

Assessment of needs, service experiences and outcomes: Listening to the voices of youth advice service clients

A report for:



by James Kenrick

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1. Background and purpose of the research

Youth Legal is an independent legal advice and education charity based in the London Borough of Wandsworth, assisting marginalised and vulnerable young people across the wider London area.

Following the coronavirus pandemic, Youth Legal became concerned to ensure its advice service was meeting emerging needs and commissioned research with young clients.

Through semi-structured interviews conducted in summer 2022, the research sought to improve understanding of clients' needs, advice-seeking behaviour, service experiences and outcomes.

Analysis of the findings from the research falls into four parts:

- The first part examines the demographic profile and characteristics of the clients who took part in the research and the nature of the legal assistance being provided by Youth Legal.
- The second part focusses on young people's access to Youth Legal's advice service and their advice-seeking behaviour. It explores young people's journeys into and through the service, their experiences of accessing the service, their advice-seeking preferences, and the impact of the pandemic on young people's advice-seeking behaviour.
- The third part focuses on young people's feedback on their experiences of getting advice from Youth Legal, including what they value about the service and improvements they would like to see in the future.
- The fourth part examines client outcomes, exploring what young people perceive to have changed for them – across areas such as mental health and wellbeing, legal capability, safety, and education and employment – as a result of getting advice from Youth Legal.

In order to assist Youth Legal's learning from the research and to inform service developments, analysis of the findings and recommendations are included at the end of each section.

This work is viewed by Youth Legal as central to its organisational strategy, which aims to develop young people's access to age-appropriate specialist legal advice, whilst ensuring that young people's voices are central to everything the organisation does and that data on young people's experiences drive service improvement.

Youth Legal's service

Youth Legal's mission is to bring lasting change to the lives of marginalised and vulnerable young people by providing easy access to young person-friendly social welfare lawyers and advisers offering high quality, holistic support and legal education.

Youth Legal's youth-friendly lawyers and caseworkers offer legal advice and representation to help young people

- understand their rights
- sort out problems with money and benefits, housing, homelessness and immigration
- obtain support from social services where they are a care leaver, need to be in care or have disabilities

In addition to its core advice and representation service, Youth Legal seeks to:

- Empower young people by giving them the knowledge and skills to manage their problems;
- Support youth professionals through the provision of expert '2nd tier' advice and support;
- Influence policy and practice through strategic litigation and by acting as an exemplar delivery model of legal advice for young people;
- Listen to young people and enable them to hold the organisation and others to account through Youth Legal's Youth Advisory Board and volunteering programme.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted by James Kenrick, an independent consultant with expertise in young people's rights and advice services.

Semi-structured interviews with twenty-six clients of Youth Legal were conducted by telephone between August and September 2022. See Appendix 1 for interview schedule.

Clients were selected by the researcher from lists of current and recent clients provided by advisers. A similar number of clients was selected from each of the advisers' client lists.

Advisers obtained clients' initial agreement to participate in the research and booked them in for interviews with the researcher using the Calendly app. This was often done in the course of routine casework, for example at the end of a meeting with the client.

An automated reminder was texted to clients 15 minutes prior to the interview. The researcher then phoned the client at the time booked. With a certain amount of chasing, it was possible to interview almost all clients selected. Interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes.

Both advisers and the researcher emphasised to clients that participation in the research was voluntary and would not affect the support clients would receive from Youth Legal in any way. Clients' consent to participate in the research, and for recording of the interviews, was confirmed at the beginning of the interview with the researcher. Where clients were aged under 18, the prior written consent of a parent or carer was also obtained.

Safeguarding of clients and their data was ensured throughout.

- An enhanced CRB check was obtained for the researcher prior to the research commencing.
- Only clients aged 16 and above were selected for participation in the research.
- A Youth Legal mobile phone was used for all contact with clients.
- The researcher checked with all participants whether their participation in the research caused them any distress or gave rise to the need for any support.
- All calls were recorded, with recordings kept for a period of three months to ensure time for monitoring and write-up, after which they were deleted.
- Only anonymised and non-identifiable data are included in the report.

Basic demographic data held on clients by Youth Legal was extracted from the AdvicePro case management system prior to interviews. Additional data was sought in the interviews to fill gaps in the information held.

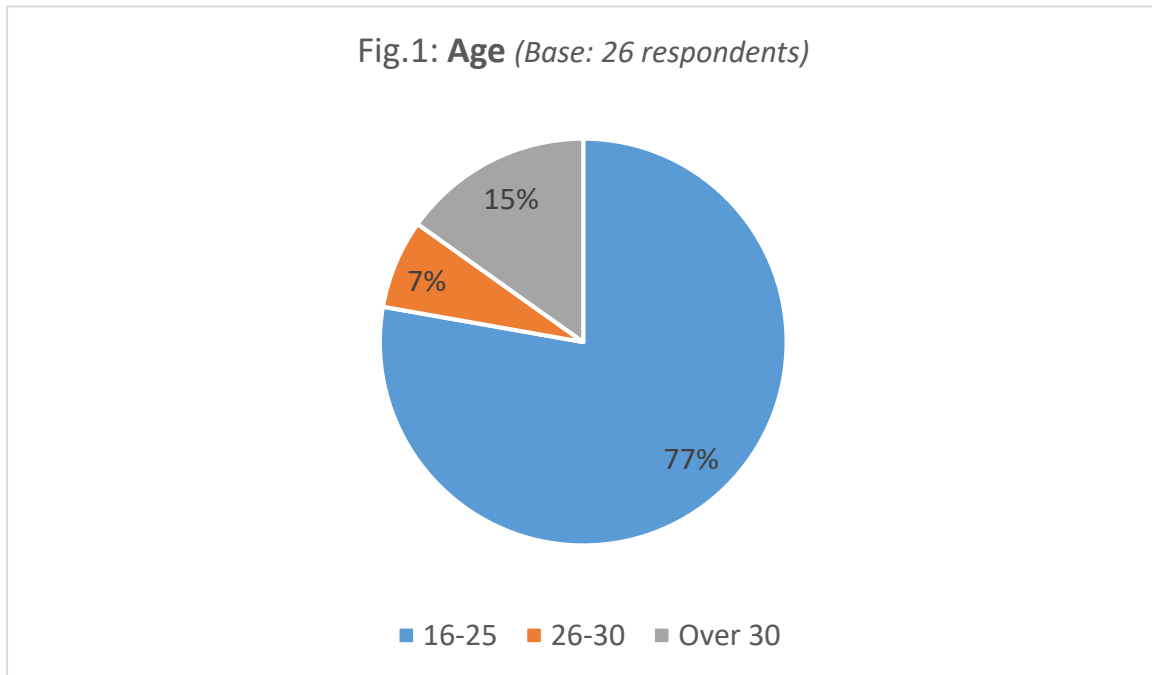
In addition to the interviews with clients, three interpreters used by Youth Legal to facilitate meetings with clients were interviewed by telephone for their perspectives on methods of advice delivery. The interpreters covered the following languages: Dari, Pashto, Somali and Turkish.

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically.

3. The Clients: demographic profile and advice issues of research participants

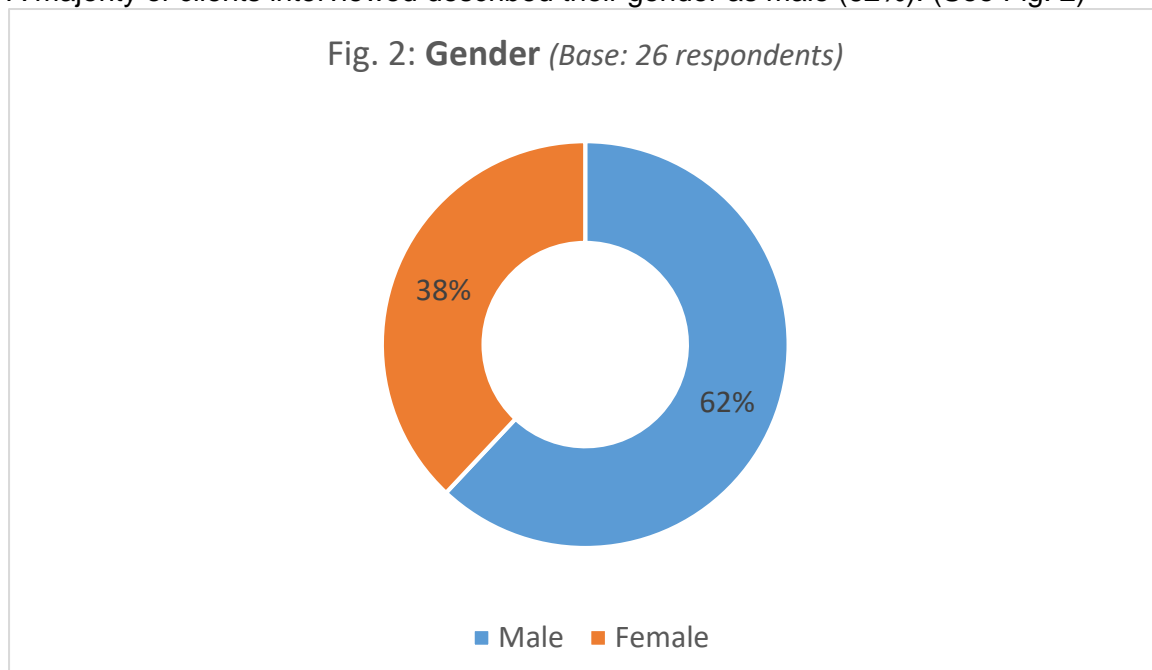
3.1 Age

77% of the twenty-six clients interviewed were aged between 16 and 25. A further 7% were aged between 26 and 30, but had first received Youth Legal's help before the age of 25. The remaining 15% were over the age of 30 and were mainly parents of children requiring social care. (See Fig. 1)



3.2 Gender

A majority of clients interviewed described their gender as male (62%). (See Fig. 2)



3.3 Ethnicity, language and vulnerability

All but one of the clients interviewed were from a minority ethnic community (96%). The majority (58%) were refugees, asylum-seekers or recent migrants to the UK.¹

More than two-thirds of those interviewed (69%) did not speak English as a first language. On the advice of advisers, five interviews took place with an interpreter. There were several other interviews where the involvement of an interpreter might have been beneficial to the collection of data.

