

Somali Advice Project

-

Evaluation



TRANSPARENCY RESEARCH

Rear Offices 24 New Road, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 1HS UK
www.transparencyresearch.co.uk

February 2010

Contents

1.Introduction.....	2
2.Background	3
3.Methodology.....	4
4.Service User Findings.....	5
4.1.Demographics.....	5
4.2.Finding out and getting in touch.....	6
4.3.Advice Needs.....	7
4.4.Opinion of Service.....	8
4.5.Specification of Service.....	9
5.Management Findings.....	12
5.1.Community Needs.....	12
5.2.SAP Provision.....	13
5.3.Pressures	14
6.Conclusions.....	16
7.Appendices.....	17
7.1.Survey Schedule for Service Users	17
7.2.Question Schedule for Steering Group.....	18
7.3.Question Schedule for Partner Organisations.....	19
7.4.Question Schedule for Advice Workers	20
8.Bibliography.....	22

1. Introduction

The Somali Advice Project (SAP) operates from St Pauls, Bristol and provides advice services, largely in Somali, to the Somali community of Bristol. The project was initially conceived to train and provide Somali speaking advice professionals, and to provide additional capacity building support to Somali community organisations. SAP was initially funded by the National Lottery.

This evaluation was commissioned by SAP and undertaken by Transparency Research, who undertake considerable work with the Somali community both locally and internationally. Relevant local work has included research on mental health, disability, ageing, and khat use amongst the Somali community. Transparency Research has also worked closely with Bristol City Council on developing resources for the Somali community.

2. Background

Originally funded by the National Lottery, SAP is managed by a Steering Group of four advice agencies with experience of working with the Somali community in Bristol. These are St Paul's Advice Centre, Avon and Bristol Law Centre, Bristol City Council and Refugee Action. Representatives of the various Somali community groups in Bristol also attend Steering Group meetings, which are scheduled quarterly. The project also maintains a co-ordinator who takes general responsibility for the project including funding. The project is managed by St Paul's Advice centre, and the core of the service is two part time Somali advice workers who have day to day appointment contact with Somalis using the service. The project is unique in Bristol in that it routinely provides advice in Somali.

The Somali community in Bristol has been the subject of a number of research reports and interventions in the past few years. In addition to this the community has grown considerably since 2001. Census statistics do not specifically identify Somalis as a specific ethnic group (being subsumed under Black African), but the growth the community has been documented elsewhere (Prosser et al 2006, Change Institute 2009) and estimates from service providers has put the population as high as 17,000 individuals.¹ The reasons for this growth in community are not simply refugees fleeing Somalia but includes family reunion with dispersed family members reuniting from the Somalia area and within the EU (particularly the Netherlands), within the UK as well as continuing (but reduced) asylum claims.

The needs of the Somali community have been documented in a number of studies which point to continued social exclusion. Major issues identified include language barriers including illiteracy in the Somali language, low qualifications, high levels of unemployment, intra-community discrimination via clan structures, use of khat, poor housing, lack of understanding about formal bureaucracies (such as the UK), physical and mental trauma and intergenerational conflict (Change Institute 2009, Wall et al 2008).

However, the Somali community is one of the most long-standing black minority communities in the UK with established settlements in Cardiff and London. The community is well networked and there is considerable help between members. Community organisations and key individuals provide support for community members.

Within this context SAP is targeted as a culturally and linguistically specific service providing assistance to Somalis across the city. Performance figures suggest the project is well known and well used.

The purpose of this evaluation was to gather feedback from services users of SAP and professionals working with the Somali community in Bristol to provide accountability for SAP work in terms of its effectiveness and needs, and to provide some guidance on future development of the project.

¹ Transparency Research believes this represents the current upper limit as these are estimates and not reliably sourced. Our own estimate would be in the region of 10,000 or less – still a substantial community and considerably bigger than 2001 figures would suggest.

3. Methodology

The evaluation took the form of surveys and interviews with the major stakeholders in SAP, undertaken in January and February 2010. The table below shows the number invited to participate, the responses and response rate achieved.

<i>Respondent Group</i>	<i>Number invited</i>	<i>Number Achieved</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>
SAP Clients	67	55	82%
Advice Workers	2	2	100%
Partner Organisations	16	7	44%

SAP Clients are those who had direct experience of the project as beneficiaries or project users. Potential contacts were randomly selected from SAP casework lists. These were contacted by telephone and face to face and interviewed in Somali.

Advice workers are the two key staff (one male, one female) who work at SAP. These were interviewed face to face.

Partner organisations included those who sat on the Steering Group and those who had experience signposting to and from the service, as well as professionals with direct experience of working within Bristol's advice provision. This group was sent a short open ended questionnaire via email, one community organisation was interviewed face to face.

The research tools were agreed between Transparency Research and SAP and are reproduced in the Appendices. The evidence collected was compiled into spreadsheets for analysis.

The evaluators felt that this combination of respondents gave considerable focus to the client experience of SAP while also taking account of management level consideration of project performance.

There are numerous levels of selection and bias involved in sampling and surveying with these methods, notwithstanding the general social science approach, and we cannot pretend that this meets any rigorous scientific standards. Evaluation is an art as much as it is a science, and there is a requirement to come to a judgement on project performance using the best available evidence within the resources and time scale required. As such, and within these constraints, we are confident that this report represents a good snapshot of the effectiveness and impact of SAP.

