

National Approach to Statutory Advocacy

Local Authority Report - Bridgend 2023 - 2024

Collated Annual Report

April 23 - Mar 24

Headline Report

During the year, 145 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 172 issues. This represents a notable decrease in young people accessing IBA when compared to the previous year, when 224 young people accessed IBA in Bridgend. Some 76 young people accessed the service for the first time, compared to 123 in the previous year. Active Offer (AO) referrals also decreased, with 71 received this year, compared to 101 last year.

Active Offer

According to information received from Bridgend, 262 children and young people became eligible for the AO during the year. A total of 71 children and young people were referred, meaning that if we assume those referred became eligible in the year, 27% of those eligible were referred, compared to 33% last year.

Of the 71 young people referred, 64 AO meetings took place, and 56 young people accepted the AO and went on to receive IBA, 24 less than in the previous year.

Children and young people in the CP arena made up 65% of those referred for AO throughout the year, compared to 85% in the previous year. Although we have noted a decrease in AO referrals for children and young people in the CP arena, AO referrals for Care Experienced young people rose from 15 in the previous year, to 25 this year.

As in the previous year, most AO referrals were for females making up 54% of the total number.

Most young people referred for AO were aged between 12 and 16 years, although this age group was followed closely by those aged between six and 11 years. Referrals across all aged groups decreased this year, except for those aged 17 years and over, rising from one in the previous year to four in this year.

Some 63% of young people referred for the AO received it within five working days of referral. Most delays throughout the year happened when carers or young people themselves asked to postpone a visit, usually because they wanted to wait until after a school holiday to be visited in school. Some young people changed their mind about meeting with an advocate following an AO referral, and some visits were delayed as the advocate had to wait for a suitable room to be available at school.

Issue Based Advocacy

This year, there has been a notable decrease in young people accessing IBA with 145 young people being referred this year, compared to 224 in the previous year.

In the previous year, most children and young people referred for IBA were in the CP arena and made up over 50% of IBA referrals. This year, Care Experienced young people make up the majority of young people referred for IBA, following a significant decrease of 70 referrals for children and young people in the CP arena, and a small increase in IBA referrals for Care Experienced young people. Referrals for young people subject to Care and Support plans and Care Leavers also decreased this year.

Despite a decrease in referrals for both males and females this year, the gender split remains as it was in the previous year with most IBA referrals being made for females.

This year, we observed a decreased in referrals for all age groups. The largest decrease in referrals was for those aged six to 11 years, falling from 107 in the previous year, to just 40 this year. This means the majority of IBA referrals were made for young people aged between 12 and 16, making up 54% of the total number of IBA referrals, compared to 43% last year. We have however, noted what could be the recovery of CP referral rates in the previous two quarters, and plan to meet with team managers to discuss promotion of the advocacy service to this age group.

'Self-referral' continues to be the most popular route into the IBA service, followed by social services referrals. This year, 14 IBA referrals were also made by third sector organisations, mostly TGP Cymru's Family Group Conferencing Service. Only 3% of referrals came from other sources, and they were made up of parents, carer and foster carer referrals.

Contact was recorded as the main issue for 37 young people this year. Some young people wanted to raise contact issues relating to more than one person meaning 37 young people asked their advocate to share wishes and feelings about contact arrangements with individuals or groups of individuals 46 times. Most young people shared that they wanted to spend more time with family, this was 21 times in relation to parents, eight times in relation to wider family and five times in relation to siblings. Wanting to stop contact or spend less time with someone was raised just nine times, eight times in relation to parents, and once in relation to wider family. One young person requested that time spent with their father was supervised.

Two young people wanted arrangements in place to spend time with family members to remain unchanged. This type of contact issue usually comes about when a family member suggests to the local authority that a young person wants more or less time with a family member, but following exploration and discussion with their advocate, the young person shares they are happy with current arrangements.

This year, 'support at meetings' was the main issue only 21 times, however, advocates supported children and young people to share wishes and feelings at 62 meetings, 43 of which they attended all or part of in person. The meetings were made up of 19 Child Protection Case Conferences (CPCC), 15 CLA Reviews, 12 Core Group meetings, seven Family Group Meetings, three Care and Support meetings, three school meetings, two placement meetings and one complaints meeting. This year, advocates have noted an increase in face-to-face meetings, as well as an increase in young people's attendance at their meetings.

During the year, 78% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of the IBA referral being made.

Residential Visiting Advocacy (RVA)

We are pleased to report face-to-face visiting advocacy has now been established in all four Bridgend community homes. RVA in Sunnybank and Meadowview is currently being undertaken by TGP's Bridgend participation worker, who will also support young people living in these homes to access the Bridgend Youth Voice Forum if they want to. These visits will continue monthly in discussion with home managers. The Managers of Bakers Way and Harwood House have advised the advocate to call monthly, and staff will assess at the time if a visit will be appropriate that week. The visiting advocate has contacted the manager of both Harwood House and Bakers Way to offer to attend a team meeting to share knowledge about the Non-Instructioned Advocacy (NIA) service.

