



The Advonet Group
Providing Independent Advocacy



Annual Report: 2020-2021





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GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

- **HCA:** Health Complaints Advocacy
- **IMCA:** Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy
- **IMHA:** Independent Mental Health Advocacy
- **RPR:** Relevant Person's Representative
- **DoLS:** Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards
- **ND:** Neurodivergent
- **Statutory Advocacy:** Advocacy that local authorities are legally required to fund e.g. HCA
- **AIM:** Advocacy, Information, Mentoring



"I'm so very grateful for all your kind assistance. That has eased my anxiety about the situation. Thank you very much."



Foreword: Peter Gruen, Chair

When I wrote the foreword of last year's Annual report, I believed the pandemic would soon be behind us. However, both our staff and the people we work with still had months of hardship ahead. Months over which keeping in touch with our clients in the community, in care settings and hospital wards has been difficult.

I remain immensely proud of how colleagues have risen to the challenge and concerned that - despite the creativity, tenacity and commitment of our staff - the uncertainty that the pandemic unleashed throughout health and social care meant that some people may have lost out on support from us at a critical time.

I am proud of the way our advocates challenged the accidental overlooking of individual rights as everyone from mental health wards to care home managers tried their best to feel their way through the crisis. It saddens me that we won't have been there for everyone. That not everyone we could have helped knew of us, or how to access us.

The Advonet Group is a learning organisation. We will learn everything we can from the pandemic. We will develop a blended approach tailored to each individual's needs, offering a mix of online, phone and in person contact to clients in all areas from Community Advocacy to Leep1.

As a Board of Trustees, we are committed to raising our profile so that in future more of the people who need us the most can find us easily. We are doing lots of work on communications this year, including the launch of a new, more accessible website.

We are prioritising the development of the Leeds Advocacy Network so we can build more capacity for others in the community to be delivering advocacy; informal advocacy that complements the services we offer. We want advocacy to be available to people at risk of being marginalised from as many sources as possible.

We intend to be at the forefront of wider talks about the new legislation which will affect citizens we work with. The Liberty Protection Standards (LPS), which will start from the autumn of next year, and the Mental Health White paper is heading for the statute book. As the LPS measures are implemented and new mental health legislation is developed, we intended to share our experience of what works and what doesn't for the people we support and bring together interested people (clients, commissioners and partner agencies) to look at how we ensure these measures are as effective at protecting people's rights.

The past year, despite the difficulties of the pandemic, brought new developments. We were successful in securing Comic Relief Changemakers funding for a regional autism service, Lottery funding for the LGBTQ+ project and other exciting new projects. You will find out more in the pages which follow.

I would like to thank everyone involved with us for all they have done this year. It has been a year unlike any before and it is only because of the huge efforts by everyone, that we are emerging from it in a strong position.

Peter Gruen, Chair of the Board of Trustees

Community Advocacy



433

Total referrals made



137

Enquiries



8

Referrals not accepted



212

Number of previous clients



314

Cases closed



206

Number of new clients

The Community Service has experienced the greatest reduction in referrals received, down by 30%. This is not unexpected as venues where we delivered Outreach Surgeries within the community closed or had restricted access, so we did not run them.

In addition, the largest number of referrals are self-referrals and national and regional restrictions may have meant people had less reason to access advocacy.

This is particularly if it was to access other services, many of which will have had their own restrictions in place, or their priorities changed during the pandemic.

Care Act Advocacy



119

Total referrals made



5

Enquiries



21

Referrals not accepted



64

Number of previous clients



87

Cases closed



51

Number of new clients

We continue to try and raise awareness and increase referrals in this area. We are doing this both internally through staff training sessions and externally, with the Care Act Advocacy manager and IMCA Manager attending social workers team meetings.

We have also invited professionals from the Local Authority to attend the Care Act Advocates' good practice sessions in order to provide us with education.

Referrals for Care Act Advocacy went up by 10% compared to the previous year. Enquiries are down from the previous year, partly owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA)



Total referrals made



Enquiries



Referrals not accepted



Number of previous clients



Cases closed



Number of new clients

The main challenge and focus of the IMCA service has been supporting clients and working with care homes/placements throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the team adapted to a new way of remote working and worked tirelessly to continue to provide advocacy, using various methods, to some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Advocates challenged restrictive practices and blanket decisions, promoting government guidance to continue to apply the Mental Capacity Act (2005) for all decisions, to ensure access to advocacy and to uphold individuals' rights.



Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA)



Total referrals made



Enquiries



Referrals not accepted



Number of previous clients



Cases closed



Number of new clients

IMHA referrals have increased by 10% compared to the previous year, whilst waiting times have been minimal throughout the year. Referrals for Section 3 under the Mental Health Act went up by 29% on 2019-20's figures.

Due to restrictions in place, it has been more difficult for advocates to access inpatient settings. Despite this, they have continued to provide advocacy using a variety of different communication methods. The team, together with their manager, have highlighted barriers patients have experienced to make sure advocacy is available when patients need it.



Health Complaints Advocacy



206

Total referrals made



80

Enquiries



1

Referrals not accepted



120

Number of previous clients



146

Cases closed



84

Number of new clients

The HCA Team have been working hard for the last year in order to ensure that we can continue to provide an effective service for our clients, while also prioritising the safety of our clients and our team. Lots of the organisations we work with have adapted their services and procedures. We have spent time reaching out to them individually.

We have also been working hard on our Young Person's service, including involving young people in the design of some of the resources that will be used to promote the service in future. We have redesigned our workflow process to ensure that we are meeting clients' needs in the most consistent and timely manner possible.



Ask4Advocacy: Kirklees

1754

Total
clients
helped

1264

New
referrals
received

Relevant Person Representative 781

Community Mental Health Advocacy 145

Parenting Advocacy 52

Ind. Mental Health Advocacy 285

Care Act Advocacy 99

General Advocacy 144

Ind. Mental Capacity Advocacy 198

NHS Complaint Advocacy 50

The Advonet Group have continued to work together with our partners Touchstone on the Advocacy Kirklees service. We have supported them as they work towards achieving the Advocacy Quality Performance Mark (QPM).

The Ask4Advocacy team have shared their learning and experience around coproduction. The partnership benefits both The Advonet Group and Touchstone and provides us with opportunities to grow and develop.

In the past year, Ask4Advocacy supported over 1,700 clients.

Self-Advocacy



188

Total referrals received for self-advocacy support between April 2020 and March 2021



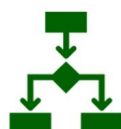
66

Felt confident or very confident dealing with their issues



50

Felt confident or very confident knowing about rights/options



76

Felt involved or very involved in decisions affecting their lives



81

Felt strongly or very strongly they were being listened to

Within the Community Advocacy service, we continued to develop self-advocacy work to provide more options to access advocacy more quickly. We also expanded access to advocacy by building a range of self-advocacy tools and resources which are freely available on The Advonet Group website. The tools were downloaded 3,196 times.

In the past year, we held a self-advocacy event on Zoom, attended by more than 30 people. Feedback given at the event was used to make our tools more accessible and inform new training sessions and what they should cover.

Join the Leeds Advocacy Network (LAN)

The LAN is a network of charities/community groups offering formal and informal advocacy. It's free to join and offers networking, shares good practice and provides free advocacy training. Email leedsadvocacynetwork@advonet.org.uk for more info.



Advocacy Services - Feedback

"Advonet are the only people that have listened to me" - a client



Satisfaction: Out of 389...



313

Were satisfied with the service provided/ how their advocate supported them

80%



64

Were somewhat satisfied

16%



12

Were not satisfied

4%

There has been a reduction in the number of complaints received and an increase in compliments. We capture all feedback so we can see what we are doing well, and what we can improve on. This is important as we want our clients to have a positive experience of The Advonet Group every time they use our services, not just some of the time.

Leep1 and Café Leep



386

Members of the Leep1 Facebook Group at the end of March 2021



30

Friendship Group members per session



8

Helped by AND to start a Social Enterprise



30

Supported with their digital inclusion



10

Supported to get their NVQ at Café Leep

The team have got 10 people with learning disabilities through the NVQ accreditation process in Café Leep, despite Covid. They responded quickly to the pandemic, achieving new funding and developing an online group on Facebook to continue the delivery of our services, which grew rapidly to 350 members. Part of the team focused on members who were not online by delivering iPads and programmes.