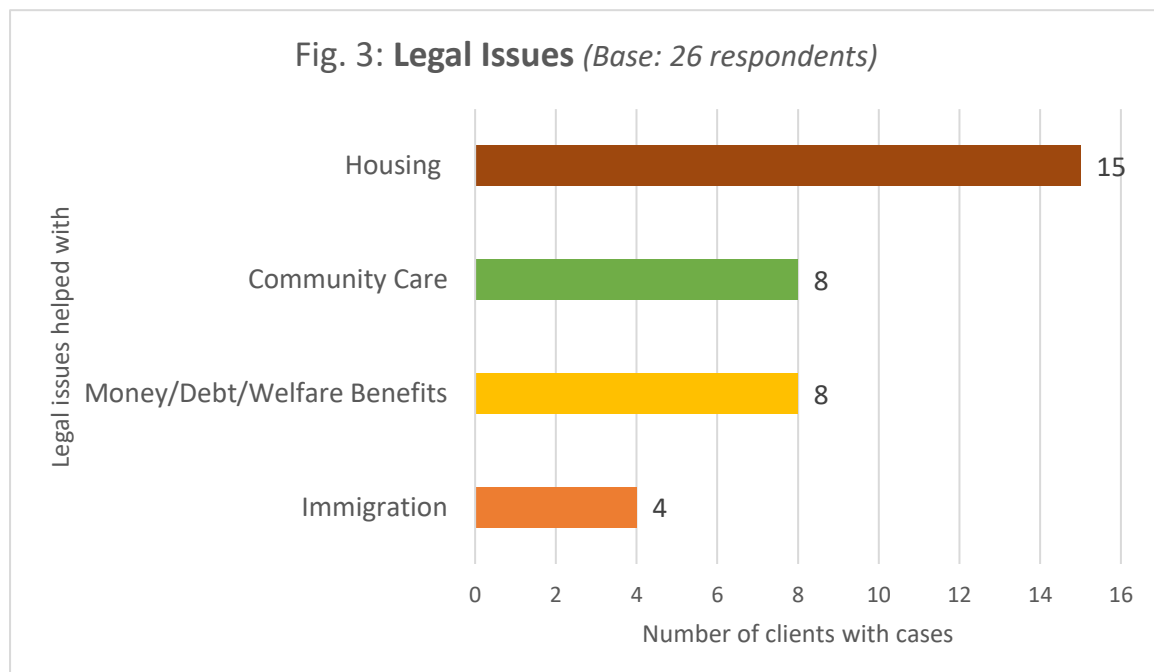
Many clients reported experiencing mental health issues, trauma, illness or disability, whilst some had been the victim of abuse, domestic violence, exploitation or torture.

Generally, it can be said that participants in the research were likely to be highly vulnerable based on their age, ethnicity, language and health, or on account of their immigration status or their experience as victims of violence, abuse or exploitation.

3.4 Legal issues

Over half of clients (58%) reported that they had been helped with housing and homelessness issues by Youth Legal. Nearly a third said they had received advice on Community Care issues (31%). A similar number reported that they had been assisted with matters relating to money, debt or welfare benefits (31%), whilst four clients had received advice on immigration (15%). (See Fig. 3)

Clients had been helped with 1.3 legal problems on average. In addition to receiving help on legal issues, around a quarter of clients had received advice or assistance in relation to non-legal issues, including health, education and employment.

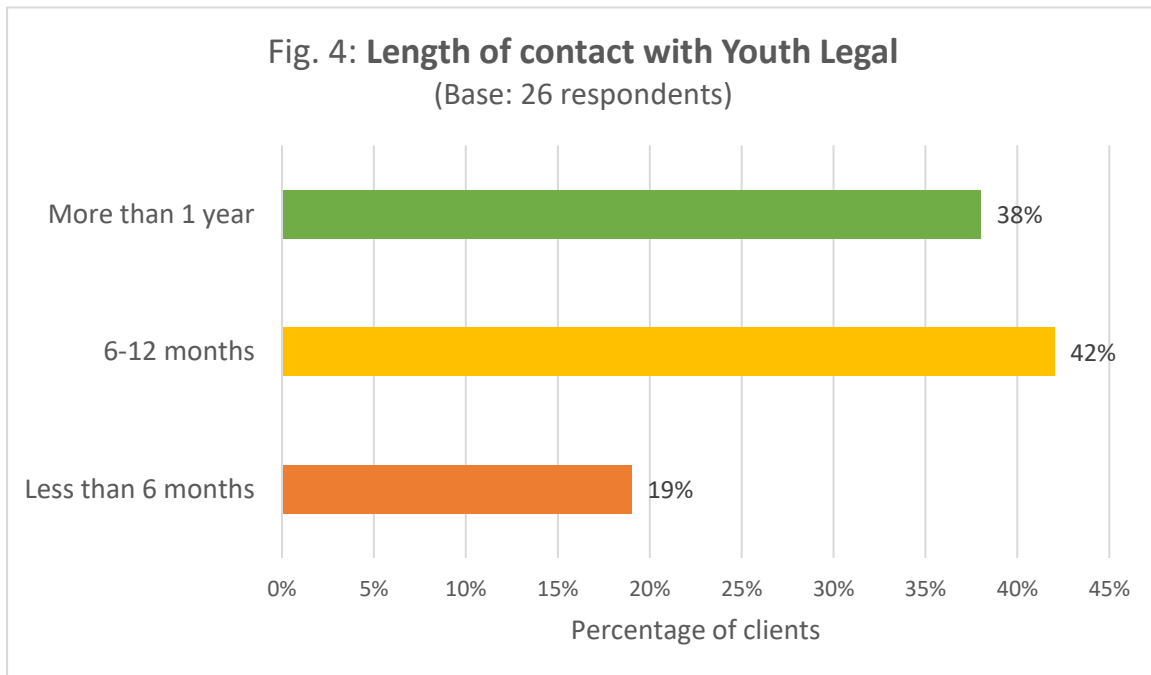


¹ Data on ethnicity and migrant status was taken from service data held on AdvicePro.

It should be noted that the issues on which advice had been provided were identified by clients in the interviews and may not correspond with data recorded by Youth Legal advisers.

3.5 Length of contact with Youth Legal

All of the clients interviewed were the subject of ongoing or recent legal casework conducted by Youth Legal. 19% of clients had been in receipt of advice for less than six months, 42% for between 6 months and a year, whilst 38% had been helped for over a year.



4. Findings: Quality of Access

4.1 Initial Access

4.1.1 How clients reached Youth Legal

Most clients interviewed (over four-fifths) were referred to Youth Legal by another agency. Most commonly, referral agencies specialised in working with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. There were also referrals from legal advice organisations (including Citizens Advice, The Law Society and a private practice law firm), youth homelessness agencies, care leavers' organisations and a women's refuge.

Two clients had found out about Youth Legal through websites (Google in one instance and the Money Advice and Pensions Service website in the other).

No clients had found out about the service through word of mouth or local community contacts.

4.1.2 Initial method of contact

Clients were most likely to have made their initial contact with Youth Legal through the telephone advice line, with nearly three-fifths citing this as the method of initial contact.

Only one in five clients said their initial contact with Youth Legal was in person. Where it was in person, the initial meeting usually took place in an outreach venue, for example where a Youth Legal adviser came to the referral agency to facilitate the 'trust transfer' that has been found to be key to successful referrals.² Only one client said their initial contact was made by coming to Youth Legal's office.

A further one-fifth made their initial contact by email, with many of these contacts being followed up by a phonecall from an adviser.

One client first met their adviser over a Zoom call after being referred by another organisation.

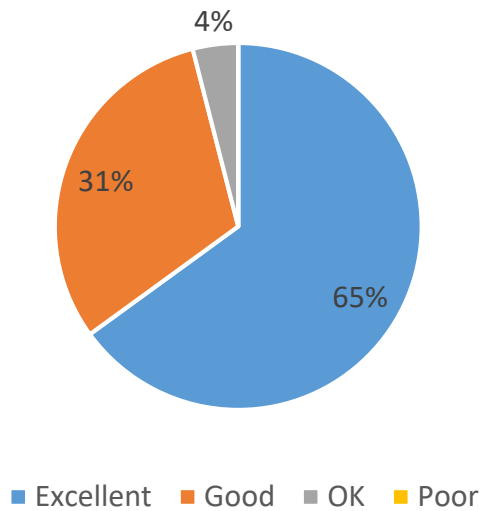
4.1.3 Client experience of initial access

Most clients reported good experiences of their initial access and first contacts with Youth Legal. Many described the adviser they first spoke to as being welcoming, friendly, helpful or reassuring.

