



Lost in translation

Feedback on Arabic interpreting and translation services in Gateshead

About Healthwatch Gateshead

Healthwatch Gateshead is one of 152 local Healthwatch organisations established throughout England on 1 April 2013 under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We are the independent voice and champion of users of a range of NHS services and social care for adults, children and young people. We have a dual role to champion the rights of users, and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

We collect feedback on services from people of all ages and communities. We do this through our network of voluntary and community sector organisations; during events, drop-in sessions and listening events at a range of venues across Gateshead; online through the feedback centre on our website; via social media; and from callers to our information and signposting helpline. As part of the remit to gather views, we also have the power to 'enter and view' services and conduct announced and unannounced visits.

Healthwatch Gateshead is part of Tell Us North CIC (company no. 10394966).

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. How we did it	1
3. Results	2
3. Key themes from results	8
5. Recommendations	9
6. Acknowledgements	9
Monitoring information	10
Contact details	13

1. Introduction

During 2019, we received negative feedback from people in Gateshead about interpreting services for health care. This included incorrect language interpreters attending appointments, interpreters not understanding medical terminology and interpreters cancelling at the last minute. We also knew from previous work with Asylum seeker and refugee child clinic at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, which required translation of letters to NHS patients, some received translations that were not in their language.

We approached the resettlement service at The Gateshead Housing Company to discuss this and the work that we wanted to do. The company reported similar feedback from service users and expressed concerns.

2. How we did it

We developed a short questionnaire using feedback received from staff at The Gateshead Housing Company (GHC) and what we have previously heard.

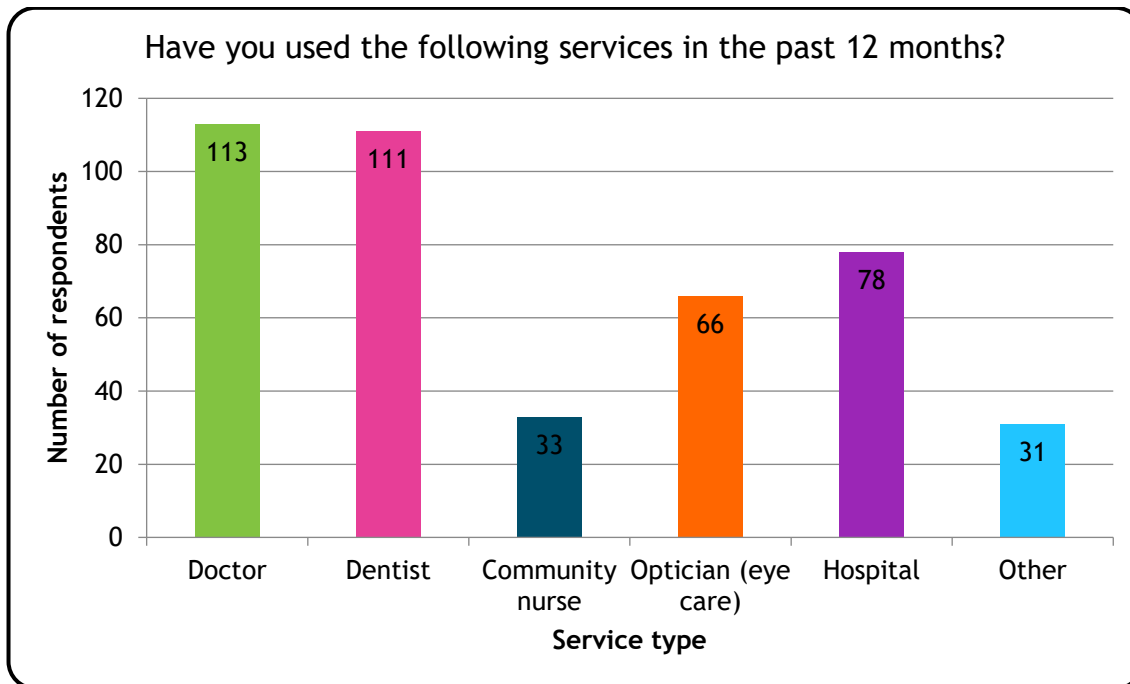
GHC holds an annual English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) assessment week. During February 2020, we gathered the views of 148 people there who spoke Arabic (our questionnaire was translated into Arabic by one of our volunteers).

