

National Approach to Statutory Advocacy

Local Authority Report CTM Regional 2023 - 2024

Collated Annual Report

April 23 - Mar 24

Headline Report

During the year, across Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM), 413 young people accessed the issue-based advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 483 issues. Some 254 young people were referred for Active Offer (AO).

Active Offer

According to information received from CTM, 768 children and young people became eligible for the AO during the year. A total of 254 children and young people were referred, meaning that if we assume those referred became eligible in the year, 33% of those eligible were referred. This compared to 32% of eligible young people being referred in the previous year.

Of the 254 referrals received, 213 AO meetings took place, and 170 young people accepted the AO and went on to receive IBA.

Children and young people in the CP arena made up 74% of those referred for AO throughout the year, compared to 78% in the previous year. AO referrals for both Care Experienced young people and those in the CP arena increased when compared to the previous year.

As in the previous year, this year, most AO referrals were for females, although the split was more even, with only three more referrals for females than males.

In a change from the previous year, most young people referred for AO were aged between 12 and 16, with referrals increasing by 28 across the year, and making up 48% of the total. Referrals for young people aged between six and 11 decreased by 14 and make up 39% of the total number of AO referrals this year.

Some 55% of young people referred for the AO received it within five working days of referral. Most delays were due to carers and young people requesting visits take place after school holidays, young people changing their mind about meeting with an advocate following the referral and being unable to contact parents or carers to arrange a visit.

Issue Based Advocacy

This year, there has been a decrease in IBA referrals across the region, falling from 476 last year, to 413 this year. This is almost entirely due to a notable decrease in IBA referrals in Bridgend. 231 of the 413 young people referred for IBA this year were accessing advocacy for the first time.

As in the previous year, most children and young people referred for IBA this year were in the CP arena, however we observed the largest decrease in referrals for this group children and young people, falling by 50 when compared to last year. IBA referrals for care experienced young people decreased slightly and make up 35% of the total this year. There was also a small decrease in referrals for care leavers but a small increase in referrals for young people subject to Care and Support plans.

As in the previous year, most young people accessing IBA this year were female, making up 53% of IBA referrals, the same percentage as last year.

This year, we have observed a notable decrease in IBA referrals for young people aged between six and 11 years, falling by over 100 from 244 last year, to 140 this year. In the same period, referrals for young people aged between 12 and 16 years increased by 35 and made up the majority of IBA referrals with 53%. We also observed an increase of 12 referrals for young people aged 17 years and over, while referrals for young people aged five and under fell by three.

As in the previous year, 'Self-referral' continues to be the most popular route into the IBA service, followed by social services referrals and third sector referrals. Self-referrals are usually the result of young people accepting the Active Offer, or young people who have previously used the service contacting their advocate directly to access the IBA service for a new issue. Most third sector referrals came from TGP Cymru's Family Group Conferencing and Restorative Approaches Service.

As in the previous year, this year, the most popular issues young people wanted support with were contact and issues relating to where young people live; placement and homelife. 'Homelife' is mostly used when young people want to share general wishes and feelings about their homelife in CP meetings, while 'placement' is used to describe specific issues care experienced young people may have in relation to their foster or residential home.

Contact was recorded as the main issue for 105 young people this year. Most young people shared that they wanted to spend more time with family, usually parents, grandparents, or siblings. Of those who share they wanted to stop seeing or spend less time with family, this was mostly in relation to a father. Several young people requested that arrangements in place for them to spend time with their mother remain unchanged. This type of issue usually comes about when a family member suggests to the local authority that a young person does want 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. More detail on contact issues is available on individual LA reports.

This year, 'support at meetings' was the main issue 77 times, however, advocates supported children and young people to share wishes and feelings at 256 meetings, 160 of which they attended all or part of in person or virtually. The meetings were made up of mostly Child Protection Case Conferences, Core Group meetings, CLA Reviews and Family Group Meetings. Advocates have reported an increase in young people attending their meetings, both virtually and in person this year.

During the year, 79% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of the IBA referral being made.

Residential Visiting Advocacy (RVA)

Residential Visiting Advocacy (RVA) is now taking place in nine Local Authority community homes across CTM. The five homes looking after young people with significant additional needs have advised monthly visits are not appropriate and have requested the advocate visits every two months and stays connected via telephone contact instead. The visiting advocate in Bridgend has offered to attend a team meeting to promote and discuss our Non-Instructional Advocacy (NIA) service.