A review of the RVA services was postponed previously to allow us to concentrate on recruitment and advocacy capacity. The current residential visiting advocate plans to retire in the next quarter and we have recruited a new advocate to continue the RVA in RCT. The new advocate will be responsible for completing the review of the service in both RCT and Bridgend which will start during the next quarter.

Service Information

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. TGP Cymru participation officer Zoe Morgan, along with Steve Berry, supported BYV to facilitate the programme for the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy Launch, which was held in the Heronston Hotel on the 27th of April.

Following a request in May from Laura Kinsey, we were able to facilitate two young people under 11 years old who had been subject to safeguarding procedures to speak with the Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangement (JICPA) inspectors. This involved CTM advocates contacting all young people they had previously worked with, who also fit the criteria requested. When the two young people had been identified and had agreed to take part, one advocate contacted their schools, and arranged for suitable rooms to be able to facilitate the conversations with the inspectors via a video call on the 15th of June.

On the 22nd of June, the advocacy team manager facilitated a workshop; 'Listening to our children and young people; Involving them in decision making that affects them' at the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Engagement Event held in Kenfig Hill Rugby Club. The event set out the activities that will be undertaken in individual organisations, and collectively, to carry out Corporate Parenting responsibilities and bring the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy to life. During the workshops, the advocacy team manager was able to promote the advocacy service to many different Bridgend organisations and teams, and plans are in place for TGP Cymru to attend the LAC Nurse team meeting in July, and the Kinship carer coffee morning in September.

In November, the advocacy team manager met with the Bridgend Group Manager for Case Management and Transition, Sheree Dixon, to discuss advocacy referral rates and AO take up rates. We agreed that the advocacy team would be invited to both the children's services' team manager meeting and the IRO team meeting in the new year to promote and share information about the advocacy service and referral routes. Sheree has supported the team when advocates have difficulty in contacting or getting a response from social workers, on behalf of the young people they are advocating for.

The advocacy team manager has also been in touch with Bridgend's Deputy Head of Children's Social Care and is hoping to make links with some Bridgend Social Care team managers to share information about and promote the advocacy service over the next quarter.

Unfortunately, following a period of sickness in quarter two, our senior advocate decided to retire at the end of December. Following recruitment in quarter four, a new full time senior advocate role has been created, and the successful candidate is due to take up the post at the beginning of April, along with a newly recruited Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) who will be working 30 hours per week. A casual advocate has also been recruited to take over the residential visiting advocacy (RVA) role when the current RVA retires during the next quarter. We are confident this will ensure no gap in service. A new full-time IPA was also recruited this year, following the resignation of another advocate following medical advice after a period of ill health.

During quarter three, one staff member began the Level 4 Independent Advocacy Qualification in partnership with Gower College.

During quarter four, the CTM team completed first aid training provided by the Red Cross, and three team members completed training provided by Pause, relating to supporting mothers through Care Proceedings.

We have arranged internal training in Non-Instructed Advocacy and Restorative Engagement to take place during the next quarter.

Previously, 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. With support from the LA, advocates have reported some improvement in this area over the last year.

Young People's Feedback

As a team, we are continuing to discuss different ways of making it as easy as possible for young people to evaluate the service they have received from TGP Cymru. 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.

Advocates also carry the Freepost envelopes with them in case a young person wants to fill in the form during a final or closing visit and are 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. To further encourage young people to share their feelings about the advocacy service we have also introduced a monthly prize draw, whereby children and young people who provide feedback will have the chance to win a £20 gift voucher.

This year, the number of young people providing feedback has increased, with the service receiving feedback from 18 young people, compared to 14 in the previous year. Feedback from the 18 young people who completed the consultation forms throughout the year has been overwhelmingly positive.

Of those 18:

17 stated they found the service helpful; 16 felt the service made a difference to their situation, 16 felt they knew more about their rights, 15 felt more confident since receiving support, 16 felt more included in decisions, and 18 felt their views were fully considered and their rights represented. 17 of the 18 young people providing feedback this year stated they would use the service again, while one person felt they wouldn't need to use the service again.

One young person said:

"I know more about my rights than I did before the service and I am feeling positive after the support of the service."

While explaining why they felt the service was helpful, one young person said:

"Because you said things when I could not."