Staff handed out the questionnaire before or after the ESOL assessments took place. People either completed the questionnaire themselves or were offered help by their support workers. The responses were entered on to an online survey tool (SurveyMonkey) and the results analysed. We reviewed our findings with The Gateshead Housing Company and made recommendations.

3. Results

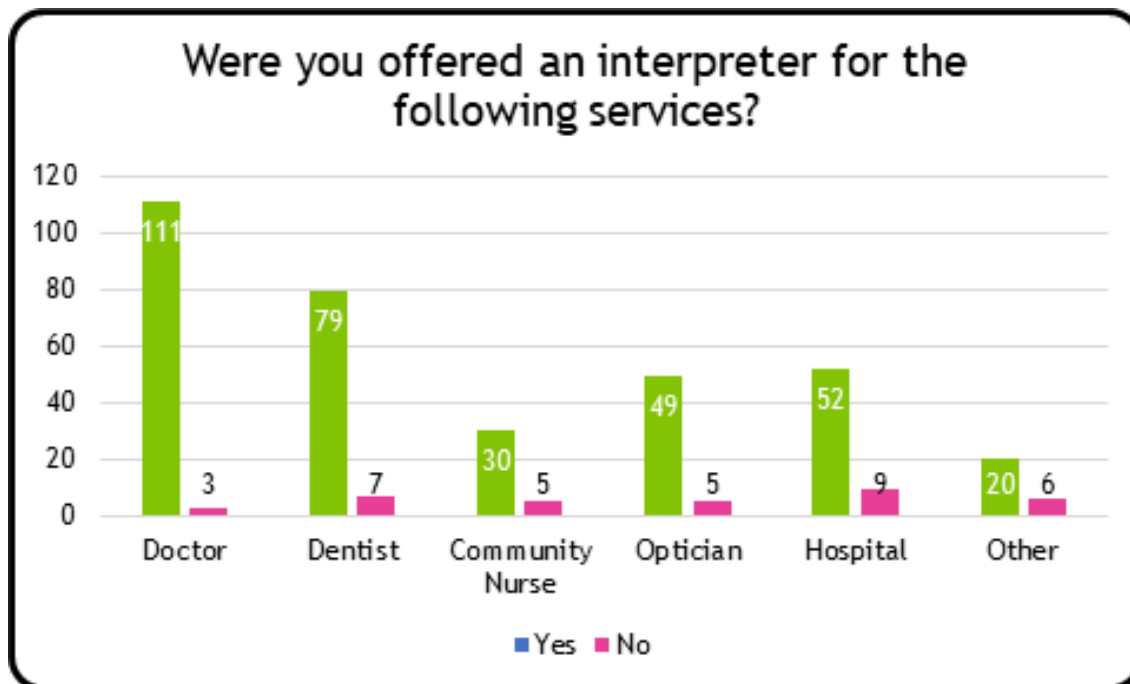
3.1 Access to health services

Question 1: Have you used the following services in the past 12 months?



We asked people who completed our survey about their service use over the past 12 months. Out of 131 respondents, doctors and dentists were accessed 21% more often than hospital services. It is also interesting that half of people visited an optician. During a focus group held at the end of 2019 with patients of the Asylum seeker and refugee child clinic, we found many were not aware of opticians. Community nurses and other services (such as pharmacies) were only used by 25% of respondents.