4. Service User Findings

4.1. Demographics

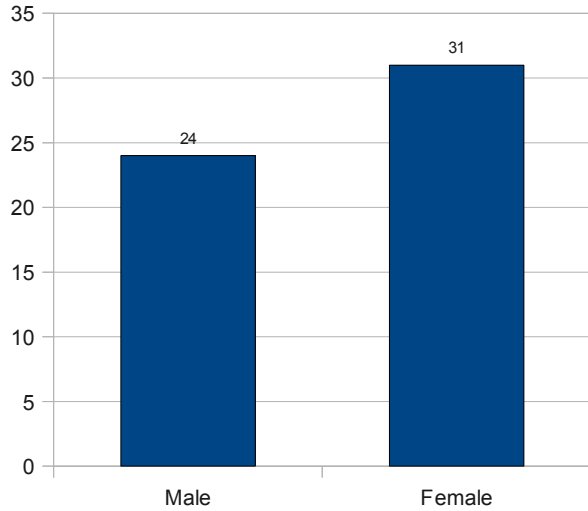


Chart 1: Gender of respondents

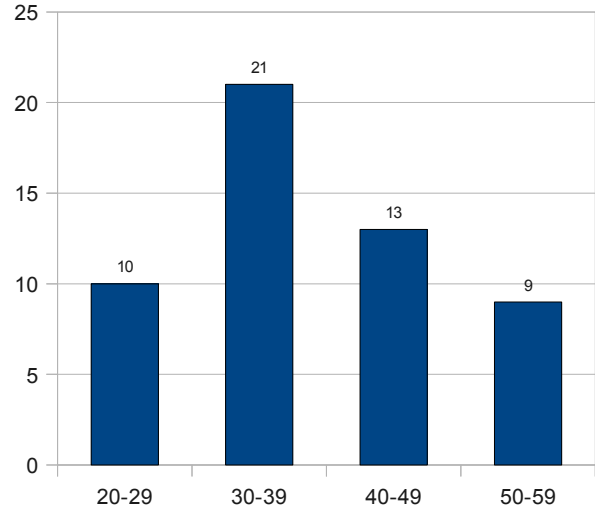


Chart 2: Age range of respondents

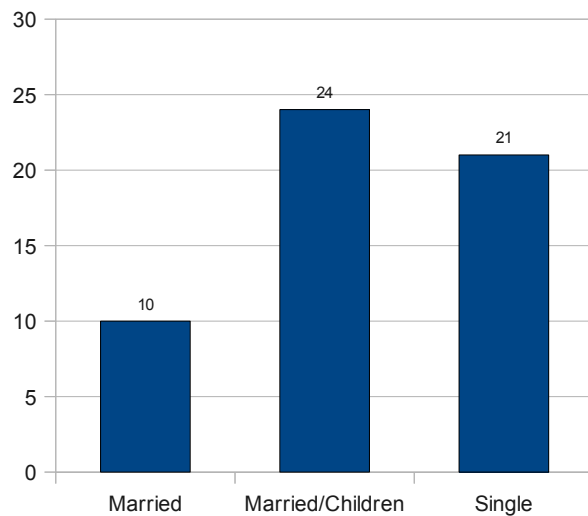


Chart 3: Marital Status

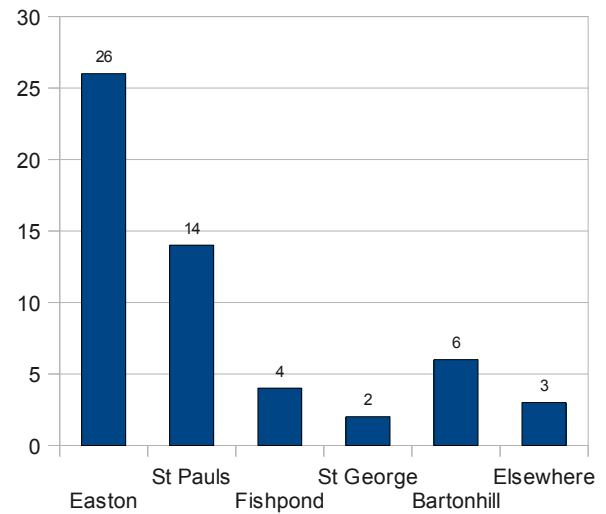


Chart 4: Area of residence

Somali Advice Project
Evaluation

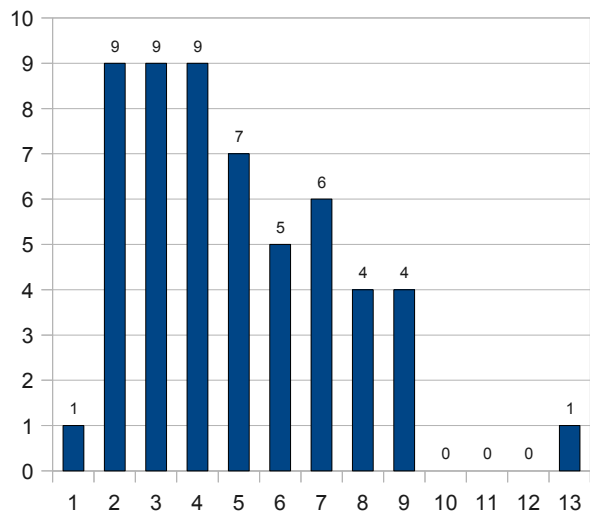
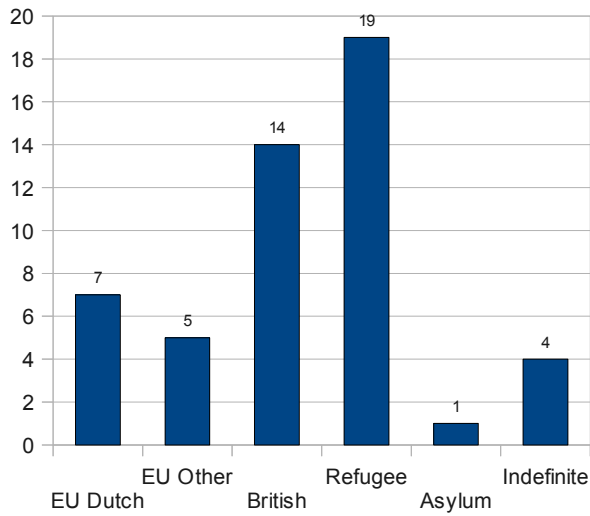


Chart 5: Immigration status

Chart 6: Length of time lived in Bristol

Basic demographic data was asked of clients surveyed. Over half (56%) were female respondents, and all were in the age range of 22-58. Most stated they were married or married with children. Previous research, however, suggests that this is likely to include a number of widows or individuals who are separated from