

VOCAL Advocacy

Annual Report
2009-2010

Charity Number 1041978
Company Number 5741949

Chairpersons Report

The year since our last AGM has been one of consolidation for Vocal. We are actively engaged in the development of the Devon Advocacy consortium. We are responsible for receiving calls for the consortium on Tuesdays which has been a challenge to organise, while helping us develop an understanding of the work of other member groups. A number of us have attended training days run by the consortium co-ordinator, which have been useful. The consortium is in its infancy with a very challenging job to do- providing issue based advocacy for all vulnerable adults in Devon which will require changes for all advocacy providers across the county.

We are working towards becoming a user led organisation and have changed the way we are organised to help with this. Our quarterly meetings with members, volunteers, staff and committee have been a first step in this process. Some members and volunteers attend regularly, however we need more people to do so and it would be good if today, we could have some ideas from you about how best to make these events relevant to you, as part of Vocal.

The management group has been strengthened this year by the contribution of Alison Wood, who has agreed to become a trustee. We need a few more people to come forward to help with these functions. As Alison did, it's possible to get involved first before becoming a trustee, so that you can get an idea of how we function and what you can do to help.

In the last year we have been actively promoting Vocal to increase public awareness of the work we do; staff have manned stalls at road-shows for services for people with learning disabilities in Tavistock and Exeter. We also had a stall at the Paignton green mile and helped with the Devon Advocacy stall at the County Show. All these events are important to bring information to people who have never heard of advocacy or Vocal.

Vocal is approaching it's 20th birthday and we are still facing uncertain times financially. Despite our efforts to obtain independent funding, we are largely dependant on our contracts with Devon and Torbay which we hope will be renewed next year. We will of course continue to apply for funding from other sources and hope that we can expand our provision if successful.

I would like to thank our members, volunteers and staff for their contribution to the organisation which, however small, is of great value. To develop our work we need you all-your ideas, your views on issues, your help in making decisions, your work to help raise funds or distribute leaflets about our work and your time to work as advocates. Without YOU doing what you do, Vocal cannot exist.

Please make an effort to come to the quarterly meetings next year, the first of which will be on March 25th. We are working on our plan for the next 5 years and we need **you** to help us think about it!!

Margaret Cushen

Managers Report

Vocal continue to be the source of change and enablement in the lives of people with learning difficulties. Our advocates have gained enhancements to people's lives across a wide geographical area and in a range of issues.

Accommodation is still the most common issue for people who use our service and we have successfully supported several clients in obtaining a positive outcome for their housing difficulties. Money, relationships with support staff and not being listened to are regular complaints we work on. The skills, attitude and management of staff remain key factors in the lives of our clients. There are still far too many organisations who are not promoting person centred working and consequently restricting the opportunities and rights of people with learning disabilities.

Departures and arrivals

Jane batson left and Jill Hickman moved from being Advocate for Teignbridge and Volunteer coordinator to working on miscellaneous projects for Vocal. Three of our volunteers left and we had two new volunteers join us, Sally Challis in Tavistock and Liz Diamond in Teignbridge. We welcomed new staff to Vocal with, Simon Heyes as the dedicated Volunteer coordinator, Julie Bevan as the Torbay advocate and Liz Parr as the Teignbridge advocate.

Policy into Practice (PIP)

Vocal is one of six advocacy providers in this national project headed by OPPAL. The work is to collate the policies of advocacy organisations from across the country and create a set of policies that will be used by all advocacy providers. The project started in January 2010 and is likely to run through 2011.

Devon Advocacy Consortium (DAC)

We have been actively involved in helping to develop the Consortium while simultaneously investigating opportunities for our own organisation. The DAC has absorbed time and resources which were not required in our previous funding arrangement, although the 3 year contract has given Vocal some security in these potentially difficult financial times.

Developments

We are continuing in our aim to be a service user led organisation, Simon Heyes is building a membership of people who want to get involved with Vocal. We have been able to get some expert assistance from Devon People First in developing strategies for involving people and developing skills.