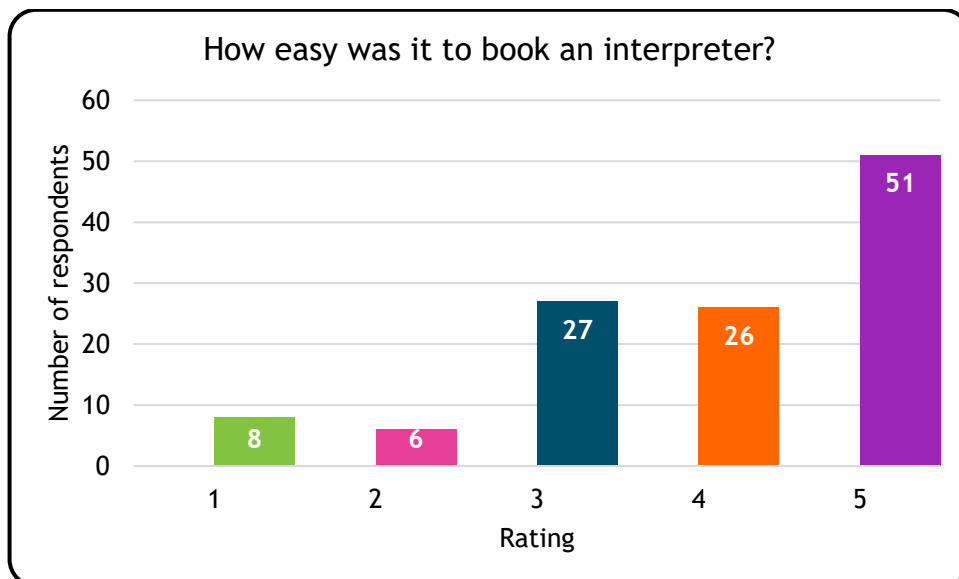
Question 2: Were you offered an interpreter?



This graph shows out of 122 respondents, interpreters were offered most frequently by GP practices to 111 respondents (97%). This was closely followed by 79 respondents at dentists (92%) and 49 at opticians (91%). 85% of people accessing hospital or community nurses were offered interpreting services. Finally, other services such as pharmacies were the least likely to offer interpreters, with only 75% of respondents being offered one. There was a low rate of interpreters not being offered by all of services we surveyed.

“We are suffering from the lack of interpreters, especially for hospital appointments. I find difficulties when I went with my husband to the hospital because of the absence of interpreters.”

Question 3: How easy was it to book interpreters for appointments?



We asked respondents to our survey to rate how easy it was to book interpreters for an appointment, with 5 being the highest score. 51 of the 118 people who answered this question rated the ease of booking interpreters as 5 stars (43%). Only 27 respondents gave star rating of 3 (23%) and 26 rated 4 (22%), whilst 8 respondents rated the booking process as 1 star (7%) and 6 gave 2 stars (5%).

Although the overall star rating was 3.9 respondents raised quite a few issues with the booking process. As we did not conduct the survey ourselves, this suggests a misinterpretation of the survey question regarding the star rating.

“I have difficulty because of the absence of Arabic (Syrian dialect) interpreters, so that we can’t understand or communicate our thoughts.”

“Sometimes there are delays getting an appointment at GPs. Please reconsider giving earlier appointments, especially for urgent medical conditions/emergencies.”

“I just want to say that getting an appointment takes so long and when we mention that we need the earliest appointment available they say there is no appointment. Thank you.”

“Procedure of booking an interpreter takes too long.”

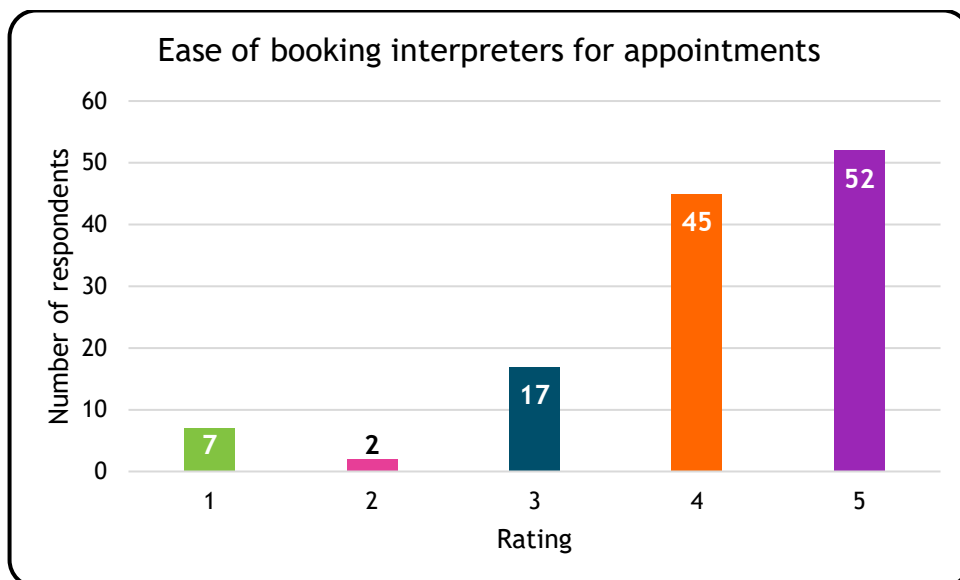
“As it takes so long, support workers help the people who can’t speak English, in particular emergencies.”