their partner or their partner remains overseas. Most lived in Easton or the St Pauls area of Bristol. Immigration status showed a large number of recognised refugees.

A quarter identified themselves as British and over a fifth were nationals of other EU countries, most notably the Netherlands. Over half had lived in the Bristol area for less than five years. This supports other evidence of recent migration by Somalis to the Bristol area.

4.2. Finding out and getting in touch

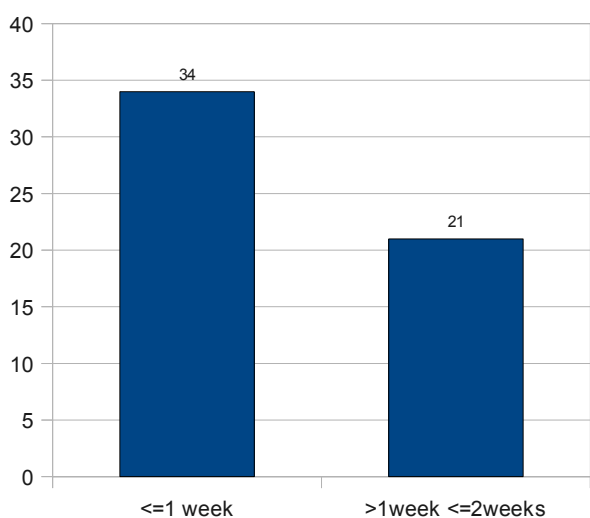
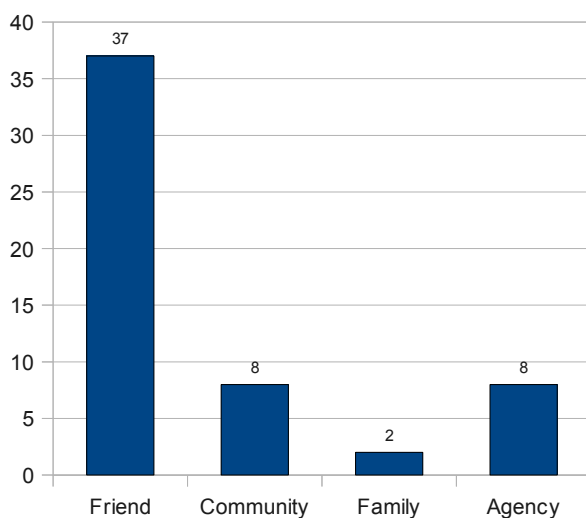


Chart 7: How first found out about SAP

Chart 8: Length of time between finding out and getting an appointment

Somali Advice Project
Evaluation

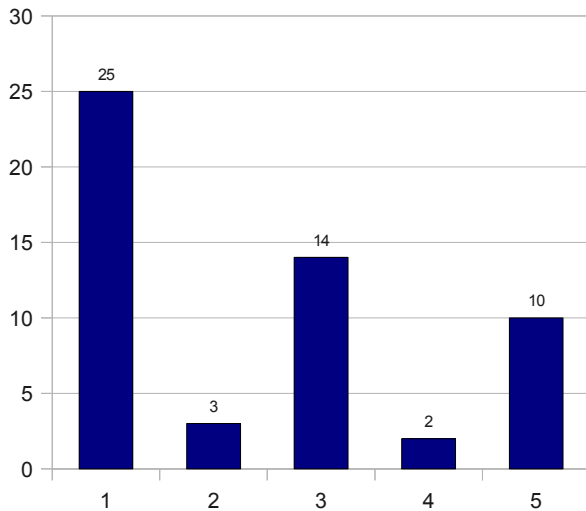


Chart 9: How easy it is to find out about SAP where 1 is very hard, and 5 is very easy.