Leep1 were selected as one of the Digital Enterprise TOP 100 and are now listed as one of the SMEs that have made the list of the Leeds City Region's most innovative, digitally transformational and resilient businesses for their digital inclusion work. Since the end of March 2021, we are now open to full capacity with our members and have five new trainees in Café Leep.



Asking You!

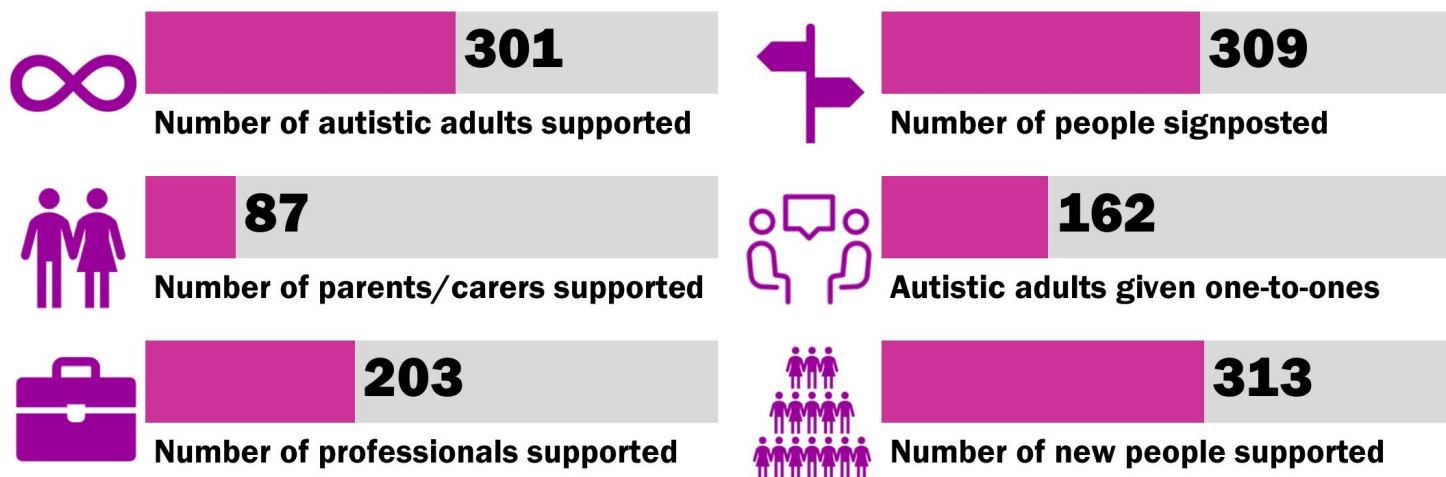
The past year saw much more achievement than we dared to hope for, given the pandemic. We equipped volunteers with IT so they could keep meeting weekly.

Our Citizen Advocacy service adapted so people without other independent support continued to receive long-term advocacy support. Our range of stakeholders expanded. One example was our work with the Kings Fund and Association Directors of Social Services. The People's Parliament increased its reach by going online.

We delivered learning disability awareness training to Health and Social Care commissioners. A Supported Decision-Making training pilot was developed and delivered by/to learning disabled adults. We employed someone with lived experience of a learning disability as a Team Member for the first time

Expect even more excitement in the coming year! The Good Lives Leaders programme will relaunch and our volunteers will be reviewing day opportunity services.

We're working towards more volunteers becoming sessional workers and then contracted staff. After our involvement in 2020's UK Parliament Week, we're planning an epic Council Chambers takeover in November. Watch out, Leeds! We're going to keep pushing to make services better for both you and us and to employ more people with lived experience!



In the past year, AIM supported a record 591 people with services such as signposting, peer support and advocacy. They also started online groups and provided autism training and consultation to local third sector groups. Their COVID-19 toolkit of self-advocacy resources received over 2,000 downloads and was praised by health and third sector services. Demand for our autistic-led post-diagnostic support continues to rise this year.

Further funding has enabled us to pilot the Autism Health Access Project, improving autism access in two local GP surgeries. AIM would like to thank the National Lottery for enabling them to develop its provision over the last three years, expanding on the CCG funded work and enabling additional services to be offered when really needed.