When asked to rate Youth Legal for how welcoming the service is, 96% of clients interviewed said 'Excellent' (65%) or 'Good' (31%). (See Fig. 4.)

² Pleasence, P. (2007) "Trust me. I'm a lawyer." Outreach advice and the integration of public services'. *Focus, Issue 54*, Legal Services Commission.

Fig. 4: How would you rate Youth Legal for how welcoming the service is? (Base: 26 respondents)



“When I first needed help, Youth Legal responded quickly.”

“Friendly, welcoming, easy to understand, friendly to young people.”

“It was perfect. I trust [Adviser]. She was very welcoming, excellent, helpful, really good communication.”

“I found the service reassuring, welcoming and helpful when I first contacted.”

“I liked that the service was linked to the CAB. It takes the pressure off.”

“The service is welcoming, friendly and very helpful.”

“Very very welcoming, really good communication”

4.1.4 Client preferences for initial access

Even though only one in five clients had initially accessed the service in person, a majority said that face to face would be their preferred method for their first contact with an advice service. Fifteen of the 21 clients who expressed one or more preferences mentioned face to face. Reasons for choosing face to face included the need to show papers, difficulties in building trust remotely and language barriers using the telephone.

Seven clients mentioned email as a preferred method, with six mentioning the telephone. Many of these clients listed more than one preference or said that face to face, email and telephone were all equally convenient for them. Clients preferring telephone or email over face to face referred to these methods being quicker and avoiding having to travel to the service.

Indeed, some clients who expressed a preference for face to face advice on initial contact qualified their choice by saying it would depend on how easy it would be for them to reach

the location of the service. Additionally, a client's preference for face to face advice was sometimes restricted to the initial meeting and did not always translate into a preference for face to face advice for subsequent contacts.

"Face to face is my favourite, you can see the person's pain and see that they're listening, you can see how I feel and how I dress. Even if it's just one face to face meeting to start with."

"I don't like face to face, I prefer phone as it's easier, there's no need to travel."

"Face to face would be the best option if it was in an accessible location. But I may only need one face to face meeting at the beginning."

"I prefer face to face because you can show papers and discuss things. It's easier to build trust."

"Face to face wastes time I don't need to spend when I can do things by phone and email."

"Telephone is more direct, you get answers straight away."

"There's a language barrier for me on the phone, things get lost in translation."

"For a new problem, I would prefer to contact face to face first."

4.2 Contact following initial access

4.2.1 Methods used by client and adviser for follow-up advice

Clients were asked what methods had been used, following the initial contact, for follow-up and ongoing contact with their adviser. Most clients mentioned a combination of methods, with an average of two methods used. The most common method was the telephone, which was used by three-quarters of clients and their advisers. Just over half of clients mentioned email, with a third citing face to face and a third Whatsapp or text. One client mentioned video-conferencing calls using Zoom.

Analysis of responses has enabled the identification of some patterns in clients' journeys through Youth Legal's service. Most clients finding their way to Youth Legal through a referral from another organisation tended to communicate with their adviser primarily through the telephone. Some clients advised by telephone when they initially accessed the service said that telephone remained the main method of contact throughout the duration of their case, but many also communicated with their adviser through email and/or Whatsapp messaging. Few 'telephone first' clients said that they had ever met up with their adviser in person. Meanwhile, clients who were initially seen face to face were most likely to communicate with their adviser through email or Whatsapp/text for ongoing advice.

However, despite these general patterns emerging, virtually every client reported a unique journey through the service, and a small number of clients reported communicating with their adviser via four or more methods.

4.2.2 Ease of access for follow-up advice

Most clients felt that it was easy to contact their adviser for further advice when they needed it. Advisers were praised for being responsive and 'always there for me', and clients reported experiencing a good deal of continuity if their normal adviser was not available.

"I was really impressed by how [Adviser] replies very fast, I feel very well-informed. She is always there to reassure me and I like that I have been able to see her face to face."

"I like that there are never any problems waiting - it's very different from the council."

"[Adviser] has been very helpful and responsive."

"Every time I have a problem, I ask [Adviser]. If she's not there, another worker will pick it up."

4.2.3 Client preferences for follow-up advice

Clients' preferences regarding methods of communication with their advisers for ongoing or follow-up advice varied considerably.

Many clients spoke again about their preference for **face to face** advice, but often only provided it was convenient for them to attend in person. For some clients who lived a long way from Youth Legal's offices, or who worked or looked after children, getting advice in person would involve too much travel, time or inconvenience. One client expressed reluctance to get advice in person because of a perception that it was more trouble for their adviser, whilst another cited their social anxiety as a barrier.

"Face to face is the easiest way to communicate, you get much more done."

"I haven't had face to face advice, but I would like that."

"The best way of getting advice is face to face. I would love to meet my adviser in person. But I have childcare issues, so telephone and email works well most of the time."

"I like face to face – but sometimes I might be busy."

"Face to face is my preferred method, but I try to see if we can solve things by phone first, as I don't want to disturb you."

"I sometimes get anxious if I see people face to face."

Although the **telephone** was the most common method used for ongoing communication with advisers, few clients held strong views about its use, with most viewing it as functional. A small number of clients, however, said it was their favourite method of communication with their adviser because it was quick and convenient, whilst others cited it as their least favourite.

"The telephone is the most convenient and flexible method for me."

"I prefer the phone to face to face as it's easier, there's no need to travel."

“On the phone, sometimes it’s not easy to understand.”

“I don’t like the telephone personally.”

“I’m less keen on the phone, but I don’t mind.”

Communication with advisers by **email** was generally seen by clients as useful for receiving information and exchanging documents. Some clients said they were not comfortable with email due to limited written English skills. One client cited email as their favourite way to communicate because it gave them time to think and made them feel less anxious than other methods.

“Emails are a useful method to sign documents, but not for urgent things, and it needs to be followed up by phone.”

“Email is good for sending documents.”

“Email isn’t easy, I cannot write too much. It’s not immediate, you get more detail face to face.”

“I don’t understand email well, I can’t write emails due to language difficulties.”

“It has really suited me to communicate mainly by email, as it gives me time to think - I don’t like telephone or face to face advice as much.”

Although a few clients said that they would consider using **video-conferencing** software, such as Zoom or Teams, for getting advice, none were enthusiastic about this method. Some were clear that they did not like it or would be unable to use it due to a lack of internet access, data or privacy.

“I don’t want to use Zoom, I wouldn’t like that.”

“I don’t mind using Zoom, but it’s not my preferred method.”

“You’ve got to be in an appropriate place for a video call, otherwise it’s not a problem.”

“Video calls are the same as a phonecall really, they may be useful sometimes, but I haven’t used it so far.”

“I don’t have access to the internet”.

Several clients expressed a wish to have **choice** over the communication methods to be used with their adviser.

“It would be nice to have options. I would like to be asked in the first interview about what I like to use.”

“I should be asked what I prefer.”

Some clients with limited English language skills said that they required **interpreters** in order to fully understand the advice given to them. Whilst face to face was generally preferred for meetings with an interpreter present, some felt that it could work equally well by telephone or Whatsapp calls.

“I need an interpreter – my English is getting better, but I still need an interpreter to have a clear conversation.”

4.3 Evidence from interpreters

Due to the high number of Youth Legal’s clients with limited English language skills, involvement of interpreters in the research was sought. Three interpreters used by Youth Legal were interviewed in order to gain their perspectives on the pros and cons for young migrants of using different methods of accessing advice and on their own preferences when interpreting for young migrants.

The interpreters all felt that face to face was the best method of getting advice for the client. They referred to the complexity of legal issues, the importance of the client building trust with the adviser and the potential for better quality of interaction when meeting face to face.

However, all three interpreters felt that remote interpreting worked better for both the advice agency using their services and for themselves. The main reason was that it saves time, travel and costs. Interpreters could “book in every minute” without having to spend lots of time travelling. This reduces costs for the agency as they do not need to pay for the interpreter’s travel time.

The interpreters felt that the quality of their interpreting service was similar whether it was delivered remotely or face to face. Whatsapp calls were favoured, as it was easy to arrange three-way calls between the client, the adviser and the interpreter.

4.4 Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on access and advice-seeking

4.4.1 Impact on Youth Legal’s service

Analysis of Youth Legal’s service data and conversations with advisers indicate that the coronavirus pandemic has left a significant legacy in terms of how the service is now delivered and who accesses it.

Originally a service based in a youth club for the local community in Putney in the London Borough of Wandsworth, Youth Legal closed its offices to the public and moved to remote delivery in March 2020 as a result of the pandemic. Clients were initially advised exclusively via telephone, email and video-conferencing. The loss of face to face access for clients in the local area led to greater emphasis being placed on generating and receiving referrals from other organisations across London. Around the end of 2020, Youth Legal started to see some clients with particularly complex problems or language issues in person through outreach at referral partner agencies. Youth Legal’s offices finally re-opened in April 2022. With the numbers of face to face visits by clients remaining low, Youth Legal moved to new, more accessible offices in Clapham Junction in October 2022.

