

Reach Community Projects

Client Feedback Report

Sep 2024 – Feb 2025

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Absolute Communication Ltd., February, 2025

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1. Introduction

This short report is a compilation of feedback from the phone conversations carried out between September 2024 and January 2025, as part of the overall Reach client feedback process.

The interviews arose when a client indicated via a text message that they were happy to discuss their interaction with Reach. Those numbers were collated by the community outreach team at Reach, and I then called them for a brief one-to-one interview to “dig deeper” into how they felt about the service.

As with all qualitative data, it provided a rich framework from which to gauge the organisation’s effectiveness. I also organised the responses into a spreadsheet, where it was possible to aggregate some of the responses more quantitatively. I have not included the Focus Group data in here – that will be the subject of another report.

2. The interviews

From September 2024 through to January 2025, I tried to get in touch with 27 clients. Four were either unavailable, or were reluctant to talk further. One did not want to speak, but was happy to respond through email.

The average call length was approximately six minutes. In addition to feeding back about their experience of Reach, the clients’ topics of conversation ranged from homelessness, issues with energy suppliers, bipolar syndrome, surgical experiences, domestic violence, unemployment, families, dementia, boiler issues, and bereavement.

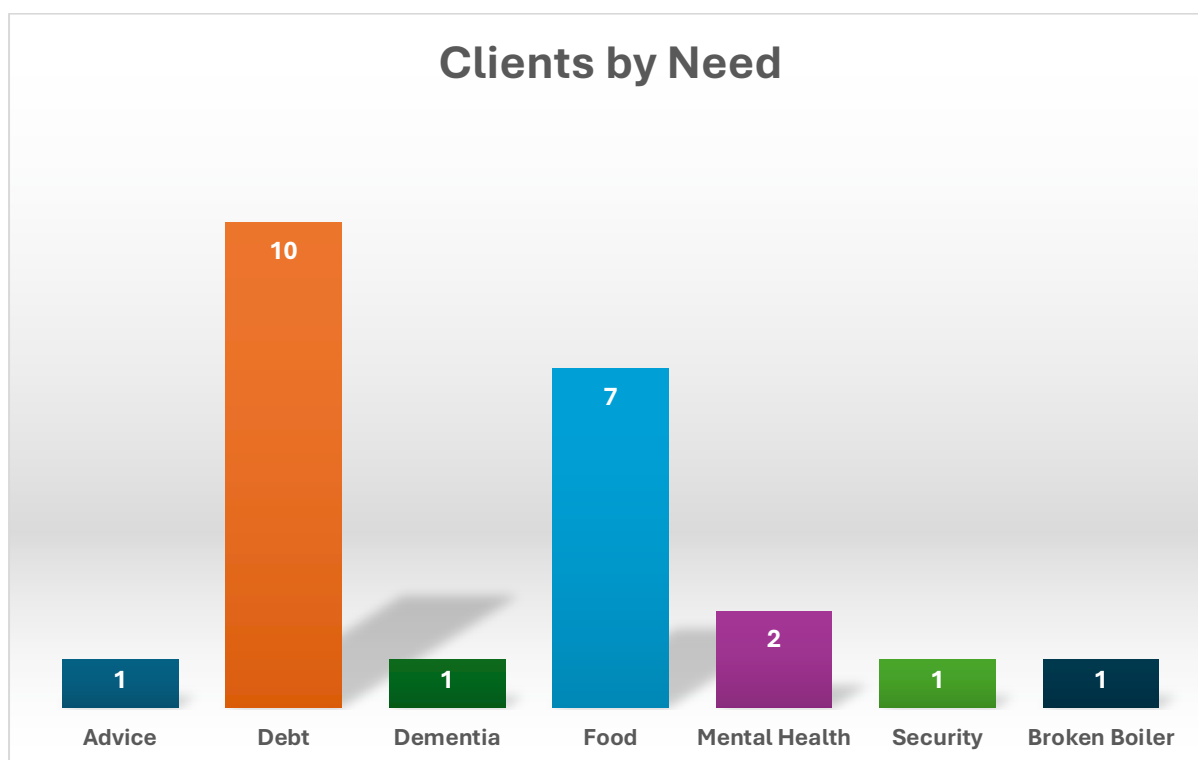
The topics covered were various, depending on where the client took the conversation. The rough framework was as follows:

- Tell me your story (family - circumstances - jobs - lack of - experience of Haverhill - mental wellbeing)
- How did you hear about Reach?
- How did you feel when you started with Reach?
- How do you describe Reach to other people?
- Have you told anyone else about Reach?
- What does the future hold for you?

