

National Approach to Statutory Advocacy

Local Authority Report - Bridgend 2022 - 2023

Collated Annual Report

April 22 - March 23

Headline Report

During the year, 224 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 275 issues. This represents a notable increase in young people accessing IBA when compared to the previous year. Some 123 young people accessed the service for the first time, compared to 67 in the previous year. Active Offer (AO) referrals also increased significantly, more than doubling from 37 in the previous year, to 101 this year.

Active Offer

According to information received from Bridgend, 310 children and young people became eligible for the AO during the year. A total of 101 children and young people were referred, meaning that if we assume those referred became eligible in the year, 33% of those eligible were referred.

Of the 101 young people referred, 86 AO meetings took place, and 80 young people accepted the AO and went on to received IBA, 47 more than in the previous year. Children and young people in the CP arena made up 85% of those referred for AO throughout the year, compared to 84% in the previous year. AO referrals for Care Experienced young people rose from six in the previous year, to 15 this year, while referrals for those children and young people in the Child Protection (CP) area increased even further from 31 in the previous year to 86 in this year.

This year, the majority of AO referrals were for females while more males than females were referred in the previous year. While AO referrals for males increased by 15 when compared to the previous year, referrals for females increased almost fourfold, from 17 last year, to 67 this year.

The majority of young people referred for AO were aged between 6 and 11, although increases in AO referrals were observed across all categories. The largest of these was an increase of 32 referrals for young people aged between 12 and 16 when compared to the previous year.

Some 70% of young people referred for the AO received it within five working days of referral. Several visits were delayed following a long-term illness within the advocacy team. Most delays throughout the year happen when an advocate is unable to contact a parent or carer to arrange a visit. When this happens, the advocate will always contact the referrer for support in contacting the young person.

Issue Based Advocacy

For the second year running, we have observed an increase in young people accessing IBA with 224 young people being referred this year, compared to 155 in the previous year. 123 of the 224 young people referred for IBA this year were accessing advocacy for the first time, 56 more than in the previous year.

As in the previous year, most children and young people referred for IBA this year were in the CP arena and again made up over 50% of IBA referrals. We observed increases in referrals for all service areas including for young people subject to Care and Support plans and Care Leavers.

Despite an increase in referrals for both males and females this year, the gender split remains as it was in the previous year with 57% of referrals being made for females. One young person defining as gender neutral was also referred for advocacy this year.

Headline Report Cont'd

This year we observed increases in referrals for all age groups. The majority of IBA referrals continue to be made for young people aged between six and 11, although the split between this age group and the 12-16 age group is far more equal this year after referrals for young people aged 12-16 more than doubled from 40 last year, to 97 this year.

'Self-referral' continues to be the most popular route into the IBA service, followed by social services referrals. This year, self-referrals increased by 45, while social services referrals increased by ten. This can be explained by the increase of AO offers received this year, and we predict that in the previous year, some IBA referrals made by social workers should have been AO referrals. This year 26 IBA referrals were also made by third sector organisations, mostly TGP Cymru's Family Group Conferencing and Restorative Approaches Service.

This year, we implemented a change to the way we record how children and young people are supported at meetings in order to capture more data about what young people are sharing. For example, when a young person requests advocacy support at a meeting, instead of recording the issue as 'support at meetings' the advocate will record the issue as the main issue the young person would like to present at the meeting, such as contact, home life or access to services. We are still able to record advocacy attendance at meetings, but we now do this separately. This has resulted in a reduction of 'support at meetings' issues but will tell us more about what issues young people want to discuss both in and out of meetings.

This year, the most popular issue young people wanted support with was contact, this being raised 70 times, although if we combine issues relating to where young people live; placement and homelife, these were raised 108 times throughout the year. Due to the increase in contact issues, this year we have amended our recording system which has enabled us to access more detailed data about who young people want to spend their time with. In quarters three and four, most young people raising contact issues were requesting to spend more time with a family member, although a significant number of young people also requested to spend less time with a family member or stop seeing them altogether.

This year, 'support at meetings' was the main issue 50 times, however, advocates supported children and young people to share wishes and feelings at 166 meetings, 84 of which they attended all or part of in person. The meetings were made up of mostly Child Protection Case Conferences, Core Group meetings, CLA Reviews and Family Group Meetings.

During the year, 74% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of the IBA referral being made.

Residential Visiting Advocacy (RVA)

Face-to-face visiting advocacy continues in Sunnybank on a monthly basis.

We are currently in the process of conducting a review of our RVA service and have sent out surveys to all LA community homes in CTM. The surveys focus on RVA service promotion as well as asking more general questions about systems the homes already have in place to support young people to raise issues and complaints, as well as to share positive experiences. When the surveys have been returned, we plan on consulting with young people before making appropriate changes to ensure the RVA service is working as effectively as possible for young people living in community homes across Cwm Taf.

At the beginning of March, the Advocacy team manager met with Daniel Bolton the Principal Officer/Responsible Individual for Children's residential services to talk about RVA. A plan was made to look at complaints as part of the RVA review process and re-establishing RVA in Bakers Way and Harwood House. We have contacted those individuals suggested by Dan and are currently awaiting a response to discuss how they would like to proceed.

