

National Approach to Statutory Advocacy

Local Authority Report Bridgend 2024 - 2025

Collated Annual Report

April 24 - Mar 25

Headline Report

During the year, 133 children and young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 172 issues. This represents a decrease of 12 young people accessing IBA when compared to the previous year, when 145 young people accessed IBA in Bridgend. Some 58 young people accessed the service for the first time, compared to 76 in the previous year. We also observed a small decrease in Active Offers (AO), with 66 received this year, compared to 71 last year.

Active Offer

According to information received from Bridgend, 132 children and young people became eligible for the AO during the year, 130 less than in the previous year. A total of 66 children and young people were referred, meaning that if we assume those referred became eligible in the year, 50% of those eligible were referred, compared to 27% last year. Of the 66 young people referred, 54 AO meetings took place, and 39 young people accepted the AO and went on to receive IBA, 27 less than in the previous year.

Children and young people in the CP arena made up 61% of those referred for AO throughout the year, compared to 65% in the previous year. Although we have noted a small decrease in AO referrals for children and young people in the CP arena, AO referrals for Care Experienced young people rose from 25 in the previous year, to 26 this year. As in the previous year, most AO referrals were for females making up 52% of the total number.

Most young people referred for AO were aged between six and 11 years, followed very closely by those aged between 12 and 16 years. Three young people aged 17 and over were referred for AO as well as one young person aged five or under.

Some 60% of young people referred for the AO received it within five working days of referral. Some visits were delayed as the advocate was instructed to wait until after the summer holidays to arrange a visit in school. Other reasons include young people changing their mind about meeting with an advocate after the referral was made, being unable to contact parents or carers and annual leave and illness affecting capacity in the advocacy team.

Issue Based Advocacy

This year, there has been a decrease in young people accessing IBA with 133 young people being referred this year, compared to 145 in the previous year.

Despite an overall decrease in the number of young people accessing IBA, the number of Care Experienced children and young people referred for IBA increased by 16 and made up 61% of the total number of IBA referrals this year. The decrease in the number of children and young people in the CP arena accessing advocacy services this year could in part be explained by the decrease in this group of young people becoming eligible for the AO. We also received 13 IBA referrals for young people subject to Care and Support plans and ten referrals for Care Leavers during this year.

The gender split remains as it was in the previous year with most IBA referrals being made for females.

Headline Report Cont'd

Despite decreasing by 19, as in the previous year, the majority of IBA referrals were made for young people aged between 12 and 16, making up 44% of the total number of IBA referrals, compared to 54% last year.

'Self-referral' continues to be the most popular route into the IBA service, followed by social services referrals. This year, seven IBA referrals were also made by third sector organisations, mostly TGP Cymru's Family Group Conferencing Service. Only four referrals came from other sources: one each from parents, residential staff, a foster carer and a school.

This year advocates supported children and young people to share wishes and feelings at 59 meetings, 37 of which they attended all or part of either virtually or in person. The meetings were made up of 22 Child Protection Case Conferences (including ten initial conferences), 20 CLA Reviews, 11 Core Group meetings, four planning meetings, one school meeting and one Pathway Plan meeting. This year, advocates have continued to note an increase in young people's attendance at their meetings.

This year, most young people accessing IBA wanted support to help share wishes and feelings about issues at home; either recorded as 'placement issues' or 'home life'. '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. This year, almost all the 21 'Homelife' issues were about relationships at home. The 29 placement issues mostly consisted of young people wanting to leave their placement or who were struggling with relationships with carers and rules and boundaries. Four young people wanted to share their wish to stay in their current placement.

Contact was recorded as the main issue for 34 young people this year. Some young people wanted to raise contact issues relating to more than one person. Most young people shared that they wanted to spend more time with family, this was 14 times in relation to parents, seven times in relation to siblings, six times in relation to wider family, five times in relation to grandparents and twice in relation to a stepparent or partner of a parent. Wanting to stop contact or spend less time with someone was raised just twice, both in relation to a father.

One young person wanted arrangements in place to spend time with their previous carers 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.

Young people also wanted their advocate to support them to share wishes and feelings in relation to social services issues, school or education issues, access to services, care leaver issues, complaints and emotional wellbeing issues.

During the year, 72% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of the IBA referral being made.

Residential Visiting Advocacy (RVA)

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 (BYV) if they want to. The RVA has offered residents to add agenda items to the BYV forum agenda during RBA visits even if they decide they don't want to attend forum meetings. The RVA reports excellent communication with both homes, particularly Meadowview where she is informed when someone new moves in, and when a young person requests an advocacy visit. The visiting advocate has dealt with several issues during her visits by supporting young people to share their views, wishes and feelings with community home managers. Several young people living in community homes have also accessed IBA throughout the year.