A review of the RVA services was postponed previously to allow us to concentrate on recruitment and advocacy capacity. The current RCT 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

This year, advocacy quarterly progress reports have been shared at Corporate Parenting Boards (CPB) in RCT, Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil.

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 and in 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. Advocates have reported some improvement in this area over the last year.

Further detail about events attended this year, including panels, and promotional visits, can be found on individual LA reports.

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. Although less young people provided feedback in this quarter when compared to quarter three we are confident that young people are able to provide feedback in a way that is accessible for them.

We are pleased to report an increase in young people providing feedback to the advocacy service this year, rising from 39 last year, to 55 this year.

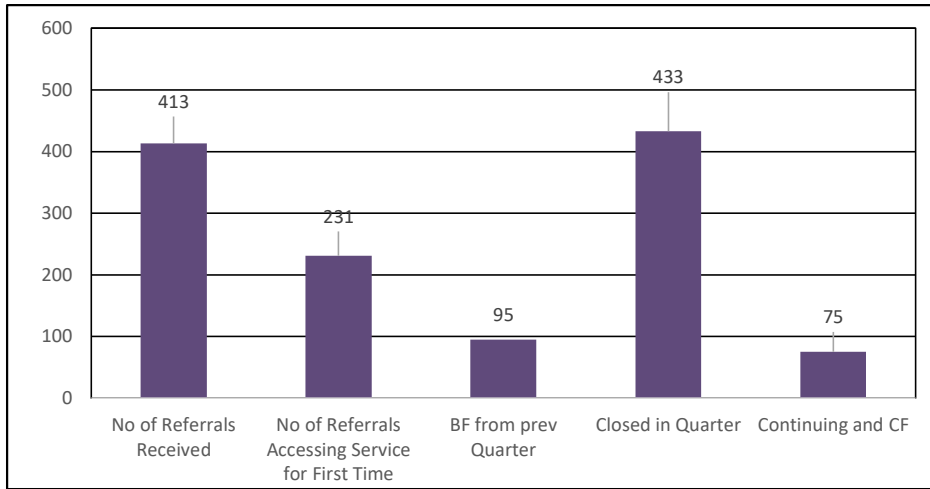
Feedback from the 55 young people who completed the consultation forms throughout the year has been overwhelmingly positive, with 52 of 55 stating they would use the service again.

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

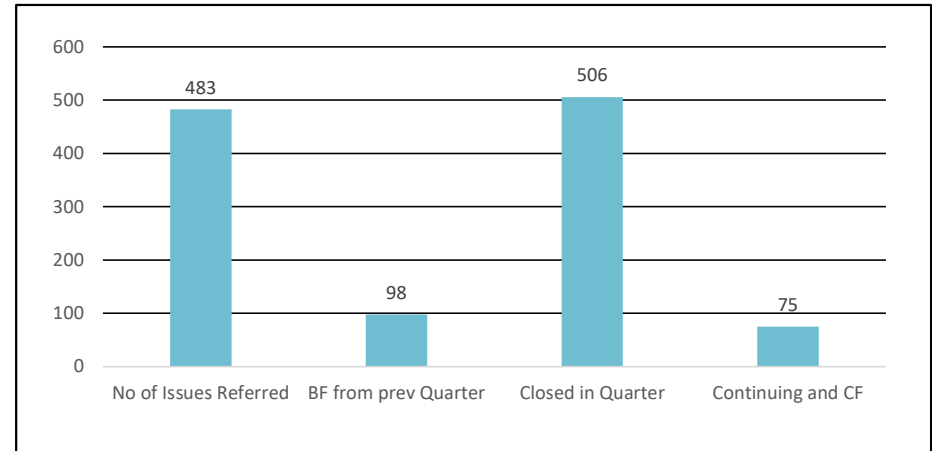
"Because you said things when I could not."

Further detail about young people's feedback, and examples of work undertaken by advocates this year, can be found in individual LA reports.