Service data held on AdvicePro confirms that Youth Legal’s clientele has become more dispersed across the London region since the start of the pandemic. Clients are now reaching Youth Legal primarily via referrals from partner agencies across London. As a result, they are less likely to live in the Wandsworth area and are more likely to be advised by remote methods. Youth Legal’s overall client profile is now determined to a far greater extent by the nature of referral relationships with particular types of specialist agencies rather than by the characteristics of the local youth population.

4.4.2 Impact on clients' expectations and advice-seeking behaviour

In the semi-structured interviews, it was clear that clients' expectations of services had been affected by the pandemic. Whilst accepting that closure of Youth Legal's office was a necessary step, some clients assumed that it was no longer possible to receive advice in person, and initially structured their responses to questions about preferred methods of contact based on those assumptions.

Several clients regretted the loss of face to face advice and expressed a desire for its return. However, a small number of clients said that limits to the availability of face to face support had led to them becoming more judicious about when they would seek help face to face, becoming more familiar with remote methods, or realising that they actually prefer to get help in other ways.

"I wanted face to face initially to show letters, but I couldn't because of Covid."

"I would have preferred to be seen face to face if it hadn't been for Covid."

"I used to always get help face to face, but I'm more comfortable with other ways now."

"Since Covid, when everything went online, I realised I prefer email and don't need to see people face to face."

4.5 Analysis

Youth Legal's ways of working, the service's client profile and clients' advice-seeking behaviour have all altered since the start of the pandemic. Few young people now visit Youth Legal's offices in person, with referrals from partner agencies across London followed by remote advice delivery having become the default pathway into the service.

This new pathway appears at first sight to be diametrically opposed to clients' most commonly expressed preference, which is for face to face advice. However, clients tend to report very positive experiences of both their initial contact with Youth Legal's advisers and the ease of access to advisers for follow-up advice. Moreover, in-depth exploration finds that clients' overall preference for face to face advice over other methods is complex and nuanced.

First, it does not mean that they want face to face advice for every interaction with their adviser. They may only want to meet their adviser in person once or twice at key points in the advice process, for example at the outset, in order to establish a trusting relationship and provide paperwork; and may then be happy for subsequent contacts to occur through a combination of telephone, email, Whatsapp messaging, video-conferencing and face to face, as appropriate, depending on what needs to be done at that time.

Second, it is clear that clients' preferences vary considerably from individual to individual. Some clients would prefer not to meet face to face at all, favouring remote methods for all interactions. There are undoubted benefits for some clients, as well as for advisers and interpreters, from the use of remote advice delivery methods. Thus, a switch back from remote by default to face to face by default would be unhelpful.

What most clients want is convenience and choice. The challenge for the service, therefore, is to tailor its approach according to individuals' circumstances, needs and preferences.

Finally, it should be noted that this study has been unable to assess which groups of young people Youth Legal is not currently reaching or what the needs and preferences of those young people may be.

4.6 Recommendations

Recommendations for Youth Legal have been omitted from the public version of the report

5. Findings: Quality of Service

Service characteristics that have been found previously to be key in securing the high quality relationships of trust between the service and service user that are key to achieving good outcomes for young people include:³

- Service is dedicated to young people
- Service is confidential, free and independent
- Age range goes up to 25 to tackle transitions to adulthood
- Holistic support is provided on a range of inter-related issues
- Service is delivered in an informal and non-stigmatising setting
- Provision is flexible, ideally with a drop-in service at its heart
- A social developmental (rather than overly clinical or technical) approach is adopted
- Young people experience continuity of help
- Young people are involved in the planning, design, delivery, evaluation and governance of the service

With the above service characteristics in mind, the semi-structured interviews with clients explored young people's experiences of Youth Legal's service. The interview questions incorporated Youth Legal's standard feedback questionnaire, which asks clients about their satisfaction with the way information was explained to them, how well they were kept informed of developments, the timeliness of the way their case was dealt with and how well their case was handled overall.

5.1 Skills and qualities of advisers

Many clients were effusive in their praise of the advisers at Youth Legal. Clients frequently referred to how **helpful** their adviser was. Helpfulness tended to be linked with acting quickly, spending time, going out of their way and sorting things out.

"[Adviser] has been very helpful and responsive."

"[Adviser] is always ready to help... she's very good."

"[Adviser] goes out of his way and gives a wonderful service."

"[Adviser] spent time and read through all the letters and checked everything."

"I'm very, very happy with [Adviser], I don't know how to explain, I got so much help from her."

Clients referred often to advisers' **friendliness, kindness, care, understanding and consistency**. One client even stressed how she had found it fun working with her adviser on her case. Such personal qualities appeared to be valued above advisers' technical legal competence, which was not referred to directly by any clients. Further, finding these qualities in their adviser increased the likelihood of the client reporting reductions in their levels of stress as a result of getting advice.

"It is very easy to talk to [Adviser], she is good with young people and very friendly."

³ Kenrick, J. (2009) *Young People's Access to Advice – The Evidence*; Young People's Health Partnership (2014) *Making integration a reality Part 2: Developing effective holistic services for young people in transition*.

"[Adviser] will do things for you selflessly, you can see the love, she understands what I have been through."

"They care - genuinely care. They ask how I am in detail, and follow up. [Adviser] is excellent, she has helped me with everything I needed and is very kind always."

"[Adviser] is really great - the way she speaks, she cares, she's friendly, she takes time to listen and help."

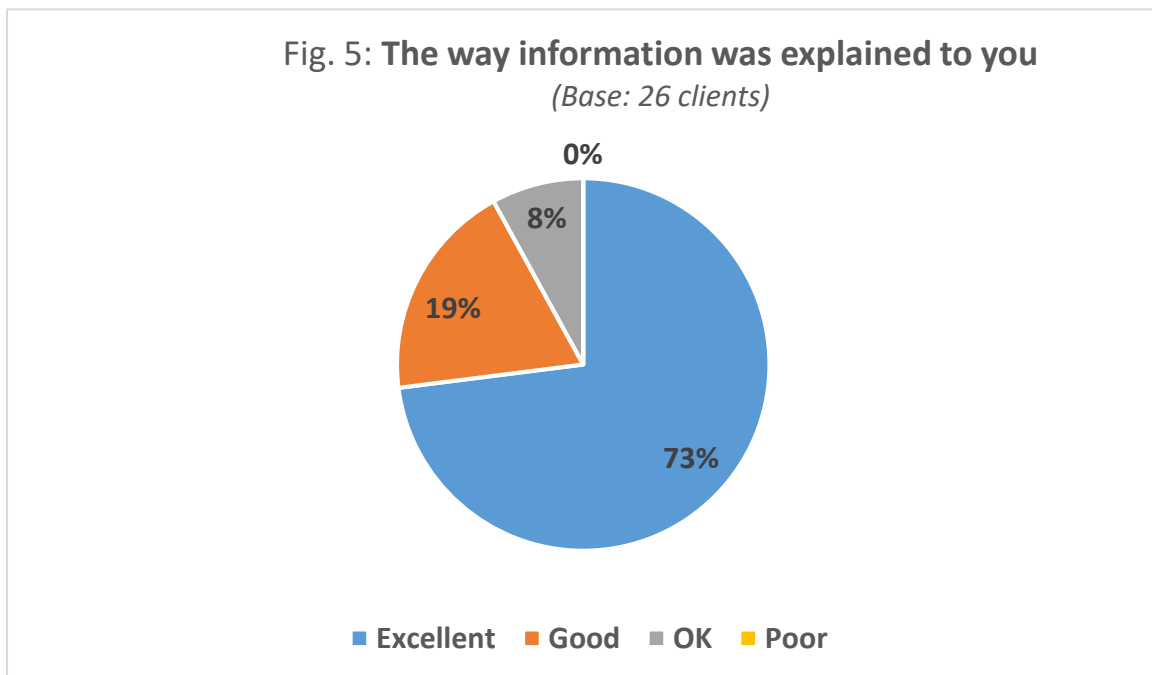
"I really respect [Adviser] and the help she's given me. There are no complications, I could be myself, the whole process was very calming for the stressful situation I was in. There have even been times when I've not been consistent, but [Adviser] has."

"[Adviser] is effective, efficient, experienced and friendly."