“This always delays appointments.”

“Regarding the appointments, they take a long time while we are in need for it and it should be straight away because some suffering and pains are urgent and shouldn't be delayed.”

3.2 Quality of services

Question 4: What was the quality of the interpreting service you received?



We also asked people to rate the quality of their interpreters out of 5 stars. Service quality is rated slightly higher than the booking experience, with an overall star rating of 4.1. Out of 123 respondents, 52 service users (42%) rated the quality of the service as 5 stars, closely followed by 45 service users (37%) who gave a rating of 4. Although only 17 gave 3 stars (14%), 7 respondents (6%) rated 1 and 2 (2%) rated 2, when asked for comments people said the following:

“I would like you to provide interpreters who can speak Arabic fluently because most interpreters 'Arabic language' is weak to a degree and sometimes they don't know what I need.”

“Most of the time interpreters don't turn up and that's really bad besides when we ask for a female interpreter, a male interpreter turns up instead so that we have to cancel that one.”

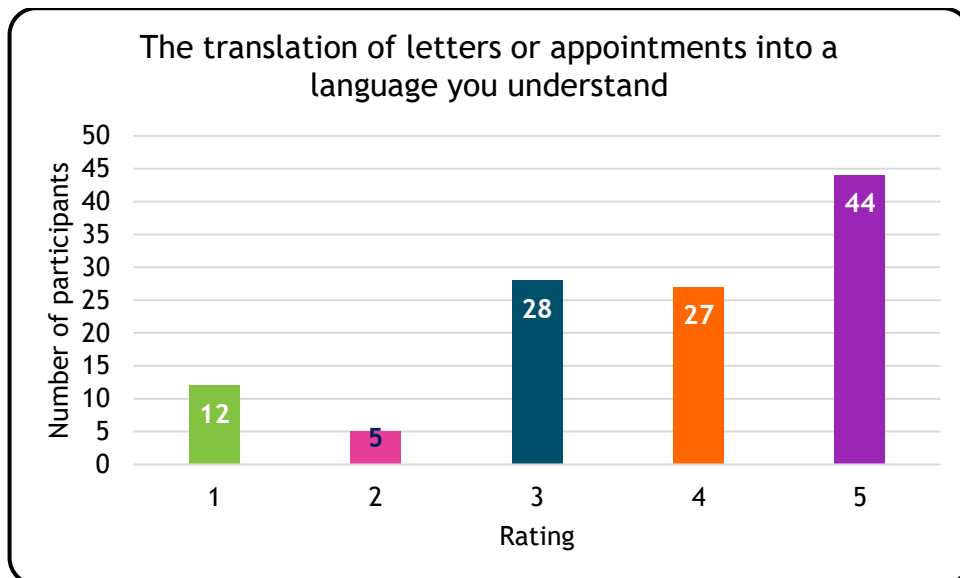
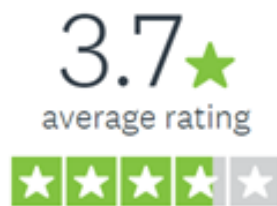
“Sometimes when I get phone interpreting services and that causes some difficulties because of my hearing impairment.”

“Sometimes the interpreter is late at the GP and sometimes there is post we can't understand.”

“I want the interpreter to be from the same country and speak the same language.”

“Support workers help the people who can speak English, in particular emergencies. Sadly, this can't always happen.”

Question 5: Were the translation of letters or appointments in a language you understand?



Respondents gave the lowest rating to this question in our survey. This is similar to our own experiences of using the translation services to prepare materials for our focus group with patients at the Asylum seeker and refugee child clinic, where some weren't provided in correct language.