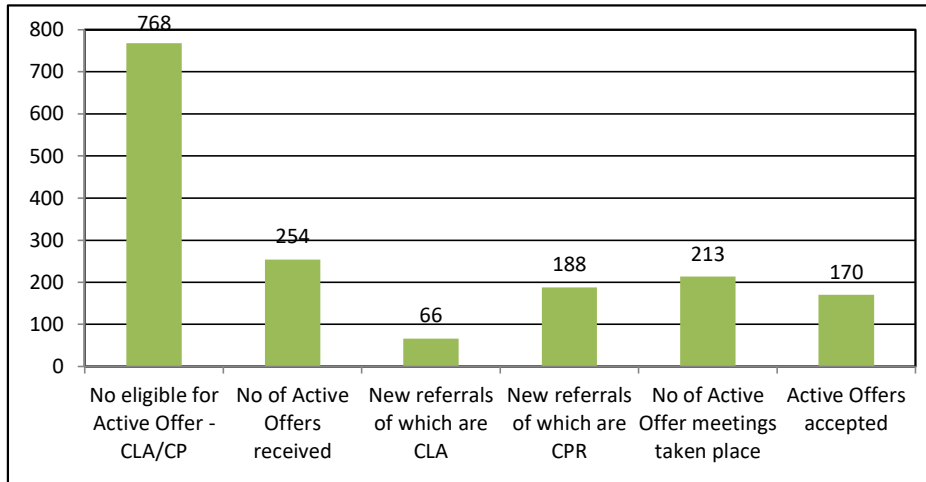
1a. Advocacy Cases - Young People - Issue Based Advocacy



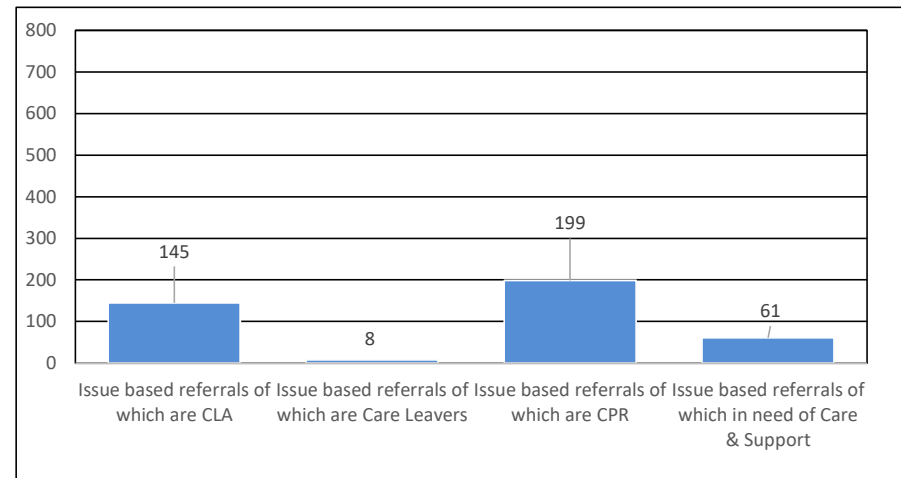
1b. Advocacy Cases - Interventions - Issue Based Advocacy