CHANGE



CHANGE has continued to produce easy read information throughout the pandemic, including building a permanent relationship with the National Lottery Community Fund to make their funding application process accessible.

It continues to be the main provider for Macmillan as well as increasing its customer base in the areas of Criminal Justice and Law as in their strategic plan.

The majority of the project team was furloughed for most of 2020. Despite this, they managed to diversify their whole training package so it can be done online. The Easy Read training has been delivered bi-monthly throughout 2021 and has sold out every event.

The team has grown with the new Out Spoken LGBTQ+ Inclusion project and is aiming to take forward its potential for further project work areas in the coming year.



Autism and Mental Health project

This is a new project that is funded for four years by a grant from the Comic Relief Change Makers fund. It will work across West Yorkshire and Harrogate.

It will be working together with West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership to improve how mental health services across the region work with autistic adults.

The project will also work with Leeds Mind in developing adapted peer support training for regional autistic-led groups, provide training for advocacy and social prescribing services and further developing resources to help access services.

It will focus on the Leeds area in year one, developing support across the West Yorkshire and Harrogate region in the future funded years. The project will work alongside our Leeds Autism AIM service, linking to them but with a separate focus.

Our new partnership work on **improving the sensory environment on inpatient wards** over the coming year will also sit under this project.



Inclusion Services - Feedback

“Leep1 helps people with self-confidence, self-belief and strength – thank you!”

Leep1 member

“The session was really informative, I really enjoyed it and learnt how effective and life-changing good supportive decision-making can be.”

From a CHANGE training course

“Being with my friends helps my confidence and improves my art and being able to sell my artwork makes me feel confident. The photoshoot made me feel really proud.”

AND Entrepreneur

“You don't need to mask with people on here, it's just turn up as you are. And that that acceptance is huge.”

AIM Peer Support Group member

Our inclusion services (Asking You!, CHANGE, Leeds Autism AIM, Leep1 and Café Leep) received plenty of positive feedback from members, clients and volunteers for their training, projects and peer-led groups.

In the past year alone, Leeds Autism AIM received 57 compliments, a record high. Meanwhile, CHANGE received plenty of positive feedback for their accessible information training.



Other project work/new projects

...Hear My Safeguarding Story

The Talk To Me: Hear My Voice, Hear My Safeguarding Story project is ending in October 2021 after two years' work.

It has met its' targets and has provided the Leeds Safeguarding Adults Board (LSAB) and Adult Health and Social Care with some insight into the problems of how Safeguarding is delivered and recorded.

The project's findings will help shape the LSAB's aim of becoming citizen-led and Adult Social Care's processes in receiving and acting on feedback.

As part of the project, it set up a citizens panel of people who have had experience of safeguarding. LSAB is currently exploring funding the Citizen's Panel for a year.

Leep1's employment work

Leep1 continue to explore improving employment for people with learning disabilities as part of the Employment Task Group.

Besides their innovative NVQ opportunities, they have produced an Employment booklet for learning disabled adults with support of CHANGE, which was funded through Jimbo's Fund. This is now being used on the following website as a free download here: [Easy Read booklet](#).

Out Spoken Project

Out Spoken is a three-year project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, with our CHANGE team working on it in partnership with Yorkshire MESMAC.

The project had two new staff members join; both are LGBTQI+ and one of them is also Autistic.

Out Spoken will work with LGBTQ+ adults who are also either autistic and/or have a learning disability in West Yorkshire and Harrogate.

The project's work will include self-advocacy workshops, accessible resources and training for health and care professionals working with LGBTQ+ autistic/learning disabled people.

Abilities Not Disabilities (AND)

The Abilities Not Disabilities (AND) project began in January 2021 with two years' funding from the People's Health Trust.

It has supported eight entrepreneurs with learning disabilities to develop their own clothing brand, learning business skills in design and marketing and sales.

The designs are now on sale in Fabrication, a shop in Leeds City Centre and online here: [AND Clothes](#)



"In my life and work, the course has helped me to think more about how to better challenge something in a more assertive way."



Other project work/new projects contd.

In-House Advocacy

Starting in the spring, we provided in-house advocacy services for residents of the Millcroft care home in Seacroft, Leeds. The setting is run by Active Pathways.

This works similarly to our existing service at Exemplar Health Care's Ravensdale care home in Whinmoor, Leeds.

