



Swansea Bay University Health Board
Annual Report
1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023



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1. Executive summary

This report presents the Guardians' Annual Report for the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023 and provides an overview of the activity and themes that took place during this period.

- Staff raised 88 concerns to the FTSU Guardians. This is a slight increase on the previous year where 74 cases were reported.
- The two most common themes for new concerns were System and Process (29), Management Concern (24).
- There were five Patient Safety concerns raised which were escalated to the Director of Workforce. The response to the concerns, which were escalated as 'Red' was very prompt and a response actioned immediately.
- The job groups that raised the most concerns were Nursing and Midwifery (40%), followed by Administrative and Clerical (18%) and those who did not confirm their role (13.5%).
- Mental Health and Learning Disabilities and Morriston Delivery Unit are the directorates with the highest number of concerns. This should not be viewed negatively but as recognition that staff are comfortable to speak up.
- 22.73% of staff gave permission for their concern to be escalated and 77.27% asked for their concern to remain confidential.
- Most staff chose to speak to The Guardian Service because they had raised the concern before and had either not been listened to or nothing had been done or were fearful of reprisal (42%) followed by that they believed that they would not be listened to (24%).
- The Guardians have continued to meet regularly with OD, monthly with the Director of Workforce and OD, bi-monthly with the Chair and Independent Board member; to discuss emerging themes. No identifiable data is shared without explicit permission from a staff member.

2. Background to Freedom to Speak Up

Following the Francis Inquiry¹ 2013 and 2015, the NHS launched 'Freedom to Speak Up' (FTSU). The aim of this initiative was to foster an open and responsive environment and culture throughout the NHS enabling staff to feel confident to speak up when things go or may go wrong; a key element to ensure a safe and effective working environment. In Wales the initiative is called "Raising Concerns".

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-of-the-mid-staffordshire-nhs-foundation-trust-public-inquiry>

3. The Guardian Service

The Guardian Service Limited (GSL) is an independent and confidential staff liaison service. It was established in 2013 by the National NHS Patient Champion in response to The Francis Report. The Guardian Service provides staff with an independent, confidential 24/7 service to raise concerns, worries or risks in their workplace. It covers patient care and safety, whistleblowing, bullying, harassment, and work grievances. We work closely with the National Guardian Office (NGO) and attend the FTSU workshops, regional network meetings and FTSU conferences. The Guardian Service is advertised throughout the SBUHB as an independent organisation. This encourages staff to speak up freely and without fear of reprisal.

The Guardian Service Ltd (GSL) was implemented in May 2019.

Communication and marketing have been achieved by meeting with senior staff members, joining team meetings, site visits, the Intranet and the distribution of flyers and posters across the organisation. All new staff will become aware of the Guardian Service when undertaking the organisational induction programme.

4. Access and Independence

Being available and responsive to staff are key factors in the operation of the service. Many staff members, when speaking to a Guardian, have emphasised that a deciding factor in their decision to speak up and contacting GSL was that the Guardians are not SBUHB employees and are external to the Health Board.

With the appointment of Dafydd Owen the service has been available bilingually which has been taken up in at least two occasions where the contact preferred to be supported via that language medium.

5. Categorisation of Calls and Agreed Escalation Timescales

The following timescales have been agreed and form part of the Service Level Agreement.

Call Type	Description	Agreed Escalation Timescales
Red	Includes patient and staff safety, safeguarding, danger to an individual including self-harm.	Response required within 12 hours
Amber	Includes bullying, harassment, and staff safety.	Response required within 48 hours
Green	General grievances e.g., a change in work conditions.	Response required within 72 hours
White	No discernible risk to organisation.	No organisational response required

Open cases are continually monitored, and regular contact is maintained by the Guardian with members of staff who have raised a concern to establish where ongoing support continues to be required. This can be via follow up phone calls and/or face to face meetings with staff who are in a situation where they feel they cannot escalate an issue