Service Information

CAFCASS and the Advocacy Providers have recently developed a joint protocol, which provides a framework to encourage a strong working relationship between advocates and guardians, explaining the differences in roles and responsibilities alongside examples of shared principles. A short event to launch the protocol was held in January and attended by the Advocacy team manager as well as TGP Cymru's Director of Advocacy Services.

Advocacy quarterly progress reports have been presented at Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board (CPB). TGP Cymru agreed to produce a separate report specifically for the CPB which will ensure accurate and appropriate information about advocacy take-up within the Bridgend Care Experienced and Care Leaver population only is shared. The Advocacy team manager attended the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Pledge event in March. We made the promise that:

"Care experienced children and young people in Bridgend, along with care leavers, are able to access good quality and responsive advocacy services at a time and place that suits them."

This promise will be written into the new Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy.

TGP Cymru continue to be responsible for facilitating young people's participation and consultation groups in Bridgend, now called Bridgend Youth Voice Forum, or 'BYV' Forum. The aim of the group is to allow care experienced young people and care leavers to have a voice in wider Bridgend forums, including the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board.

Unfortunately, one of our team members has been struggling with a long-term illness, and as a result of medical advice has had to make the very difficult decision to resign with immediate effect. We will shortly be going to recruitment to cover this gap and address the increase in referrals we have recently observed.

Two new recruits, an Independent Visitor (IV) Coordinator and a casual Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) have joined the team in quarter four. The IV Coordinator is currently working 30 hours per week and is employed to coordinate the IV service across both Cwm Taf Morgannwg and Mid and West Wales. We are hopeful that by combining the posts, we will be able to pool resources and grow this service area.

In recent months, advocates have reported difficulty in obtaining feedback for young people when they have sent wishes and feelings reports to some social workers. On receipt of referral, social workers are made aware that the expectation is that the recipient of any wishes and feelings report will respond to the young person's wishes and feelings and the advocate will then visit the young person again to discuss the response. The lack of response, as well as being frustrating for the young person, also adversely affects the capacity of the advocate as it can mean some young people's cases are open longer than they need to be.

Young People's Feedback

After meeting as a team to discuss making it as easy as possible for young people to evaluate the service they have received from TGP Cymru, we are in the process of implementing more options for young people to do so and we hope to see a further increase in the number of young people providing feedback after a slight increase in forms received in quarter four.

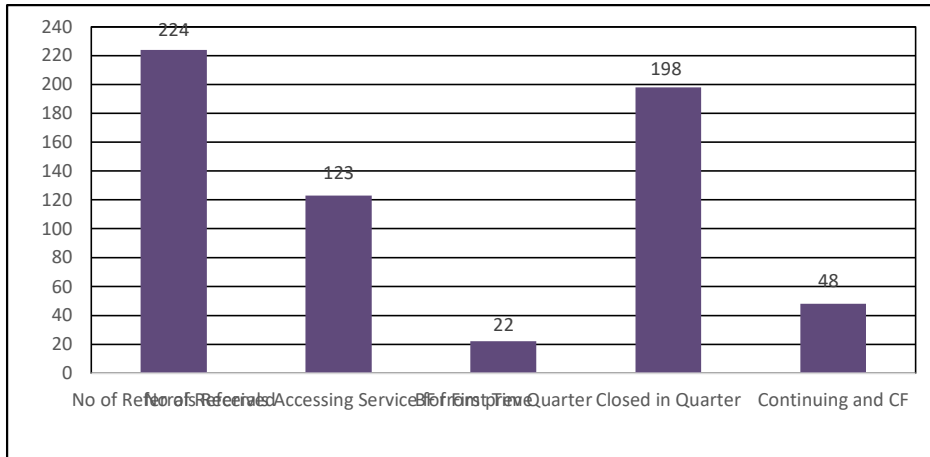
Young people can scan a QR code which allows them to fill in a short questionnaire about the advocacy service on their own mobile phones. Advocates carry this code with them, and they are also sent to young people following the end of a piece of work. A paper copy of the feedback form is also sent by the Quality Assurance Officer at the end of a piece of work along with a Freepost envelope. Young people can either post the form, scan the code or take a picture of the filled in form and email or text it to the service. From quarter four on, advocates will also carry the Freepost envelopes with them in case a young person wants to fill in the form during the final or closing visit. Advocates are also encouraged to remind young people their thoughts and opinions about the service they receive are very important to TGP Cymru and they are welcome to share them in whichever way they feel comfortable.

Feedback from the 14 young people who completed the consultation forms throughout the year has been overwhelmingly positive with all 14 saying they would use the service again.