SAP would appear to be mostly gathering clients via a word-of-mouth approach in the Somali community. Overall 85% heard about the project via friends, family or the community. Only 8 were signposted via another agency.

There was little delay in the ability to get appointments. Most had managed to get an appointment within one week of making contact with SAP and the remainder under two weeks. There were no cases of an appointment being more than two weeks away.

However, when asked to rate how easy or hard it was to find out about SAP (the exact question was “How easy would you rate it is to find out about SAP on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is very hard and 5 is very easy?”), results indicated that word of mouth was a difficult way to find out. Just under half rated it as very hard to find out about, a quarter opted for the middle option and 18% said it was very easy to find out about. Clearly the means by which the the project becomes known is not a uniform experience in the Somali community and there is some scope for further investigation or developing new ways of generating referrals.

4.3. Advice Needs

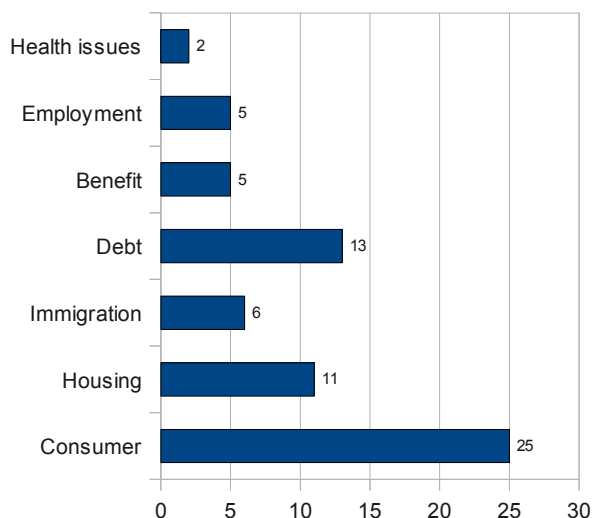


Chart 10: Advice issues

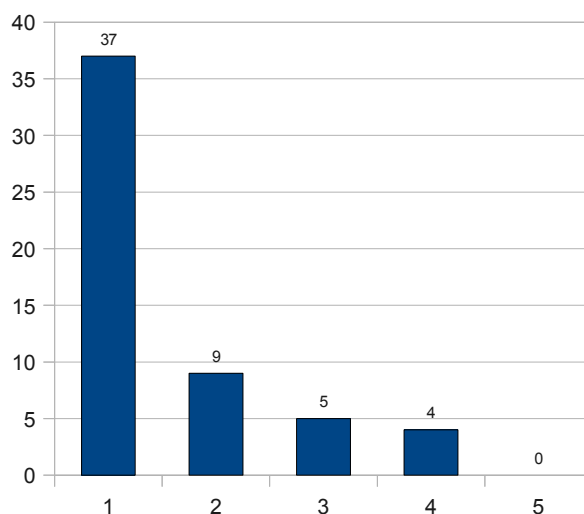


Chart 11: Number of meetings with SAP advice worker.

Advice needs varied and 15 respondents indicated multiple needs. The most common was consumer issues. Although this can be a broad category additional answers indicated that many of these issues were to do with debt including water and gas bills. SAP confirmed that debt accounted for most of recorded consumer issues. Overall nearly half (45%) indicated needs with consumer issues. Housing issues affected 20% of respondents, although immigration was less of a concern (10%), which indicates that many members of the community are now more settled than they would have previously been.

Most respondents indicated that they had had only one meeting with SAP advice workers. A third, however, required one or more follow up meetings to settle their issue.

4.4. Opinion of Service

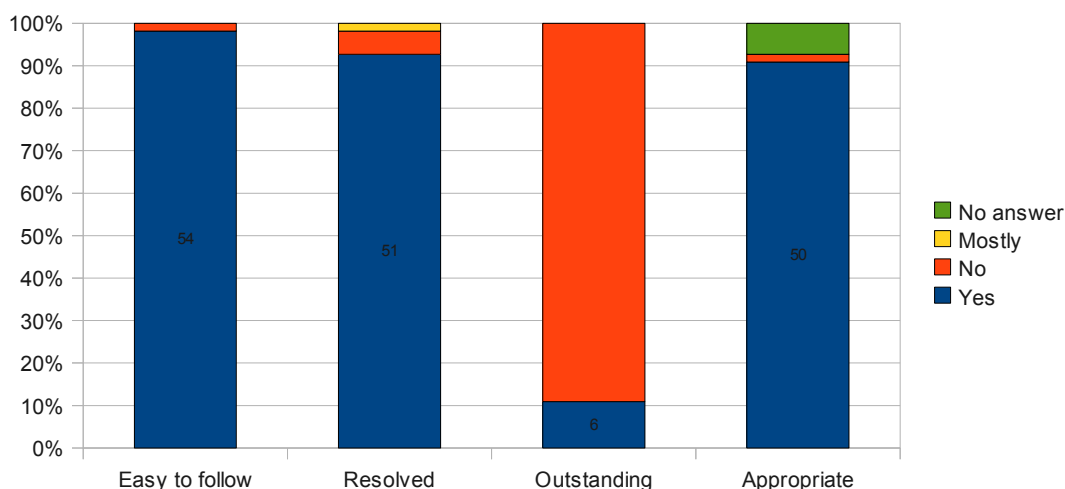


Chart 12: Responses to: Was the advice easy to follow, Did you manage to resolve the issue, Is the issue still

