skills and experiences and enable us to reach more people. Volunteers have worked in every area of the organisation, from advocacy and project work, to awareness raising, marketing and outreach. And where we can benefit from their skills and experience, the volunteers also benefit from tailored training and development opportunities, which help them build confidence and can lead to further opportunities for them.

Through 2016/17, we had 136 volunteers across a number of roles and we expect that number to rise significantly in line with our five-year strategy. To support us with our long term goals, we brought in an expert in volunteering to create a suite of resources, from recruitment, management and legal guidance. Teams are now being trained in how to use the resources and get the very best out of our developing programmes.
Champions

“We inspire and educate people about our work and our impact. We use what we learn to champion change in policy and practice wherever and whenever it’s needed.”

Representing the voices of people who use our services and championing change is core to VoiceAbility’s work, be it for individuals, local groups or on a national scale. Here’s a few examples of our work over the past year.

Peter and Jenny: Stronger Together

Peter and Jenny have been together for 44 years. They are devoted to each other. But in order to find the level of support which Jenny needed as her dementia advanced she needed to move from the home they shared into a higher support residential service. Unfortunately, although both Peter and Jenny have learning disabilities, Peter was not considered to have high enough care needs to move with Jenny. Peter was distraught. He couldn’t understand how his local council could feel that tearing them apart was better for him or for Jenny.

Peter’s advocate worked tirelessly to challenge this decision, and challenge again when he was initially blocked. Peter and Jenny are now together again, thanks to their advocate.

You can read their full story: www.voiceability.org/peterandjenny

Do not attempt CPR (DNACPR)

In her role as Relevant Person’s Representative, one of our advocates became concerned about a potentially unlawful DNACPR note on someone’s file. In investigating this, she discovered 16 other such cases in the same care home. The advocate worked tenaciously to challenge these, and succeeded in getting those DNACPRs removed from the people in that care home, and from a number of other care homes in the local area. Her work has also led to a review of working practices and policies by the CCG that was responsible for those DNACPRs.

Voluntary Patients Leave – Warwickshire

Many people are treated in mental health provision as ‘voluntary patients’, which means that they agree to be there and are not detained under the Mental Health Act. Voluntary patients should be able to leave their wards without seeking formal authorisation. So our advocates in Warwickshire felt it was strange when they were asked on a regular basis for advice about leave by people who were treated voluntarily. The advocates found that patients were being asked to sign a care plan and believed that if they didn’t comply with the plan they would be sectioned under the Mental Health Act and not allowed to leave.

These people were very anxious about challenging this individually and asked our advocates to take forward the issue on their behalf. The team suggested that the Trust develop clearer patient information leaflets explaining their rights as voluntary patients and pointed out information on websites that other Trusts were using and suggested this as good practice.

The Trust agreed and developed a leaflet of their own, asking for VoiceAbility’s input, resulting in clearer information about people’s rights.
**Tesco Signing Responsibilities**

Under equalities legislation, people who need a signing interpreter have a right to one during all NHS treatment, including optician’s appointments. Despite that right, Tom was told at his appointment in his local Tesco branch, that communication would be written out for him instead. Since Tom and his wife felt this was a breach of his right’s under the Equality Act, they asked for an advocate to support them to make a complaint to NHS England. Their advocate met with them and helped them to submit a complaint through both Tesco and NHS England. Their complaint was upheld and Tesco have now provided a signing interpreter for Tom. In addition, the local Primary Care Team are liaising with Tesco head office to advise them of their responsibilities. Tom, and others like him should now expect their rights upheld when they visit a NHS-funded Tesco optician.

**National Influence**

**Deprivation of Liberty (DoLS)**

Tens of thousands of people in the UK are deprived of their liberty in the name of their best interests in care homes and hospitals. These are mainly people with dementia and people with learning disabilities. It is essential that there is a formal process to authorise this detention, to challenge it where needed and most importantly to ensure that people are only detained when it is genuinely in their best interests.

Getting the balance right so that people’s rights and freedoms are not compromised and yet potentially vulnerable people are appropriately protected from harm is not easy. Our staff help to make this happen for thousands of people.

This work has also placed us in a privileged position to comment on the legal framework for Deprivations of Liberty. Sadly we endorse the widespread view reported by the Law Commission that the system is ‘in crisis’.

We engaged extensively with the Law Commission who were appointed by the Government to review the legislation and develop proposals for the future, including in our formal consultation response. Our aim has been to shape the proposals so that they would provide effective, proportionate and realistic safeguards to disabled people’s rights. We continue to work to improve the lives of people affected by this legislation, including in our role on the Mental Capacity Act Voluntary Sector Group.

**Advocacy Outcomes Framework and Toolkit**

VoiceAbility provided briefings, practice examples and core outcomes best practice to NDTi for their advocacy framework, published in 2016. The framework helps to drive forward improved outcomes/standards and professionalism across the industry.

**Making Safeguarding Personal**

VoiceAbility provided data and intelligence to ADASS, the association of directors of adult social services in England, for their ‘Making safeguarding personal’ (MSP) temperature check. The 2016 paper supported the need for advocacy and our recommendations that earlier referrals were needed to support MSP objectives. In addition, VoiceAbility have published a suite of resources for use by advocates and social workers to use when talking with individuals going through safeguarding processes, and with their friends and family.

- Advocacy during safeguarding – plain English
- Advocacy during safeguarding – easy read
- Friends and family guidance – plain English
Partners

“We believe in the value of partnerships and ensure that we make working with us a positive, constructive and enjoyable experience.”