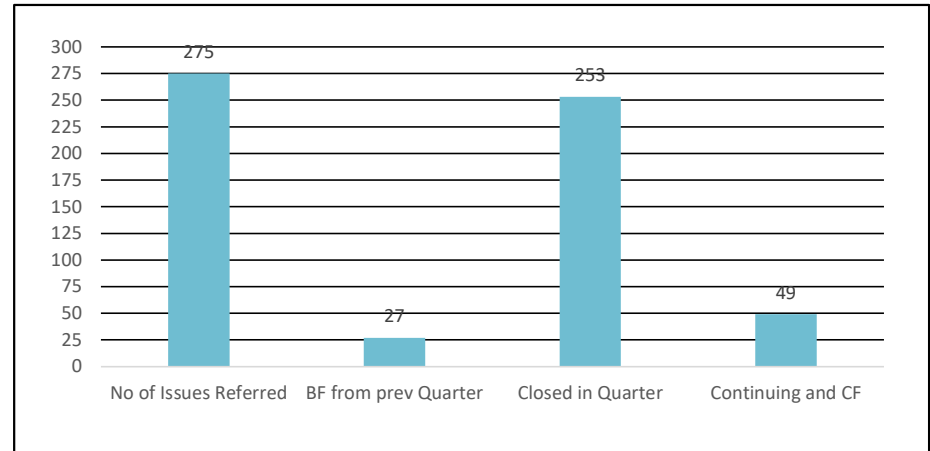
When explaining how advocacy made her feel more included in decisions, one young person said:

"I know my voice matters"

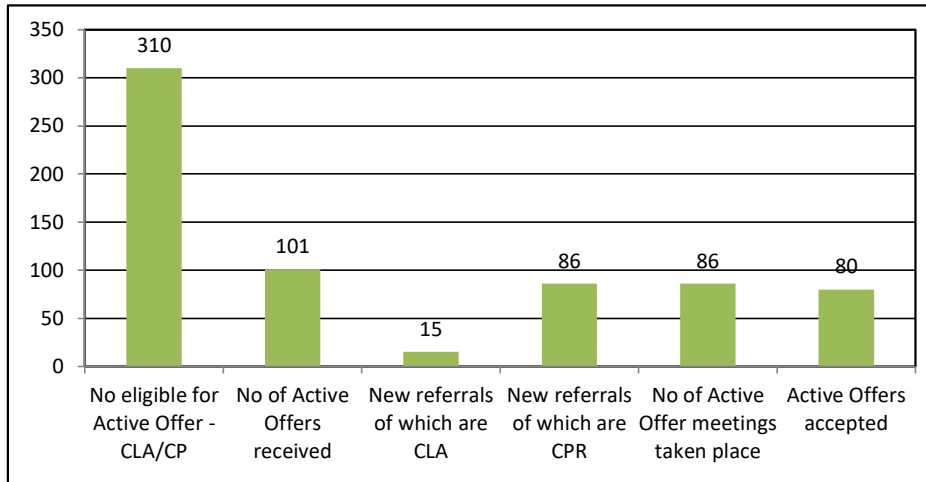
1a. Advocacy Cases - Young People - Issue Based Advocacy



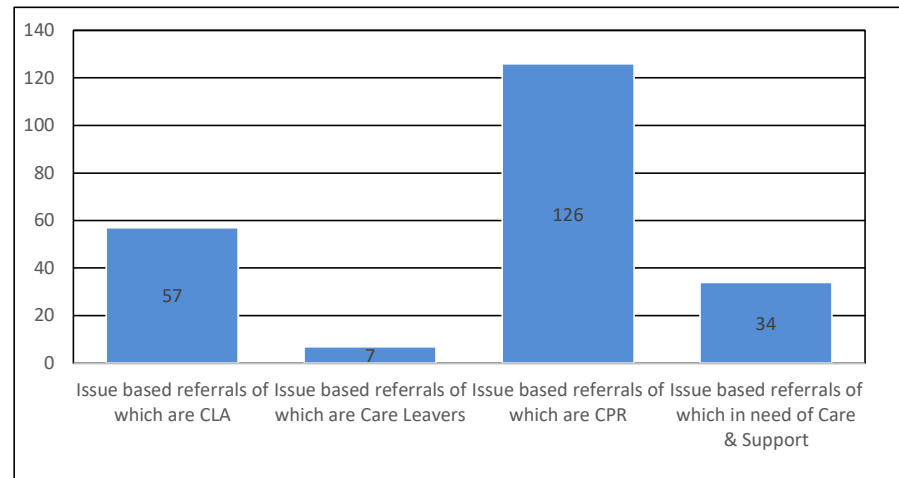
1b. Advocacy Cases - Interventions - Issue Based Advocacy