We put together a leaflet for residents at Millcroft and the people supporting them. It explained what advocacy is and how it can help them to be heard.

Autism Health Access Project

This project is led by Leeds Autism AIM in partnership with The Light Surgery and Leeds Student Medical Practice Local Care Partnership (LCP).

Groundwork for the project began in the spring, with it getting up and running in August 2021. It aims to ensure autistic patients at two inner-city GP surgeries have more of a say in what they should do.

It also aims to offer one-to-one peer support and help to access local GP surgeries.

Keeping ND People Connected

The Keeping Neurodivergent (ND) People Connected project was funded by West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership.

Its aim was to help people with neurodivergent conditions keep connected and know about support available to them locally during lockdown.

It ran during the spring and summer of 2020 and provided information to clients by phone and email.

ALaDDIN Project

Leep1 worked with other third sector groups who support adults with learning disabilities to look at digital inclusion. It focused on adults with learning disabilities/autistic adults.

It saw a survey go out, which had over 50 responses. Leep1 were among many services to make videos on digital inclusion.

It was led by Forum Central and the Leep1 team, who took a lead on engaging with people who were digitally excluded.



"Thank you for taking care of me while I have been in the hospital, calling me and not forgetting about me"

Volunteering



1,263

Hours contributed by our volunteers between April 2020 and March 2021



Active volunteers

99



New volunteers trained

15



People supported by volunteers

50



Volunteers with lived experience

32

In the past 12 months, many of our volunteering roles went online, particularly our Citizen Advocacy and Autism Mentor services. Although volunteer numbers and hours contributed are less during the pandemic, the volunteers were able to continue to support staff, clients and members creatively online.

We provided autism awareness and learning disability awareness training via Zoom for new volunteers, as well as inductions. Leep1 recruited some very enthusiastic student volunteers, while we also [published videos on our YouTube channel](#), promoting the various volunteer roles we have on offer throughout the year.



Communications and Engagement



In the past year, we have continued to grow our social media following. The Advonet Group's Twitter account went past 2,000 followers, while we have over 100 followers on LinkedIn. Increasingly, we have published more videos on our YouTube channel, promoting areas such as volunteering, self-advocacy and Health Complaints Advocacy.

Although the pandemic means we haven't been able to work as much face-to-face, we have attended forums and been involved in organising and contributing to online events. Examples include the Leeds For All event, marking International Day of Disabled People in December. Our Asking You!, CHANGE and Leeds Autism AIM teams took part.

Training

Independent Advocacy Qualification (IAQ) training

Hold L3 IAQ Certificate	13	
Hold L3 IAQ Diploma	13	
Hold L4 Certificate	1	
Staff working towards IAQ	8	
Hold L4 Certificate	4	