Somali Advice Project Evaluation

outstanding, Do you feel the advice was appropriate

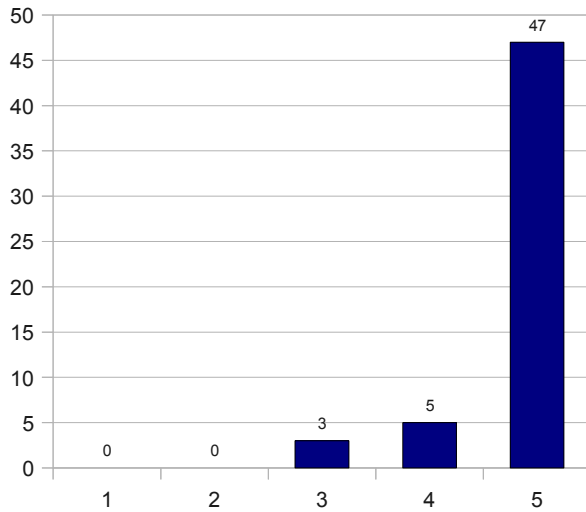


Chart 13: How would you rate the SAP where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good

Experience of the project by users was rated very highly. A series of questions asked if the advice was easy to follow, if the issue had been resolved, if it was still an issue and if the respondent felt the advice was appropriate. Respondents were also asked to rate the service between very bad and very good. Overall the results indicate high level of satisfaction with nearly all indicating the advice was easy to follow, that the advice was appropriate and that the issues were largely resolved. None of the respondents indicated the service was bad or very bad overall, in fact 95% said overall the advice was good or very good.

4.5. Specification of Service

SAP offers a male and female advice worker and offers advice in Somali. Client respondents were asked how important having a choice of male or female advice worker was and how important it was that advice was in Somali.

Somali Advice Project
Evaluation

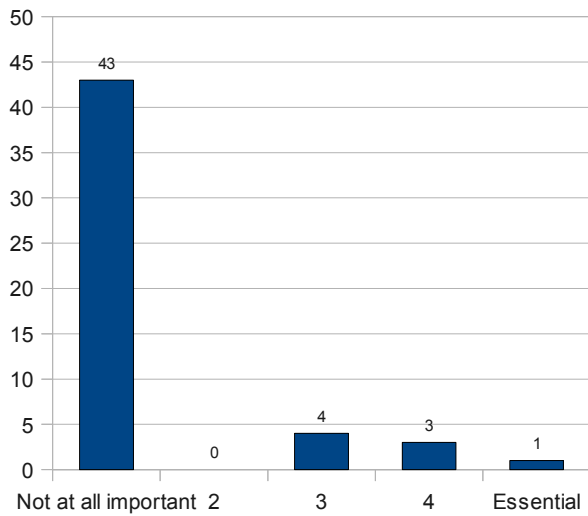


Chart 14: Answers to the question: On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not important and 5 is very important, how important is it for you to have a choice of a male or female adviser?

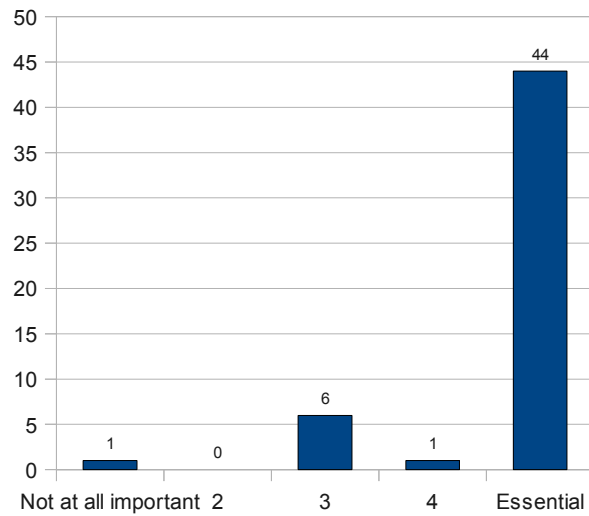


Chart 15: Answers to the question: On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not important and 5 is very important, how important was it to you that the advice given was in your own language?

Being able to choose a male or female adviser was not an overall important consideration. A minority – about one in 20 – felt that gender of adviser was important to them. This may reflect as much about the nature of the issue that was being dealt with as social mores, so one must be careful about interpreting this.

As far as language was concerned, it was essential for most users that they were able to access the service in Somali. Respondents were asked to elaborate on why this aspect was important to them. For many it was a simple language issue: they needed interpretation and would not have been able to access an English speaking service. Some users, however, indicated they had some English ability and the issue was comprehension: “I can explain my problem in Somali”, “I can tell perfectly in Somali”, “Explained in an understandable way” for example, indicated that while some English could be understood, the detail, nuance and comprehension required use of Somali. Corroborating the importance of language in this delivery of service, later respondents were asked why they had used the SAP rather than an alternative service: 58% stated language was the reason, 16% stated distance, or that the service was local, and 5% acted on recommendation.