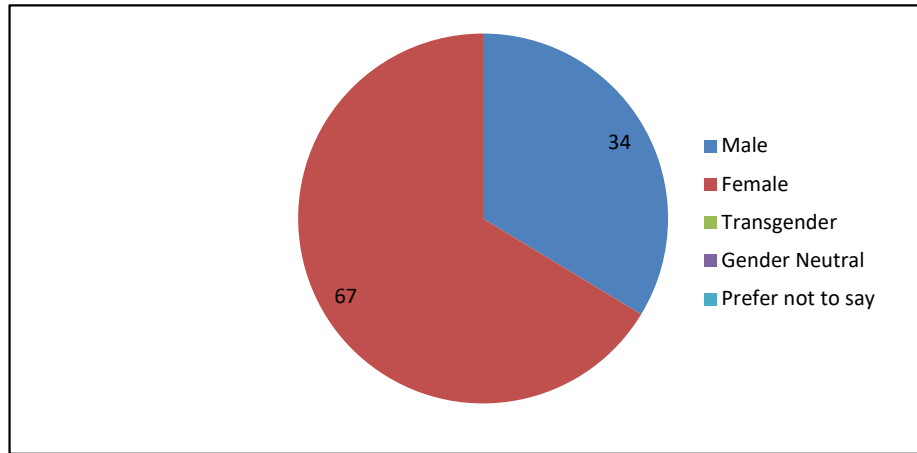
2a. Eligibility Criteria: Active Offer



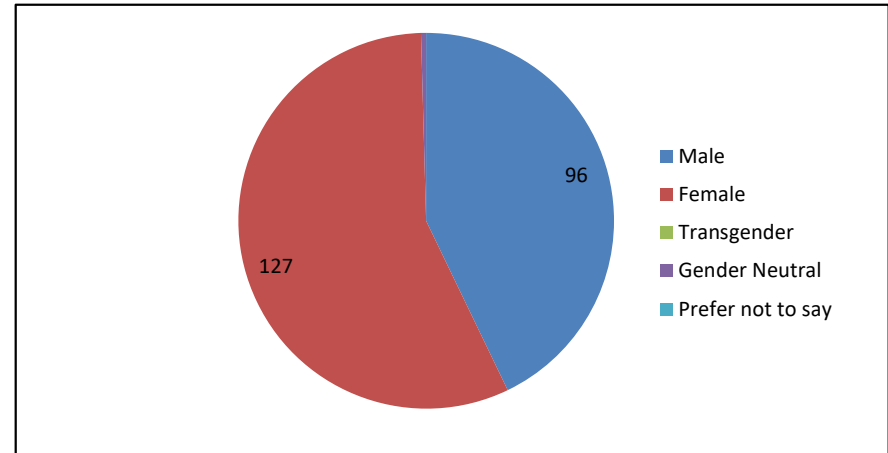
2b. Eligibility Criteria: Issue Based



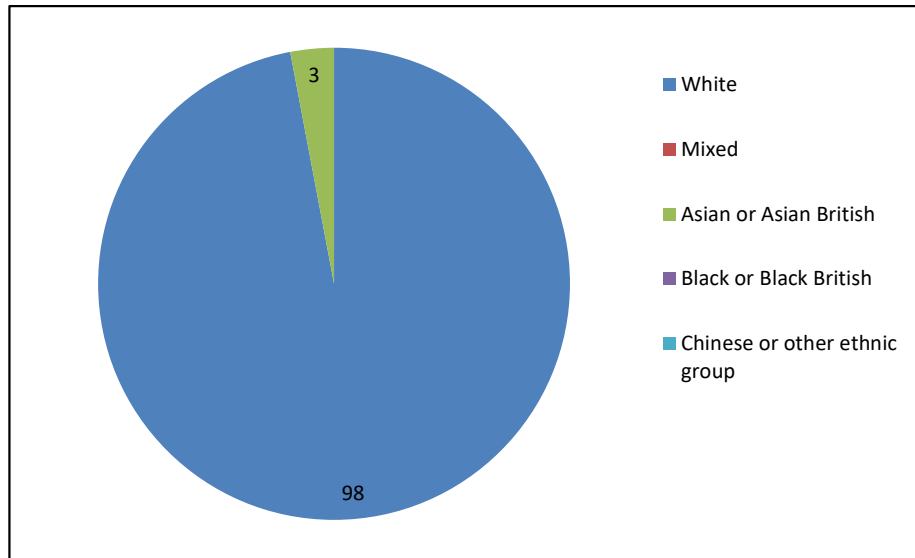
3a. Demographics: Gender - Active Offer