We have delivered advocacy awareness training on behalf of Devon Care Training. We have provided advocacy through the Citizenship project, working with people in Mid and East Devon. We continue to investigate new ways to generate income and have had some success in this area.

Website development

The Vocal website has been transformed, after the initial construction by Roger Tressider, Petrina has continued to develop the site. We have plans to make our website more accessible to people who use our service and as a showcase for the work we do.

We have a skilled and dedicated team of staff and volunteers who deliver a professional advocacy service and we have the ability to change and develop to meet new challenges and opportunities.

Brian McAuley

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Volunteer Co-ordinators Report

I started work for Vocal in July 2010 and initially I made contact with all our volunteers to introduce myself and to start to get a feel about what my priorities would be. Currently we have seven active volunteers and four new volunteers who are going through the process to become fully fledged ones. We estimate that our volunteers contribute approximately 35 hours a month.

I have been working with Graham Macey from *South Hams Community and Voluntary Services* looking at good practice in managing volunteers. To start with, we did a joint assessment to look at how Vocal works with volunteers. This assessment showed that we have had good structures in place and this is down to the excellent work of Jill Hickman, my immediate predecessor, and previous incumbents of my post. The work with Graham is looking on building on these good foundations and one aspect of this has been to share experiences with other local organisations that have a strong volunteer element.

Immediate areas to work on have been building a volunteer database (completed thanks to Emma Hadland), updating the volunteer handbook and volunteer policies, and looking at how best to provide support and supervision to our volunteers. As regards volunteer recruitment, we are fortunate to have *Volunteer England* accredited volunteer centres in Totnes, Newton Abbott, Tavistock and Dawlish as well as *Community and Voluntary Action Torquay*. I have been in contact with these organisations and plan to continue working with them to find new volunteers as well as using our own methods of advertising and recruitment.

As part of my role, I have been working with Brian to increase the participation of people with learning difficulties in the work of Vocal. To this end, Brian and I attended a training event called *Community Engagement* on October 19th. The event used techniques that come under the term *participatory appraisal (PA)*. Perhaps by serendipity, Devon People First, a service user run organisation, use *participatory appraisal* tools as an integral part of their work and they provided a great deal of help in our first member's event which we held in Tavistock on November 24th.

The principles of *participatory appraisal* start from the belief that people are experts in their lives. Other principles are that it is a deliberative process, solution-focused, easy to understand and needs good facilitation skills. We also got a useful update about good communication skills and the use of the mnemonic SOLER:

Square – as in sitting square to the person one is talking to

Open

Learning Forward

Eye Contact

Relaxed

We plan to have another member's day early in the New Year and to continue to work with *Devon People First* to ensure that participation in Vocal is not mere tokenism.

The future of volunteering and volunteer management is hard to gauge. In the last few years there has been an emphasis on volunteer management infrastructure through the work of organisations such as *Volunteering England*. However, the statement below, by Chief Executive of *Volunteering England* Justin Davis Smith in November 2010 announcing staffing of *Volunteering England* would be cut from 55 to 24 suggests that volunteering will face the same economic constraints as other sectors. And that we will have to continue to be creative in the way we manage our resources:

"It is extraordinary we have to plan on cutting back our organisation at a time when across our society there is more interest in volunteering than ever before. The coalition government's Big Society is built upon volunteering, and *Volunteering England* has a crucial part to play in helping public and community services become more effective through involving volunteers"

A more optimistic note can be taken from the words of Julie Wilkes, chief executive of *Skills – Third Sector* when she launched a report in August 2010 entitled *Valuing Volunteer Management*: "The coalition government's Big Society agenda is about drawing on the goodwill of people across the country to respond to challenges facing Britain today. Central to this is the promotion of civic action and volunteering. *Valuing Volunteer Management's* findings help us to see the picture from the point of view of those managing volunteers on the ground. Based on this, *Skills - Third Sector* is drawing up a skills strategy which gives top priority to creating flexible and affordable learning opportunities for these key managers."