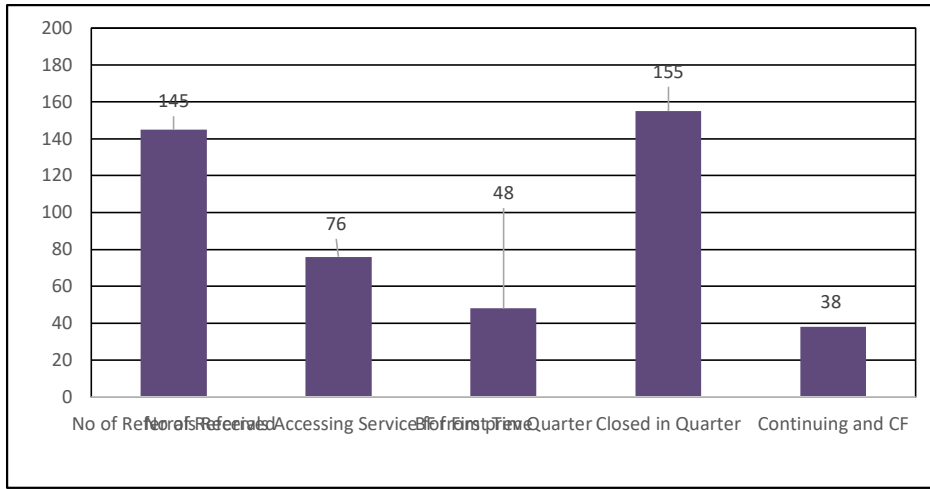
While explaining why the service made them feel more confident, one young person said:

"I can say what I think and people can listen."

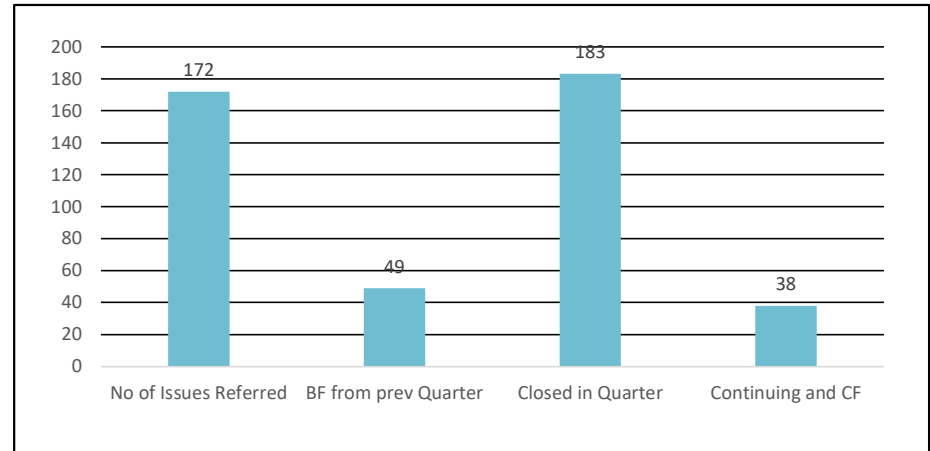
And another said:

"I feel like I do have a right to speak and be included in decisions."

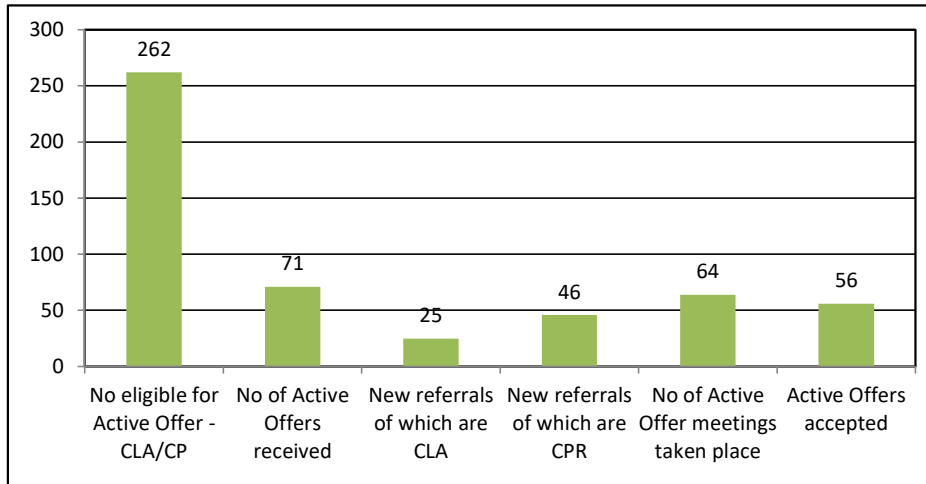
1a. Advocacy Cases - Young People - Issue Based Advocacy



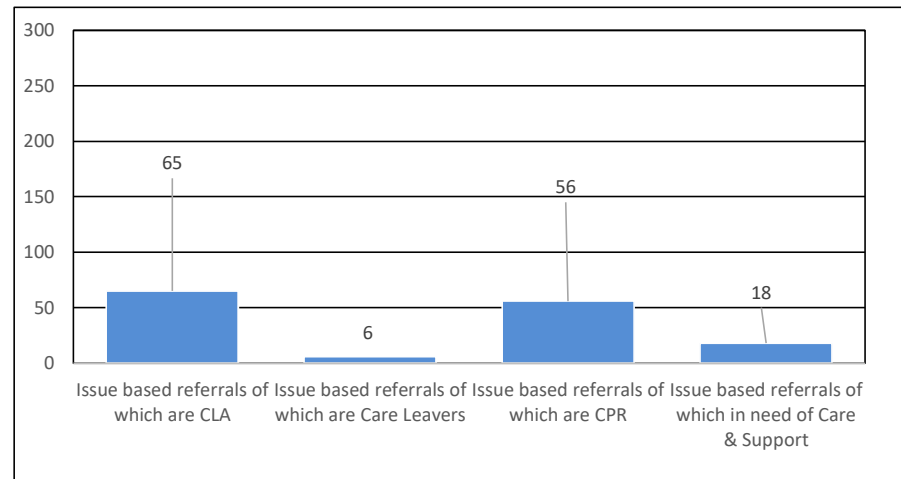
1b. Advocacy Cases - Interventions - Issue Based Advocacy