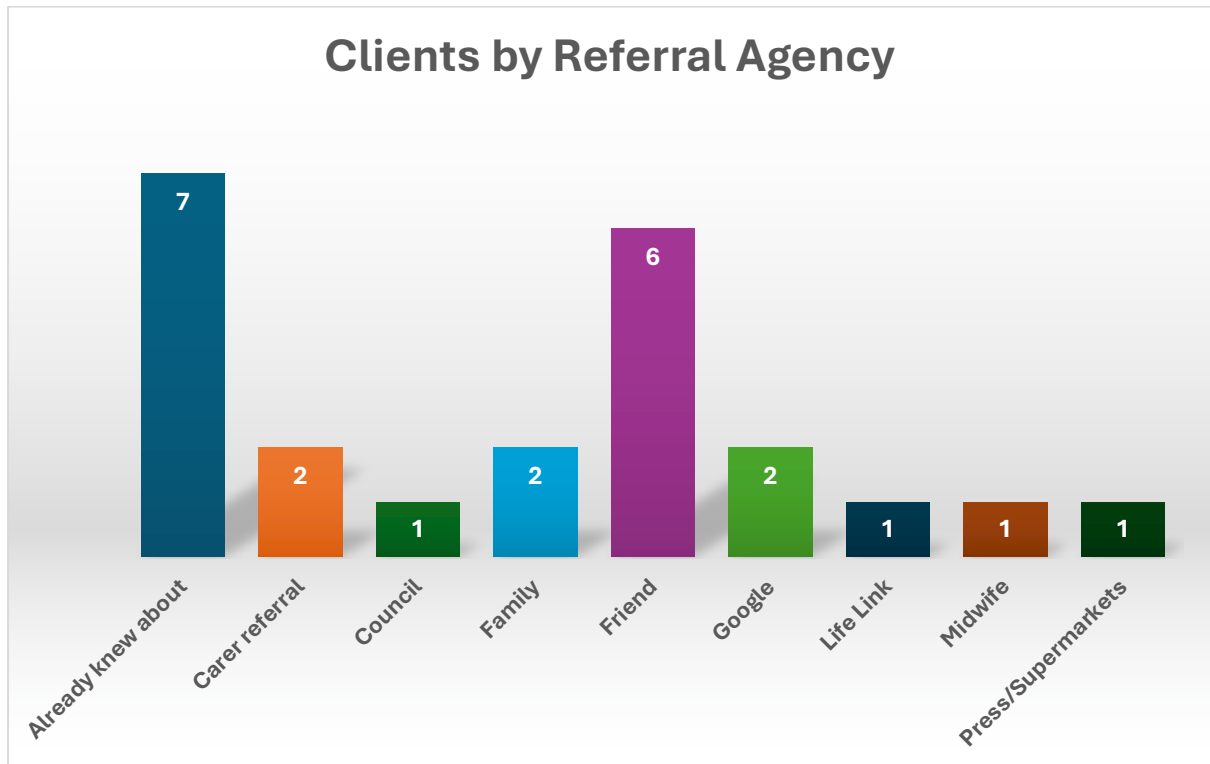
The conversations were relatively brief, and to-the-point. The advantage of calling on the phone enabled this to be the case, whereas the disadvantage was the lack of awareness of body language or any subtle nuances which may have been expressed by the client.