The RVA for Bakers Way and Harwood House initially experienced some difficulties in contacting home managers to arrange a visit. The RVA contact the Deputy Residential Manager and a visit to Bakers Way was carried out in quarter three, but the manager feels regular monthly visits will not be beneficial at this time. The RVA also met with the manager of Harwood House in quarter three who explained the young people in residence had no current issues and were well supported by professionals, she therefore also felt visiting advocacy was not beneficial at this time. The RVA has offered to attend a team meeting to discuss advocacy and share information about Non-Instructed Advocacy (NIA) in both homes. We have agreed that the managers will let the RVA know if they would like her to attend in the future.

Consultations have been prepared and have been shared with both young people and staff in Bridgend community homes during the quarter four. This will allow us to review and evaluate the service and inform any necessary changes to improve our service.

Service Information

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

In June, following a decline in young people in the child protection arena being referred for AO, the Advocacy Team Manager and the Advocacy Operational Manager met with the Bridgend Group Manager for Case Management and Transition, along with a member of the Bridgend Commissioning Team. During the meeting, the Active Offer Activity Spreadsheet, along with guidance for completion was shared and discussed, along with referral information and general information about advocacy and the AO designed to be shared with young people.

In September, the advocacy team manager attended the Children's Continuous Improvement Group in Bridgend Civic Centre, to promote and discuss the advocacy service, as well as discuss the AO referral pathway and referral rates. Following this, the team manager also attended the Care Experienced Children's Team (CECT) meeting where information on referral pathways and the advocacy process was shared.

Both team meetings were very positive, and the team manager was able to answer questions from both team managers and social workers, as well as share feedback from advocates about recent pieces of work undertaken. Social workers in the CECT team also shared some recent case examples describing positive advocacy interventions, which the team manager shared with the advocacy team. Later in the year, the advocacy team manager attended the West team meeting and the 16+ team meetings and the Information Advice and Assistance team meeting in Bridgend Civic offices.

Following the meetings, literature was sent via email, containing information on referral pathways, the AO and the advocacy process. Several IBA referrals were received as a result of attendance at Children's Services team meetings.

The advocacy team manager met and shared information on the advocacy service and referral process with a trainee social worker in quarter four as part of her induction. A meeting was also held with a social worker from the Care Experienced team to discuss and share information on the Non-Instructed Advocacy (NIA) service. We welcome the opportunity to share and discuss advocacy provision with social workers across CTM.

Following recruitment in the previous year, a new full time senior advocate role was created, and the successful candidate started her role at the beginning of April. A casual advocate has also been recruited to take over the residential visiting advocacy (RVA) role. Two new part-time Independent Professional Advocates (IPA), one working four days per week, and one working three days per week have also been recruited. Following an increase in referrals in this period, we considered starting the recruitment process for a new full-time advocate to adjust our capacity but have decided to put this recruitment on hold for now, until the outcome of the current tendering process is known.

During quarter one, the CTM team completed internal training in Non-Instructed Advocacy (NIA) and internal Restorative Engagement. The advocacy team have also completed training in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Personal Safety and Lone Working Training with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, and in response to the increase in referrals for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking young people, the Senior Advocate has completed a one-day training course with the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST).

The Senior Advocate has completed a Children in Wales training course about Care Experienced Young People Transition and the Care Leaver Journey. Team members who were unable to attend previously, completed a First Aid at Work training course in February.

TGP Cymru have identified a funding source which we plan to use to deliver a pilot project which will focus on the delivery of advocacy services to children and young people suffering with emotional and mental health difficulties but do not meet criteria for statutory services. Unfortunately, the recruitment process undertaken in quarter four was unsuccessful and we have decided to put this piece of work on hold until the current tendering process is complete.

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 Senior Advocate 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, 18 young people provided feedback about the advocacy service they received.

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, 14 felt more confident since receiving support, 16 felt more included in decisions, and 17 felt their views were fully considered and their rights represented. All of the young people young providing feedback this year stated they would use the service again.

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

"Tony found out the answer of something I could not answer."

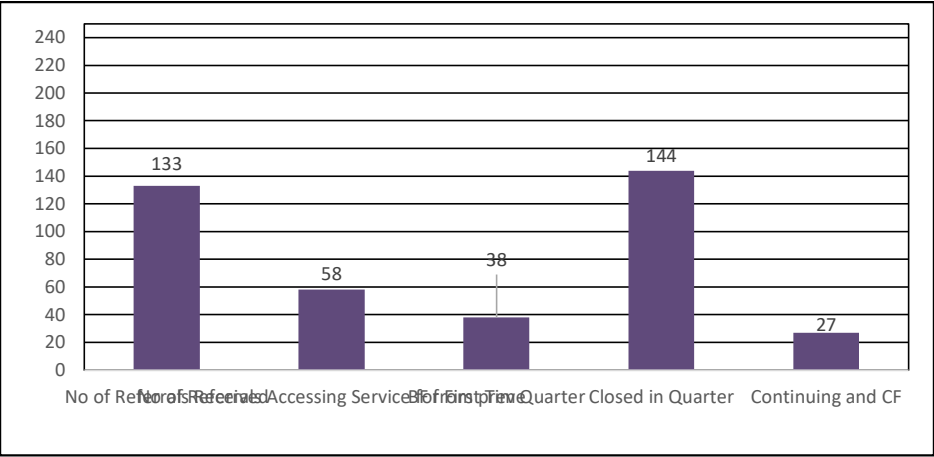
When explaining why they felt more confident about things since having advocacy support, one young person said:

"I now feel I can talk without being judged and looked at different with my opinions"

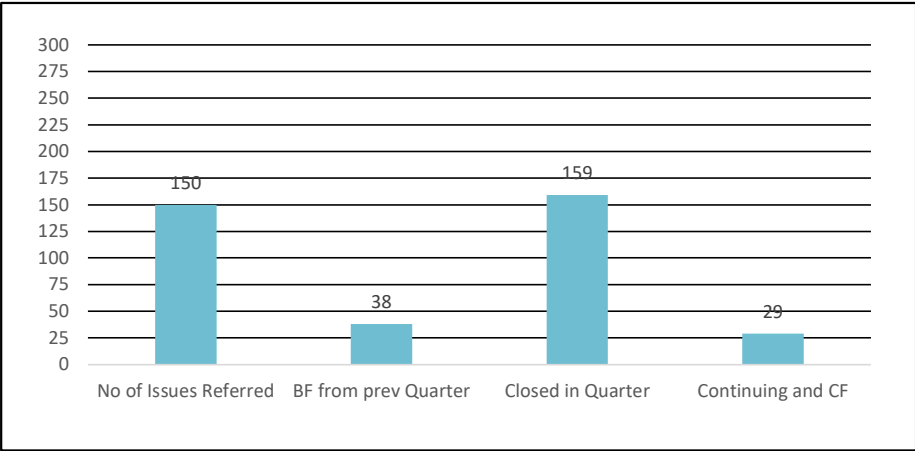
Whilst explaining why they felt the service made them feel more included in decisions, and led to them knowing more about their rights, one young person said:

"I feel I have more options in life and I feel that I can have my own say"
"I know more about the fact that I have my own choices and my own voice"

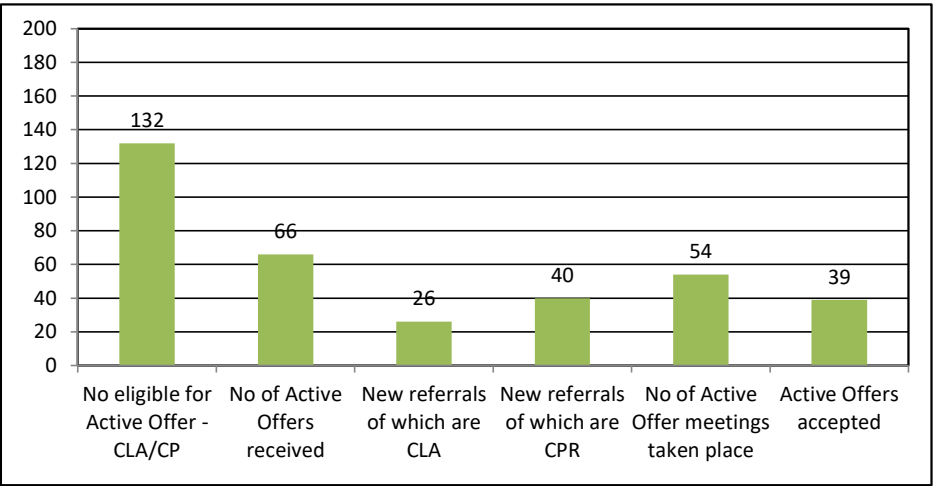
1a. Advocacy Cases - Young People - Issue Based Advocacy



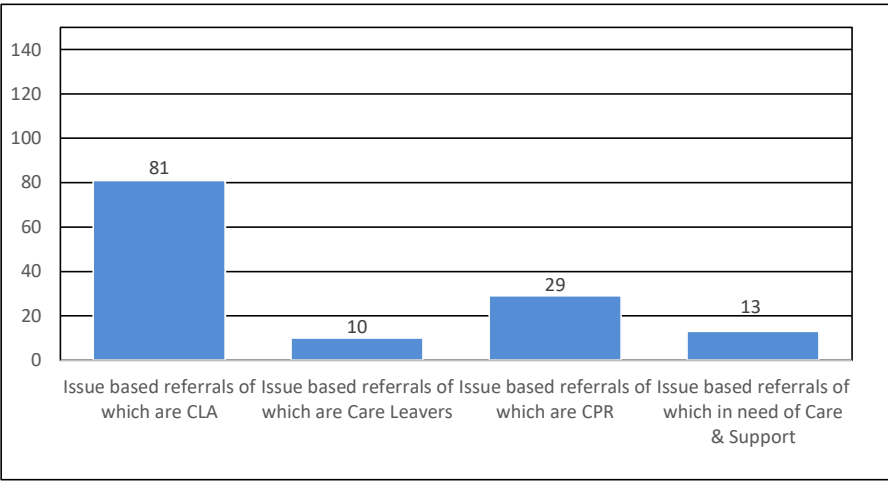
1b. Advocacy Cases - Interventions - Issue Based Advocacy