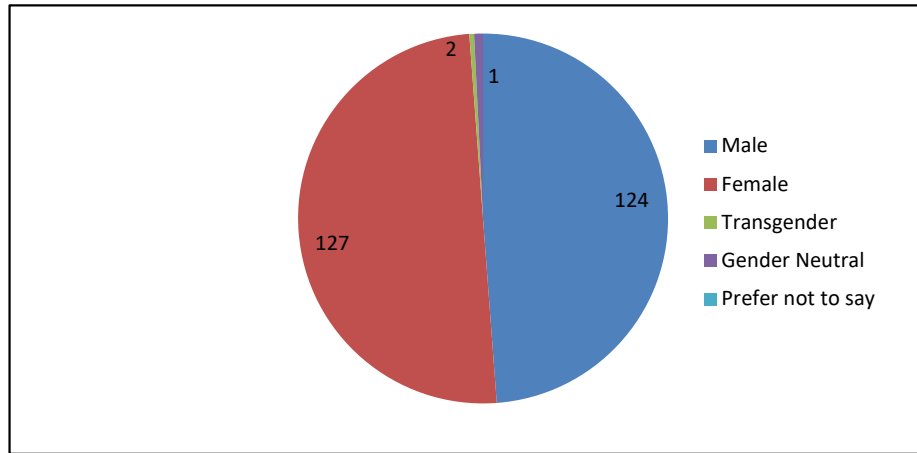
2a. Eligibility Criteria: Active Offer



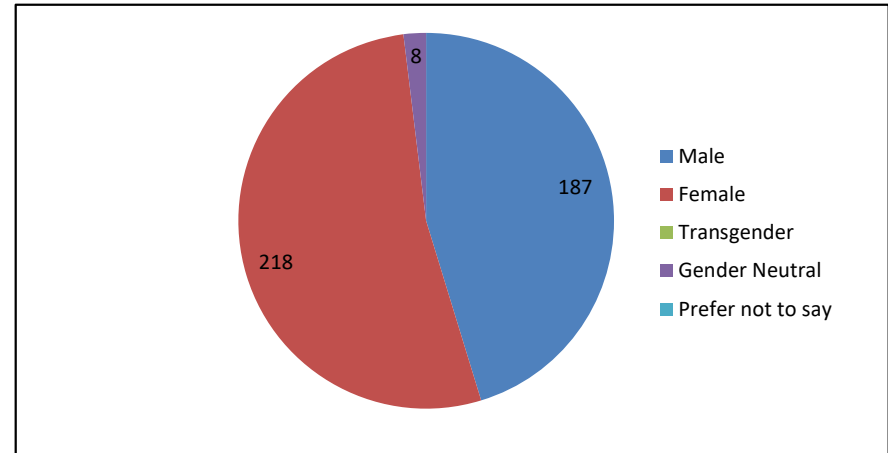
2b. Eligibility Criteria: Issue Based



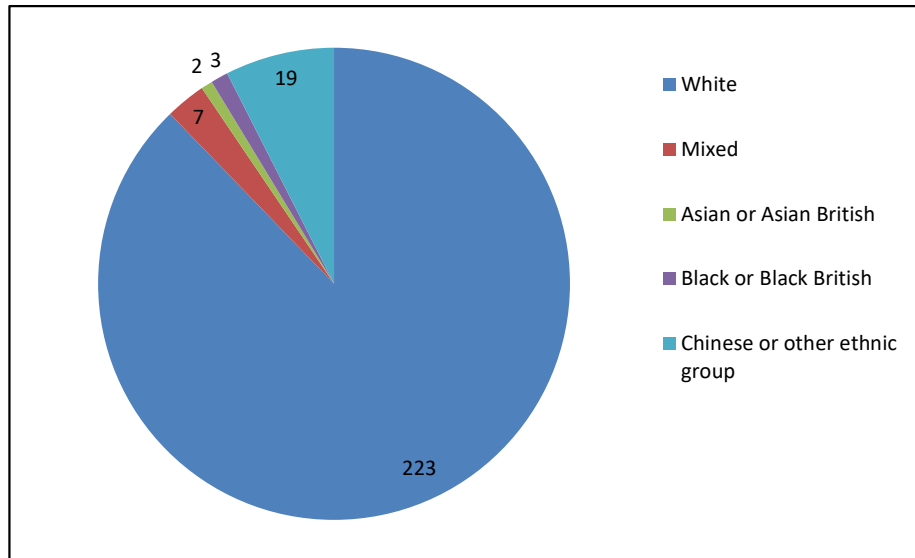
3a. Demographics: Gender - Active Offer