How the Big Society and squeezed public finances impinge on volunteering will be an interesting backdrop to ensuring Vocal continues to have volunteers as an integral part of the way our organisation operates. I remain committed to ensuring Vocal adheres to the best practice as regards volunteering and that it remains an excellent organisation to offer one's unpaid time and energy.

Simon Heyes

Financial Summary

ABBREVIATED BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST MARCH 2010					
		2010		2009	
	Notes	£	£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible Assets	2		3,080		3,850
CURRENT ASSETS					
Prepayments		5,048		368	
Cash at Bank and in Hand		<u>34,236</u>		<u>36,363</u>	
		<u>39,284</u>		<u>36,731</u>	
CREDITORS					
(Amounts falling due within					
one year)	3	<u>1,574</u>		<u>575</u>	
NET CURRENT ASSETS/ (LIABILITIES)					
			<u>37,710</u>		<u>36,156</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS LIABILITIES					
			<u>£ 40,790</u>		<u>£ 40,006</u>
CAPITAL AND RESERVES					
Reserves per summary	4		<u>40,790</u>		<u>40,006</u>
Shareholders Funds			<u>£ 40,790</u>		<u>£ 40,006</u>

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Simon Heyes
Volunteer
Co-ordinator
(12 hours)



Brian McAuley
Manager
(23 hours)



Adele Rennells
Administrator
(16 hours)



Liz Parr
Advocate
Teignbridge
(12 hours)

**Meet
Vocal's
Team**



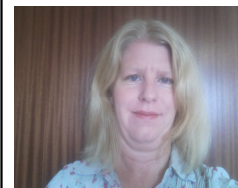
Jill Hickman
Advocate
PIP &
Misc.



Petrina Frost
Advocate
South Hams
(14 hours)