Out of 116 respondents, 44 gave a 5-star rating for receiving a correct language translation (38%) and 28 gave 3 stars (24%), closely followed by 4 stars with 27 respondents (23%). Only 12 people gave 1 star (10%) and 5 gave 2 stars for quality (4%), however there were a couple of negative comments:

“Sometimes we receive letters from NHS and have to translate using Google Translate.”

“I am trying to translate post that I have received but the translation isn't accurate, therefore, I don't understand the content.”

3.3 Anything else?

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

- I wish all the best for this country and I would like to see it more flourished. Thank you for all your efforts.
- The service is very good and I wish the best for this country and I thank the UK for all services and efforts.
- I am suffering from a hearing disease and I am waiting for a medical surgery and that negatively affects my energy. On my health in general that's why I can't do anything difficult at the moment because that causes pains in my hands and hurts my back. I would like to learn English and to be fit so that I can support my family and the community. Thanks.
- Thank you for your efforts.
- Everything is good.
- Everything is ok and thank you.
- I would like to thank all the medical team in the UK.
- I would like to thank all who support and help us and the ones who have helped us to get over our daily problems.
- I would like to learn English communication because I can't speak English well
- Thank you for everything and for the educational, occupational and health support.
- I would like to learn English.
- I want to say thanks for everything.
- I don't usually ask for an interpreter because I can speak English well.

As you can see from the above comments, respondents were grateful for all the help and support they received from services. They also appreciated being able to have their voices heard.

3. Key themes from results

The key themes from the results of people who spoke Arabic are outlined below.

3.1 Service use

The Gateshead Housing Company service users mostly access GP and dentists with Hospital use closely following. Half the service users attend their opticians, and community nurses and other services are only used by a quarter. This reflects previous findings that more awareness on these services is needed.

3.2 Services offering interpreting services

GP practices most frequently offer interpreting services, followed by dentist and opticians. Hospital and community nurses offer services slightly less. Other services such as pharmacies offered interpreters the least.

3.3 Ease of booking interpreters

Our survey respondents gave an overall rating of 3.9 stars out of 5 for ease of booking interpreters. Despite the majority highly rating the booking process, we received contradictory comments, including lack of Arabic (Syrian dialect) interpreters, long waiting times for appointments with an interpreter and having to rely on support workers in emergencies.

3.4 Quality of service

The overall rating was 4.1 stars for the quality of service people received. Again, although the rating was high for quality, people raised issues including interpreters having weak 'Arabic language' skills, interpreter punctuality and reliability, not receiving the requested gender of interpreter and using the phone services with a hearing impairment.

3.5 Translation services

Translation services had 3.7 stars for receiving services in the correct language. Despite a relatively high rating, there were some negative comments including people sometimes having to use Google Translate for NHS letters and translated documents not being accurate.