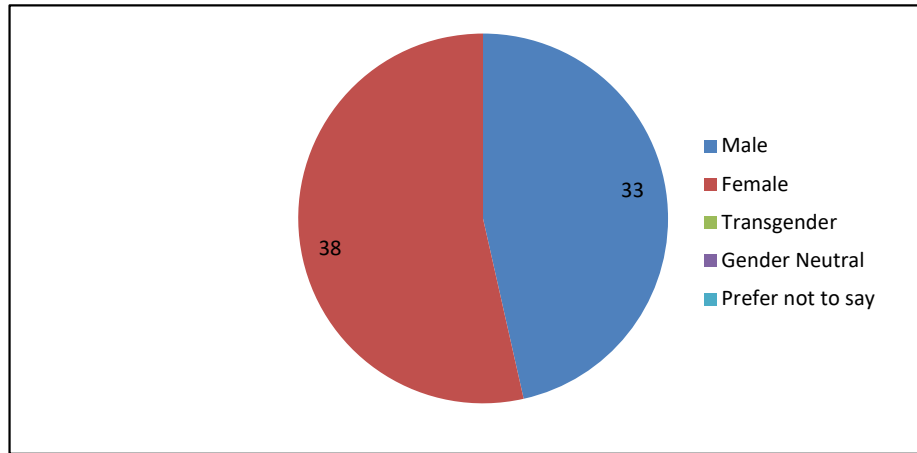
2a. Eligibility Criteria: Active Offer



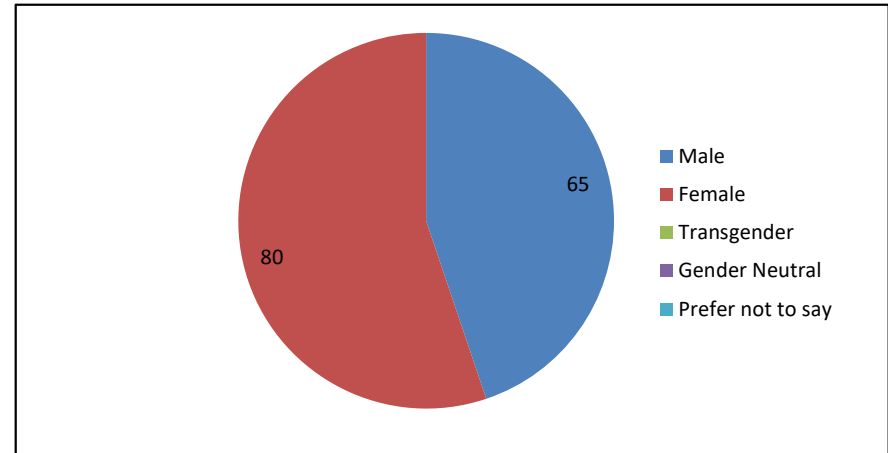
2b. Eligibility Criteria: Issue Based



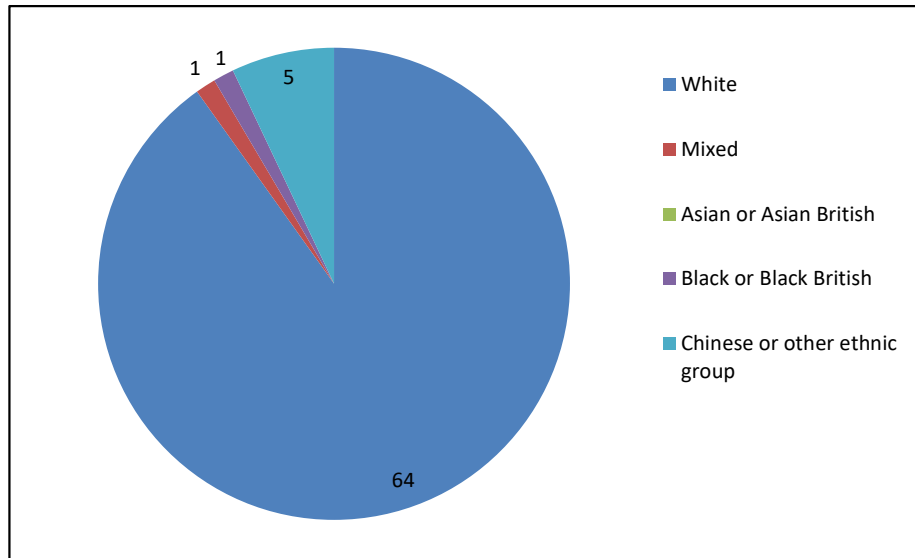
3a. Demographics: Gender - Active Offer