Respondents were asked if they could suggest improvements to the service. Nearly two thirds said that there were no improvements they could suggest. The remainder of suggestions for improvement all indicated more staff, more Somali speakers, and generally a greater provision of service. When asked if they would recommend the service to others, the answer was unanimously Yes (not tabulated).

Somali Advice Project Evaluation

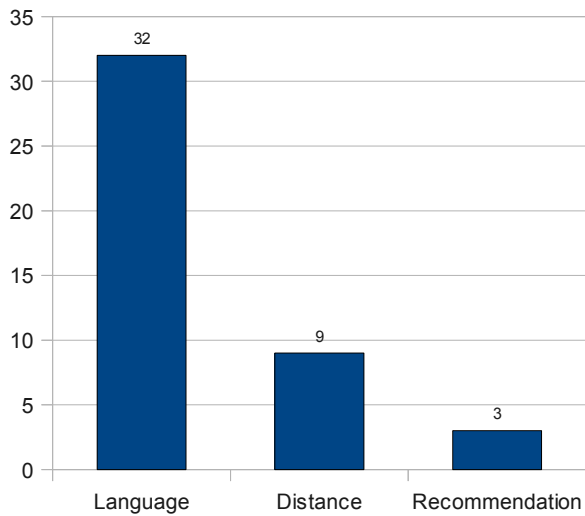


Chart 16: Answers to the question: Why you have chosen to go to SAP and not use other advice agencies? (responses reclassified).

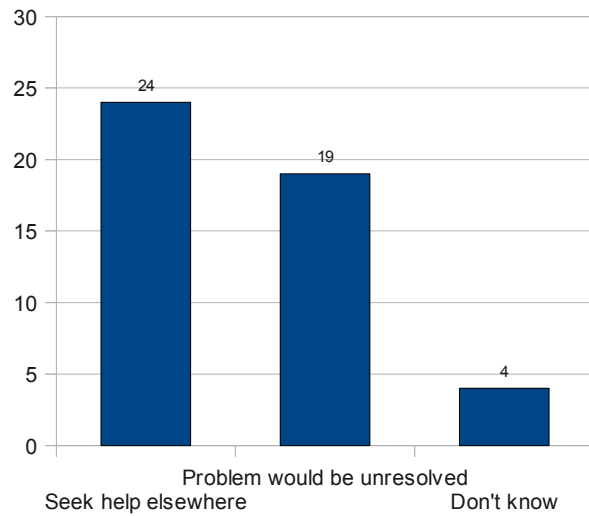


Chart 17: Answers to the question: What would have happened to you if SAP did not exist? (responses re-classified).

No respondent felt they had been discriminated against in accessing SAP. Respondents were asked to speculate what would have happened if SAP had not been there. Nearly half would have sought help elsewhere – some determination in solving problems was evident – but a third felt the problem would remain to be resolved and some simply did not know.

5. Management Findings

Management level responses include those of advice workers, partner organisations who operate professionally within the same advice environment in Bristol and those on the steering group. Information from these respondents was gathered via email survey and face to face interview. Questions and responses were all qualitative in nature and a broadly thematically concerned the needs of the Somali community, the ability and quality of SAP to meet those needs, pressures on the service and opportunities for development. As such these views constitute broadly the opinions of peers working in Bristol.

5.1. Community Needs

Partner organisations indicated a broad profile of needs amongst the Somali community in Bristol. There were indications that this had changed over time as those who entered Britain via the asylum process were becoming more settled, and then further migrations from within the EU had also altered the pattern of needs. Professionals mentioned a plethora of general needs and pressures on the community which included:

- Social barriers such as racism, local prejudice and scapegoating for local problems (the Somali community has rapidly increased in Bristol and is considered a “new” community).
- Service providers being apathetic, hostile or otherwise inaccessible to the Somali community.
- Unfamiliarity (on the part of Somalis) with institutional norms – such as how (UK) bureaucracies operate, general distrust of authority systems, and general “how-to” in British society. Very specific examples include form filling, a mainstay of the UK bureaucratic system.
- Language barriers – not only related to language proficiency and literacy, this also includes a reliance on information via oral transmission and via trusted individuals. The high level of community referral to SAP is evidence of this reliance.

Information requirements that would be in the UK context considered at an advice level covered virtually all elements of interaction with the state: education including ESOL, employment, unemployment, rights, benefits, housing, disability, training, mental health issues and disability.