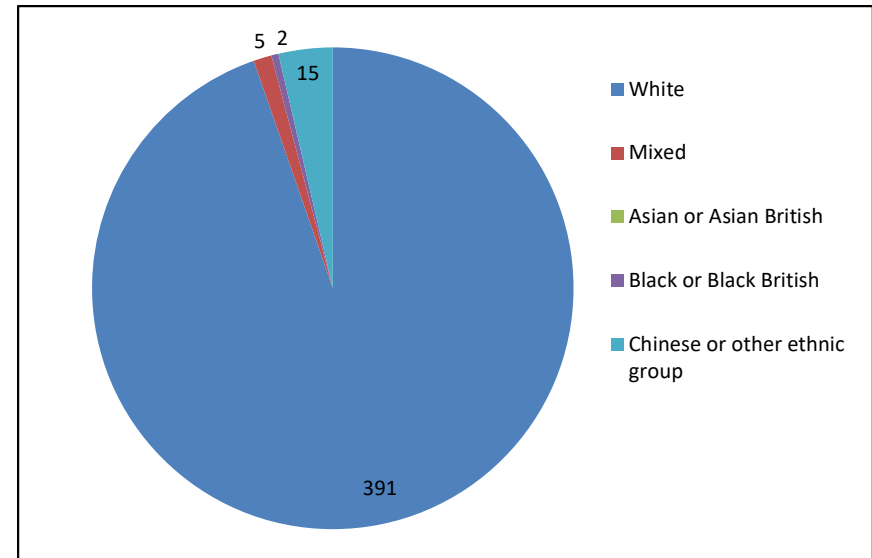
3b. Demographics: Gender - Issue Based



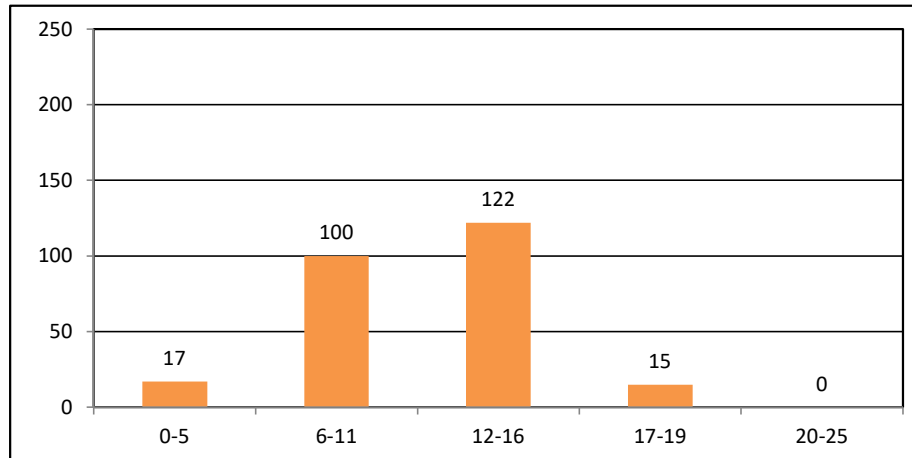
3c. Demographics: Ethnicity - Active Offer



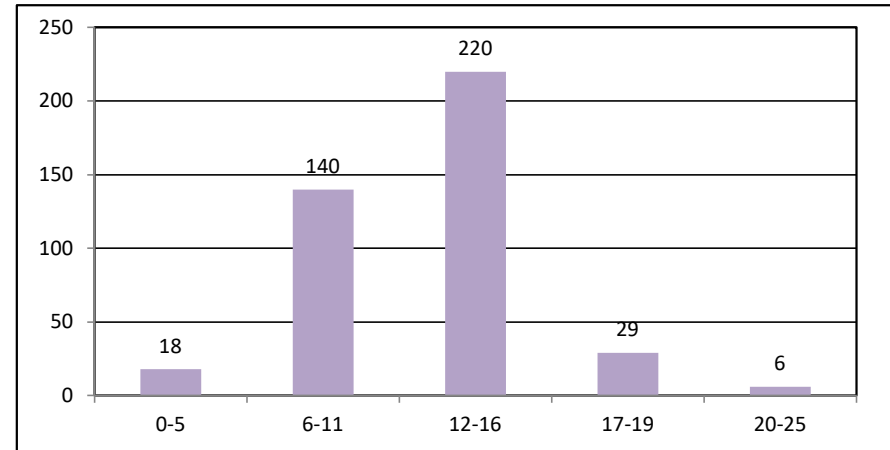
3d. Demographics: Ethnicity - Issue Based