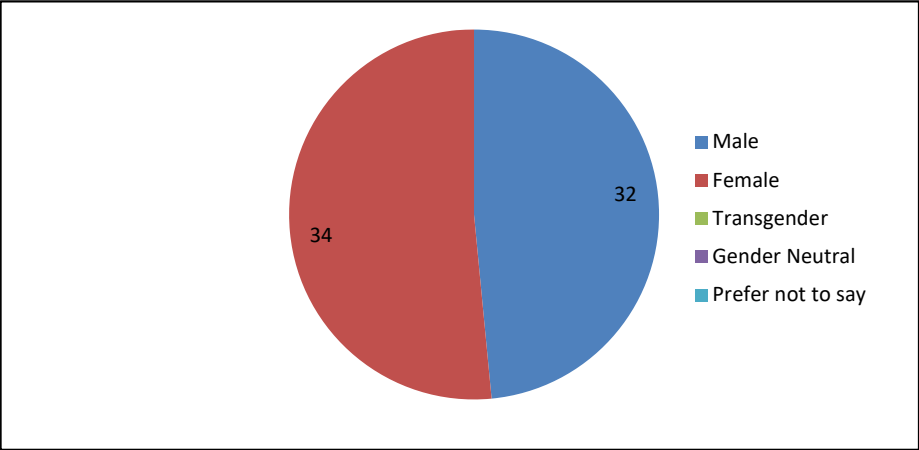
2a. Eligibility Criteria: Active Offer



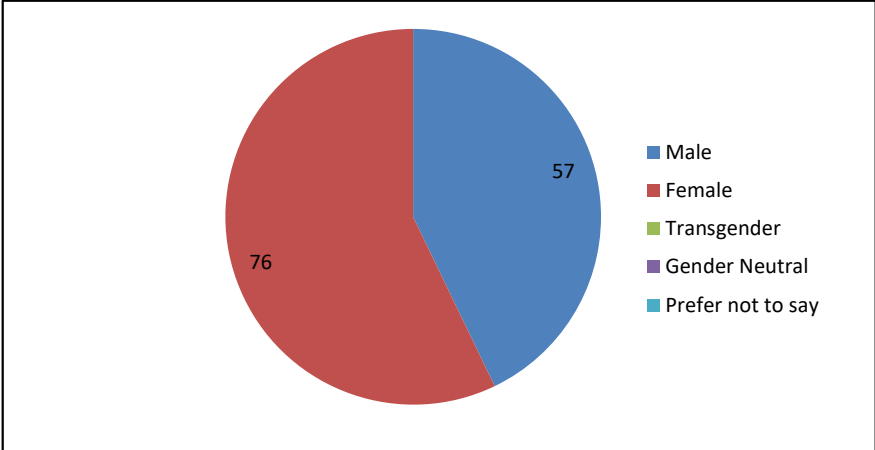
2b. Eligibility Criteria: Issue Based



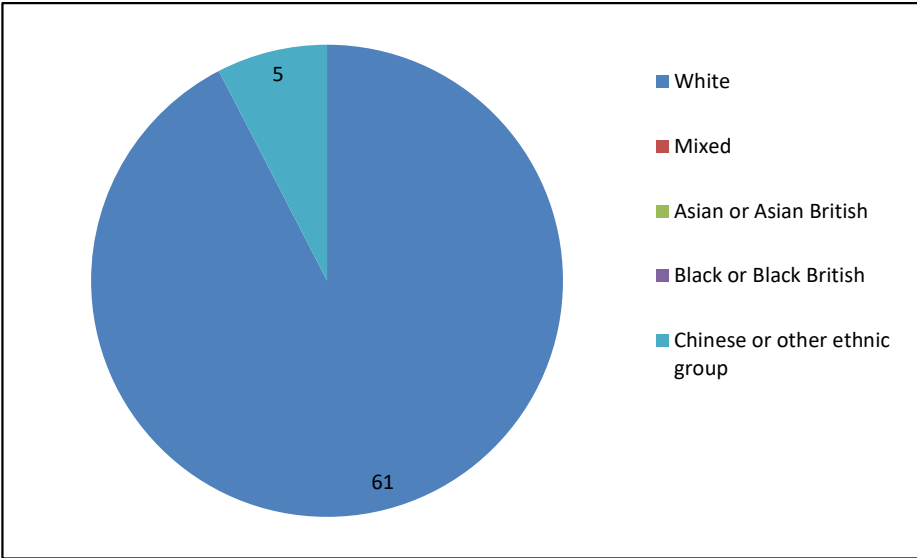
3a. Demographics: Gender - Active Offer