There was some evidence that needs had changed in recent years. Immigration advice featured less than one would expect in the client survey (above) although this particular area of advice often requires specialist legal support and might not feature highly amongst the client group discussed here. The issues presenting – and suggested by professionals – were more of a group that had established residence rights but was negotiating other institutional boundaries: *“the legal issues involve have changed as communities have become longer established.”*

The advice workers had more intimate knowledge of the issues presenting by the community. Most important were language and cultural barriers in accessing the 'UK system'. This included:

- Not knowing *“how to maintain and keep their important documents together; for*

example an issue that would take 15 minutes to solve would take 2 hours as they need to find the right paperwork etc”

- *“Time keeping is a problem as they come late for appointments.”*
- *“Client[s] come to us when their case is very critical and they are about to lose their benefits”.*
- *“Utility bills – they don't understand contracts and the fact that the more they use (eg gas) the more they pay. Their point of reference is their neighbours or friends and they say “how come we have to pay so much when my friend only pays so much per month / quarter”!*
- *“TV Licence – most people don't think this is a huge problem at all, so they ignore it.”*

In addition, there were issues when it comes to dealing with staff working in statutory services: they *“can be very challenging and difficult to deal with it. Some of them know very little about benefits and can make our job very difficult.”*

To summarise, professionals working with the Somali community in Bristol had differing understandings about the needs of the Somali community, but all were consistent in that there were considerable needs that needed to be dealt with. None of the needs identified were mutually exclusive or idiosyncratic. Needs had evolved over time in that immigration work had become less of a priority, but equally, assisting people to work with British institutional arrangements had become more of an issue. As one provider noted:

The need for information and advice about many issues/services is still as clear and pressing as when the project was first planned.

5.2. SAP Provision

Overall other providers within the city felt that SAP met a distinct need and had established itself as a key specialist provider in Bristol:

- *It is a professional Somali organisation which is well run. Their offices are local and very close to where the community lives. Staff are trained and know what they are doing.*
- *It is the only organisation which has trained Somali advisers in the city.*
- *It provides a service in its own right and acts as a link to the services of other advice providers.*
- *There are very few Somali speaking advice workers in mainstream Bristol advice agencies*
- *[SAP] is [the] only advice service in Bristol for Somali community which is own language, trusted, culturally matched, and professionally managed.*

Other services which nominally were able to serve the Somali population had some gaps that SAP met. These included help in understanding documents and filling in forms, which (it was felt) many mainstream advice agencies were unable to do. Mainstream advice providers all provided an equal opportunity service but this was “in theory” and interpreting provision had to be arranged. Specialist advisers dealt with specialist issues

such as immigration, and while community organisations tried to help they had little by means of resources and little experience.

Overall the view was that SAP met distinct linguistic and cultural needs of the Somali community in Bristol, provided a professional service and that there were few alternatives. This concurs with the evidence gathered from the clients themselves. Not many organisations collected feedback on SAP services in any organised way, however, anecdotal evidence and responses from client referrals indicated a high level of satisfaction with the service.

5.3. Pressures

The professionals consulted indicated that they thought SAP was felt to be under a number of pressures which had considerable consequences, not least was the lack of funding. A number of respondents indicated the consequences of this as more far reaching than a service simply lost: SAP was felt to have built up a level of trust and was established in the Somali community as an organisation which could deliver: *“It provides an accountable culturally appropriate advice service with essential language support”*, the project was *“well respected”*. One provider suggested the outcomes would be more thoroughgoing: previous services had already been shut down (former CAB Refugee Support Project). The loss of a specific Somali advice and Somali language services was considered a loss for Bristol and would hit the most socially excluded first. Less professional advice - in terms of informal advice between community members - would fill the gap and this would not provide the same level of quality of advice.

Other pressures involved the management of the project. One respondent noted that having management at a ratio of one manager to two part time staff wouldn't normally be considered efficient:

Normal balance would be 1:7 or 1:8. Staff who are trainees or themselves new to UK or using English as a second language need more support, but not as much as a half time manager each. However managing advice staff is only part of the job; a large part is developmental. We need to be clear how much of the time we expect to be operational and how much strategic, and what developmental/strategic work is priority. This would be feasible with more secure funding, but isn't whilst the manager is having to spend all his time fund-raising.

There is a clear implication here that if funding was longer term that this would assist project development.

The two advice workers indicated the level of training that they had received which included NVQs and basic advice work training. Training and assistance was provided from Avon and Bristol Law Centre, the CAB and St Paul's Advice centre which also provided management. The two advice workers felt that they were managed well, but indicated interest in further training, particularly about the Child Support Agency. More importantly, they felt under considerable pressure: *“There is a huge demand for our services and a huge waiting list, which two part time staff can not satisfy. We need more staff and resources to meet the demand.”*

6. Conclusions

Overall our findings suggest that there is continued need for SAP in Bristol. It remains a unique service providing advice to a community which has high level of needs and remains at considerable risk of social exclusion.

The needs of the Somali community have been well documented elsewhere, and the evidence suggest that needs are evolving as community members become more settled in the UK. Demand for SAP services remains high, and satisfaction with the service where it is delivered is also high. Choice of a male or female worker is not important across all community members, although it remains a preference for some. More important is that the advice is delivered in Somali.

Both professionals working with the community and the services users themselves concur that the services is unique, professional and competent. The major risk to the project continuing would appear to be funding rather than any issues of ability or demand.

7. Appendices

7.1. Survey Schedule for Service Users

Gender

Age

Ethnic Origin

Family (Married/single/children, how many)

Immigration status (Asylum, Refugee, other EU etc).

Which part of Bristol do you live in?

How long have you been in Bristol?

How did you first get in contact with SAP?

(Referred by another agency, via a friend, or how first found out about the service)

How long was it before first deciding to get in touch with SAP and getting appointment with an adviser?