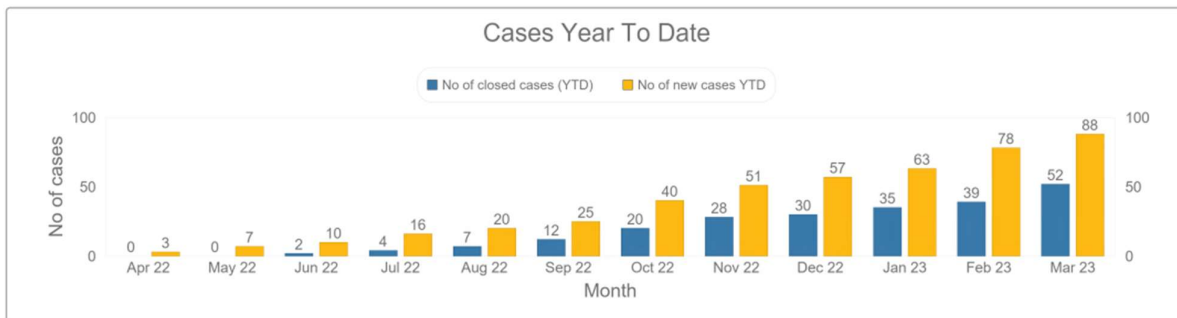
for fear of reprisal. Guardians will also maintain contact until the situation is resolved or the staff member is satisfied that no further action is required. Where there is a particular complex case, setbacks or avoidable delays in the progress of cases that have been escalated, these would be raised with the organisational lead for the Guardian Service at regular monthly meetings.

Escalated cases are cases which are referred to an appropriate manager, at the request of the employee, to ensure that appropriate action can be taken. As not all employees want their manager to know they have contacted the GSL, they either progress the matter themselves or take no further action. There are circumstances where cases are escalated at a later date by the Guardian. A staff member may take time to consider options and decide a course of action that is right for them. A Guardian will keep a case open and continue to support staff in such cases. In a few situations contact with the Guardian is not maintained by the staff member.

6. Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to share the continued progress, development and evaluation of the service and recommendations from the Raising Concern Guardians for the period 1 March 2022 to 31 March 2023. The paper must be considered in light of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic, its impact over the last 12 months, the renewal of the contract for another 12 months from November 2022 which was made in order to continue to provide an additional avenue to support staff during the most challenging of times.

7. Number of concerns raised



There have been 88 (74 last year and 66 & 91 in previous years) concerns raised by staff during the period of this report.

Contact has been made from staff to the Raising Concerns Guardians via email (763), telephone (428) and face to face visits (344). In 2021 the figures were 606, 337 and 254 while in 2020 the figures were 1441, 471 and 254 and in 2019 the figures were 906, 1493 and 152 respectively. While the use of Microsoft Teams remains a useful method of engagement there is no doubt that the easing of pandemic restrictions has increased the number of “in person” engagements.

As was suggested in last year’s Annual Report planning was underway to bring about a return to sites which was implemented during the year with 145 promotions/visits or briefings during the year. The support of the SBUHB staff at all levels to assist this has been greatly appreciated.

With the easing of the pandemic restrictions there has been several requests for visits to some specific areas of the Health Board.

In addition, the Mental Health and Learning Disabilities directorate made the decision on October to allow the Guardian Service access at any time to all their facilities without restriction a decision that has also recently been taken up by Singleton/Neath Port Talbot Hospitals.

8. Confidentiality

While there has been a small increase in the number of concerns that have been prepared to be escalated this still remains lower that it is hoped would be the case. This may show that there is still a level of fear about being identified in the organisation. It is to be hoped that the current “Big Conversation” will further break down those barriers and allow the figure to increase as this does seem to be the case in concerns raised in 2023.

Confidentiality	No. of concerns	Percentage
Keep it confidential within Guardian Service remit	68	77.27%
Permission to escalate with names	6	6.82%
Permission to escalate anonymously	14	15.91%
Total	88	100.00%

9. Themes

Concerns raised are broken down into the following categories;

Themes	No. of concerns raised		Percentage	
	01/04/22-31/03/23	Previous 12 months	01/04/22-31/03/23	Previous 12 months
Patient safety	6	2	7%	3%
Management Concern	24	27	27%	36%
System and Process	29	13	33%	18%
Bullying and Harassment	6	6	7%	8%
Discrimination and Inequality	3	2	4%	3%
Behavioral / Relationship	10	22	11%	30%
Worker Safety	1	1	1%	1%
Other	9	1	10%	1%
TOTAL	88	74	100%	100%

10. Trends in Cases

There is no doubt that the easing of the pandemic restrictions allied to the opening of areas of the health board to the Guardians has resulted in an increase in engagement both of concerns and access to information. The Guardians have been encouraged to have a presence in areas of the health board where it was felt staff may have concerns to raise; also demonstrating a commitment from managers to hear and address concerns.

