

IMPACT REPORT SUMMARY

ADVOCACY IN ACTION



Offering free and independent advocacy

to vulnerable communities in Norwich and Norfolk.

From July to December 2025, we have gathered data and insights from service users, advocates, team leaders, managers, and CEOs who have worked in the frontlines of advocacy.

This report draws on primary data to provide insights into the quantitative information shared with Norfolk County Council. It highlights the intricate relationship between complex cases needing a multi-faceted approach and serves as a guide to understanding advocacy's role in navigating fragmented systems for people who share a protected characteristic.

Intersectionality

Advocates stress that intersectionality, especially the combined impact of disability, trauma, and poverty, is often overlooked by institutions.

Many clients have faced trauma, including abuse, neglect, substance misuse, or domestic violence. This shows the complexity of advocacy work and the need for a comprehensive approach to support.

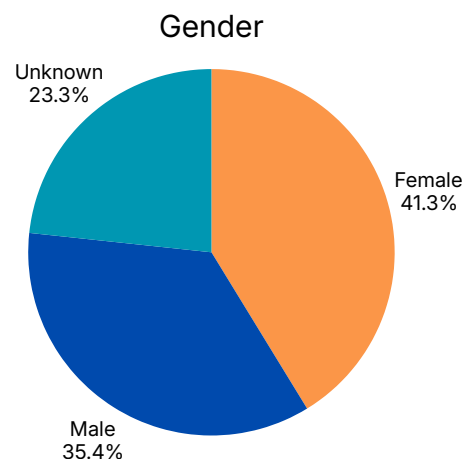
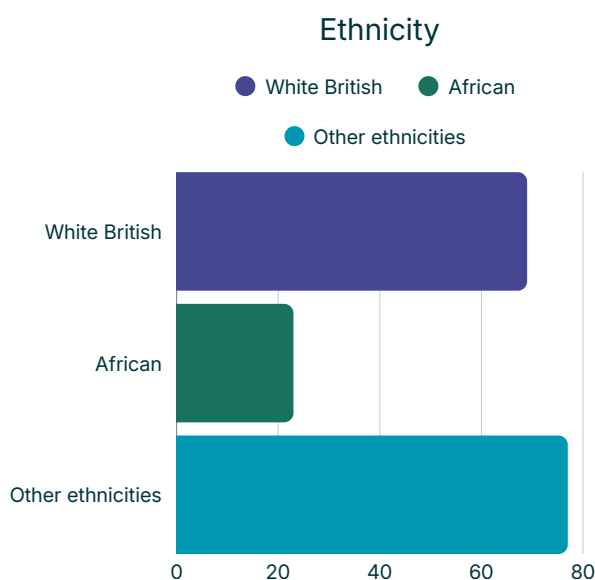
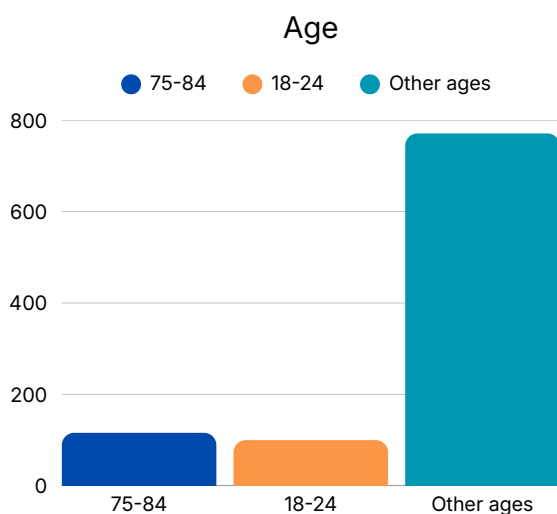
Our partners



Demographic & engagement

During this time, we provided support to **1,895 people** in Norfolk and Norwich, representing a diverse range of ages, backgrounds, genders, and disabilities. Notably, 57% of the referrals were self-referrals.

Data shows that more women use advocacy services than men. Since data collection is new for the partners, about 20% of users haven't provided their information.



Key Impact

- A case study illustrates how an older woman, who was facing domestic abuse and navigating the complex welfare system, successfully rebuilt her life thanks to the comprehensive support provided by Age UK Norwich.
- The largest group accessing services were older adults followed by young adults. This supports shows the growing need for advocacy among these groups, who face significant barriers.
- More young people are seeking advocacy due to the efforts of MAP and Bridge Plus, which aid those facing homelessness and navigating the benefits system.
- Though collecting ethnicity data is new, service users of African descent are the second largest group. MAP and Bridge Plus report increased advocacy needs among ethnic minorities, especially refugees facing homelessness and issues with housing, benefits, and employment

Systemic issues

- **The decrease in funding for advocacy services** would limit the sector's ability to provide the holistic, support required by individuals with complex needs. As funding continues to diminish, institutions will increasingly face the challenge of managing complex cases with multi-layered issues.
- **Fuel poverty** affects older people and those with learning disabilities, they continue to face serious financial pressures, including difficulty heating their homes and managing rising living costs.
- **Increase in homelessness among young people & refugees** driven by complex, interlinked challenges and a lack of holistic responses.



Refugees granted status often experience periods of street homelessness.

Many of them experience profound economic and social disadvantages, often as a result of forced migration or settling as economic migrants in insecure, low-paid jobs (The Bridge Plus).



"The cost of electricity has quadrupled over recent years... It's not unusual for bills to reach £400–£500 a month for our clients. Many residents are trapped in outdated local authority housing with inefficient electric heating systems, driving them deeper into debt" (Norfolk Age UK).

- **Social services often do not meet their statutory responsibilities**, this creates unrealistic burdens on charities as advocates are increasingly expected to take on responsibilities outside their remit.

Equal Lives has noted the persistent unmet needs in social care. "Families dealing with trauma, neglect, and domestic abuse frequently fall through the cracks, as services do not take a comprehensive approach"

Systemic issues

- **Digital exclusion and language barriers** is hindering access to services for people with learning disabilities, the Deaf community and migrants.



"People are anxious about scams, receiving misleading job offers, and navigating unclear messages. The fear generated by these situations is very real and concerning for those who find themselves in this digital landscape" (Opening Doors).

Advocacy impact

The role of advocacy is crucial in amplifying marginalised voices. Despite challenges, advocacy has a significant positive impact:

- Preventing unnecessary residential care and promoting independent living.
- Recovering financial losses effectively.
- Assisting neurodivergent clients or those with language barriers in managing bills, benefits, and legal issues, reducing stress and encouraging independence.
- Preventing homelessness among youth and refugees while fostering community involvement.
- Connecting clients to statutory services they might struggle to access without an advocate.
- Empowering parents to navigate child protection.

Health inequalities

- Slow or inadequate responses from social care in safeguarding cases, negatively affecting clients' mental health and wellbeing.
- Lack of in-depth assessment and support for older adults and people with learning disabilities when navigating the health system.
- Limited understanding of neurodiversity in disabled clients who have other overlapping identities.

"If we weren't here, what would happen to these communities?" (Opening Doors)

"Advocacy provides emotional safety, reduces isolation, and ensures clients' voices are heard at critical decision-making points, avoiding unnecessary interventions." (Equal Lives)

"I am so pleased that L now has an advocate as with all other meetings she always got up and left but since you have been on board she remains in meetings and remains calm. ... " (independent chair)