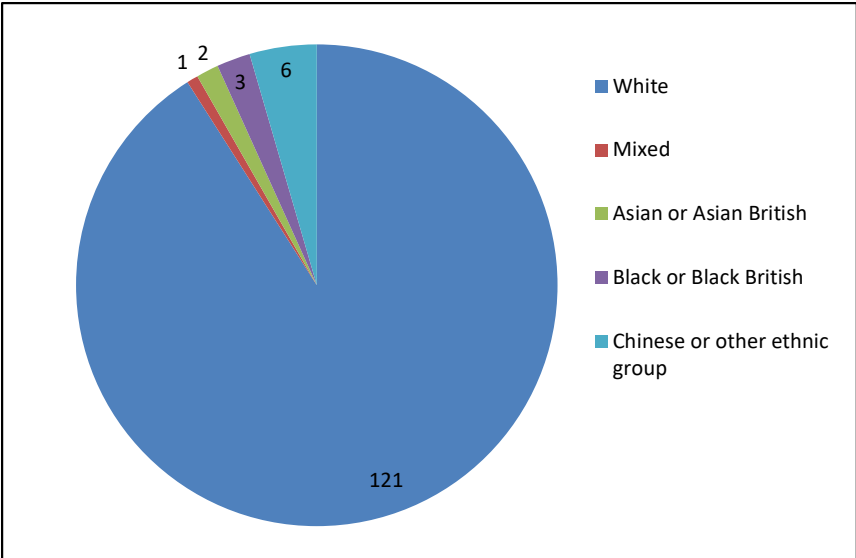
3b. Demographics: Gender - Issue Based



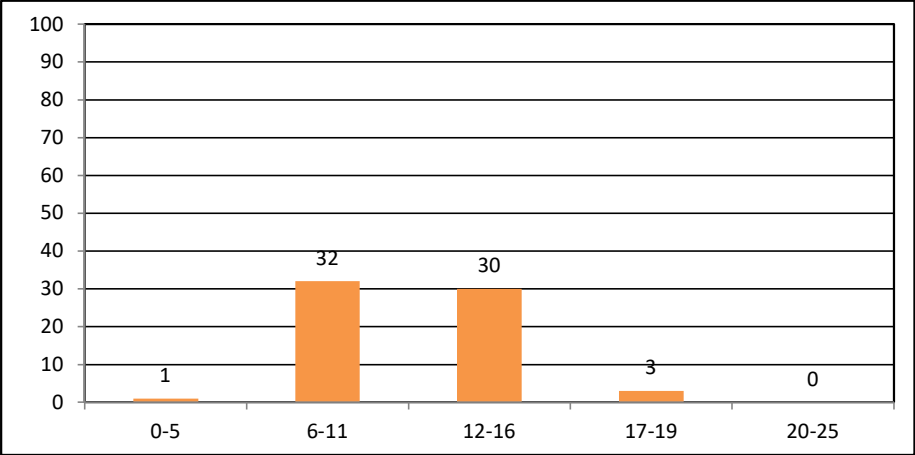
3c. Demographics: Ethnicity - Active Offer



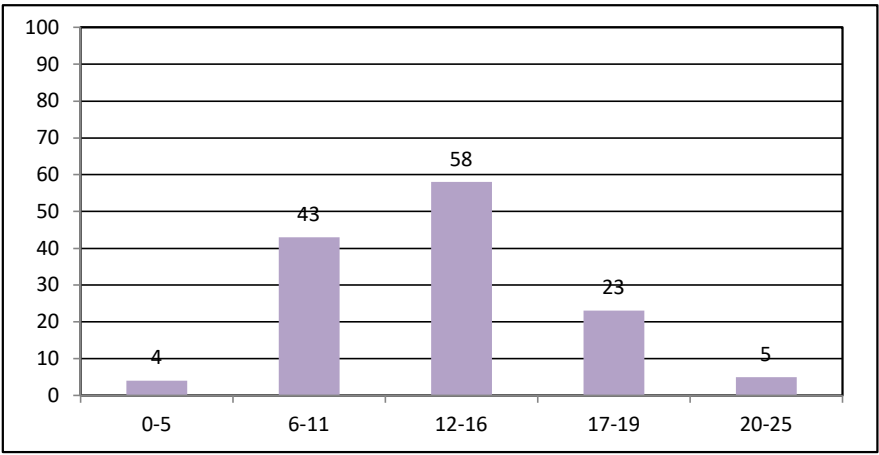
3d. Demographics: Ethnicity - Issue Based