11. Assessment of Themes

As you will see from the table/figures below there has been a marked increase in the concerns affecting “systems and process” which we believe reflects that considerable amount of change currently occurring in the Health Board. However there has been a marked decrease in “behavioural/relationship” concerns which maybe a by-product of the Big Conversation.

While the increase in “Patient Safety/Quality” theme is higher than last year there has been no one specific theme although there is an argument which says every concern raised as an impact on at the least patient quality.

There was a requirement during the year to raise a number of RED concerns which in every case were dealt with in the contracted timescales although in some instances work is still ongoing to rectify some of the issues raised.

The System and Process concerns relate to job roles (8) and service delivery (19). The “other” theme relates to concerns raised from staff that do not fall within the above categories, i.e. request for information about policies or what happens if entering the “Respect and Resolution” framework or to review options. It should be noted that whilst a concern may have more than one theme, only the main theme is recorded.

Whenever a contact is made, we always suggest to staff (if they are members) to make contact with their Trade Unions to ensure that staff are aware of all the options available to them. To re-confirm, The Guardian Service does not intervene in formal Employee Relations Cases, however, it is important to share feedback received in listening to staff as part of initial scoping of a concern as well as providing emotional support.

The outcome of the bullying and harassment concerns raised that are **closed**:

Outcome of bullying and harassment concerns raised	Number		Percentage	
	12 months	Previous 12 months	12 months	Previous 12 months
Informally resolved with Guardian support	2	3	34%	50%
Decided not to take forward	3	3	50%	50%
Resignation	1		16%	0 %
TOTAL	6	6	100%	100%

The contacts follow a similar pattern to last year and again it was possible to help staff avoid engaging in a formal process, by empowering them to raise the issue themselves, while the service provided ongoing support. It should be noted here that the Respect and Resolution Policy has made improvements to the process with the mediation option being helpful in certain “softer” cases.

12. Statistical Graphs

Concerns raised by Directorate

As there were some realignments of Directorates during the year the comparison is not quite “like for like” but does clearly show where the “hotspots” are with Morriston bearing the brunt of the concerns either by way of the Delivery or Service Unit. The level of concerns from Mental Health and Learning disabilities is as expected with their “open door” approach.

There was a number of concerns raised by staff who did not disclose their location - “not confirmed” - this year which was the highest it has ever been. The board may wish to consider the reasons for this; whilst it is likely linked to the reasons why staff use the service. It can also be interpreted that without access to a service where staff can control the level of personal information they disclose they may not feel able to raise the concern.

Directorate	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/22-31/03/2023	Previous 12 months	01/04/22-31/03/2023	Previous 12 months
Morriston Delivery Unit	24	25	27%	34%
Singleton Delivery Unit	1	10	1%	13.5%
Neath Port Talbot Delivery Unit	1	7	1%	9.5%
Primary & Community Services Delivery Unit	6	8	7%	11%
Mental Health & Learning Disabilities	21	5	24%	6.5%
Informatics	1	5	2%	6.5%
Morriston Service Group	13		15%	
HQ	2	5	2%	6.5%
Digital Services	1	0	1%	0%
Singleton & Neath Port Talbot Service Group	6	0	7%	
Corporate Nursing		1		1.5%
Corporate Governance		3		4.5%
Estates & Ancillary	1	4	1%	5.5%
Not confirmed	11	1	13%	1.5%
TOTALS	88	74	100%	100%

Concerns raised by Job Group

There is little change at all from last year although there has been a marked increase in those who have preferred not to identify their staff group. In most of these the reluctance has been due to fears of being identified due to the size of workforces in those areas.

Staff Groups	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/21-31/03/2022	Previous 12 months	01/04/21-31/03/2022	Previous 12 months
Additional Clinical Services	9	9	10.25%	10.5%
Additional Professional Services	2	1	2.25%	1.25%
Administrative and Clerical	16	17	18%	24%
Allied Health Professional	6	5	7%	8%
Medical and Dental	3	2	3.5%	2.5%
Nursing and Midwifery Registered	35	32	40%	44%
Estates and Ancillary	1	7	1%	8.5%
Healthcare Scientists	0	0	0	0%
Role not confirmed	12	1	13.5%	1.25%
Students	4		4.5%	
TOTAL	88	74	100%	100%

13. Why do staff use The Guardian Service?

The figures this year remain remarkably similar to last year with staff believing that they have raised the concern before but have not been listened to / nothing has been done/no action taken. The figures would suggest that the organization has much work to do dealing with long standing issues that maybe due to the pandemic have not been addressed. The introduction of the “Just Culture” initiative during the year and then the follow on of the “Big Conversation with the CEO commitment often noted by the staff and this may assist in lowering this figure over the next year.