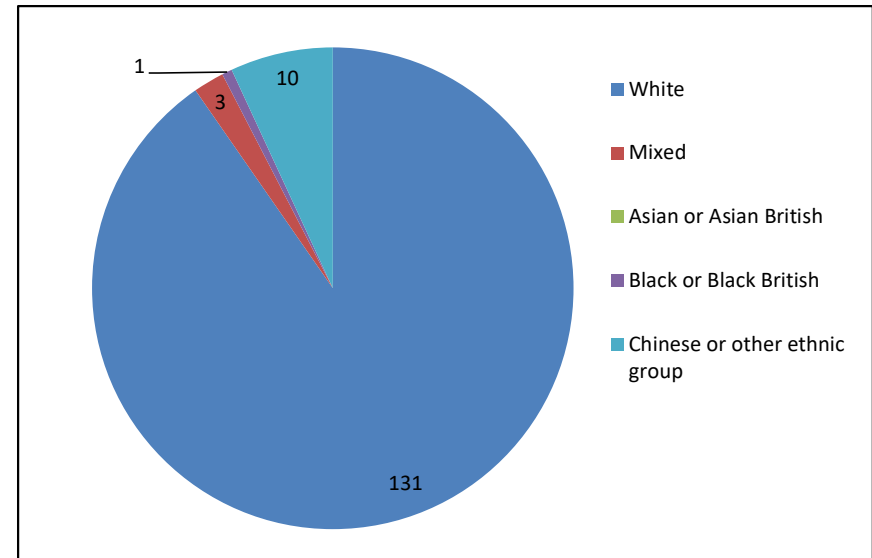
3b. Demographics: Gender - Issue Based



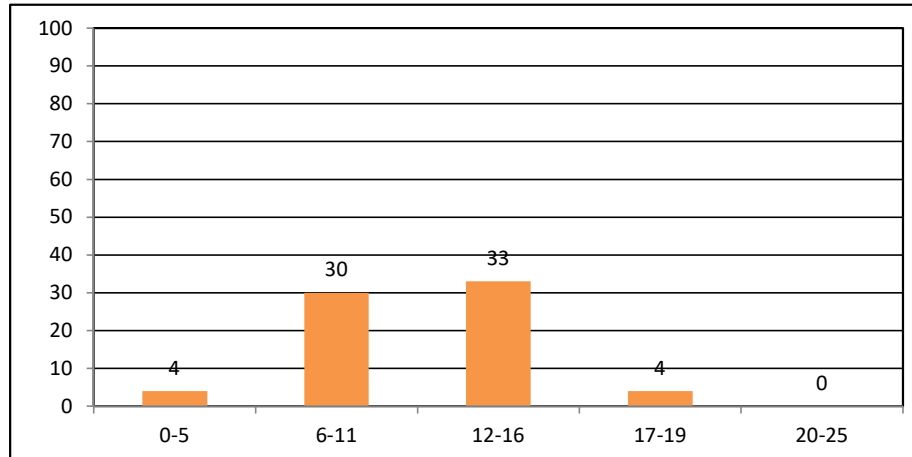
3c. Demographics: Ethnicity - Active Offer



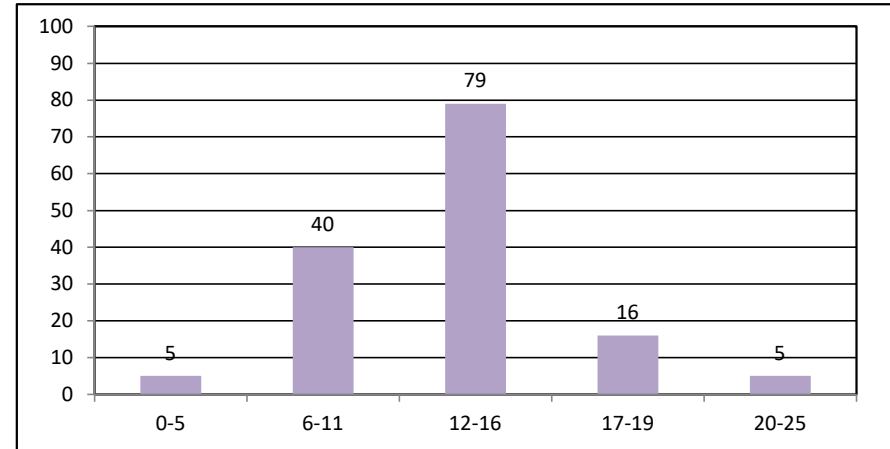
3d. Demographics: Ethnicity - Issue Based