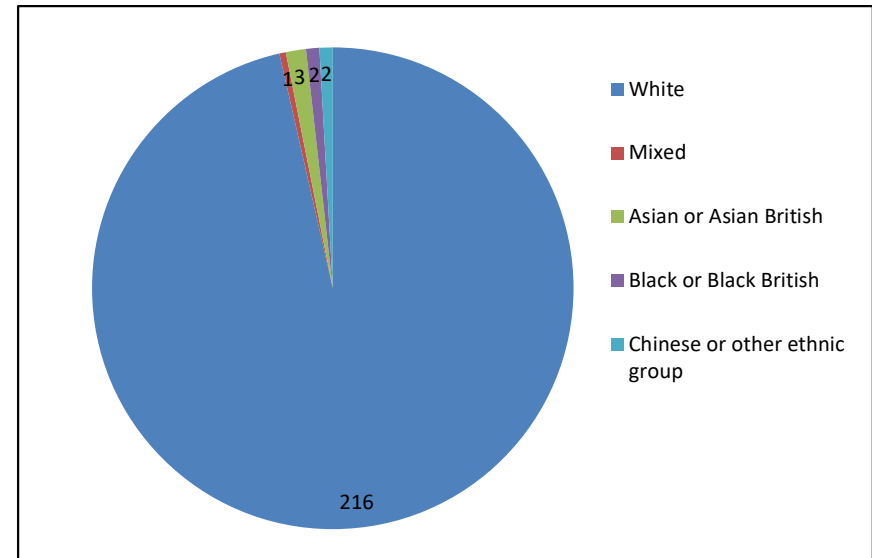
3b. Demographics: Gender - Issue Based



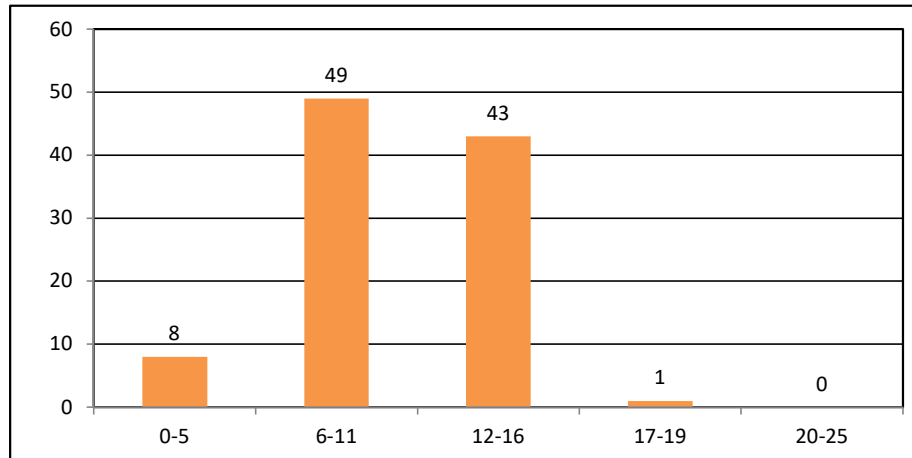
3c. Demographics: Ethnicity - Active Offer



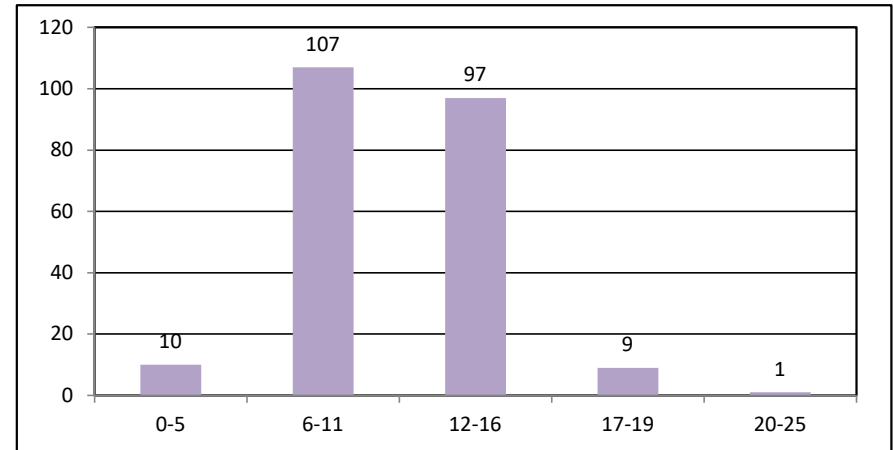
3d. Demographics: Ethnicity - Issue Based