Reason	Number		Percentage	
	01/04/21-31/03/2022	Previous 12 months	01/04/20-31/03/20	Previous 12 months
Fear of damage to career	6	3	4.5%	4.5%
Fear of losing job	0	5	7%	7%
Fear of reprisal	6	4	5.5%	5.5%
Believe they will not be listened to	26	18	24%	24%
Believe the organization will not take action	22	13	17%	17%
Have raised the concern before but have not been listened to / nothing has been done	28	31	42%	42%
TOTALS	88	74	100%	100%

14. Action taken to improve the Freedom to Speak Up Culture

Action taken to address themes.

- While matters have improved since last year’s Annual Report the timescales often involved in resolving formal processes often cause staff great anguish and speedy

resolution should remain a priority. There has also been a number of instances this year where we have been required to provide a high level of emotional support (as we are not able to provide anything else once a formal process has been started) as the level of support/engagement from Line Management has been almost non-existent.

- There is no doubt that that many staff, even though they may be going through a formal process, value the Service as it gives them a safe space to vocalise their feelings/emotions as the Guardians have time to give them. While during the pandemic this was especially prevalent there has been no reduction since emerging from the pandemics.
- The Raising Concerns Guardians have on a number of occasions been able to provide staff with information on the options available to them in taking forward their concern, offering safe, independent listening without judgement, highlighting the benefit of engagement with Line Management and even a facilitated meeting if that would be helpful. We always suggest that if members of a Trade Union they should make contact with the applicable Trade Union thereby ensuring that they have explored all the options open to them before deciding what (if any) action they propose to take.
- There is no doubt that a reported benefit where cases have closed, is that the individual concerned has felt enabled and empowered to raise and take forward their concerns themselves by ensuring they have as much information as possible as to their options without engaging in a formal process.
- One area of concern remains the often insensitive approach taken to suspending staff where often there is no rationale given for the action being taken, While accepting this is a difficult area because of the issues often involved the fact that often staff are sent home without any information as to why the action has been taken is challenging for the staff involved. This added to the often very limited engagement from management after the event to check on wellbeing etc. does mean that there is a real danger of a mental health impact.

Communication and escalation

- For approximately half the year it was not possible for the Raising Concerns Guardians to attend meetings and events in person including the monthly staff inductions to brief staff about the service. The Service was included as part of the virtual induction and a series of online sessions were made available for staff across a range of days/times. Once it was permissible Guardians have made a limited return to site with sessions in Block D at NPT, the Library at Morriston and the Chapel at Singleton. A redesign of posters etc was implemented during the year and coincided with the removal of constraints on visiting sites which resulted in an increase in referrals. The support of the Health Boards Wellbeing Team is greatly appreciated.
- The Raising Concerns Guardians become empathetic listeners when a staff member wishes to share their experiences. However, as per our mandate we do not become involved in any internal disciplinary or respect and resolution process.

Staff are informed of our position at the outset as well as advised that in order to make a decision, they should consider all options including speaking with their Trade Union if applicable. However, Raising Concerns Guardians are available to listen in these situations and thereby promote the Speaking Up culture. The anecdotal evidence is that staff have really appreciated the CEO's commitment to the "Big Conversation" with the opportunity to speak with him directly being something that staff value. The situation with regard to the interaction with the Trade Unions has improved slightly over the year with engagement at a number of "Wellbeing Sessions" proving beneficial to both parties when this has occurred. The Service would positively encourage "working together" with all Trade Unions as it can only be beneficial for the staff.

- Monthly meetings are held with the Director of Workforce & Organisational Development to talk through the monthly activity reports which includes themes and outcome of cases. No individual can be identified by the report, therefore keeping staff members' confidentiality, which is essential and a contractual obligation. It has been agreed that on a quarterly basis these will return to F2F sessions. Eight-weekly meetings have been held with the Chair of the Health Board along with the Chair of the Workforce and OD Sub-Committee and both of their commitment to the Service is clear.

A visit by the Raising Concerns Guardians Operational Manager in March gave an opportunity to brief the CEO about the Service which was without doubt beneficial.