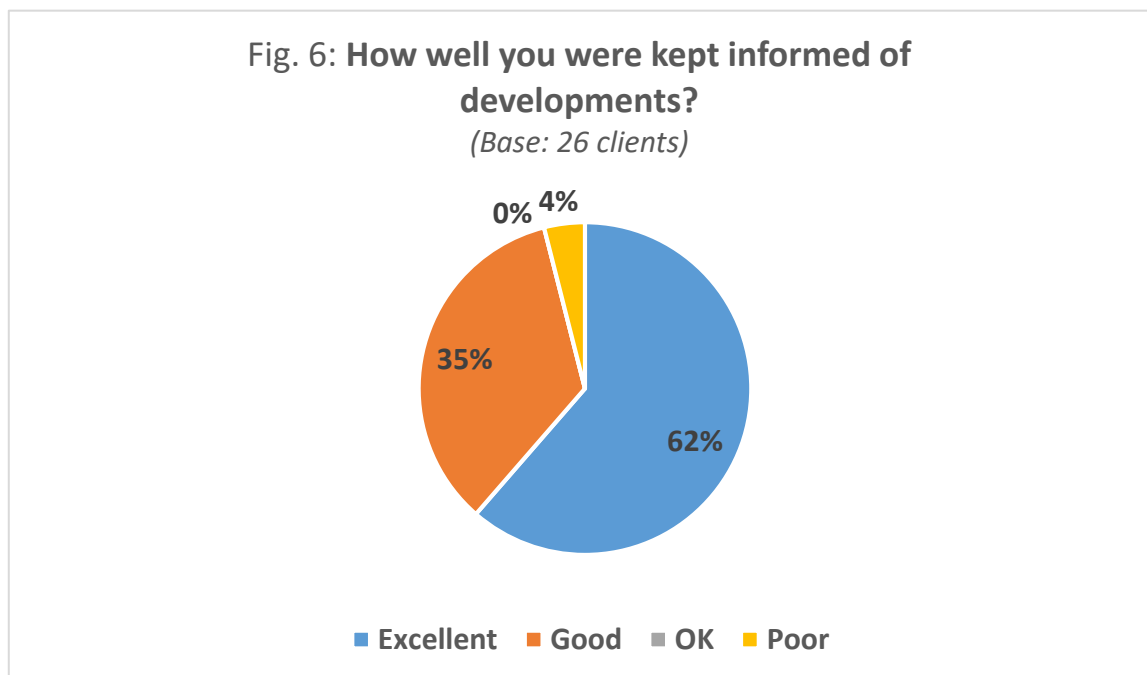
"It's been FUN working with [Adviser] on my case!"

5.2 Information and Communication

Most clients rated the way **information** had been explained to them by their adviser as excellent (73%) or good (19%). (See Fig. 5.)



A high proportion of clients were also satisfied with how they had been kept **informed of developments** in their case, although the proportion rating the service as excellent on this indicator (62%) was slightly below that for other indicators. (See Fig 6.)



Clear information and explanations were linked by clients to **trust** in their adviser, feeling reassured and in control, and reductions in their stress. Some clients referred back to their preference for face to face advice and how meeting in person can aid good communication.

“[Adviser] has helped me deal with my stress, she explains things and then I have no worry.”

“It was perfect. I trust [Adviser]. She was very welcoming, excellent, helpful, really good communication, everything was explained really clearly.”

“I feel very well-informed. [Adviser] is always there to reassure me and I like that I have been able to see her face to face.”

One client described the advice process they had experienced as ‘working alongside’ their adviser, assisted by good communication, and preferred this **social developmental approach** to the expert problem-solving approach traditionally adopted by many solicitors.

“I have enjoyed working alongside [Adviser]. The word alongside is important - she keeps me up to date with exactly what’s going on and why things are being done. It gives me some control about what’s going on, which is better than leaving the caseworker to just do everything.”

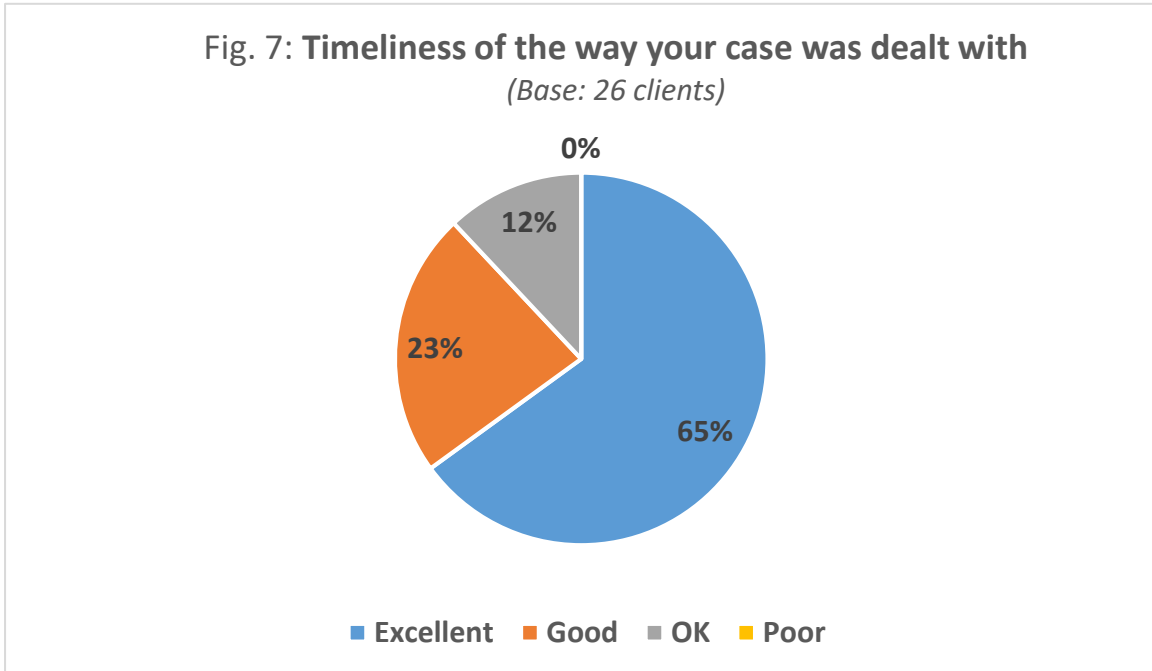
5.3 Timeliness, effectiveness and efficiency

Most clients felt that their adviser had acted quickly and been responsive. Two-thirds rated the **timeliness** of the way their case had been dealt with as ‘excellent’, whilst a quarter rated the service as ‘good’ and 12% as ‘OK’ on this indicator. (See Fig. 7.) Clients often linked speed with efficiency and effectiveness.

“I was really impressed by how [Adviser] replies very fast.”

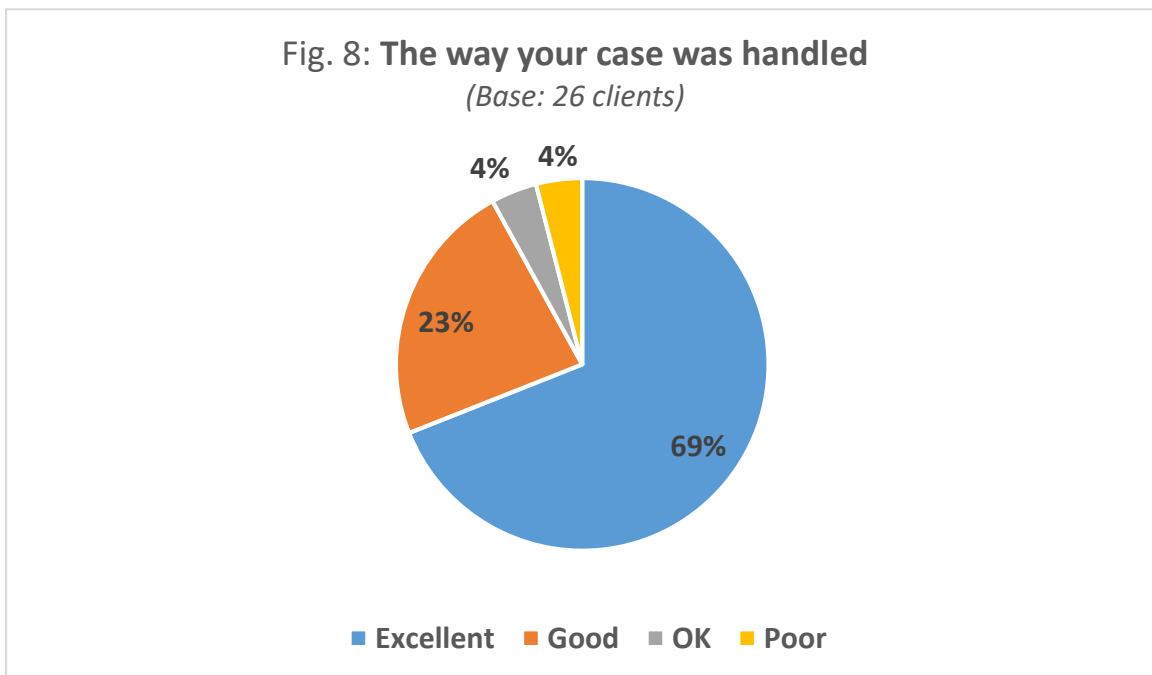
“The way [Adviser] deals with things is perfect - quick, friendly, helpful and effective.”

“[Adviser] got on the problem quickly and very effectively.”



When clients were asked to rate **how their case was handled** by Youth Legal overall, 69% said ‘excellent’ and 23% ‘good’. (See Fig. 8.)

“Everything was very efficient and worked really well for me.”



Some clients viewed Youth Legal as considerably more **helpful and effective** than other organisations they had come across.

“I didn't think I would get such huge help from any organisation when I first came to the UK. My needs for help were very significant. [Adviser] really helped me. I never came across a service as good. I know people helped by other organisations, but no one has had anything like as good. You have surpassed all my expectations.”

