

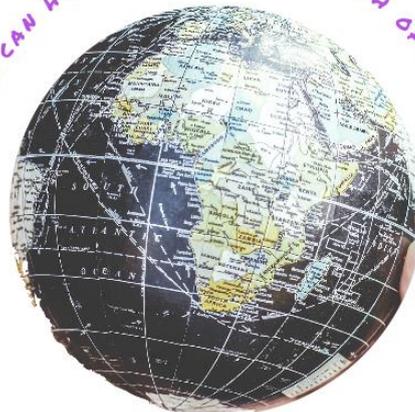


## Community Advocacy Newsletter - December 2021

At Rethink Essex All Age Advocacy Service, the CARES philosophy is constantly before us and serves to keep our work focused and on point, as we strive to fulfil our primary task and grow our service.

CONFIDENCE,  
GROWTH,  
SELF-WORTH

ADVOCACY CAN HELP GUIDE TO YOUR PATH OF EQUALITY!



Feel equal and  
look after your  
well-being!  
Strengthen  
your future!



*This artwork was created by our volunteer Jasmine Weller.*



## Connect – We work together, we celebrate together!

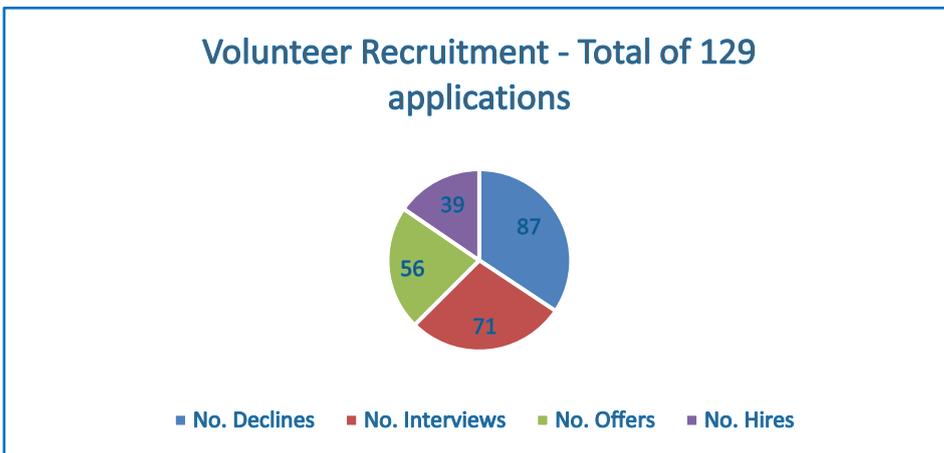


A warm welcome to the Rethink Essex All Age Advocacy Service- community advocacy newsletter, and we are thrilled to connect with you! This is our very first editorial venture as a new collaborative team, along with our volunteers, and we are delighted to provide an update and review – there is so much to tell!

This first edition will reveal examples of the work we have completed in the last 18 months, amidst an unprecedented time of extraordinary new challenges with covid-19. Yet, those challenges encouraged us to widen our already flexible approach and has served to bring the core team and the volunteers closer. It did not prevent the ‘extra mile’ mindset approach from remaining constant. Rather than shrink back, we found other ways to move forward, and staff and volunteers alike brought skills and fresh ideas to the table, helping those in need of advocacy achieve solutions and improvements, developing self-advocacy skills and autonomy towards improved life and mental health. Thanks, and appreciation to all other services who have also weathered the covid-19 storm and continue with their work for those in need. Bravo!

So let us open the doors, step within, and explore the work we do, the successes and challenges, the growth, and what we are planning for the near future.