(1 day, week, month?)

How easy would you rate it is to find out about SAP on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is very hard and 5 is very easy?

What was the name of your advice worker?

What was the nature of the issue you contacted SAP about?

[1. welfare Benefits 2. Debt 3. Consumer issues 4. Housing 5. Employment 6. Immigration.]

How much contact did you have with the advice worker

(1 or more meetings, follow up)

Was the advice easy to follow

Did you manage to resolve the issue?

Is it still outstanding ?

Do you feel the advice was appropriate to the issue?

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good, how you would rate the advice from SAP

[5 – Very good – resolved the problem completely

4 – Good – resolved the problem mostly

3 – Neither good nor bad – didn't make the problem better or worse. No change

2 – Bad – made the problem moderately worse

1 – Very bad – made the problem much worse]

On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not important and 5 is very important, how important is it for you to have a choice of a male or female adviser?

Somali Advice Project
Evaluation

[5 Very important – they would not see an adviser of the opposite gender
4 Quite important – they would see the adviser and it would affect the advice sought
3 Not very important – they would see the adviser but it might affect the advice sought
2 Not important – but a preference exists
1 Not at all important – gender of adviser is unimportant]

On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not important and 5 is very important, how important was it to you that the advice given was in your own language?

[5 Very important – advice could not have been sought or given unless in Somali, 1 – Unimportant, advice could be in English]

If this aspect was important to you please can you explain why ?

Are there any improvements to the SAP service that you would like to suggest?

Are there any other issues you would like SAP to help with?

On a scale of 1-5 where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good how would you rate the advice you received?

How would you rate the resolution of the issue you came with

- ~ The problem has got worse
- ~ The problem has stayed the same
- ~ The problem has been partially resolved
- ~ The problem has been completely resolved

Would you recommend a friend to use SAP?

Why you have chosen to go to SAP and not use other advice agencies?

What would have happened to you if SAP did not exist?

Did you experience any discrimination in accessing this service?

7.2. Question Schedule for Steering Group

Identify the Organisation and Role

What other work do you do with the Somali community?

How long have you been involved with SAP?

What was your initial understanding of the SAP service?

What is your current understanding of the SAP service ?

What differences were there?-

Do you think the needs of the Somali community in Bristol have changed since the project

began?

How do you feel SAP meets a gap for the Somali Community?

What do you think are the main issues (or difficulties ?) that are present for Somalis in Bristol?

What do you think are the most important issues for the Somali community in Bristol?

What other services are there that provide advice to Somalis in Bristol?

What problems do you think Somalis have in accessing mainstream services?

What challenges do you think currently face the SAP

How do you feel the project has dealt with previous challenges (if any)?

Do you feel the current management of the project is efficient or sustainable? What changes should be made?

How do you think the project (services) should be developed?

What do you think would happen if SAP were closed?

How are SAPs links with other organisations?

How do you think better links can be developed?

How appropriate do you think the current service of SAP is with the needs of the community?

How effective do you think SAP is in helping and providing advice to the Somali community?

Do you have or collect feedback from other sources about SAP?

Where do you think SAP performs well?

Where do you think SAP could perform better?

7.3. Question Schedule for Partner Organisations

Name of organisation

What role does SAP have with regard to the Somali community in Bristol?

What do you see are the needs of the Somali Community in Bristol?

What involvement do you have SAP?

What gap does SAP fill? (Why SAP and not another project or service)

Do you signpost to SAP?

For what purposes (specific. issues etc.) ?

Do you receive signposts FROM SAP?

For what purposes (specific issues ?)

How is your relationship with SAP staff? Are there any issues or successes?

Where do you think SAP performs well?

Is there anything unique about the SAP project?

Where do you think SAP could perform better?

How you think SAP should develop in the future?

What are the implications should SAP have to close?

Do you gather any feedback about SAP? (Can you tell us about it).

7.4. Question Schedule for Advice Workers

Before you came to SAP, what work did you do?

Please describe your current role within SAP.

What training and support is given to you to do the job?

How did the training help to do your job?

How does the training and support help you do your job?

Is there any further training or support that you need.

What qualifications have you achieved?

What sort of needs do you deal with from the Somali community?

What do you think are the needs of the community in general?

Somali Advice Project
Evaluation

How do you feel the project is managed? What is managed well?

What could be improved?

Do you have any problems have in contacting clients?

What problems do you think clients have in accessing the services?

Are there any types of particularly challenging cases?

Where could SAP improve on challenging cases?

Are there any types of particularly successful cases?

Is there something that SAP is particularly good at?

What are the implications for the Somali community if project should close?

Apart form the above where do you think SAP could improve?

Apart from the above, where do you think SAP performs particularly well?

What are your future aspirations?

8. Bibliography

Change Institute (2009): The Somali Muslim Community in England. London: Department of Communities and Local Government.

Prosser B, Ismail L, Hall A (2006): Disabled and Elderly Somalis in Bristol. Chippenham, Transparency Research.

Wall L, Mumin M, Ahmed A, Hussein I, Abdi S, Ismail M, Ismail L, Hall A (2008): The Mental Health Needs of Somali 11 – 18 Year Olds in Bristol. Chippenham, Transparency Research.