“[Adviser] has helped fix half of my life - housing, food, money, immigration. People in other organisations don't know, they're timewasters, they promise but they don't help.”

Several clients were impressed by their adviser's ability to **get things done**, solve their problems and relieve their stress. Having the weight of a solicitor behind them was felt to be key in getting things sorted.

“They never say they can't help. They solve things.”

“I love the way [Adviser] is forceful with Social Services. She's straight up, very clear and firm - she does Social Services' job for them.”

“[Adviser] was very helpful when contacting the Home Office, dealing with what would have been very stressful, and communicating with the housing office.”

“No one else was listening, it was all very stressful. I was very alone, it was too hard. Now I have a solicitor who is really helpful – [Adviser] has helped me a lot and I now have the weight of a solicitor behind me.”

5.4 Youth-friendliness

It was important to many clients that Youth Legal was a **specialist service for young people**. Clients felt that the service was there for young people, good with young people and understood young people. One client described talking to their adviser as like ‘talking to a mature friend’.

“I like that the service is for young people like me.”

“You are there for young people - this is very important. Care leavers slip through the cracks. You are doing a lot, there should be more services like you.”

“The name 'Youth Legal' showed me that you are there for young people.”

“They understand young people”

“[Adviser] has helped me a lot. When I first got in touch, it felt real, like talking to a mature friend. It was easy to communicate and I felt like I was understood as a young person.”

For some clients who were asylum-seekers and refugees, the importance of the service being young person-centred was less important. These clients tended to comment instead about how the service **understood the needs of migrants** in their situation.

“They are very good with refugees.”

“[Adviser] is very good, she knows everything. I only trust Youth Legal, especially [Adviser] - her experience and knowledge about Syria and Afghanistan - she even speaks Farsi.”

5.5 Meeting wider needs

In addition to receiving help on legal issues, around a quarter of clients reported that they had received advice or assistance from Youth Legal about **non-legal issues**. Most often, clients mentioned receiving support from their adviser in relation to their stress or mental health. Education and employment issues were also mentioned by a few clients.

Clients were asked if there was any **further help** they might need. Generally, clients felt that they were already getting all the help they needed with their legal problems. However, one client whose case had been closed by Youth Legal, said that their problem had returned, requiring more legal advice.

“I need more help, my problem was only resolved temporarily.”

In terms of **unmet non-legal needs**, four clients mentioned wanting more help with mental health issues, four with non-legal education issues (including college applications and fees), two with non-legal employment issues (including finding a job), one with ‘personal issues’, one with their application for a driver’s licence, and one dealing with loneliness.

“[Adviser] has helped a lot and asks me if I need any other help. She asked me if I needed any help when my mental health was in a bad way.”

“[Adviser] is helpful about stress and mental health as well.”

5.6 Views on potential service improvements

Clients were asked in the interviews whether there was anything they thought Youth Legal should change about the way it delivers its service. Many clients said that there wasn’t.

“No - just do more of what you do.”

“Absolutely nothing, your service is already really excellent, really fast. Please continue doing everything as you are doing it.”

“No, everything is perfect.”

Suggestions for service improvements most often centred on the **accessibility** of the service, with several clients referring back to their previous comments about their desire for more face to face advice. When informed that the service was planning to move to the Clapham Junction area, some clients felt this would make the service easier for them to reach in person.

“You need to be easier to reach, more accessible for face to face advice.”

“More face to face advice - it’s important to sit down and see body language, get positive assurance, put a face to a name.”

“Make it easier to get advice in person, because you can show papers and discuss, and build trust more easily.”

“It would be helpful if you move to Clapham Junction, that would be easier to get to.”

Most other suggestions focussed on broadening the scope of the service to provide more **holistic support**, particularly on mental health and employment issues.

“Mental health support would be good.”

“Can you add mental health to your service?”

“It would be good if you could deal with employment, personal issues and mental health.”

“Mental health support for young people living by themselves and support for young people wanting to become self-employed.”

5.7 Participation and involvement in the service

Clients were asked if they would be interested in becoming more involved in Youth Legal’s work, for example by joining the Youth Advisory Board or becoming a volunteer or Trustee. Only two clients said that they would be, whilst two more said they might be interested in the future. Most clients were focussed on getting their problems sorted out and had little interest in getting involved further. However, several clients said they were glad to be able to have their say on Youth Legal’s service through the research interviews and that they were pleased to be able to help the organisation in this way as they were grateful for the help they had received.

5.8 Analysis

Clients generally reported high levels of satisfaction with Youth Legal’s service. The qualities that clients valued most in their advisers included their helpfulness, friendliness, kindness, caring and understanding. Most clients felt their advisers explained things clearly to them, kept them informed of developments, dealt with matters efficiently and sorted out their problems effectively.

Some variation in clients’ experiences was observed depending on the adviser who had managed their case. Reporting good experiences of their adviser and the advice process was associated with clients reporting good outcomes, such as reduced levels of stress.

Whilst it was important to many clients that the service focussed specifically on young people, this was less important for those clients who were over the age of 25 and, interestingly, for those who were asylum-seekers or refugees, for whom Youth Legal’s perceived migrant-friendliness was more important than youth-friendliness. This raises important questions around the specialisms and target groups of the service, as the sets of knowledge and skills required to provide specialist advice to young people and migrants are complementary but distinct.

Most clients felt that their needs were met by the service. Key areas for development identified by clients included improving the service's accessibility for face to face advice and increasing the provision of holistic support on mental health and employment issues.

Finally, whilst Youth Legal is keen to involve young people with lived experience of legal issues in the organisation, interviews confirmed that it will often not be appropriate to involve clients with ongoing legal cases until their lives have been stabilised.

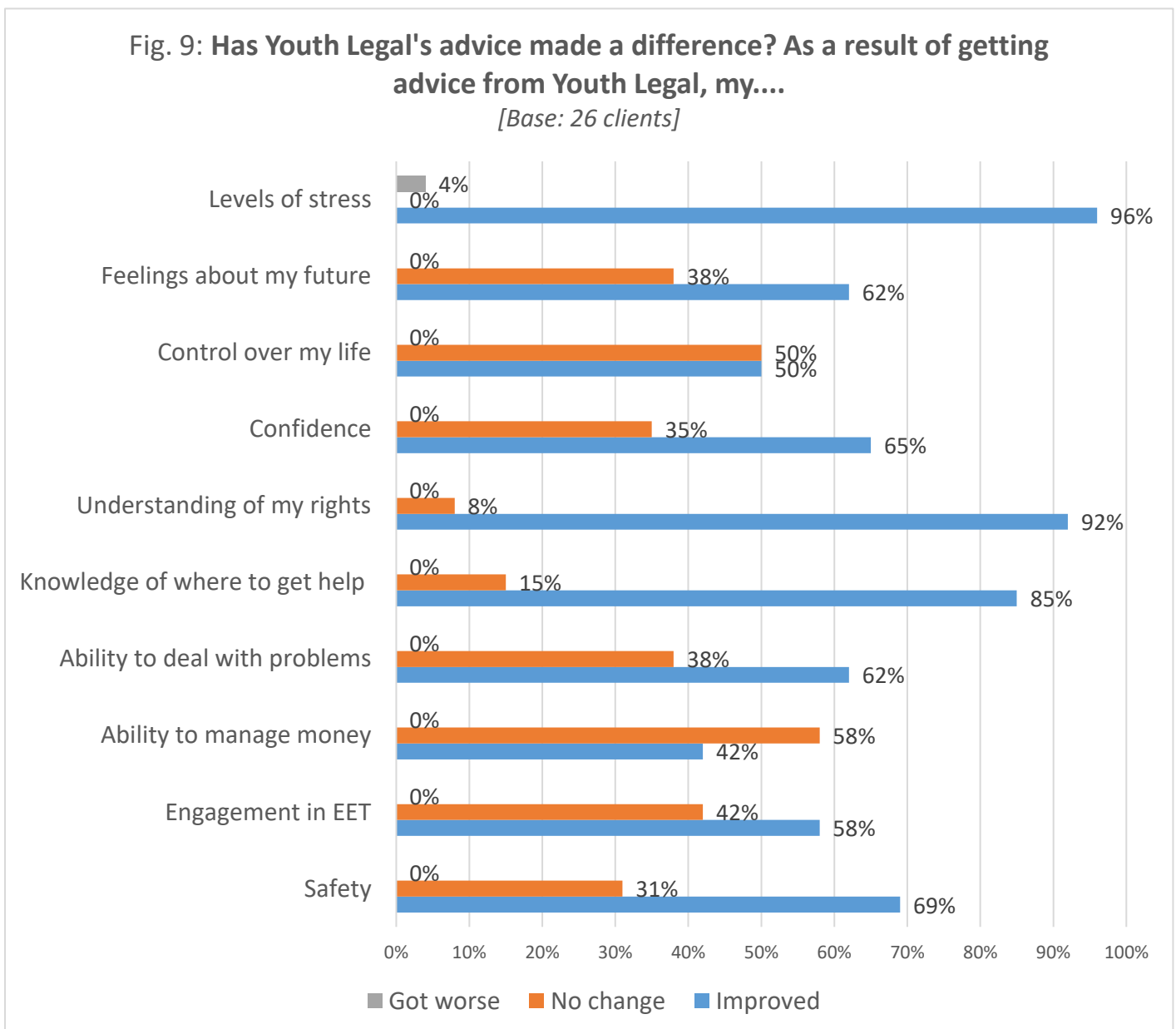
5.9 Recommendations

Recommendations for Youth Legal have been omitted from the public version of the report

6. Findings: Quality of Outcomes

There is mounting evidence that unresolved legal problems have an adverse impact on young people's lives, most commonly leading to young people becoming ill, often due to stress; losing income; or losing confidence. However, such problems can also lead to young people experiencing violence, homelessness, relationship breakdown, and barriers to education and employment.⁴ Such adverse consequences disproportionately impact disadvantaged and minority groups, and generate large costs for individuals, states and societies at large.⁵

During the interviews, clients were asked a series of questions about the difference getting advice from Youth Legal had made to their lives. As can be seen in Fig. 9, clients reported a wide range of positive outcomes.