Training Delivered

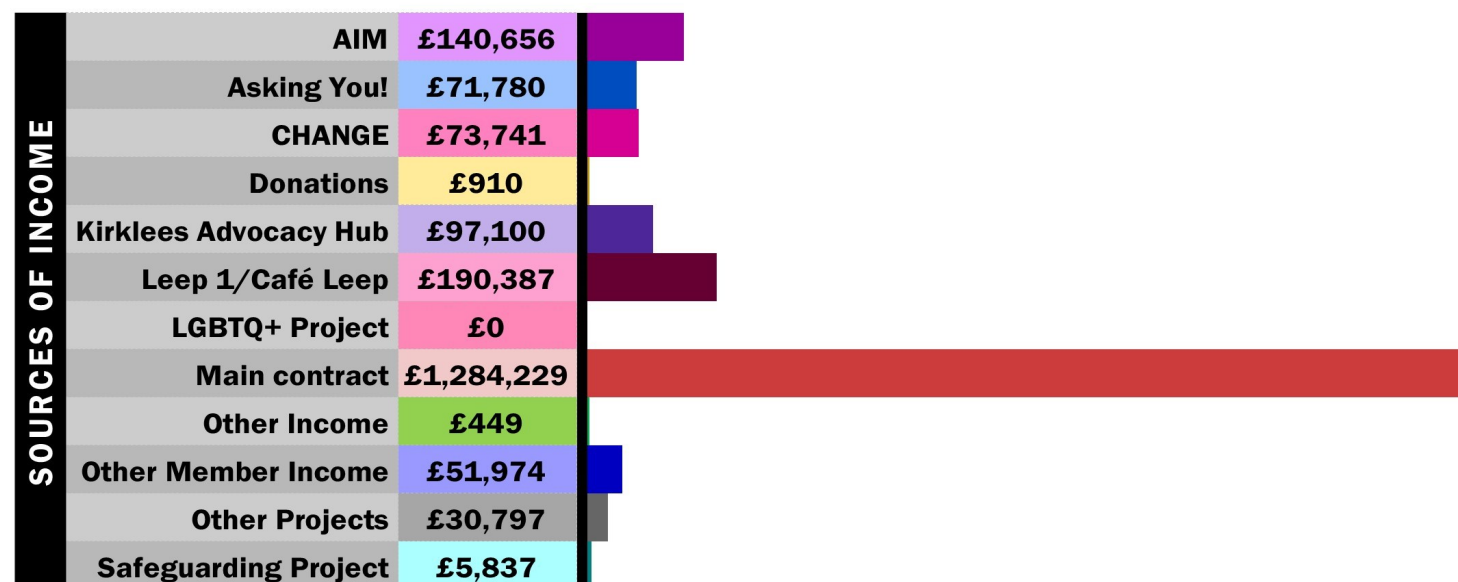


A number of our staff took the Independent Advocacy Qualification (IAQ) online. Some of our advocates attained the new Level 4 certificate, whilst others took courses specific to areas including Mental Capacity and the Care Act.

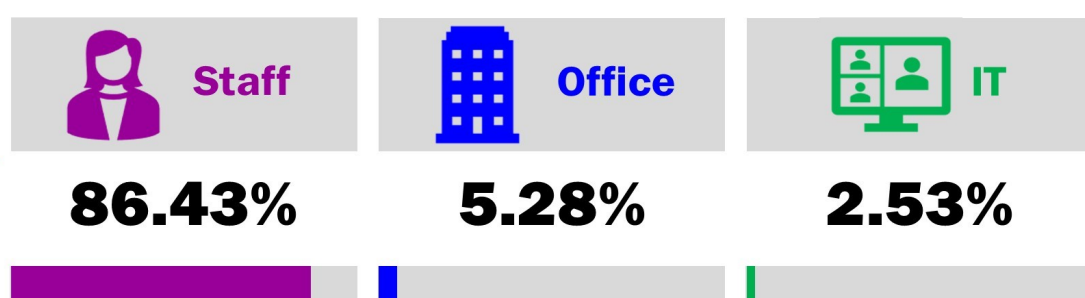
The Advonet Group refreshed their training offer due to moving it online. This enabled us to continue to deliver during the pandemic. In total, we delivered eight training sessions.

In addition to that, we delivered three self-advocacy groups. The self-advocacy event in October 2020 saw groups discuss how training could be more accessible.

Finances



Main sources of expenditure: 2020/21





Thanks to funders and partners

At the beginning of April 2021, we entered into our fourth year of working as part of an advocacy consortium with Touchstone and Age UK Leeds.



We have worked in partnership with the following organisations. Thanks to all of you for working with us!

- Leeds City Council
- Leeds NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
- Leeds Community Healthcare
- Carers Leeds
- Chapeltown Citizens Advice
- Engage Leeds
- Forum Central
- Touchstone
- Age UK Leeds
- Leeds Hearing and Sight Loss Service
- Pyramid
- People in Action
- People Matters
- Yorkshire MESMAC
- Aspire CBS
- Leeds Safeguarding Adults Board
- Healthwatch Leeds
- Youthwatch Leeds
- Exemplar Health Care
- Active Pathways
- InMind
- West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership
- Yorkshire and the Humber NHS Operational Delivery Network (ODN)
- West Yorkshire Police
- Cloverleaf Advocacy
- Voiceability
- Wakefield Together Advocacy Hub
- York Mind - York Advocacy Hub
- Live Well Leeds
- Leeds Mind
- Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service
- Connect in the North/Through The Maze
- Specialist Autism Services
- Voluntary Action Leeds
- William Merritt Disabled Living Centre
- Leeds Migration Partnership
- Leeds Student Medical Practice
- The Light Surgery
- 4Neurodiversity



Thank You!

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