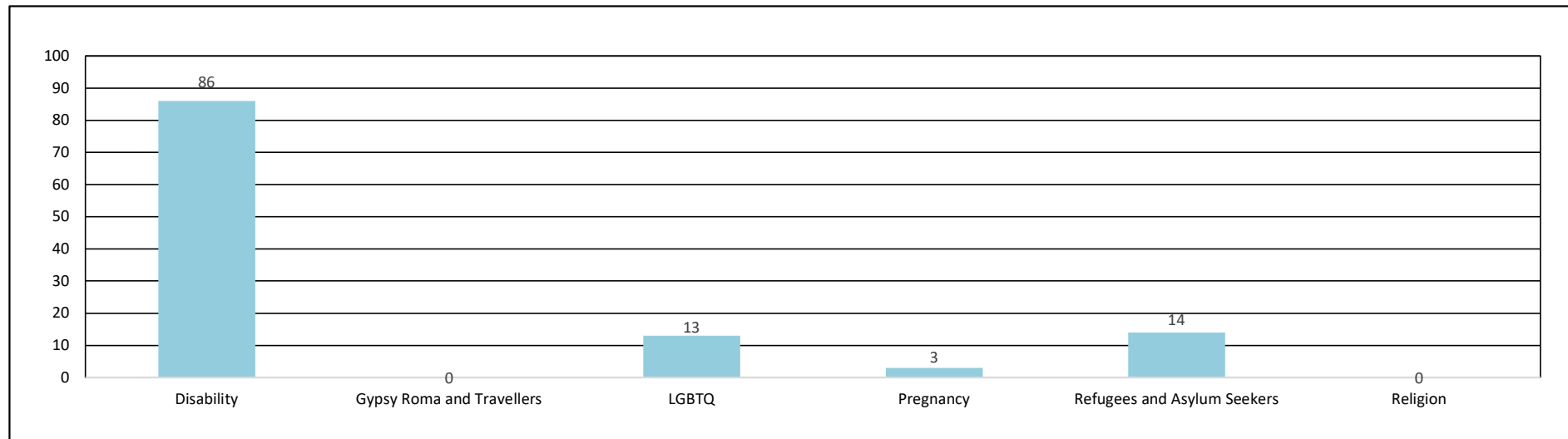
3e. Demographics: Age - Active Offer



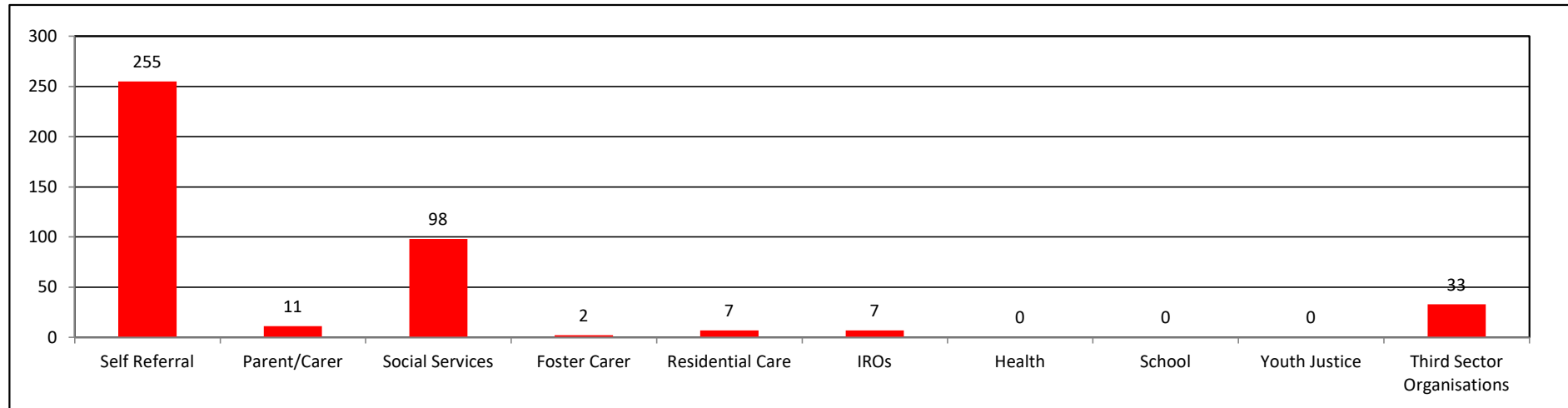
3f. Demographics: Age - Issue Based



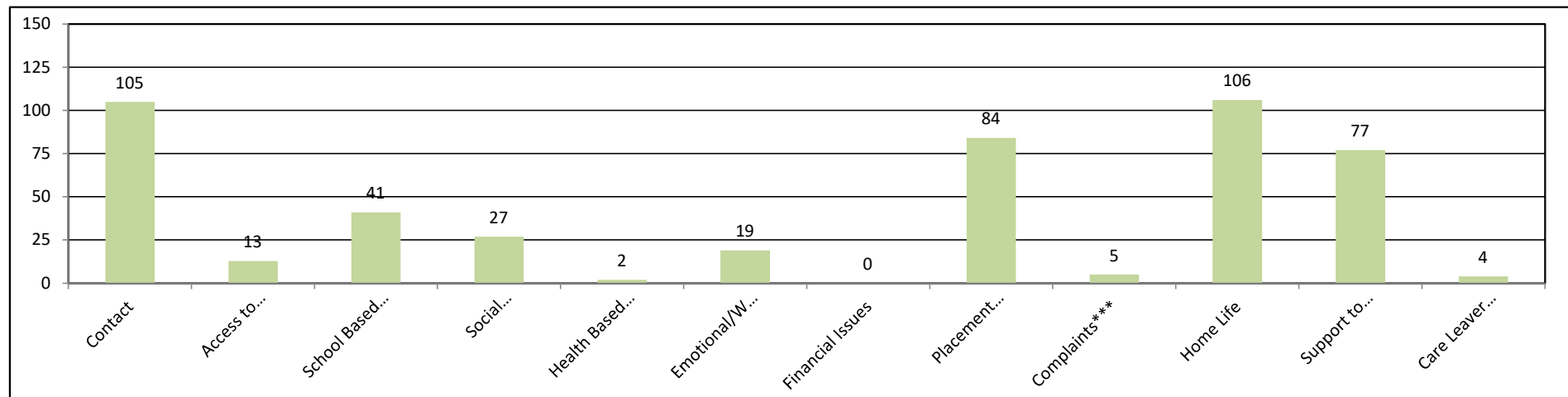