Partnerships are a brilliant way of gathering different skills and experience together, to provide great services for people who need them. At VoiceAbility, we don’t try to have all the answers, but instead work with a wide variety of local and national partners in order to find the solutions which people need.

We worked closely with 24 partner organisations last year, in 13 different local areas across the country. You can see some of them below.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

We were thrilled in October last year to begin working on a new Total Voice partnership in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, working together with NYAS and Cambridgeshire Deaf Association. You can read more about our Total Voice work in our new, dedicated website – www.totalvoicecp.org
Newham

Our Newham team are working closely with Newham People First, setting up a successful peer advocacy programme. The partnership sees Newham People First, which is a user-led organisation, providing peer advocates, who are then trained up by VoiceAbility advocates. The peer advocates deliver both one-to-one and group advocacy sessions in the area, funded by VoiceAbility. As a reciprocal partnership, Newham People First have also been training VoiceAbility staff to help develop their skills; the latest training session was in deaf awareness.

Suffolk

Our Total Voice partnership in Suffolk is entering into a new phase from April 2017, having regained the contract to offer integrated advocacy across the county. The partnership brings VoiceAbility together with five organisations who, between them, have a large number of volunteers and offer a varied range of services. This allows the partnership to access people in hard to reach communities and ensure that advocacy is available to everybody who needs it. Partners get access to up-to-date resources, training and expertise in advocacy practice as well as a centralised referral and reporting system, which saves them time and effort.

Lincolnshire

VoiceAbility works with three organisations across the county and one partner is particularly crucial to the programme – Lincs2Advice. This organisation provides the hub for Total Voice; a ‘one stop shop’ for locals who need information, advice and advocacy. Partners have access to over 300 local organisations through their formidable database and work closely with one another to ensure that individuals and groups have continuity of service and consistency of quality. Because we partner with Barnardo’s, we are able to offer continuity to young people who are going through transition to adult services, ensuring that they have someone from Total Voice on their side whenever they need them.

Age UK are responsible for reaching older people and their volunteer programme has allowed Total Voice to increase awareness of advocacy for those who have dementia.

Birmingham

Advocacy Matters in Birmingham had been delivering advocacy for over 15 years as a small, local provider. When we started working with them, they had been working as a partner of another larger advocacy organisation. The team were anxious about entering into a similar agreement and felt that Advocacy Matters, their culture and standing in Birmingham was going to be swallowed up and changed forever. Fast forward to today and Elssa, the Advocacy Matters Operations Manager has this to say:

“There has been no downside to our partnership with VoiceAbility. They have given us support and training that has not just benefitted our partnership, but the wider work Advocacy Matters does in its own right - and therefore benefitted people using our service. Advocacy Matters have adopted VoiceAbility’s management system which has meant that we have been able to provide consistency for our funders and partners.”
Dedicated

“We work with integrity and we stick to our principles. We’re sincere, honest, open and transparent. We ensure our work and services are accessible and that we communicate what we do clearly and effectively.”

Mystery Shopping at VoiceAbility

In summer 2016, a team of service users conducted a mystery shopper project, looking at how easy it was to access VoiceAbility services and how approachable and knowledgeable team members were. The project team made a total of 40 calls to VoiceAbility offices throughout the country over a period of 4 weeks. They spoke to a total of 14 different staff members and volunteers at 20 different services.

The results were generally positive, with the majority of staff rated as friendly/very friendly (88%) and knowledgeable/very knowledgeable (75%).

The team of mystery shoppers said that:

“Very friendly, felt like I was a friend rather than a client.”

“Very professional, Good knowledge of area. They were very helpful, I would have liked if I could have talked about my problems right there.”

Some areas for improvement were identified, such as phone calls not always being answered and local numbers being difficult to find on the website; and we have made changes to improve these items so that our services are as accessible as possible.

Doncaster – Shaping Services

Late last year, we commissioned an independent report to investigate what people who could access our Doncaster advocacy service wanted to see change.

One of the key issues identified was that lots of people didn’t know about advocacy and didn’t know how to access the service. The Doncaster team have made immediate changes to rectify this, taking advocacy to the community.

- They set up three drop in sessions (with two more in the pipeline) in areas of Doncaster identified as needing additional support. The team have already seen increased referrals numbers with people getting quicker access to advocacy and with a greater understanding of how we can help in their local area.

- The team are also investigating what innovative solutions they can use to make their services more accessible, including using Blippar, a virtual discovery app, on leaflets / posters to play videos about advocacy. People with disabilities on a local media course have designed, produced and starred in the videos.
The consultation showed that people wanted a local Facebook page, which has been set up (www.facebook.com/DoncasterVoiceAbility) and regularly get 350 people reached on posts after just 3 months of setting up the page.

The team have begun facilitating local resident’s meetings in residential homes so people are engaged in shaping, developing and changing the services they receive in the place they live.

The team in Doncaster are monitoring how the changes they have put in place affect who accesses the services, and will conduct regular sense checks throughout Doncaster to make sure that they are reaching everyone they need to.

Thanks

The Trustees would like to express their appreciation to the Charity’s commissioners and funders as well as to the organisations we have worked closely with throughout the year. Our members of staff and volunteers have continued to display an exceptional level of commitment, skill and hard work and our success throughout the year has been a testament to their hard work. We thank them.

Please note that names have been changed to protect identities in all stories.