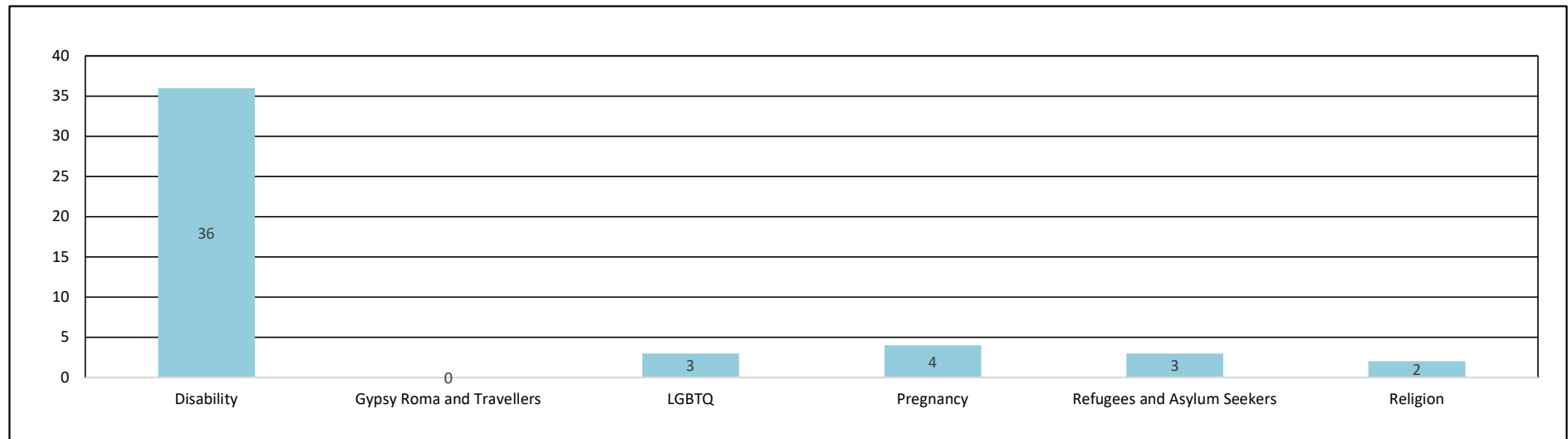
3e. Demographics: Age - Active Offer



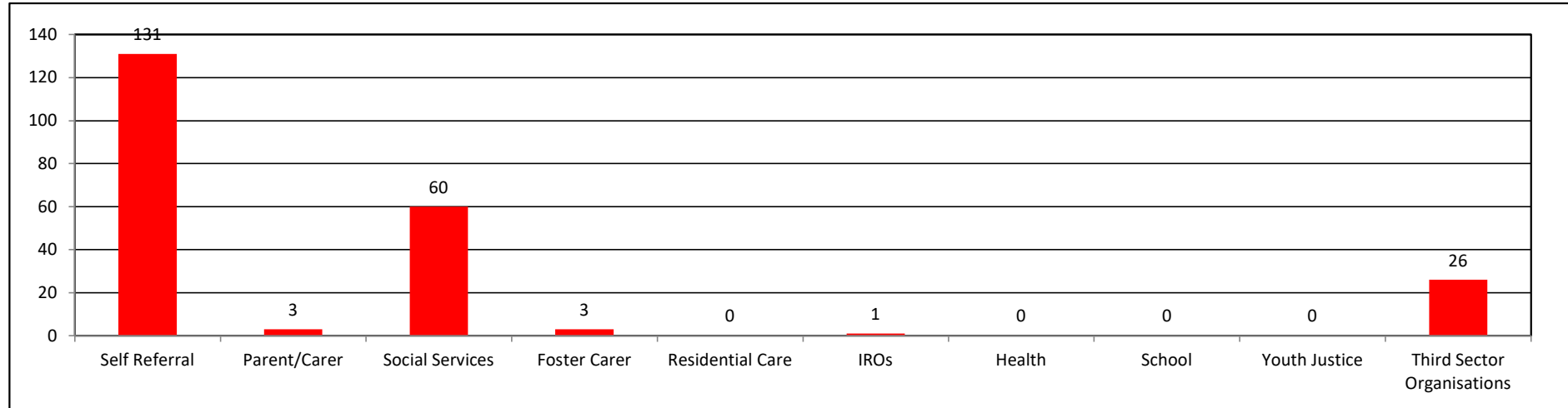
3f. Demographics: Age - Issue Based



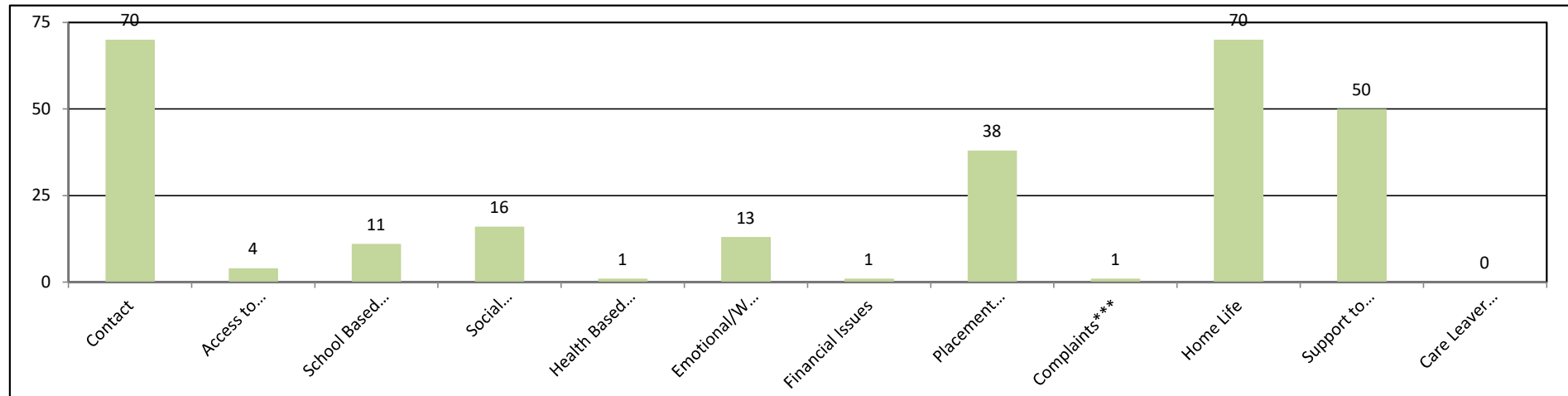
4. Protected Characteristics



5. Referral Source per young person - Issue Based only