3. Charts

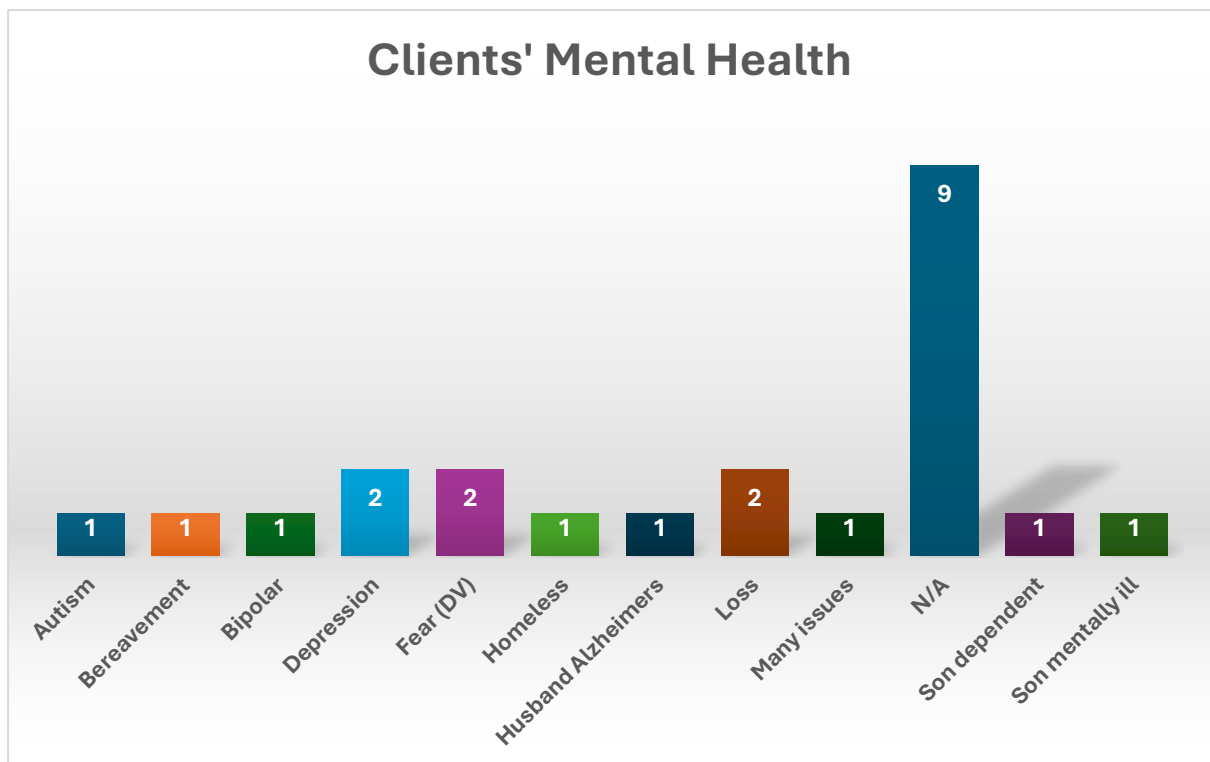
These charts show some of the more qualitative of the numerical responses - some of which deal with how clients felt when they first had to turn to Reach for help, as well as looking at the clients' mental wellbeing.



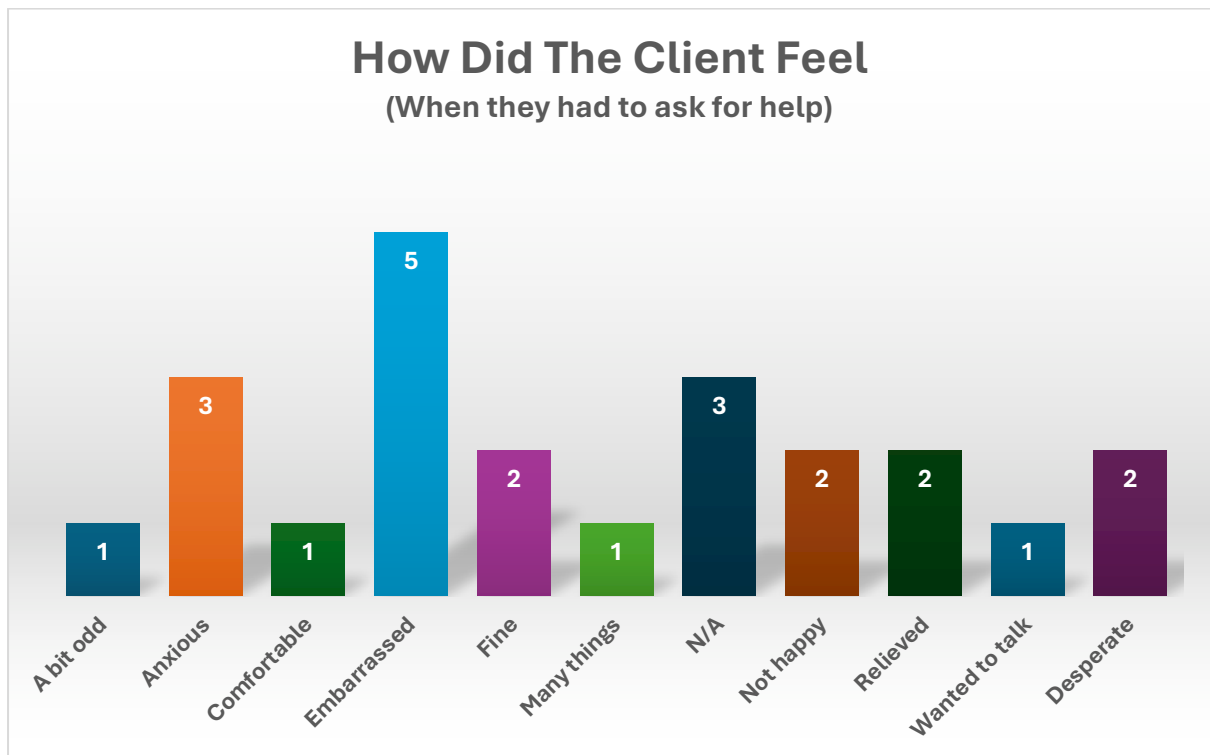
The above chart shows the diversity of need presented by most clients - debt and food, unsurprisingly, being the most prominent (although once a client receives food, or debt relief, the rest of their lives begins to open up).