*In the last 18 months we had 19 active volunteers and have supported 276 clients.*



*“I’ve learned that help is usually not an individual effort, it requires a team of people collaborating to decide how best to support an individual, as well as action and input from the individual themselves. Everyone has their role throughout this process and communication is paramount to achieve a successful outcome.”*

**Volunteer Advocate**

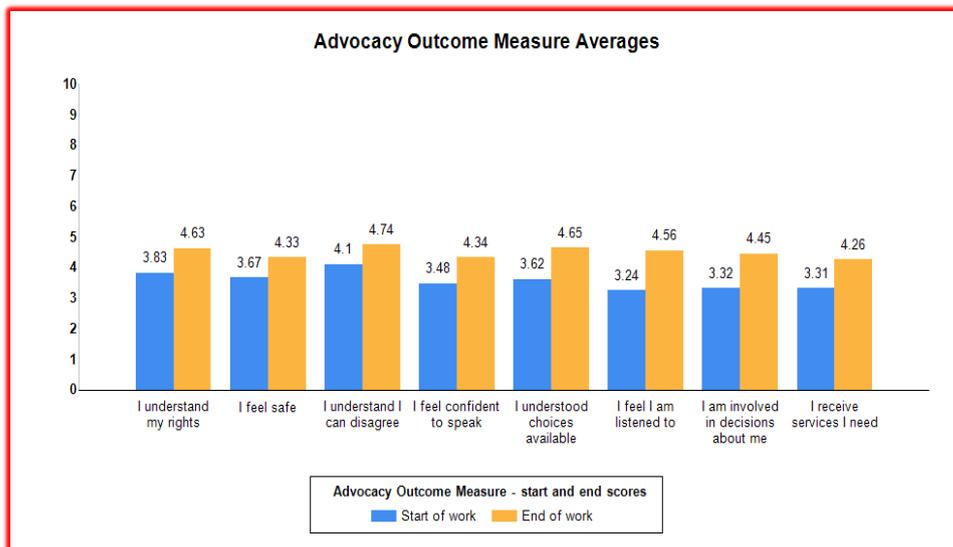
# A

## Accountable – We do what we say we will do



At Rethink Essex All Age Advocacy Service we are fully aware of the gravity of our task in supporting clients, and for our responsibility to ‘One Rethink’ the greater organisation. We strive to remain within the remit of our work ethic, persisting within the boundaries and guidelines. All staff and volunteers receive in-depth training and are fully equipped for the work. Ongoing and regular supervision and mentoring serve to support the team and volunteers alike. Reflective practice helps us refine issues and improve wherever possible.

Feedback from clients is a reliable way to show accountability for the work we do. If the advocate and the client work alongside each other and follow the action plan, this will be clear in their feedback and whether their desired outcome was achieved.



We are mindful and highly appreciative of the precious resources and donations to the charity and that every penny must be used wisely. For example, during the lockdown, many of our meetings with clients were conducted online, over the phone, and even via WhatsApp. We found that many clients preferred this, and often seemed more at ease being in the comfort of their own home and conversed freely. This had the bonus effect of reducing time and travel costs. Training and networking sessions are held online via Microsoft Teams, with the advantage of being convenient for busy volunteers and professionals. We were issued with state-of-the-art phones and are using them for the organisation’s best advantage.

*As advocates it is important for us to be accountable for our actions and the work we do with clients as they have put their trust in the service and their advocate. However, this does not mean that all desired outcomes will be achieved. This is a realistic perspective, and the very nature of our work means we expect that sometimes things are uneven, or circumstances change.*



## Respect – We believe everyone counts



At Rethink Essex All Age Advocacy Service, we believe in a fair and equal society and take an entirely non-judgmental approach. We assist our clients who need a source of empowerment to have their voices heard, their views acknowledged, and their rights observed.

We passionately believe in the empowerment approach, doing our best to ensure that clients have their voice heard and respected. This mindset is applied not only to clients, but also throughout our entire work ethic with our highly valued volunteers, who come from all walks of life and who greatly enrich our experiences and knowledge base.