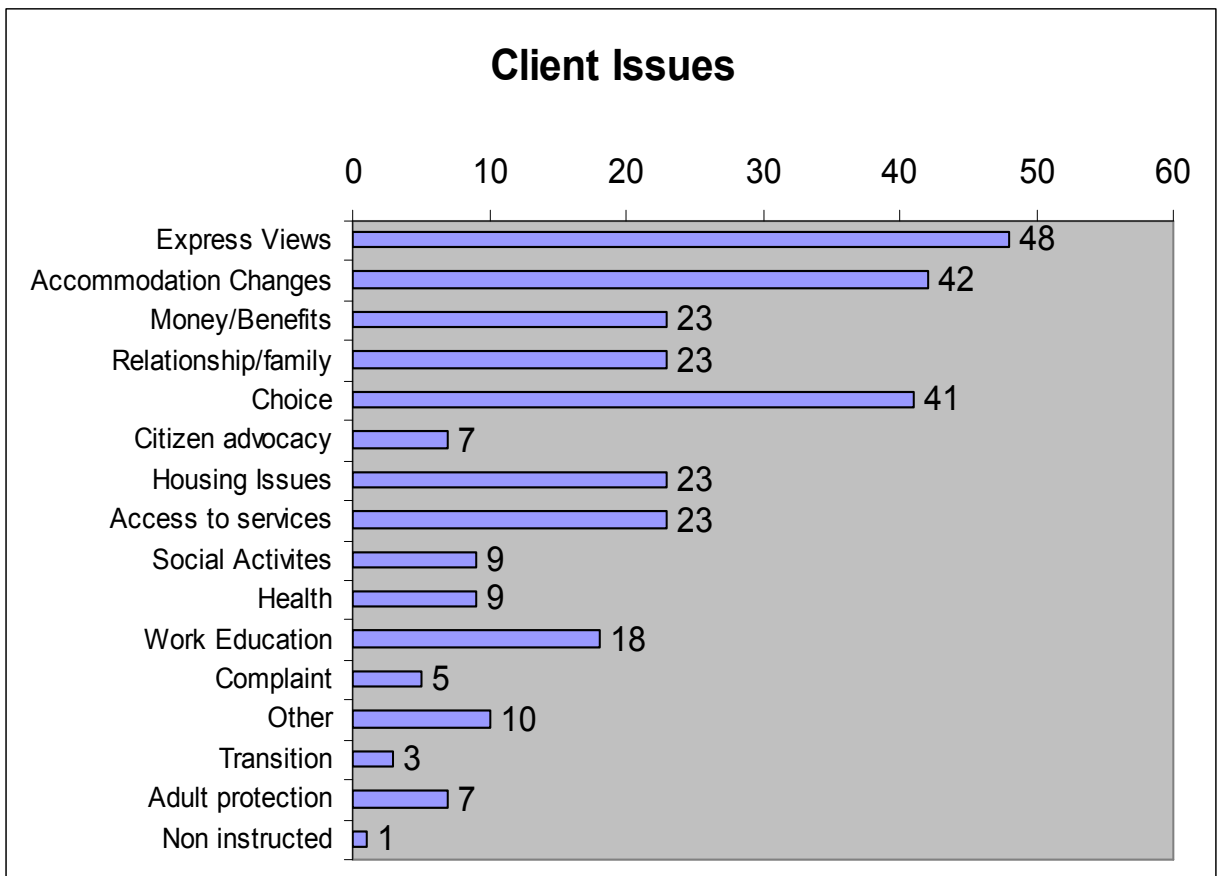
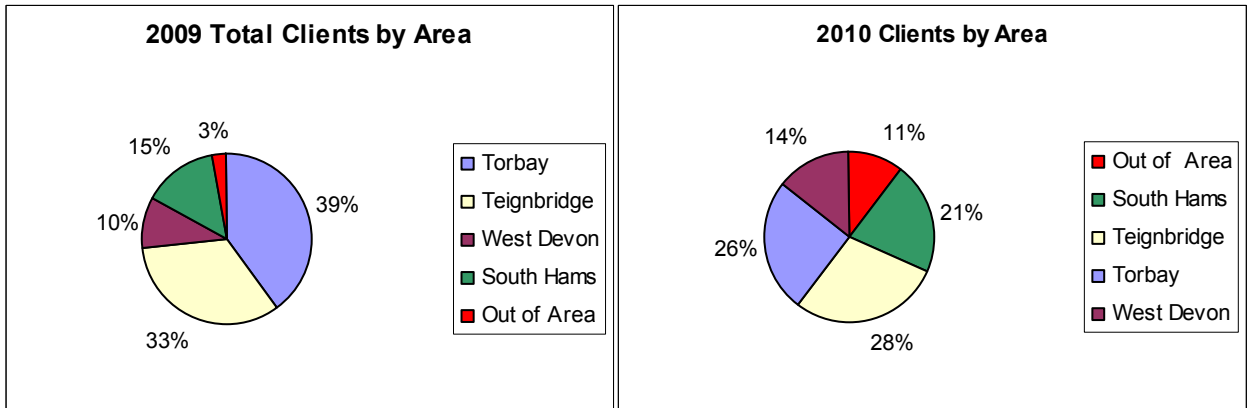
Anne Phelan
Advocate
West Devon
(8 hours)



Julie Bevan
Advocate
Torbay
(12 hours)