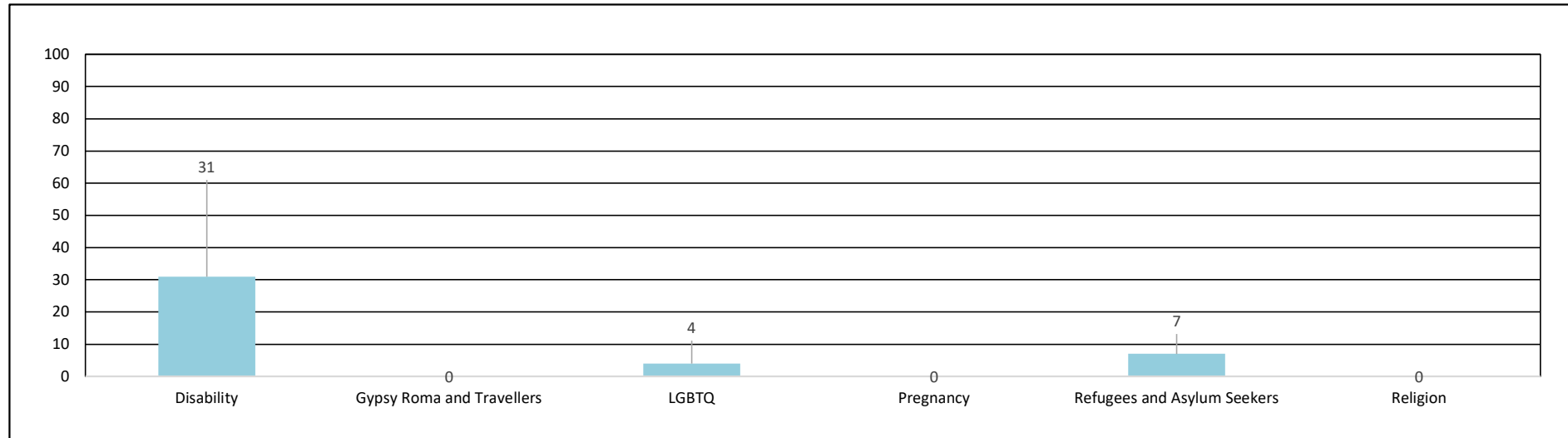
3e. Demographics: Age - Active Offer



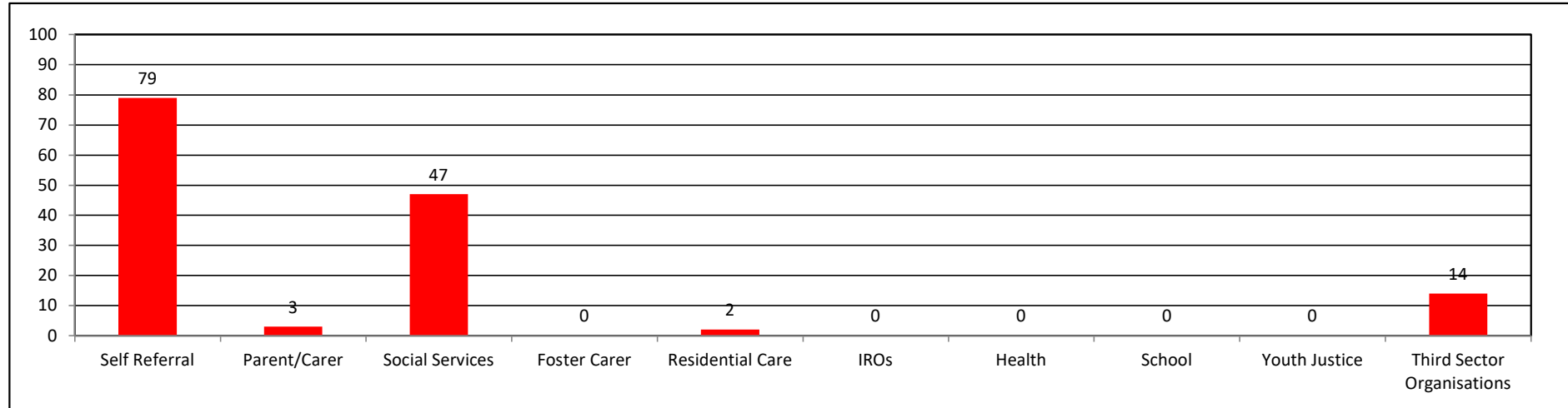
3f. Demographics: Age - Issue Based



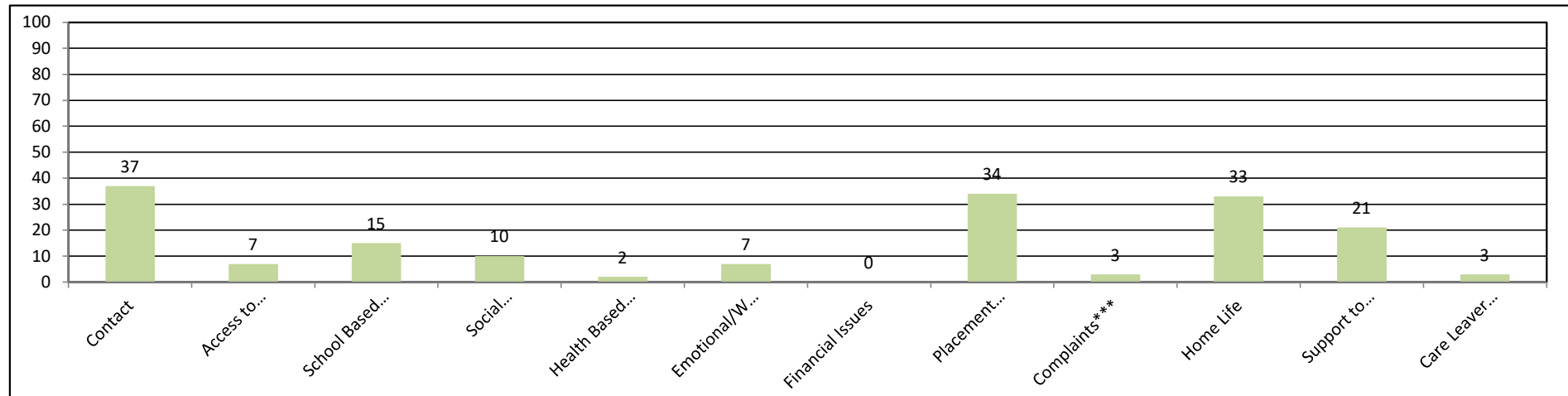
4. Protected Characteristics



5. Referral Source per young person - Issue Based only