4. Protected Characteristics



5. Referral Source per young person - Issue Based only



6. Issues Presented

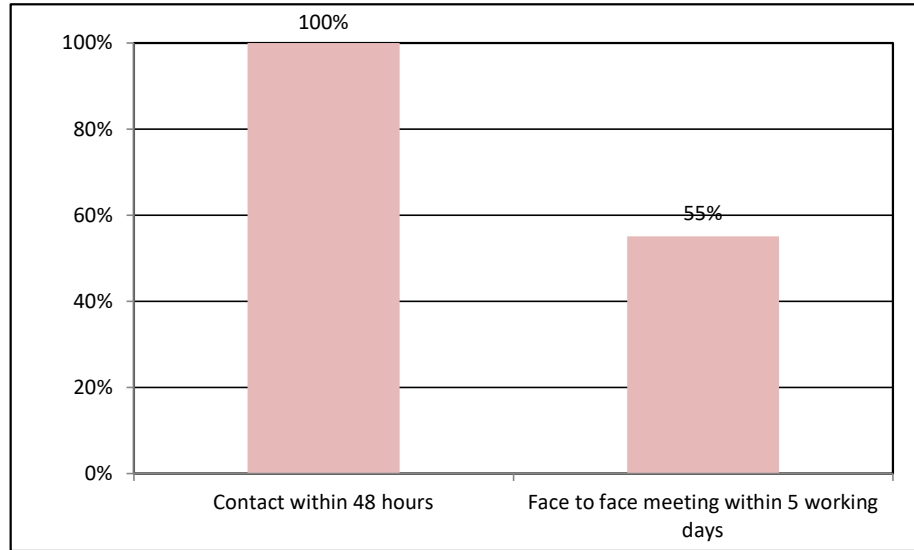


* School based issues including: SEN/ALN, exclusions, bullying, transport.