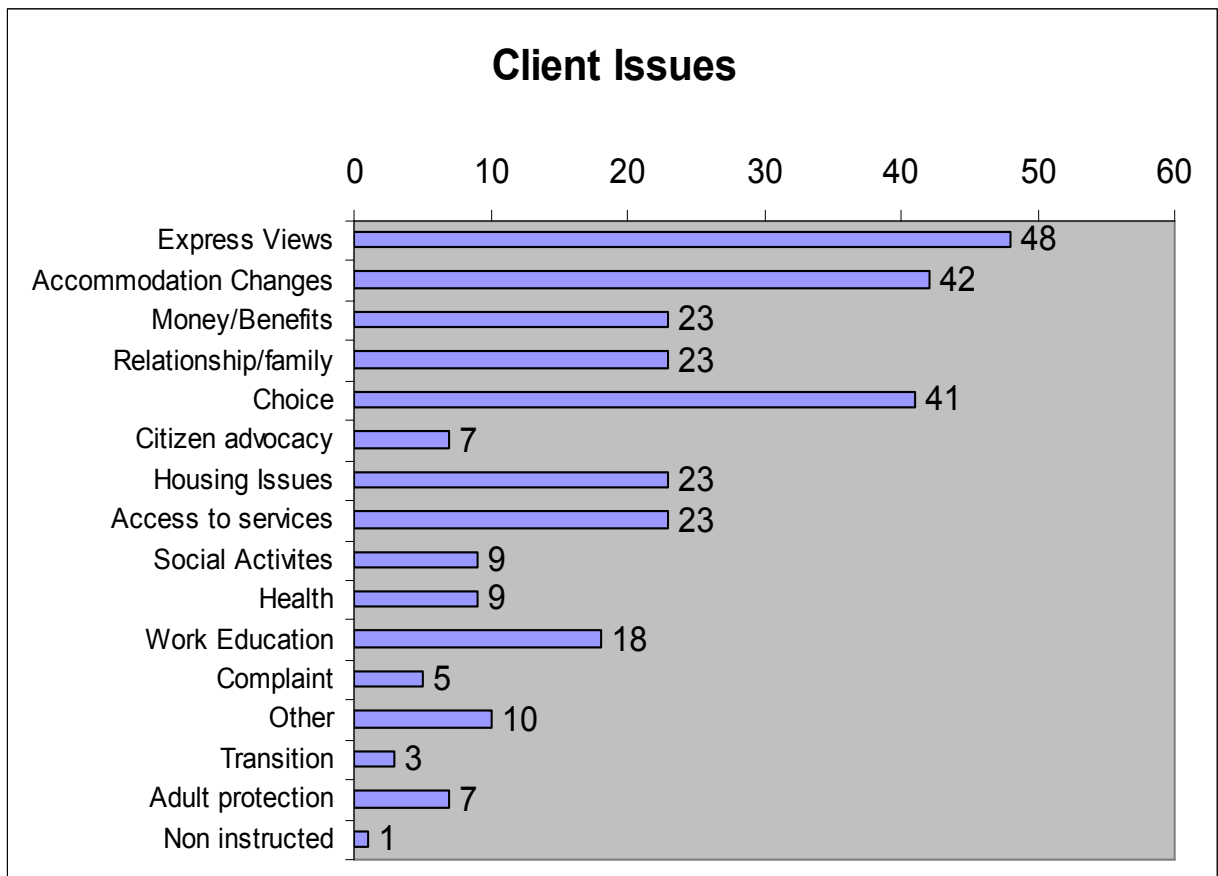
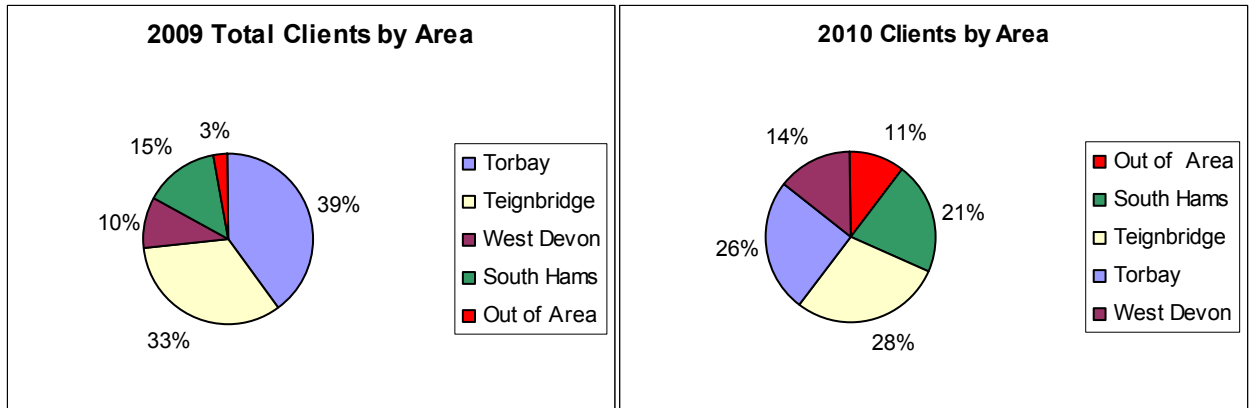
Statistics