⁴ Kenrick, J. (2011) *The outcomes and impact of youth advice*, London: Youth Access.

⁵ OECD (2019) *Building a business case for access to justice*, OECD White Paper.

6.1 Mental health and wellbeing

Regardless of the nature of the legal problems with which Youth Legal were assisting, every client interviewed reported improvement to at least one aspect of their mental health and wellbeing. Some clients suggested they would have been experiencing severe mental illness without Youth Legal's help.

"I would be in hospital, but my mind is now at rest."

"Maybe I kill myself... because I'm frustrated."

"I would be homeless, on the streets. I would be mentally ill, depressed - I would have lost my mental health completely."

"Before I had mental health problems, I was talking to myself on the street, but with your help and support, my mental health and wellbeing is good."

"I would have got more ill, my debt situation would have got worse, I would have got totally lost."

"I honestly don't know where I'd be without the help I've had. My case resurfaced post-Covid and I was struggling. I was feeling the lowest I was ever feeling. I felt vulnerable and powerless. I was very stressed, facing eviction and homelessness. It was such a sense of relief that there was a last ditch of hope, it was very timely and reassuring to get your help when I did."

6.1.1 Stress

The most common change reported by clients was in their level of stress, with 96% of clients reporting an improvement.

"I was feeling very stressed before, but that's definitely improved."

"Before advice, I was very stressed, I felt like I was in a box, I couldn't move. Now I feel free."

"I was very stressed when I first got in contact, I wasn't getting anywhere with Social Services."

"Stress – yes, this is the main thing that has changed."

"[Adviser's] advice helped my stress and my mental health, I really appreciate it."

Whilst most clients reported that their stress had been improved by the legal advice they had received, a few clients reported receiving additional support for the stress itself.

"I had been stressed for a long time, but I felt comfortable talking to [Adviser] about what was normal, a point of reference."

"[Adviser] has supported me a lot with my stress."

A small number of clients said that their stress had improved thanks to the advice they had received, but had deteriorated again because they were experiencing new problems.

“Although my stress improved, it has come back and my mental health is deteriorating again due to new issues I'm experiencing”

“My stress is up and down because of the council, but getting advice eases my worry.”

One client, who had been unhappy with the advice they had received, said that their stress had got worse as a result of Youth Legal’s advice.

“[Adviser’s] advice gave me more stress.”

6.1.2 Confidence

Around two-thirds of clients (65%) said that their confidence had improved as a result of the advice they had received. Several clients linked their improved confidence to gaining knowledge about rights or having the powerful support of a lawyer behind them. Others referred to the impact of living in better circumstances, receiving the support they were entitled to or gaining greater independence.

“Yes, this has improved because I feel more confident understanding my rights.”

“My confidence has improved because I know my rights now.”

“I feel more confident because I know I have someone there to back me up.”

“This has improved 100%, mainly through changing from a small room with nothing to do and no support and no one to talk to. Now I know my rights, I can speak up for myself and live by myself and I’m getting social care.”

“My confidence has increased dramatically, 100% improved - I’m now able to do things myself on my own and go places on my own.”

6.1.3 Feelings about the future

Nearly two in three clients (62%) reported improvements in their feelings about their future. Positive outcomes in this area were often associated with clients also reporting improvements in their education or employment situation. Some clients said they had no hope or were just trying to survive before getting advice, but getting their legal problems resolved had enabled them to study, plan careers or make progress with other aspects of their lives.

“When I came to the UK, I was just thinking about surviving. Now I have much bigger ambitions, I’m thinking on a much bigger scale about my future. I am planning to do computer engineering.”

“I’ve made progress with Social Services. Before I had no hope, the support Social Services gave me was actually detrimental to my future.”

“Everything feels much better, I am studying at college and hoping to get a good job on the trains.”

Clients reporting no change in their feelings about their future were more likely to have ongoing cases which had not yet been resolved, whilst some explained that they still held

concerns about their future despite experiencing other positive outcomes from the advice they had.

“My feelings about my future? No, they haven’t changed because I’m still struggling with my immigration case. If that gets sorted, I will feel a lot more positive.”

“Not changed - because I still feel somewhat uncertain about my future.”

“I still have worries about my future, but it’s very reassuring knowing what kind of support I can get. It has got me to where I wanted to go.”

6.1.4 Control over life

Half of clients (50%) reported that their control over their life had improved. Clients tended to relate control to their ability to make decisions for themselves.

“I am now able to make decisions for myself and follow my dreams.”

“I don’t have any more control over my life because Social Services are still controlling my life.”

6.2 Legal and financial capability

In the interviews, we were keen to explore whether there had been any improvements in clients’ ‘legal capability’, a term referring to people’s ability to manage their problems and perform their role as equal members of society while being aware of their basic rights and responsibilities.⁶ Clients were asked whether they had experienced any change in their ability to understand their rights, their knowledge of where to get help and their ability to deal with problems. In addition, in order to measure any changes in their financial capability, clients were asked if their ability to manage their money had improved.

6.2.1 Understanding rights

Twenty-four out of 26 clients (92%) reported that their understanding of their rights had improved. Many clients said that they didn’t know their rights before getting advice, either because no one had told them or they had been given false information previously. Discovering their rights had opened their eyes, given them confidence to speak up for themselves and reduced their stress.

“I understand my rights and now my eyes are open.”

“I know my rights when dealing with the bailiffs now.”

“Social services didn’t tell me the truth, but [Adviser] told me what my rights are.”

“I knew nothing about what I was eligible for before. Getting advice has opened my eyes. Now I know my rights, I can talk for myself more.”

One client who was a young migrant talked about how knowing their rights made them feel more a part of society, as they were previously in the dark about how everything in this country worked.

⁶ Definition taken from *Make Our Rights Reality Training Manual*, Youth Access, 2018.

“My life has changed drastically thanks to your help. I didn't know my rights before. Now I feel better acclimatised to living here and my stress has improved a lot.”

6.2.2 Ability to deal with problems

Three out of five clients (62%) said that they were better able to deal with problems themselves as a result of getting advice. Many clients felt powerless before getting advice, but talked about how their adviser had supported them to do some of the follow up work on their case themselves or had empowered them to speak up for themselves or take action in the future.

“I felt broken and powerless before, dialogue with [Adviser] made me feel less powerless.”

“[Adviser] helped me apply for Universal Credit, but encouraged me to do the follow-up. I managed to do it and that makes me feel more confident to do things in the future.”

“The way [Adviser] works has empowered me and given me some control about what's going on.”

“I don't want to disturb people all the time. Now if I need help I can do some things by myself.”

“I can speak to the council myself now.”

Some clients, however, felt that they would be unable to manage their legal problems on their own and would need to return for advice if they had another problem in the future.

“I still need a legal rep for these problems.”

“I'm not sure I'd be confident dealing with this kind of stuff on my own.”

6.2.3 Ability to manage money

42% of clients interviewed said their ability to manage their money had improved. This was slightly higher than the proportion who had received advice on money issues. Most often, improvements were associated by clients with being in a more secure financial position, for example after getting help with debts or to apply for welfare benefits, rather than having enhanced money management skills.

“The pressure's off now my money's sorted out.”

6.2.4 Knowledge of where to get help

A high proportion of clients (85%) said that their knowledge of where to get help had improved. This was often because clients were now aware of how they could be helped by Youth Legal.

“I didn't feel I could get help. Now I have Youth Legal.”

“I had exhausted every possible route I knew about, I was at the end of my tether.”

6.3 Housing, care and safety from harm

Many clients had come to Youth Legal in desperate situations, often facing homelessness or destitution, before receiving specialist advice which had radically improved their circumstances.

"I was homeless, now I've got a house from the council."

"I have a care plan in place now and my housing situation has improved."

"I've gone from living in a caravan to having a council flat of my own."

"I'd be on the streets without Youth Legal's help."

"I would have nowhere to live, I would be homeless and wouldn't be able to live in London. Now I know where I'm going to sleep."

More than two-thirds of clients (69%) reported improvements in their safety as a result of the advice they had received. In many cases, they felt safer because they were in better housing away from situations which put them at risk of crime, exploitation or ill-health.

"My safety has improved because my housing situation is better."

"I no longer have to look over my shoulder."

"Thanks to Youth Legal, I have a Social Worker and somewhere to live independently. I was in a place that wasn't safe before. The council were willing to just throw me anywhere. I had bad neighbours and was a victim of crime. I think I'd still be in the same place now. I moved from that place thanks to Youth Legal and am now in a settled, much bigger place."