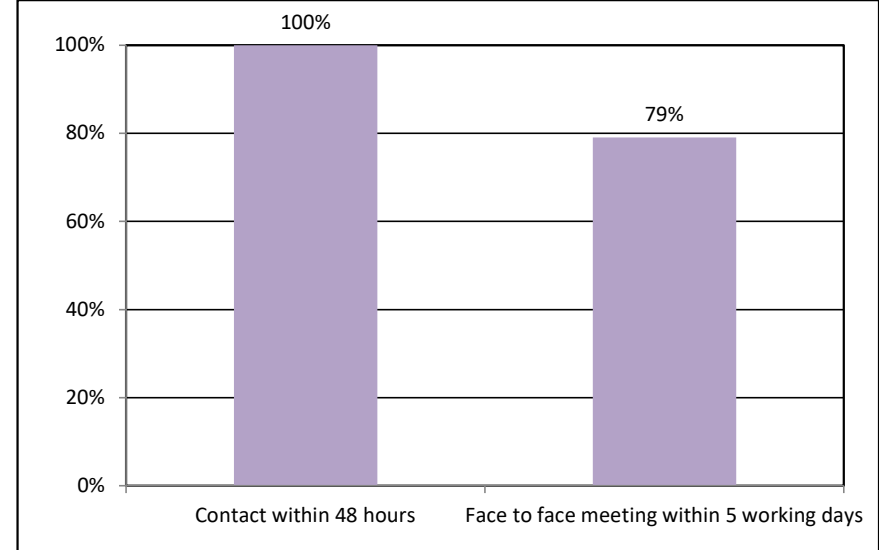
** Social Services based issues including: relationship with worker, care plan, service provided.

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

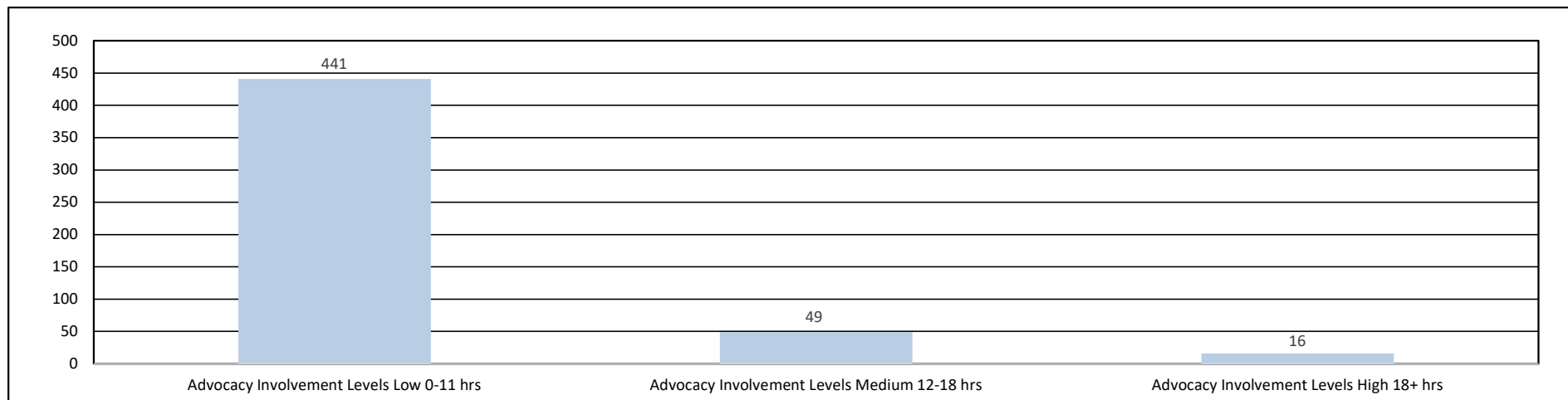
7. Service Performance - Active Offer



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>Across the two service areas, 67% 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 lived in neighbouring authorities, but we have also received referrals for young people living in Pembrokeshire, Powys, Gwynedd 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 CTM have access to good quality and effective visiting advocacy services, supported by community home staff.</p>
Outcome 2	Children and young people have their privacy and confidences respected and their wellbeing safeguarded and protected.	<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. This year, we have also received multiple requests from referrers and young people themselves to meet at alternative venues such as cafés and LA offices when a school visit is not an option.</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>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, hearing impairment, ADHD, and ASD.</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 received 13 IBA 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>Four IBA referrals were received for pregnant young people this year.</p> <p>Young people identifying as transgender, gender neutral, and LGBTQ have also accessed IBA services this year.</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. This is reflected in young people's feedback, with 48 of the 55 young people providing feedback saying they felt more confident following advocacy support.</p> <p>This year, advocates 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. Often the young person is happy to speak themselves when asked any follow up questions with the support of the advocate.</p> <p>Young people report this as a positive experience and feel more confident about speaking because of the preparation and the attendance of their advocate.</p>

Outcome 5	Children and young people participate in the design, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of advocacy services.	<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>
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