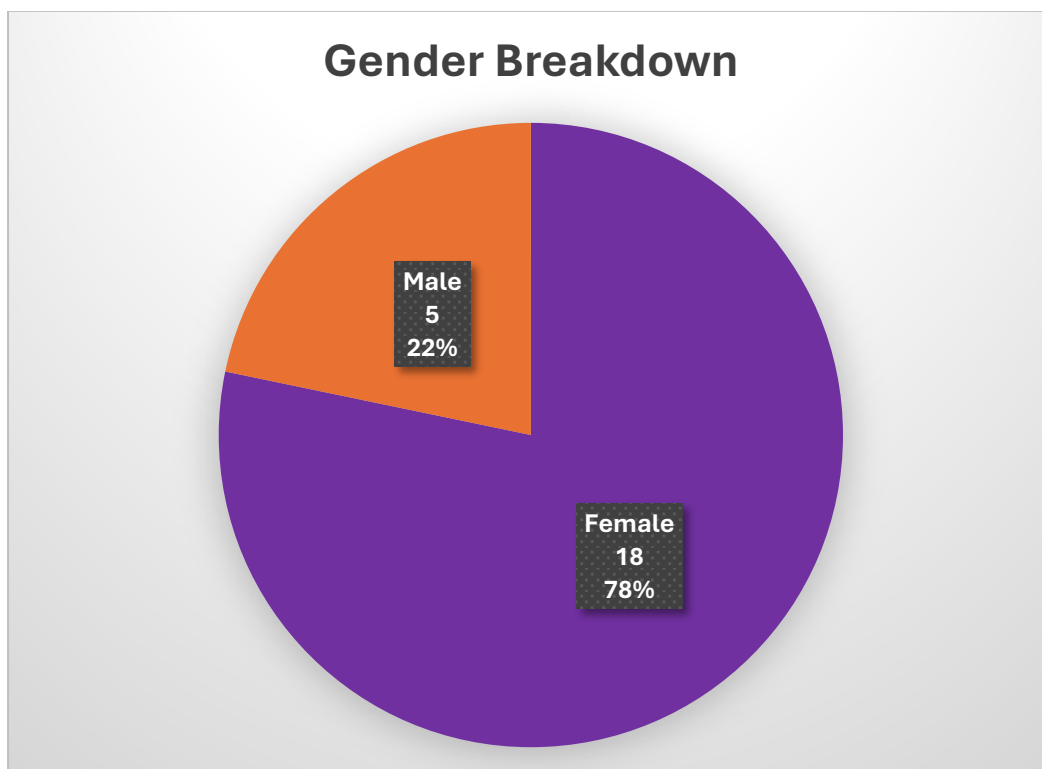
Reach appear to be already quite well-known in the area. It is heartening to know that they can discover Reach through Google, and local press or supermarket campaigns.



Many of the clients had multiple physical and/or mental health issues. At least two said that they had just come out of a relationship which had been marked with domestic violence.



This chart is important, because it shows Reach staff and volunteers how vulnerable some clients will be when they first approach the organisation for help. Many come through the food bank of course, and later comments will show that the reception clients receive is almost always exemplary.



4. The Need

The need for Reach's services are clearly spelt out by the clients who were contacted. There were a lot of stories, and the clients were able to express themselves fully, despite the fact that the average interview length was about six minutes. Many of the clients were in debt:

I usually keep on top of gas and electric ... it just totally whammed us in the winter ... basically it just kept going up and up and up.

I couldn't work basically, (and) all my bills were piling up more.

I felt embarrassed. I've always had two jobs ... I've always been able to support myself.

We had many expenses ... and even those days, my husband didn't get a proper job ... and even I lost my job.

I'm struggling at the moment with bills and stuff.

I don't really know what else they can offer me. At the end of the day ... I need help with my rent.