6. Issues Presented

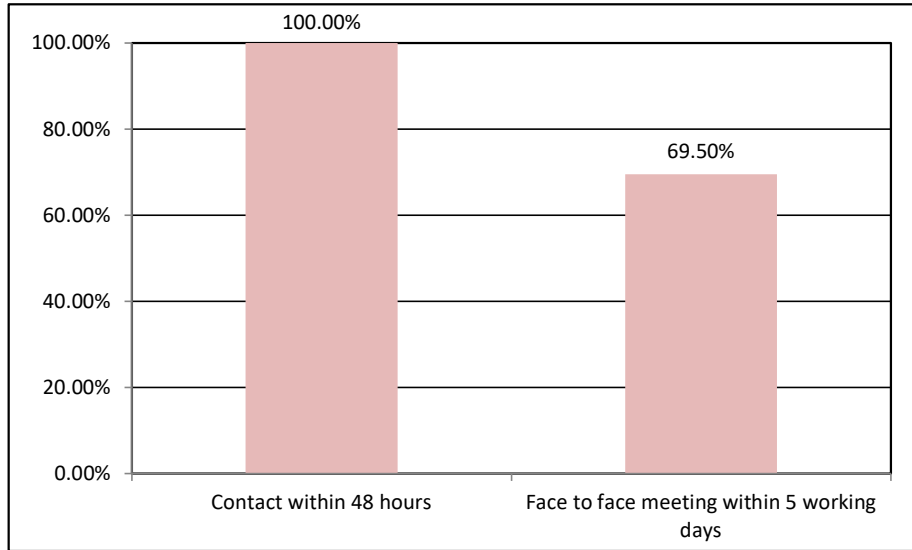


* School based issues including: SEN/ALN, exclusions, bullying, transport.

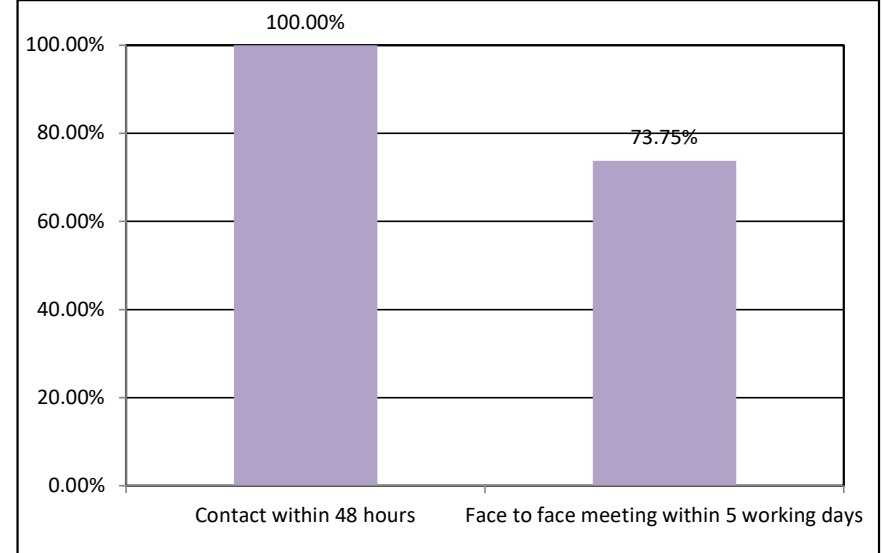
** Social Services based issues including: relationship with worker, care plan, service provided.