5. Recommendations

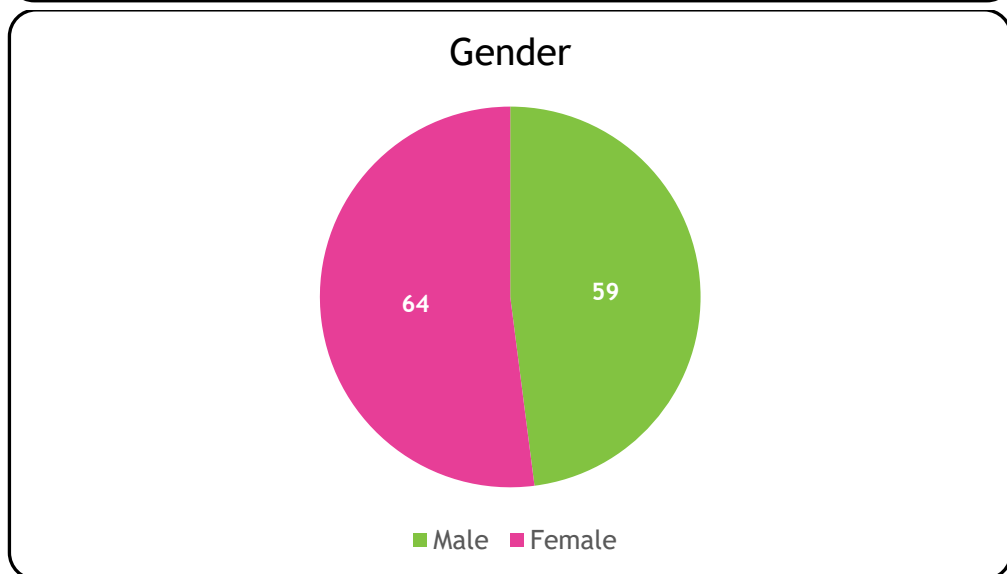
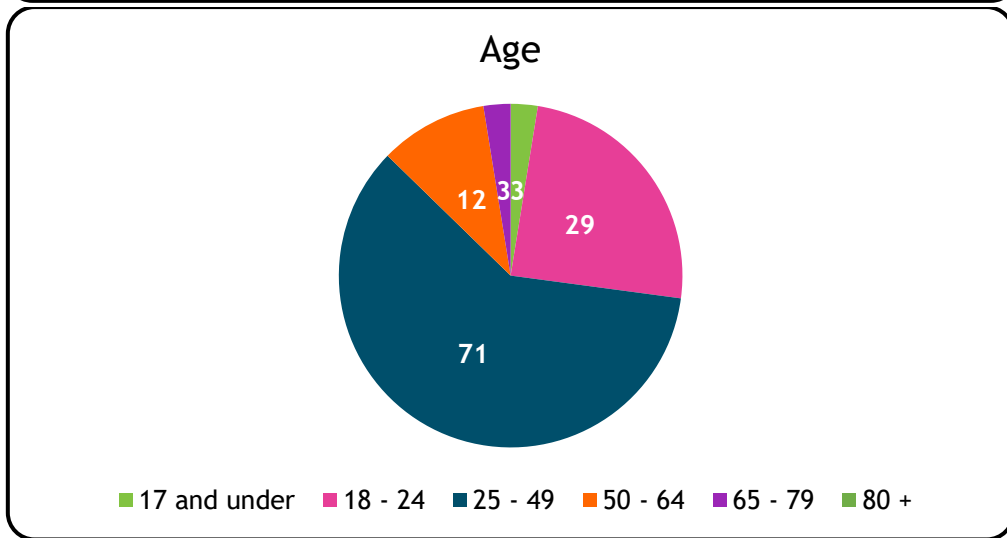
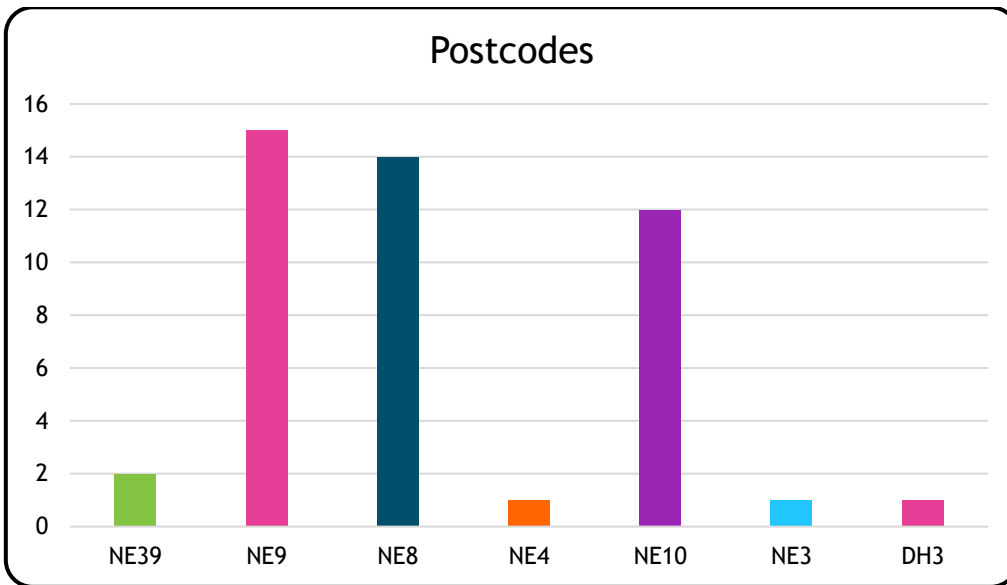
Based on the feedback from users of the resettlement service at The Gateshead Housing Company, these are our recommendations. Please note these are based on experiences of Arabic speakers:

1. Raise awareness of opticians, community nurses and other health services, such as pharmacies, in Gateshead and the wider region to help service users access the care they need.
2. NHS providers to review how hospital, community nurses and other services, such as pharmacies, offer interpreting services.
3. NHS/interpreting services to review why there are long waiting times for interpreting appointment. Is it waiting for interpreter availability or long appointments availability with GP?
4. Interpreting services to recruit more Arabic interpreters to increase capacity and reduce waiting times
5. Interpreting services to review staff management procedures to ensure interpreters having the necessary language skills and are punctual when providing services especially their language skills and punctuality.
6. NHS/interpreting services to review systems to ensure that patient needs are being met with regards to correct language, cultural and sensory impairments, and gender and this is being recorded on patients' medical records.
7. Survey speakers of different languages to gather their experiences of using the interpreting service.

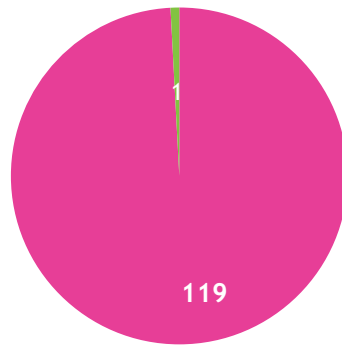
6. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our Healthwatch Gateshead Champion, Randa, for her invaluable help in translating the survey and the responses. We would also like to thank the staff of The Gateshead Housing Company for letting us speak to its service users. In particular, Victoria Walker-Freeman and Kate Lang, for their input and support throughout this piece of work.

Monitoring information

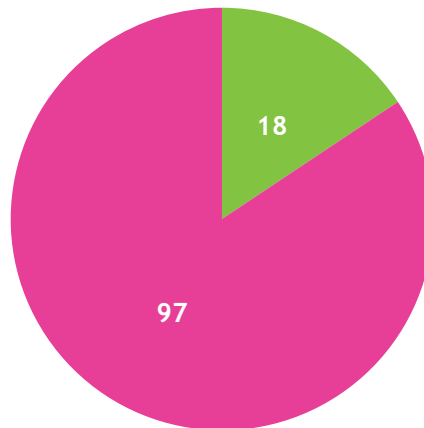


Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?



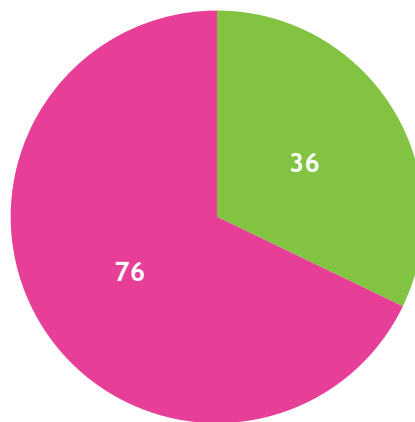
■ Yes ■ No

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?



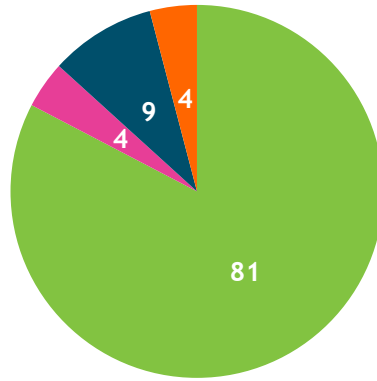
■ Yes ■ No

Are you a carer?



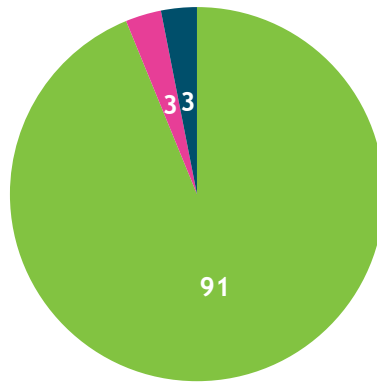
■ Yes ■ No

Are you?



■ A student or in full-time education ■ Employment or self-employed
■ Not in paid employment ■ Retired

Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?



■ Heterosexual/straight ■ Bisexual ■ Gay woman/lesbian

Contact details



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