6. Issues Presented

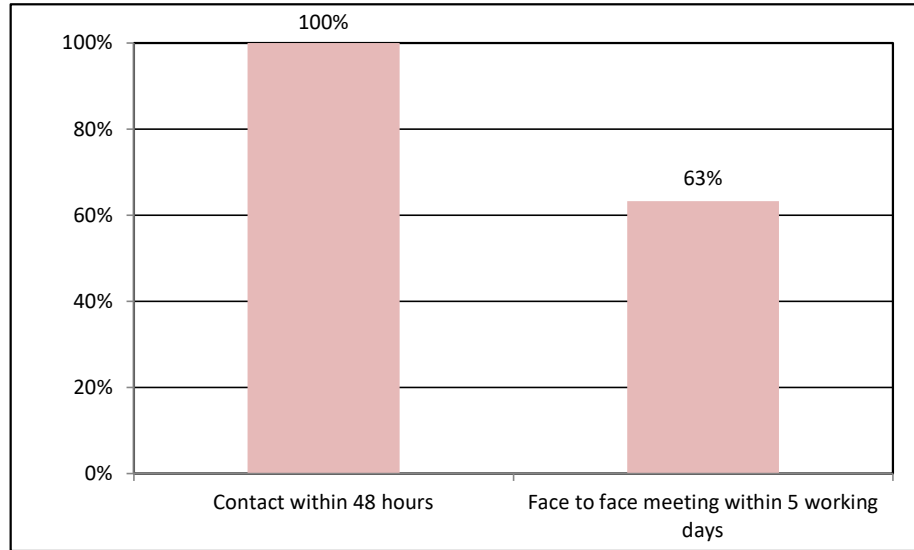


* School based issues including: SEN/ALN, exclusions, bullying, transport.

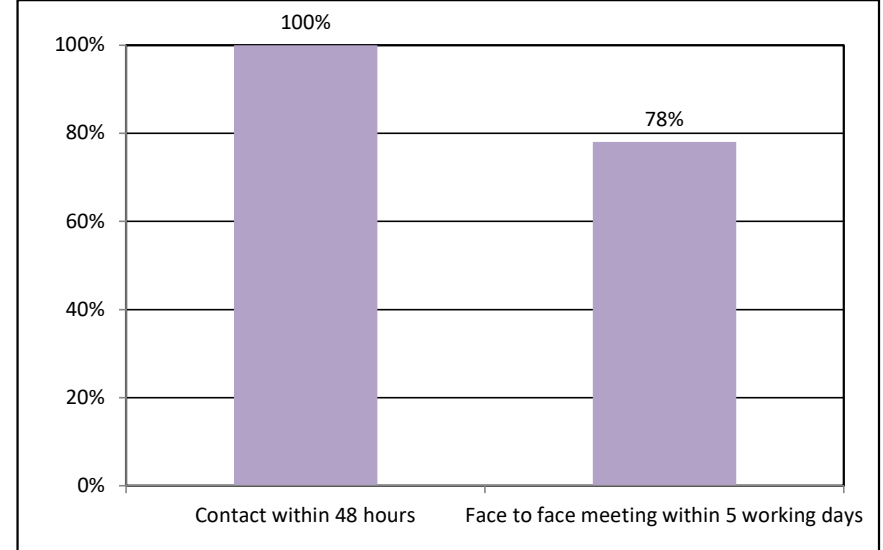
** Social Services based issues including: relationship with worker, care plan, service provided.