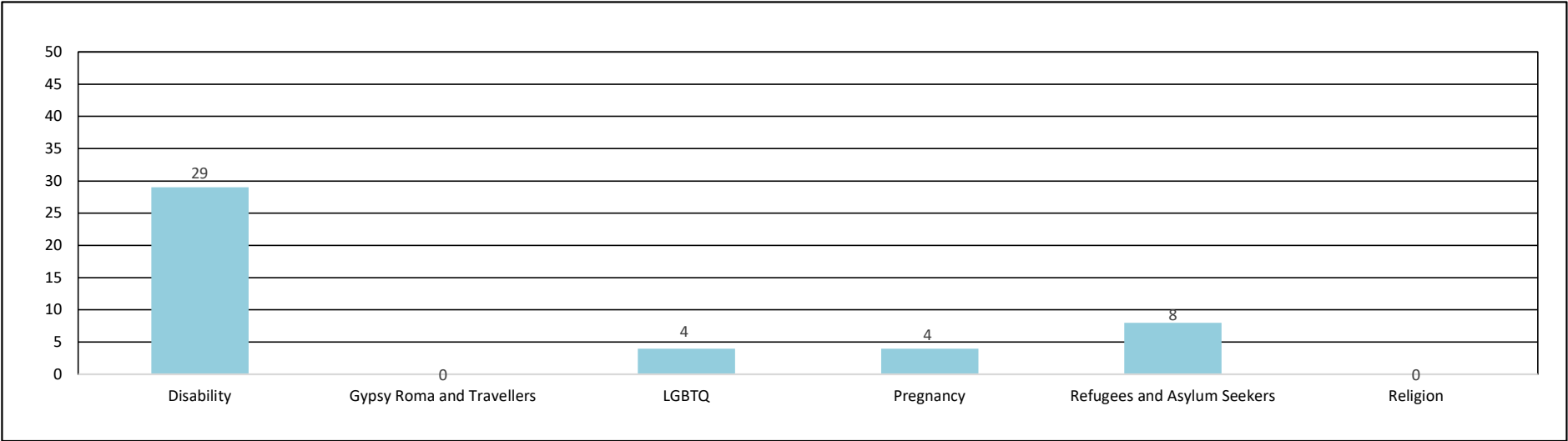
3e. Demographics: Age - Active Offer



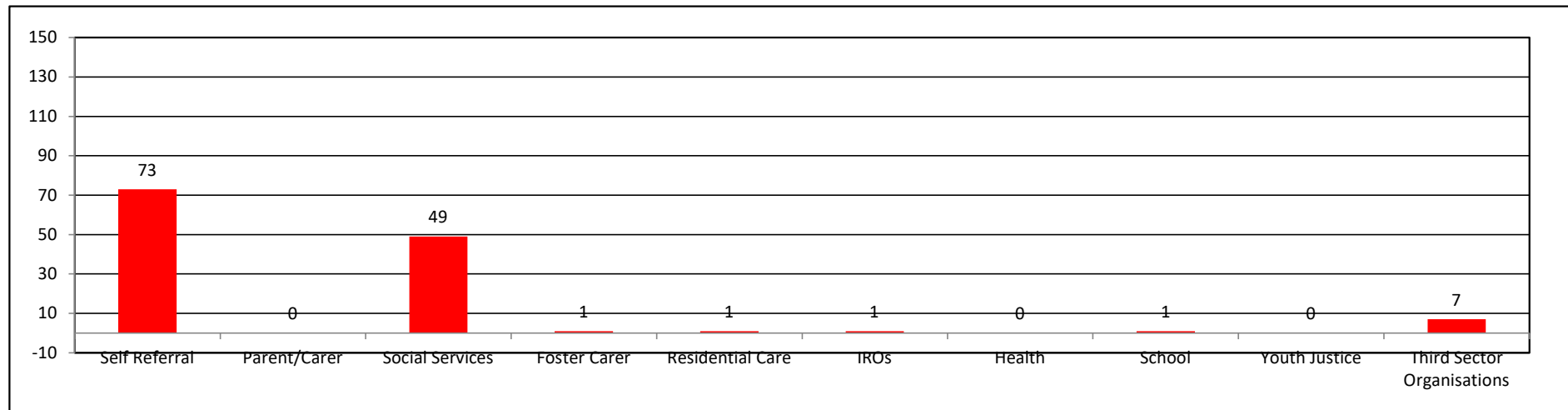
3f. Demographics: Age - Issue Based



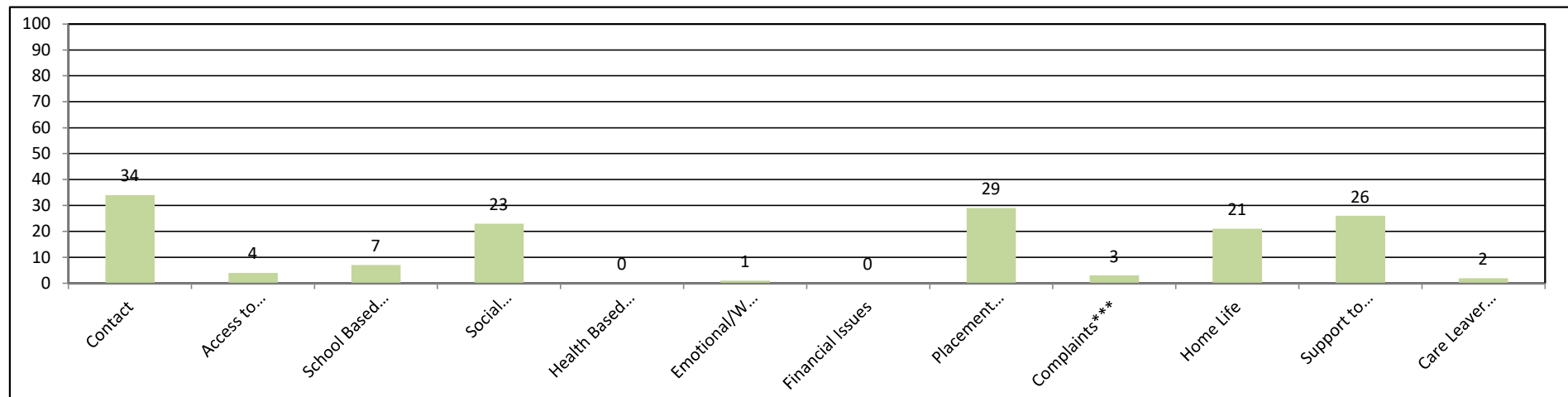
4. Protected Characteristics



5. Referral Source per young person - Issue Based only