- Throughout the pandemic there were regular virtual meetings with our Liaisons, Julie Lloyd and Kay Myatt which continue on a 3-week cycle to ensure that any issues are discussed/resolved. During the year the Liaison Officer changed to Natalie Mills who has brought a different view to our activities with considerable success in gaining us access to specific areas. We have also regularly engaged with Leads for the BAME Network and Calon throughout the year as well as meeting with the Lead regarding the "Just Culture" work when they were in post.
- During the year there have been specific engagements in areas of concern after discussion with Management in the following areas:
 - AMU – Morriston
 - ED – Morriston
 - Mental Health & Learning Disabilities – Caswell Clinic
- As a general rule we have made every effort to close cases as quickly as possible but some cases will remain open for as long as staff members require support. We have made a real effort to improve this rate by instigating regular "case review" meetings with our Line Management which has borne dividend.

15. Learning and Improvements

- The Raising Concerns Guardians attend fortnightly (increased activity since the start of the pandemic) Guardian Service meetings where difficult concerns raised are discussed, peer support and learning gained, and good practice shared. Again, confidentiality is always held, and no individual is identified.

- During the year the Guardians have a minimum of one six monthly supervision sessions with an external Psychologist to consider any difficult cases as well as their own mental/emotional wellbeing although this individual is available at anytime for support.
- As the Guardian Service has clients across a number of English NHS Trusts, we are in a position to compare and contrast best practice approaches (while acknowledging the difference approaches in the Home Countries) in respect to policy, service implementation and organisational response. This enabled a number of promotional ideas/videos to be shared where applicable.
- During the year work has been undertaken to adapt the National Guardian Offices “Reflection & Planning Tool” document for use in Wales and this will be one of the early aims in the first six months to get completed. This will enable a clear vision to be had as to where things are currently which will be very helpful with the retendering process underway.
- Regular contact is made with the SBUHB network groups although they have been subject to considerable change over the past year as well as with the Mental Health Champion.
- On a quarterly basis Debbie Rees-Adams joins our 3 weekly meeting with KM/NM/JG to ensure that all areas providing support are aware of each other’s activities which has proved very helpful in identifying “hotspots”.
- Whilst the concerns raised did not have a specific concerns relating to Patient Safety it should be remembered that the Francis Report revealed that overall patient outcome was diminished as a result of cultures and practices. The themes other than ‘Patient Safety’ can provide an insight to the cultures and practices. In his letter to the Sec of State for Health Sir Robert in relation to his review stated:
“....It did not listen sufficiently to its patients and staff or ensure the correction of deficiencies brought to the Trust’s attention. Above all, it failed to tackle an insidious negative culture involving a tolerance of poor standards and a disengagement from managerial and leadership responsibilities. This failure was in part the consequence of allowing a focus on reaching national access targets, achieving financial balance and seeking foundation trust status to be at the cost of delivering acceptable standards of care.”

16. Comments & Recommendations

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 situation continued to impact on the plans that we had jointly developed last year to develop the Service in the early part of the year. With the increased opportunity to return to site, along with the increased engagement from certain areas of the Health Board it is pleasing that we are now in a position to plan our face to face promotion of the service and propose we progress the following recommendations over the next 12 months:

- While the commitment of the Board and Executive team at Swansea Bay University Health Board to the Guardian Service has been excellent, consideration should be

given to publicising personal commitments from each member with regard to “raising concerns” in order to further cement to staff that the Board/Executive team are committed to the “Raising Concerns” Policy. This would further enhance the work being undertaken by way of the “Big Conversation”.