*“Within my time volunteering for Rethink All Age Advocacy, I, along with other team members and members of ENACTUS (University of Essex) created a self-advocacy group. Our aim is to encourage students to speak out about issues they have experienced, such as racism, homophobia, mental health etc. We want to empower other young individuals and create a positive and accepting future.”*

**Volunteer advocate**

*“I have nothing but praise for all the members of Rethink I have come into touch with – both paid and volunteers. I have worked in other voluntary roles over the years, and it seems the norm for volunteers to be treated as second-class citizens, even if they have greater expertise than the paid employees. This has never been my experience with Rethink”*

**Volunteer Advocate**

*‘It was about eighteen months ago that a very close friend of mine told me about the Rethink charity and gave me their phone number. I had felt so defeated and I was convinced that no-one could help me. The Community Advocate picked this up immediately. This first call started a journey between this lady and me. I cannot overstate the amount of clear information, encouragement and motivation that I received.*

*I slowly but surely noticed that my attitude changed and my confidence to deal with my issue using the information and support provided by my advocate grew more and more. I was delighted when I received an answer to my correspondence stating that the account had been cleared.*

*Without the help from my advocate this would have definitely not happened.  
Thank You Rethink and my advocate for your amazing service. it is so greatly appreciated*

**Client**



## E

### Evolve – We challenge, we listen, we change



Due to demand and ongoing success, we are now expanding and changing in very positive ways, and rapidly. The service is widening its recruitment process to gain excellent quality volunteers to support the service, offering training, mentoring and supervision throughout the volunteer's journey. Many are university students who gain experience in the field of advocacy, others bring experience from their various fields of expertise and inform our practice, helping us to evolve and expand in every way. Volunteers bring a wealth of knowledge and welcomed diversity into the service, which is shared during online meetings, open discussions, and reflective sessions. Recently we had to say goodbye to a few of our active volunteers, yet that was for good reason. One volunteer advocate was recently successful in getting a post as Assistant Psychologist, another has gone on to be a Wellbeing Practitioner, and there are lots more successes including Megan who now works for Co Durham Advocacy services.

To accommodate the ongoing success and need for expansion, our Rethink Essex All Age -community advocacy service has welcomed two new staff members, Maxine and Susan, who previously served as volunteers. Together, with the rest of our organization, we move forward as 'One Rethink' breaking down barriers regarding fear and negative attitudes in mental health, helping to educate and empower people everywhere.

From September 2020 to May 2021, we collaborated in a partnership approach with the ENACTUS group from Essex University and delivered a course of eight self-advocacy workshops, via our service Facebook video room facility, to students from Essex University.

In May 2021, we celebrated the Mental Health awareness week by delivering, in partnership with 'Synergization', workshops about Professional Kindness, both internally and externally, including to Job Centre Plus team from North Essex.

In June 2021, we picked up the work we've started just before the lock down in 2020, and we deliver a weekly generic advocacy drop-in service at the Peter Bruff unit at Kingwoods Centre in Colchester.

The encouraging feedback from the drop-in service lead us to a new venture - self-advocacy workshops at the Rehabilitation Unit in Colchester, which are delivered monthly.

Some of our volunteers are those who have accessed our service as clients. Here is what they say:

*"I would like to thank Rethink Essex Advocacy service for this opportunity as they have changed my life, making me feel valued and respected, and the training I have undertaken to become a community advocate has increased my skills, increasing my potential for future employment and getting out of the benefits system. I cannot wait to be an active community advocate; I now feel this is my purpose!"*

**Former Client – now Volunteer Advocate**



## Success – We deliver results



Through Essex All Age Advocacy, people everywhere are finding a listening ear where they can comfortably discuss their issues and concerns. A person-centered practice is always our aim, to ensure the individual feels valued, dignified, and confirmed. We strive to make people feel empowered to make their own decisions, thus building self-confidence with improved quality of life.

*“You don’t just listen, you really listen, and you give me options.”*

*Client*

Sometimes people talk more openly to someone new about what might really be going on for them. This happened during an informal drop-in service to an in-patient mental health service, where our visits are regular. Our focus is always what the person or even the group, really thinks and feels, and we look for opportunities to support people to maximize this possibility. It can have some surprising results, as evidenced in the scenario detailed below.