6. Issues Presented

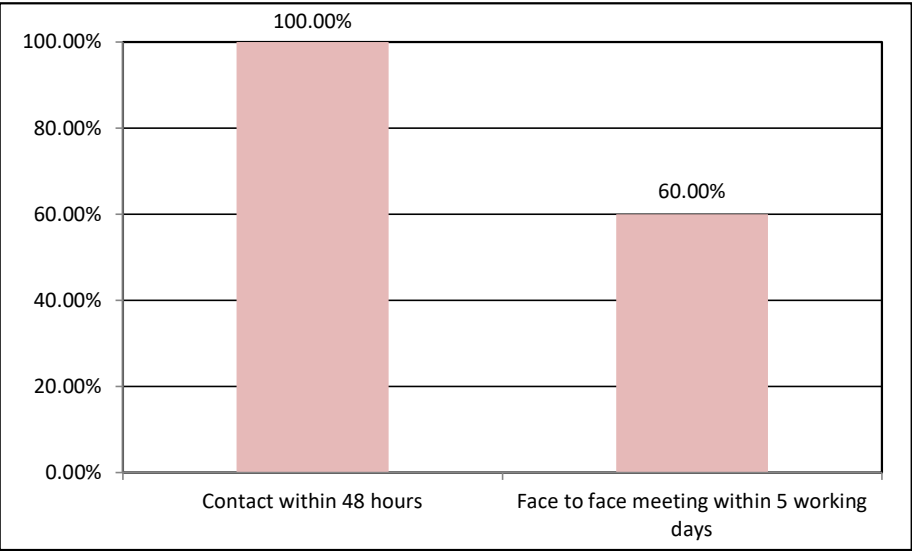


* School based issues including: SEN/ALN, exclusions, bullying, transport.

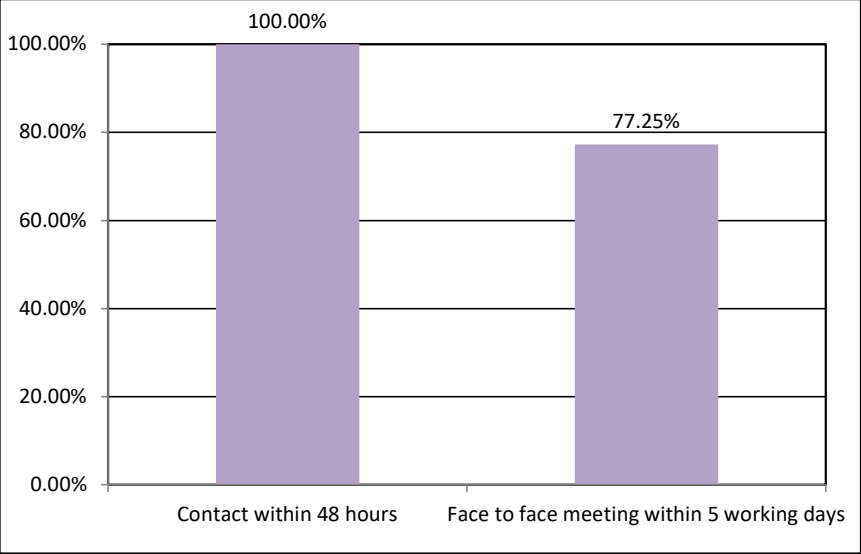
** Social Services based issues including: relationship with worker, care plan, service provided.