- A series of 1-1 meetings be arranged with each member of the Board and Executive Team to further strengthening the understanding of the Service as an agent for change working with the organisation for the betterment of staff.
- Within the first six months of the year the Board undertake an Annual Review utilising the National Guardian Office Toolkit which in England is a mandatory function but would help embed Raising Concerns further.
- The issue of staff turnover is a common theme from staff and there needs to be a concerted effort to publicise to staff the considerable extent of the efforts being undertaken to recruit new staff while ensuring that the programmes to retain and value existing staff continue. There is no doubt that the pandemic has also meant that many staff have reevaluated their lives which will have an impact on retirements etc. In respect of recruiting new staff, the perception is that the Executive Team are doing little, which we know is not the case, so there is still work to do to educate around this. We would encourage in particular a focus of A&E due to the continuing pressures.
- There has been considerable feedback on the lack of a consistent policy with regard to exit interviews with different directorates seemingly following their own guidelines/policies. On a number of occasions when staff have made the decision to leave the Health Board they have wanted to undertake an exit interview to give the organisation the opportunity to review any appropriate actions that might be applicable but this has unfortunately not happened. Whenever this has been requested on behalf of a staff member it is has been facilitated by HR but there is a concern as to whether there could be good learning opportunities being missed. To increase the take up of exit interviews, and the analysis of data obtained, consideration should be given to the Guardian Service undertaking this additional bespoke function.
- Staff continue to report that the length of time taken for formal processes to be heard is too long and exceeds the policy. Steps have been made to improve this and there is some evidence of positive impact, but it is essential that regular communication with staff to keep them updated is undertaken. This will also help encourage staff to raise any further concerns.
- A continued programme of communication and engagement sessions is required to promote the Guardian Service to all staff groups wherever they are located, as there are still areas that are not aware of the service despite the comprehensive plan undertaken so far. **The “open door” policy adopted by Mental Health and Learning Disabilities and Singleton/Neath Port Talbot Hospital’s is to be welcomed and work will continue to get that adopted for Morriston.**
- There has been much work on “Living our Values” with the introduction of the “Big Conversation” concept this year but there are clearly areas where the philosophy is

as yet not embedded, which causes issues when there is conflict between staff. Often it is clear that there is a divide between new staff who accept the values and the more established staff where there is clearly more to do. **Contacts often tell us that they have been promoted to positions with little or no experience of or training to equip them for managing staff. There have been instances where staff have intimated that they would rather take sick leave than speak up, as they believe they will not be listened to or that the Health Board will take no action.** There clearly is still a lot of work to be done to allow staff to feel they can trust the organisation and the Guardians are happy to work with the continuing initiatives that the Board have undertaken as well as assist in developing any new ones.

- In last year's report it was noted that there had been a good level of engagement from HR at certain sites and it is good to report that this has forthcoming from all areas this year – long may it continue. Our specific thanks should be noted to Julie Lloyd, Kay Myatt, Judy Goss and our new direct liaison, Natalie Mills who have always been prepared to assist whenever we have contacted them which has made our work so much easier.
- The bimonthly meetings with the Chair of OD & Workforce Sub Committee (Tom Crick) and the Chair of the Board (Emma Woollett) continue to be really valuable.
- There appears to be a lack of awareness from some line managers in the Raising Concerns process. Not all line managers see the Guardian Service as an agent to help sort issues, preferring to take a defensive approach/view. Increased engagement with the Guardians will allow managers to take a proactive approach when managing and supporting their staff. Raising Concerns should be more embedded in management training.
- The Guardian Service remains very keen to develop a working relationship with the Trade Unions and will support any measures that senior management feel appropriate as this would have a positive impact with staff. It remains disappointing that engagement remains limited as this is something that many of our colleagues in all other UK-wide Health Boards and Trusts do not encounter thereby providing an enhanced offer to staff.
- Consideration be given to formulate an action plan from these recommendations that would be discussed monthly along with the monthly reports to ensure actions are taken and progressed.

17. Staff Feedback

While a survey is sent whenever a case is closed the completion is totally voluntary. There were 52 cases closed in the year and 11 surveys were submitted which is approximately a 21% return.

Here are some examples of comments made by users of the Service who completed the survey:-

“thank goodness for the service, I’m not a member of a union so I really needed the support to be able to talk through my concerns. At times i have felt extremely upset and almost walked out of my job on many occasions. without the guardian service i would not still be working in the NHS. My heartfelt thanks to you”

“I cannot recommend the service highly enough. I would not have got through the last 2 years without”.

“The Service helped me make sense of my situation when I was at my most vulnerable. A credit to your service, Thank you”.

“I would like to thank the Service for the support, patience and time. I believe without the guardian service a child would likely been left at risk, the health board would have continued to ignore my concerns and I would of remained excluded for raising concerns, the system has now been addressed and improved, the child has been protected appropriately and I have received a formal apology. Thank you to the guardians for making the NHS safer for everyone.”

“I can honestly say that without my use of the guardian service I would not have been in work due to the stress that I was under. I was always made to feel comfortable and calm during our meetings. I will definitely advise my colleagues to access the service should they require it. many thanks”

“Sincerely thankful to The Guardian Service.”