... when all our money stopped, (we) went from something like a £1,000 a month ... to about £280 after I'd paid my bedroom tax.

Some of the clients had persistent mental health issues:

I've had a condition since childhood ... I kept on breaking down.

I know how it is to be in a black hole ... I know all about ... the black, black side.

It's been hell. That's why I went to Reach.

Many clients had issues of both mental and physical illness:

I've got really bad arthritis, and I had an awful flare up, and I was just, I've been at home stuck indoors with the heating on, and it was just telling on me a bit.

“I felt embarrassed. I’ve always been able to support myself.”

“It’s been hell. That’s why I went to Reach.”

“I felt awkward, but they were lovely.”

I've been long-term unemployed due to ill health.

Some clients simply needed food:

I'd just got out of prison and I needed some food.

I had nothing when I moved ... I went down there one day. Someone said ... “go down to Reach.”

... we had nothing, we had no bread, no milk ... and the council wouldn't come up with any more funds, and so obviously I had to come up with some food.

In many cases, the need for food was compounded by other issues, which caused the need for intervention.

5. First Impressions

When a client first approaches a charity for help, they have many complex feelings. One of the most common is “embarrassed” or “ashamed” that they have come to a place in their life where they need assistance.

The first impression they receive from Reach is critical therefore, and the feedback here has been encouraging:

... everybody in there was really, really friendly, really welcoming, and just instantly helped.

They didn't make me feel uncomfortable.

I felt a bit awkward (but) they were lovely.

... they were well worth contacting because they were so polite, they were so friendly, and ... I was - I was sort of expecting to be judged a little bit, but they weren't (judgemental) at all.

That last comment is telling, because many clients fear judgement, regardless of whether they themselves have been responsible for their downturn in fortunes or not. And a frequent response was that they felt welcomed, and accepted:

... they were really cool with me ... They weren't judgmental.

“They weren't judgemental at all.”

**“There is
nothing worse
than feeling
stupid and
poor.”**

6. Challenges

As with all reports, there are always areas where improvements can be made. My impression, however, is that these are often reflections of one-off incidents, many of which may never be repeated.

Nevertheless it is worth highlighting them for future reference.

One client said that they had high fibre diet requirements, but that the food parcel hadn't taken this into account:

... sadly, they didn't give me the brown stuff. They only gave me white rice, white pasta. So that put a bit of a damper on it, that they didn't listen that I said I needed that.

Another client mentioned the value of having a mental health advocate:

Well, the one thing that I would really, really love for you guys to have, and I think it's important for everybody with a mental health issue, is to have a mental health advocate.

In a sense, that role is already covered by the “community connectors” who work for Reach.

Another client said that they felt diminished when they asked for a second food parcel, and was told that they couldn't have one:

I did not know how many times a month you could request food ... I felt a bit stupid when the lady rang and told me the answer was NO!

You need someone with a caring, considerate voice. There is nothing worse than feeling stupid & poor.

As I have said, most of these are one-off incidents, but they reflect a continuing need to ensure staff put the wellbeing of clients above all else.

7. Positive Feedback

The positive comments are, once again, predominant in the feedback from the clients of Reach.

They range from the profound:

They do wonderful, wonderful things.

To generally positive:

... everything that Reach have done for me, (has been) very, very positive.

I'm glad that the people of Haverhill have you.

... they've been a godsend to me ... over the years.

To the practical:

*... they were very kind, they were very sympathetic.
And the lady stayed on the phone as long as I wanted.*

*(They) basically made sure I was okay, I guess,
mentally as much as anything else.*

Every client who responded had positive things to say:

Reach surprises me every day.

(They have) been excellent. Second to none ... in all fields.

The cookery courses, in particular, received regular special mention:

I've rekindled my skills in cooking ... as I can now cook fresh food and so on and so forth.

The cookery courses are fantastic.

Perhaps this section is best summed up in one sentence from a very happy client:

Reach has literally turned my life around.

“I’m glad the people of Haverhill have you.”

“They’ve been a godsend to me over the years.”

“Reach has literally turned my life around.”

8. Summary

This is an interim report, drawn from the phone responses of a number of clients. The overall sample was 27 participants, of whom 23 responded, and all of those were overwhelmingly positive about Reach. This is useful, because it is consistent data, both with regard to previous reports, and other sources.

The feedback has some sticking points as well as mentioned in section 6, so it is not entirely one-sided. That said, once again, feedback from the Reach clients speaks to an organisation that is focused on the individual and their needs, on continuous improvement, and on “delighting the customer” as one staff member has so aptly described it.