

CLAIRE'S STORY

Advocacy Awareness Week #AAW24

*All names have been changed to protect the identities of the people we support



Claire's* son had been a Looked After Child for several years through a Care Order. Claire was struggling when attending Looked After Child Reviews and Family Time meetings due to some executive functioning difficulties. The Local Authority recognised this and commissioned independent advocacy to support her. Claire had an advocate called Maureen.

Over time Claire had worked hard to turn her life around and felt that she was now able to care for her sons and very much wanted her sons to live with her again.

Maureen supported Claire at the statutory meetings and to work with the local authority towards getting the care order discharged. This included Claire being re-assessed to care for her son fulltime. Sometimes this process did not go as expected, and Maureen supported Claire to raise complaints and to seek further access to her son through the family court.

Through having Maureen as her advocate Claire felt more involved in meetings and built-up the confidence to speak for herself. Claire and her advocate spent time preparing for statutory meetings and Claire practiced with Maureen what she wanted to say. Claire felt confident having Maureen there if she needed her support.

Having advocacy support meant that Claire could positively challenge the local authority through the complaints process and to uphold her rights as a parent with shared parental responsibility.

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As a result of Claire working with her advocate to develop the confidence to express her views and what outcome she wanted, Claire and her sons were able to spend more time together at weekends. Eventually a transition plan was put in place for Claire's sons to return home to her.

Claire said, "I am delighted you are able to come today to the final lac review. We can celebrate your intense dedication of supporting me in bringing my boys where they belong, home to me. You have been more than fantastic I couldn't have got here without you.

"Thank you for everything – for always being there to support me, for standing up to the local authority and helping me to do this myself sometimes. I feel I have grown in confidence and can speak up better now, so thanks for helping me get that confidence."

I appreciated the notes you sent me after every meeting, they helped me remember and keep track, and sometimes it was because of your notes that we could challenge the social workers. I can't believe how long it has taken to get the outcome I wanted and the boys wanted, but you have never let me down once the whole time. You helped me prepare for meetings, speak at meetings, and even discuss my case with a barrister when I went to court. You are such a lovely person, warm and approachable, – I felt comfortable with you very quickly. You are a wonderful person and a brilliant advocate."

Claire's family member told us, "Maureen, I just wanted to thank you so much for being an outstanding advocate. You have the right mix of professionalism, warmth and deep humanity that made her feel comfortable with you and trust you. Being able to have a laugh with you as well really helped her relax.

You have been her advocate for a long time, through countless meetings with Social Services and I have seen a difference in how much she can advocate for herself now. Thank you for this, as at one time she would not have been able to voice her wishes and feelings to authorities who she felt discounted her completely.

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You have been amazing in holding the Local Authority to account, and in challenging them when necessary. Being organised as you are, helped my auntie, as she was able to refer back to your notes, and you helped her and myself to prepare for meetings, as you had already done your preparation before meeting with us. Our emotions often ran too high, everything felt personal, and your experience of working with Local Authorities and your professional objectivity, helped calm us down and see the bigger picture, and different ways of approaching them. We appreciated you going the extra mile – literally, considering the distance you had to travel!

“As well as being a superb support for my auntie, you made such an impression on me, that I became an advocate myself. I wanted to be able to have the kind of impact on somebody that I saw you have on my auntie. You made her feel worthy, like her voice mattered and should be counted, and little by little, she has grown in confidence. I hope I can make someone feel like that, and achieve what you have done for her.”

Do you need an advocate?

We provide advocacy and related services across Lancashire, Salford, Trafford, and St Helens, you can view which areas our Advocates cover on our website.