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

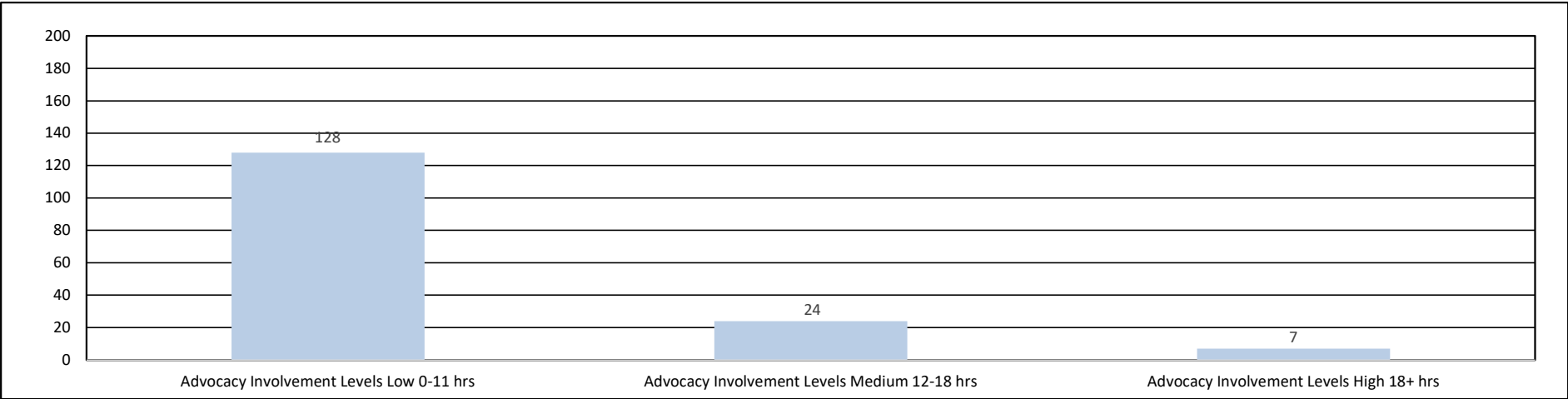
7. Service Performance - Active Offer



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 69% 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 London, Pembrokeshire, Monmouthshire and Newport among others this year.</p> <p>During the initial visit with a young person, the allocated advocate shares an advocacy pack with the 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 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. If the referred young person chooses not to meet with an advocate, they will still receive the pack by post and have the choice to request an advocacy visit later.</p> <p>As detailed above, consultations have now been shared with both young people and staff in Bridgend community homes. Information from the consultations will allow us to review and evaluate the service and inform any necessary changes.</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. We ask referrers to inform parents and carers if young people request a visit at school to avoid potential delays in arranging visits.</p> <p>During quarter four, an advocate met one young person in a coffee shop as she lived in temporary accommodation and was not allowed to have visitors at home.</p> <p>One Bridgend safeguarding referral was made in quarter three. No formal feedback has been received but the advocate is still in contact with the young person.</p>

Outcome 3	Children and young people are valued for their diversity, treated with respect and all forms of discrimination against them are challenged.	<p>During this year, we have provided IBA to young people with a wide range of disabilities and communication needs. These included ADHD, ASD, Cerebral Palsy, Global Development Delay, Dyspraxia and a Brain Tumour.</p> <p>When young people have an additional learning need or disability that potentially affects communication, advocates always take advice from their social worker and others who know them best to communicate as effectively as possible. It is important to note that young people accessing the mainstream advocacy service must have some understanding of the role and function of advocacy, meaning they will be able to have control over the information they share and understand the possible outcomes.</p> <p>IPA's have supported unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people with 13 issues during this year. They have accessed IBA in the language of their choice via interpreter services. The languages are Arabic, Kurdish and Sudanese.</p> <p>Pregnant young people, and young people identifying as LGBTQ have also accessed IBA in Bridgend this year.</p>
Outcome 4	Children and young people are empowered to take the lead in relation to advocacy services and their rights, wishes and feelings and championed.	<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 echoed in young people's feedback, with almost 80% of young people providing feedback saying they felt more confident following advocacy support.</p> <p>We have continued to note 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. As highlighted in the feedback section above, when young people have a positive experience following an advocacy intervention, they often gain confidence and will continue to share their feelings, and challenge decisions they are unhappy about, with or without the support of their advocate.</p> <p>During quarter two, an advocate supported a young person to co-chair his own CLA Review. This was something the young person requested and found to be a very rewarding experience.</p> <p>During quarter four, another young person was supported to attend a CP conference for her unborn child. She had initially told her advocate that she didn't want to talk at all, mainly because she was nervous about the questions she would be asked. After some encouragement and preparation with her advocate before the meeting, she felt she would be able to ask questions if needed, providing her advocate agreed to step in if she appeared uncomfortable. The advocate shared her views, wishes and feelings report, but the young person spoke for herself for the remainder of the meeting, and was able to ask some questions herself as well as answer questions from professionals.</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, the Residential Visiting Advocate, with the support of the Senior Advocate has begun consulting with young people living in local authority community homes to capture their thoughts about visiting advocacy. Consultations have been shared with both young people and staff in Bridgend community homes and will allow us to review and evaluate the service and inform any necessary changes.</p>
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