*“I am 99.9% sure the distressed adult as stated said she is not safe going home, as the individual was not being listened to, so I would firstly like to say, as much as it is your job role to ensure safety and patients are being heard, **I THOROUGHLY BELIEVE YOU PREVENTED ANOTHER FORM OF SUICIDE**”*

*Patient*

We also discovered it may take just one session to deliver results for clients, and attentive listening can produce clarity of mind, and choices available to the client so they can make an informed decision, based on their own wishes thereafter. The following is an example of this, and what the client said following the session:

*“Thank you for letting me tell my story. I’ve been stuck for so long and can now think about moving on.”*

*Client*



*"I don't know what I would do without Rethink during this crisis. There's so many services involved, you help me think clearly and I can manage meetings on own"*

**Client**

*"Thank you for inspiring me to contact my doctor to change my medication"*

**Client**

We hope you enjoyed reading about us and everything we do, and feedback is always so appreciated, and we would love to hear from you. By now, you will have discovered that our work is fast paced, lively, broad, in rapid development and brimming with enthusiasm! A final few words from a professional colleague, a client , and one of our highly valued volunteers:

*"The generic Advocacy drop-in sessions offer something very valuable to patients on Peter Bruff Ward. They provide a forum for patients to open up and express themselves in such a way that they feel listened to and recognised not just as patients but as human beings. The volunteers advocates' independent status, non-uniformed appearance and straightforward manner puts patients at ease. I have seen throughout many of the sessions how participants have slowly stepped out of the role of helpless patient and asserted themselves within the group with increasing confidence. I believe that this is very validating experience, which reminds patients of their own power and agency. We are hoping the advocacy drop in service will continue." Occupational Therapist*

*"The service from my advocate was really great, and I felt that the advocate went all out to get hold of someone to sort out an appointment that I had been trying to get for over 2 years. I felt that she went the extra mile and was really good at communication and letting me know what was happening each week."*

**Client**

*"I know the word "rewarding" gets banded about too much and has become a synonym for "thankless" but from my own experience, I have never felt such overwhelming pride, watching my first client feel empowered by my help and seeing them grow stronger with every interaction"*

**Volunteer Advocate**



The positive feedback we receive, is the result of a collective effort!

A huge thank you goes to our dedicated volunteers: Alexandru, Dan, Clare (who also helped with starting the drop in service) Claire B, Emma, Finny, Harry, Graham, Jasmine, Joelle, Jyotee, Kehinde, Megan, Natalie, Sandrine, Sarah S (who also helps with delivering the drop in service), Sarah B, Sandrine, Simona, Tom and Tereska. We had to say goodbye to a few of them, for good reasons though, as they secured employment or returned to their studies at university.

We are delighted to welcome, our new trainee volunteers: Alex, Ashely, Beverlyn, Lauren, Jo and Ruth.

We would like to acknowledge the support from: HR volunteering recruitment team, who supports us with volunteering onboarding, colleagues from comms department, who helped us with our marketing materials, our colleagues from Rethink Advocacy Referral Hub, for dealing with the initial enquiries from people who need our advocacy services.

We also like to thank you our service colleagues: Amanda, Belinda, Craig, Mel and Nicola who joined some of our monthly team meetings, as guest speakers, giving us good insight into their roles.

Mark Gaston, who delivered a presentation about Mental Health Money Advice Service.

Simon - Whitney Snape, who joined one of our team meetings and gave us a few tips about ICT.

A huge thank you goes to our external speakers, who delivered presentations at our team meetings.

Lady Sidra Naeem, who spoke with us about her dedicate work in reducing stigma related to mental health.

Lindsay Whitehouse - former Deputy Crime Commissioner for Essex, for the inspiring presentation, and for the wise words he used: "You do not have 20 years' experience. You have one year and 20 experiences."

Nigel Warren and Trevor Potter, from DWP, who delivered a presentation about Employment Support Allowance.

**Merry Christmas and to a better New Year 2022!**



**from Georgeta, Maxine, Sandrine and Susan (the newsletter's editorial team)**

Please contact us at: [essexadvocacy@rethink.org](mailto:essexadvocacy@rethink.org) or visit our website <https://www.rethinkessexadvocacy.org>