*** Complaints refer to any complaints made against statutory services, including Social Service, Police, Health, YJS

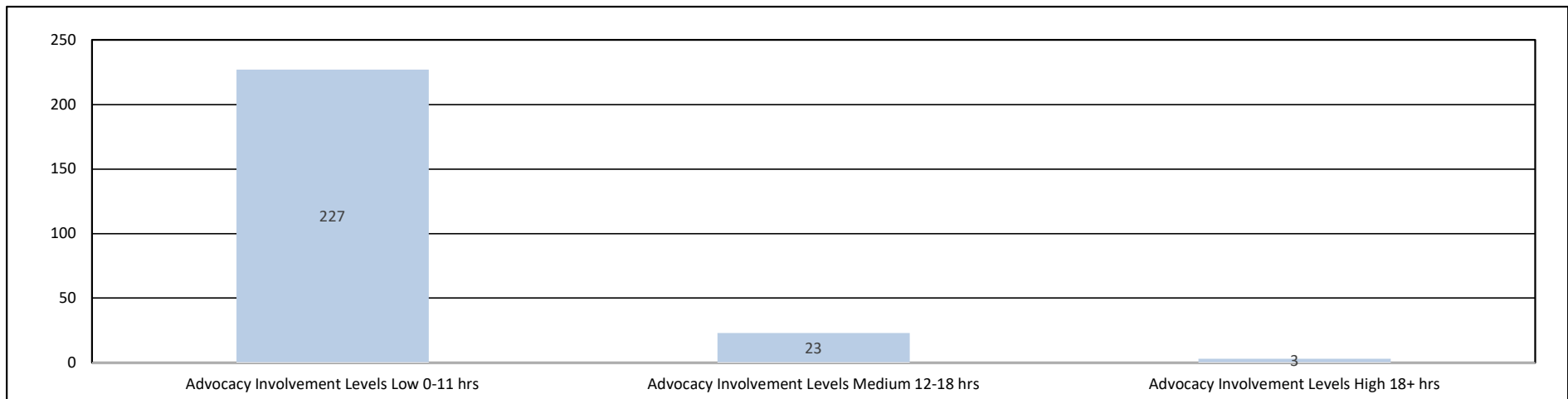
7. Service Performance - Active Offer



Service Performance - Issue Based



8. Level of Advocacy Intervention at point of Issue Closure



9.Outcomes: linked to The National Advocacy Standards & Outcomes Framework

| | | Comments |
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| Outcome 1 | Children and young people find good quality independent advocacy easily available and accessible. | <p>Across the two service areas, 72% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of referral.</p> <p>Advocates continue to support young people placed out of county, both virtually and in person if requested.</p> <p>This year we have produced and shared two presentations. The first aims to raise awareness of TGP Cymru services in general. The second focuses on the Active Offer, and aims to support front line practitioners, specifically social workers to promote the Active Offer to eligible young people and their carers. The team manager will continue to be available to attend social services team meetings over the next year.</p> <p>As soon as a new advocacy referral is received, our administrator posts a comprehensive advocacy pack to the child or young person. The pack includes lots of information about advocacy, our service and other support services available in Cwm Taf. The advocate is then able to follow up on this during their initial meeting and use the pack as a resource to introduce some of the key concepts such as advocacy and Children's Rights, directly with the child or young person. The young person is then able to keep the pack and have access to this information, even if they choose not to continue with advocacy support.</p> |
| Outcome 2 | Children and young people have their privacy and confidences respected and their wellbeing safeguarded and protected. | <p>The vast majority of direct work with young people continues to take place during face-to-face visits. We ask the referrer to tell us where the young person would like to meet the advocate at the point of referral, and the advocate will always attempt to visit the young person at a place they have specified. This is usually in their home or at school, and advocates report many young people find it easier to share how they feel about their home life while at school, where privacy and confidentiality is often easier to maintain.</p> <p>This year, we have received multiple requests from referrers to take young people out of the home when a school visit is not an option, as they are aware that maintaining confidentiality in the family home may be difficult. If the advocate does take the young person out in their car, this is always fully risk assessed and the advocate will always confirm with the young person that this is what they want.</p> <p>We continue to offer virtual contact to those few young people who prefer to engage over the phone or via a video call. Due to capacity issues caused by long term sickness in the team, some phone calls have happened when, for example, an advocate has been unable to visit a young person before a meeting. This is always with the consent of the young person and a follow up face-to-face visit is always offered at a later date.</p> <p>This year, one safeguarding referral was made by an advocate.</p> |

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| <p>Outcome 3</p> | <p>Children and young people are valued for their diversity, treated with respect and all forms of discrimination against them are challenged.</p> | <p>During this year, we have provided IBA to young people with a wide range of disabilities and learning needs including young people diagnosed with anxiety disorders, ADHD, and ASD.</p> <p>Two unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people have been referred for advocacy support this year, and advocates have supported them to receive the service in the language of their choice.</p> <p>Two pregnant young people have accessed IBA this year, as well as young people identifying as gender neutral, and LGBTQ.</p> |
| <p>Outcome 4</p> | <p>Children and young people are empowered to take the lead in relation to advocacy services and their rights, wishes and feelings and championed.</p> | <p>Young people consistently tell us they feel empowered to speak up for themselves following advocacy intervention and advocates always encourage young people to speak for themselves when they feel able to do so.</p> <p>When explaining why they felt more confident since receiving advocacy on their feedback form, one young person wrote: <i>"I feel confident about asking questions without being scared to" and "I now feel confident when I join meetings with social services. I can ask questions as well."</i></p> <p>One young person was supported to attend his CLA review virtually from his school. The advocate was able to arrange an appropriate space in the school and sat next to him while supporting him to share his wishes and feelings at the meeting.</p> |
| <p>Outcome 5</p> | <p>Children and young people participate in the design, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of advocacy services.</p> | <p>The CTM Advocacy Service Participation Lead will continue to be responsible for keeping up to date with participation and consultation opportunities within Cwm Taf Morgannwg.</p> <p>All contracted staff have attended a training session in participation practices this year. The session was designed to bring staff up to date with and understand different participative practices and how important it is to include young people's feedback to further develop TGP Cymru.</p> <p>All young people receiving advocacy support will continue to be offered the opportunity to feedback to TGP Cymru to allow us to monitor the services provided and make improvements where needed. We are hopeful the changes we have made to the feedback process will result in more young people expressing their views about the service they have received.</p> <p>At the beginning of the year, several young people from the CTM region took part in a Welsh Government consultation regarding the transition from CAHMS to AMHS, facilitated by TGP Cymru.</p> <p>As detailed above, in the coming months we plan to consult with young people living in local authority community homes to capture their thoughts about visiting advocacy. We will also consult with BYV forum when the community home staff have returned the surveys. Following this consultation, we will, in partnership with managers of the homes make any necessary changes to ensure all young people are able to access an effective visiting advocacy service.</p> |