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

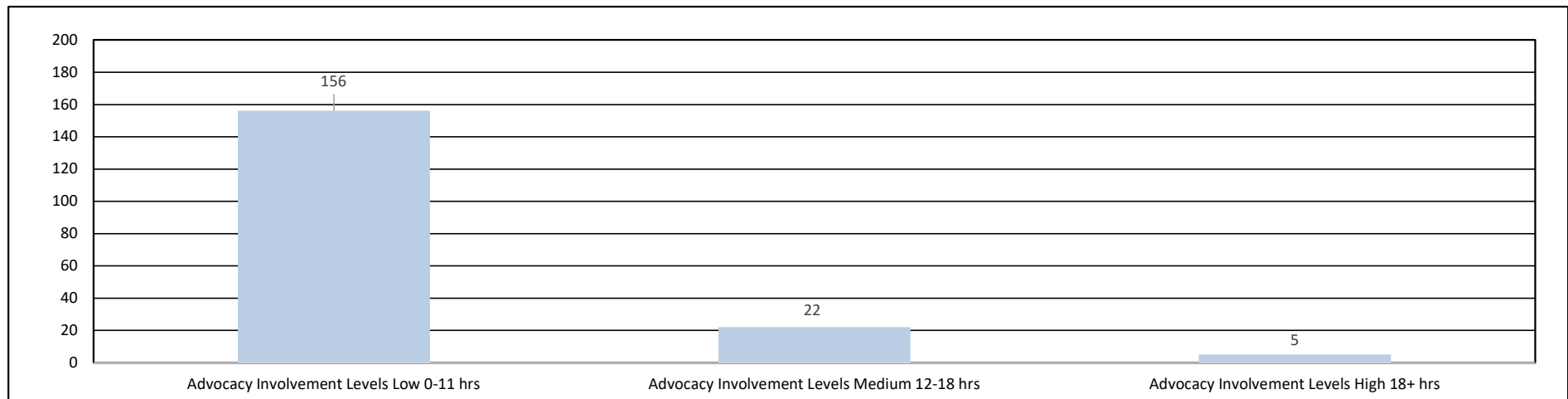
7. Service Performance - Active Offer



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
Outcome 1	Children and young people find good quality independent advocacy easily available and accessible.	<p>This year, across the two service areas 71% 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. Most young people live in neighbouring authorities but we have also received referrals for young people living in, Monmouthshire, Newport and Lancashire among others this 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> <p>As detailed above, the review of our RVA service will restart when the new RVA takes up his post at the end of the next quarter. This will ensure young people living in community homes in Bridgend have access to good quality and effective visiting advocacy services, supported by community home staff.</p>

<p>Outcome 2</p>	<p>Children and young people have their privacy and confidences respected and their wellbeing safeguarded and protected.</p>	<p>Direct work with young people continues to take place during face-to-face visits, although occasionally advocates will contact young people over the phone. This sometimes happens following a request from a young person, or it might be offered if a visit cannot be arranged before a specific meeting. The advocate will always offer a follow up face-to-face visit in this situation.</p> <p>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 continued to receive requests from referrers and young people themselves to meet outside 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>Examples of this are when one young person was not attending school, she asked her advocate to take her to a local cafe where she said she would find it easier to talk than if they had met at her home. Another young person requested his advocate take him outside of his residential home as he wanted to talk freely about his feelings about the staff.</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. Advocates report some older young people prefer to engage via phone and email, especially if they have work or education commitments.</p> <p>No safeguarding referrals were made in Bridgend this year.</p>
<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. Young people diagnosed with anxiety disorders, ADHD, and ASD have also received IBA this year, along with young people diagnosed with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Hearing Impairment and Arthritis.</p> <p>When young people have additional learning needs, advocates always take advice from their social worker and others who know them best to communicate as effectively as possible.</p> <p>We have received seven referrals for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people this year, and advocates have supported them to receive the service in the language of their choice.</p> <p>Young people identifying as LGBTQ have also accessed IBA in Bridgend this year.</p> <p>One Active Offer was delivered in Welsh.</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>As highlighted in the feedback section above, most young people who access IBA feel more included in decisions when they are able to share their views. This often proves to be the case, even when the decision made is not what the young person originally wanted.</p> <p>During this year, we have noted an increase in young people attending virtual and face to face meetings with the support of their advocate. In most cases, the advocate and the young person prepare for the meeting beforehand, and the advocate then reads out the wishes and feelings at the meeting.</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. One young person read the wishes and feelings report he had prepared with the support of his advocate at his CLA Review, and two unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people were supported in person at their CLA Review's to share their advocacy reports which were translated by an interpreter.</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 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 will continue to make changes to our feedback process to ensure young people experience no barriers in expressing their views about the service they have received.</p> <p>As detailed above, we hope to restart a piece of consultation work with young people living in local authority community homes to capture their thoughts about visiting advocacy. 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> <p>A Care Experienced member of the BYV forum was invited to be a member of the interview panel during the recruitment of a new Independent Professional Advocate during quarter four. He engaged in asking questions, scoring, and discussion following the interview, and offered invaluable insight into the skills and qualities he felt were needed to provide a quality advocacy service. The new IPA will take up her post in the next quarter.</p>