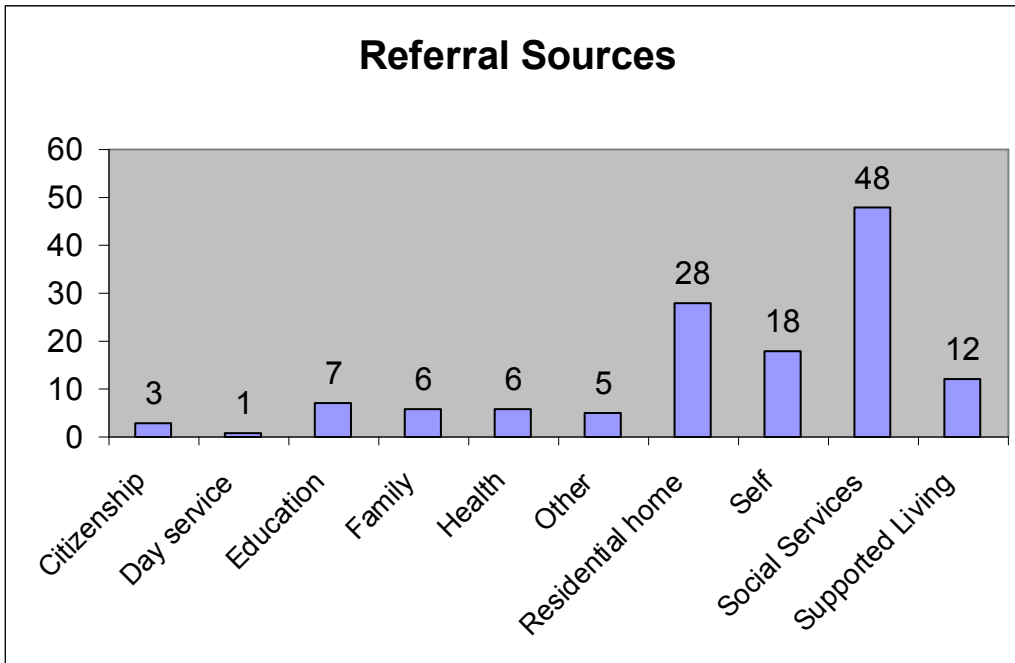
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- ◆ 66 New referrals
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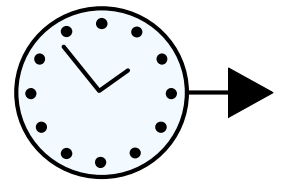




Client Feedback 2010

Did we help you?		Yes 92.5%		No 7.5%
Did we explain everything clearly?		Yes 92.5%		No 7.5%
Would you ask for help again?		Yes 92.5%		No 7.5%
Would you recommend vocal to a friend?		Yes 92.5%		No 7.5%

The Future

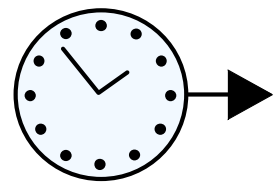


VOCAL aims to achieve the following within the next three years:

- ◆ The continued delivery of independent advocacy for individuals with communication difficulties and / or learning difficulties across South and West Devon.
- ◆ Endeavour to achieve a sound financial base
- ◆ Develop service user involvement within Vocal
- ◆ Advocates trained in specialist areas of expertise.
- ◆ Continue training and development of advocates to enable delivery of an excellent service
- ◆ The continued recruitment, training and support of volunteer advocates.
- ◆ Identify areas of growth for advocacy around the personalisation agenda and other areas.



The Future



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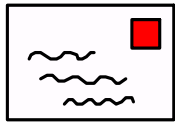
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Members meeting in Tavistock

Contact Details



Vocal Advocacy
Room D8
Foxhole
Dartington Estate
Totnes
TQ9 6EB



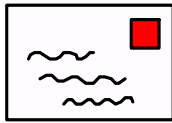
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