One client talked about how Youth Legal had saved her and her child from an abusive and dangerous situation.

"I can't imagine where I'd be [without Youth Legal]. I would be in a nightmare, being abused. I and my child would have been dead, I'm telling you the truth. I wanted to die and get killed by a car. [Adviser] said no, we can get through this. I thought I couldn't get through lockdown, I couldn't see anyone, but [Adviser] was always there for me and talked to me when I needed it."

6.4 Engagement in education and employment

More than half of clients interviewed (58%) reported improvements in their ability to engage in education or employment as a result of the advice they had received.

In some cases, clients' education and employment situations had improved as a direct result of receiving effective legal advice and assistance on housing, community care, immigration or money issues.

"My ability to engage in education and employment was restricted, getting my immigration status sorted was key."

"I would be homeless. Thanks to Youth Legal, I am studying at college and hoping to get a good job on the trains."

For other clients, their improved situation was the result of receiving specific additional help regarding education alongside their legal case.

"[Adviser] managed to get me into one of the best colleges in my area."

"[Adviser] helped me apply to college and I'm now working."

"My education has improved – [Adviser] contacted the college."

"I am going to do a mechanics course - if I didn't have the support letter from college that [Adviser] got, I wouldn't have been able to get on the course."

Meanwhile, some clients attributed education and employment improvements to the broader impact of Youth Legal's help on their life circumstances and attitudes.

"I was homeless and in a lot of distress. I was very stressed and scared of society and crime. If I hadn't had help from Youth Legal, no one else was going to help me. I would be lost. I would be doing nothing because I would be unable to engage in education. Instead, I am at college."

"I have a better drive for work now. I want to start a career and work."

6.5 Cumulative impact

Analysis of interview evidence indicates that, whilst occasionally the receipt of legal advice may focus or impact on only one aspect of a client's life, more often it leads to multiple outcomes, with impact in one area often leading to another. For many clients, the resolution of their legal problems had enabled them to escape precarious situations and move forward in their lives.

"I was homeless before and would be on the streets now. Youth Legal helped me get an education, got me housed by the council, helped me bring my brother over here with me, even helped me with food and money. I am very happy [Adviser] has helped me, she has fixed half my life. My life has moved forward and I now understand how life works here."

"I don't know where I would be without [Adviser's] help, she has helped me with everything in the UK - college, housing, hospital, GP, everything."

"I wouldn't have where I'm living now and I'd still be going back and forth trying to get a decent assessment from Social Services. I don't think I'd have anything in place right now. My life is completely different now."

"I would have less income. And I wouldn't be able to live in my current accommodation - I would be staying in a bad situation in the overcrowded accommodation I was in before."

"I would not be where I am now. I wouldn't have had the opportunities. I would have found it impossible to deal with everything."

“Everything’s better now. [Without advice] I would be 100 steps back from where I am now.”

“I would have lost everything. I would be on the plane back.”

“Your help has got me to where I wanted to go in my life.”

6.6 Analysis

Youth Legal’s service is having a profound beneficial impact on the lives of many young clients, ranging from their mental health and wellbeing and their safety to their engagement in education and employment and their legal capability. Often Youth Legal’s support leads to multiple positive outcomes, enabling young people to move forward in their lives and manage the transition to adulthood with confidence.

As many of the quotes from clients demonstrate, the positive outcomes achieved are closely related to the quality of the one to one relationship between adviser and client. An adviser who possesses the skills to engage with vulnerable young people, the expertise to provide technically proficient active assistance and the tenacity to pursue a case to a successful resolution is clearly more likely to produce good results that can change a young person’s life. Previous research has also linked the achievements of good outcomes from youth advice to the provision of a holistic service tackling inter-related legal and non-legal needs, the depth of advice provided and the availability of face to face advice.⁷

The findings indicating a significant impact from Youth Legal’s advice on clients’ mental health and wellbeing is in line with a growing international evidence base on links between young people’s legal problems and their health and wellbeing.⁸ In the UK, legal issues have been identified as both a key determinant of young people’s mental health and a common consequence of young people’s mental health issues.⁹ It has been argued previously that huge savings could potentially be made by intervening more smartly by tackling young people’s social welfare legal problems and mental health problems in a coordinated way in accessible young person-friendly settings.¹⁰ In this context, Youth Legal’s service model should be of interest to policy-makers.

In addition, almost all clients reported improvement in one or more aspects of their legal capability, suggesting that Youth Legal’s advice is playing a preventative role by empowering young people to manage their future legal problems. Nevertheless, the sheer complexity of many legal problems, and the deep-seated nature of the inequalities faced by many clients, means that some young people will inevitably require legal advice again in the future.

Further, whilst our findings are heartening, they are unable to provide a great deal of insight into the extent to which positive outcomes and impact from youth advice are sustained over time.

⁷ Kenrick, J. (2011) *The outcomes and impact of youth advice – the evidence*. London: Youth Access.

⁸ Woodhead, C., Gunasinghe, C., Kenrick, J., & Genn, H. (2022) *Social welfare advice and health among young people: a scoping review*, Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, DOI: 10.1080/09649069.2022.2028409

⁹ Balmer, N. J., Pleasence, P., and Hagell, A. (2016) *Health Inequality and Access to Justice: Young People, Mental Health and Legal Issues*. London: Youth Access.

¹⁰ Youth Access (2016) *The social determinants of young people’s mental health*. London: Youth Access.

6.7 Recommendations

Recommendations for Youth Legal have been omitted from the public version of the report

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule for semi-structured interviews with young people

Preamble

I'm [name], I'm the researcher working with Youth Legal.

Thank you very much for agreeing to this call to help Youth Legal understand how it is doing and how it can improve its services.

This call should take around 30 minutes, depending on how much you want to say, and it will be quite informal. There are no right or wrong answers to any of my questions, we are interested in your experiences and what you think, so feel free to say what you want. You may decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time and for any reason. Anything you tell me will be kept confidential and nothing you say will affect the help you receive from Youth Legal in any way.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview because I don't want to miss anything you say. I will delete the audio recording as soon as I have written up the notes. My notes will not be shared with staff at Youth Legal and any information included in the report will not identify you.

Do you have any questions?

Can you please confirm again that you are happy to take part in this interview?

May I turn on the digital recorder?

Please confirm your name

Questions and prompts

To start, I just want to ask a few questions about you and the help you have received.

Could I first of all check your age?

What issues have you been getting help/advice from Youth Legal about?

How long have you been getting advice from Youth Legal?

INITIAL CONTACT:

How did you find out about Youth Legal?

How did you first get in touch? (Probe: phone/f2f/email/website/referral)

Did you find it easy to contact Youth Legal?

Is there any way Youth Legal could have made it easier for you to contact them?

What was your impression of Youth Legal when you first contacted them?

Was the person you spoke to/contacted friendly? Welcoming? Helpful? Easy to understand?

If you were to need advice again, what ways of contacting Youth Legal would you prefer?

Would you like to get help in person?

Would you like to get help by telephone?

Would you like to get help by email?

*Would you like to get help by video, e.g. Zoom?
What are the good things/bad things about each option?*

ONGOING ADVICE:

Having made the initial contact, how have Youth Legal mainly been contacting you about your case? Has this suited you or would you find it easier if Youth Legal used a different method?

Have you found getting advice from Youth Legal has helped you? In what ways?

Is there any other help you would have liked to receive?

Are there any other issues you have needed advice about?

FEEDBACK SURVEY QUESTIONS

I've got some questions now about how you have found Youth Legal's service and would be grateful if you could provide some feedback on how you think Youth Legal have done.

How would you rate Youth Legal for:

- 1. How welcoming the service is* Excellent Good OK Poor
- 2. How Youth Legal have kept you informed of what's going on* Excellent Good OK Poor
- 3. How quickly Youth Legal have dealt with things* Excellent Good OK Poor
- 4. The way information has been explained to you* Excellent Good OK Poor
- 5. The way your case has been handled* Excellent Good OK Poor

Is there anything you particularly liked about the service you received?

Is there anything you think Youth Legal should change about the way they deliver their service?

OUTCOMES SURVEY QUESTIONS

Youth Legal are really keen to understand if they've made a difference to the young people they help.

Could I ask you how things have changed for you as a result of Youth Legal's advice? (open Q)

I now want to ask you about some specific things that may have changed and want you to tell me whether it has improved or not.

Would you say that your levels of stress have...
Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

Would you say that your understanding of your rights has...
Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

Would you say that your ability to deal with problems yourself has...
Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

Would you say that your knowledge of where to get help has....

Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

Would you say that your feelings about your future have...

Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

Would you say that your engagement in education / training /employment has...

Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

Would you say that your confidence has...

Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

Would you say that your control over your life has...

Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

Would you say that your safety has...

Improved Not changed Got worse [Ask how/why]

What do you think would have happened to you if you hadn't received Youth Legal's advice when you did?

Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experience of getting advice from Youth Legal?

Closing

That's the end of my questions. Thank you very much for taking the time to take part in this research. What you've told me will really help Youth Legal to keep improving what they do.

I just want to check whether our conversation has brought up any issues you want to talk to anyone about? [Provide list of support contacts if required.]

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