



Creating communities,
empowering lives

Annual Inclusion and Belonging Report

2023

From awareness to action

At Abri, we want everyone in our community to feel a strong sense of belonging, regardless of what group they identify with, and to have access to the best chances in life.

In our first Inclusion and Belonging report, published last year, we acknowledged what more we have to do to improve equality, diversity and inclusion here at Abri. That's not just for our colleagues, but for our customers too.

Driving diversity and providing services that truly reflect our communities is really important to us and we are dedicated to creating change. Since our first report, we have deepened our understanding of what we need to do to strengthen our inclusive culture so that we can be confident that we're moving in the right direction.

To help us better understand our customers, between June and October 2022, we carried out an equality and diversity data collection survey, with support from a specialist independent market research agency, IFF Research. The aim of the survey was to help us improve the services we provide to our customers, making them more efficient and accessible.

During the year, to further our commitment, we have added new structures within our organisation to make sure our equality, diversity and inclusion agenda is at the heart of everything we do at Abri. We've reformed our EDI steering group and created an operational EDI Champions group to get things done and to make sure we're more representative of the communities we serve.

We are focused on ensuring inclusion is a key part of our workplace, and during the year, we have created more opportunities for colleagues to get together to learn and share experiences so that they, in turn, can better understand each other and the customers and communities we serve. This includes informal sessions on Let's Talk about Race, Allyship, and Trans Awareness to get colleagues talking in a safe space, and to explore understanding and awareness of unconscious bias among colleagues.

Our inclusion journey is an ongoing process, and this report outlines the ways in which we continue to drive a culture of equality and belonging. This report also reflects our commitment to transparency and accountability.



Gary Orr
Group Chief Executive
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion



Lou Taylor
Board Member
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion



Our purpose, vision, values

Our vision and why we exist

To create quality homes, thriving communities and improve people's life chances.

Our mission and how we'll achieve it

By working in partnership with others, we create quality homes and thriving communities, supported by outstanding customer services.

Our Values



Be the Difference

As agents of positive change, we will always seek a better way. Our obsession with understanding our customers and communities means we can make a difference in everything we do.



Always Curious

We're always ready to challenge and question ourselves and others in our search for better answers and smart solutions.



Achieving Together

Working in true partnership with others enables us to act as a unifying force. Our collaborative spirit ensures that every voice is heard and that everyone shares in our success.



Own it Openly

We take our responsibilities seriously and always stay true to our values. Our behaviours and communications reflect this openly and transparently.



Embrace Possibility

We love coming up with new ways of doing things. We consider everything and rule out nothing. We do everything in our power to see every challenge through to a positive outcome.

Towards the end of 2020, we published our EDI statement ‘All In’

‘All In’ is our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. It’s about making sure that we’ve not just got a seat at the table, but that we’re part of the conversation. It’s about making sure everyone is treated with respect and reaffirming that there’s no place for discrimination, of any kind, on our doorstep. It’s about making change from the inside, so we can become a truly great place to work, for everyone.

‘All In’ sets out how we plan to do this. We need to:

- Come up with new ideas
- Stop doing things the way we used to
- Call out bad behaviour
- Make sure we treat everyone with respect, always.

We haven’t always prioritised this issue as we should. For that we hold ourselves accountable and promise to do better. We want everyone to feel included. So, we have to do more.

It’s going to take time

We know this isn’t going to happen overnight. No big culture change ever does. But we are in this for the long haul. And we aren’t going to stop until we get it right. We want to involve everyone in this change, and we have an action plan in place.

We have started to see some really positive change happen in the place we work. This includes:

- Surveying a total of 29,787 households for their EDI data to identify areas to improve our services. We received 8,948 responses (equivalent to 11,148 customers) - that’s 30% of everyone we reached out to. This means we’ve increased the overall baseline for equality, diversity and inclusion data we hold on our customers, which is great news.
- To make sure we’re recruiting, developing and keeping diverse and talented colleagues that reflect the communities we work in we have introduced recruitment guidance for all hiring managers and we’ve been certified as a Disability Confident employer.

- We’re encouraging customer involvement to deliver high-quality services, and since publishing ‘All In’ we have carried out an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy and Priorities consultation with our customers. We heard a significant amount of examples from customers who have been affected by inequality, lack of opportunity or discrimination. The results of the consultation and the priorities identified by customers have been used to refine and shape the refreshed Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy.

The road ahead

We expect to face some challenges as we continue to learn and improve. But we hope that, by listening and trying hard to find new ways of improving, we can create equal opportunities for everyone. We want to be part of ending discrimination for good. It’s in everyone’s interest that we succeed.

We hope that by working with our partners we can make change happen more quickly and effectively so the barriers that still exist in our country come down sooner.

Why are we doing this?

And if you’re still wondering why we’re doing this? It’s because we can’t address what we don’t talk about. To do the best we can for customers, colleagues and communities, we need everyone to be given the chance to be their best. No ifs or buts, that’s the right thing to, always.

How diverse is the housing association workforce in England?

In December 2021, the NHF – the national body that represents England’s housing associations – published its first-ever report on the equality, diversity and inclusion of housing associations’ workforce.

The 2022 report will be available later on this year. Abri is fully supportive of this initiative and has contributed to the study. The NHF’s EDI data tool allows us to make comparisons between our workforce and local populations at a regional level by comparing our colleague data to that of our communities.

We will include an update of the NHF report in our next year’s Inclusion and Belonging report.

Data is critical to progressing equality, diversity, and inclusion. Not only does it improve transparency and accountability, but it can also lead to change.

Profile of Abri’s group board, executive team, directors, customers and colleagues

The following section is based on our current understanding.

We’re committed to continuously improving our data collection, insight and understanding of our customers and colleagues at Abri.

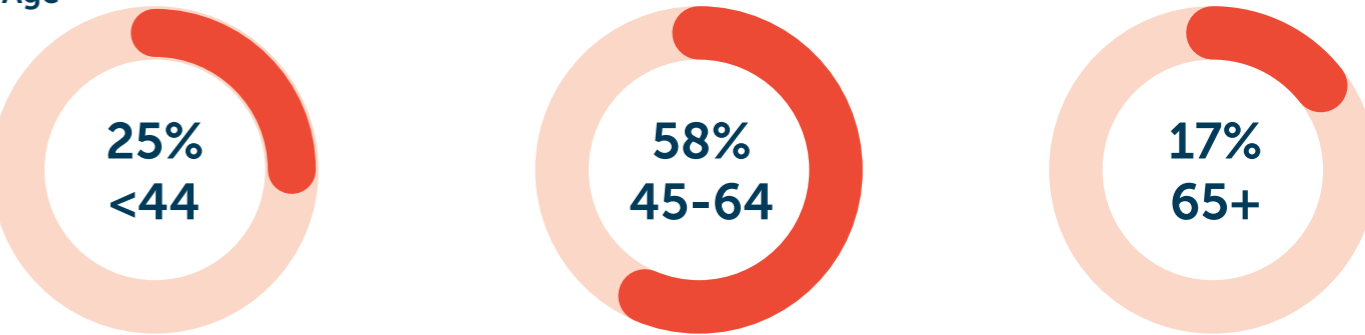
Our group board

Gender and sex at birth

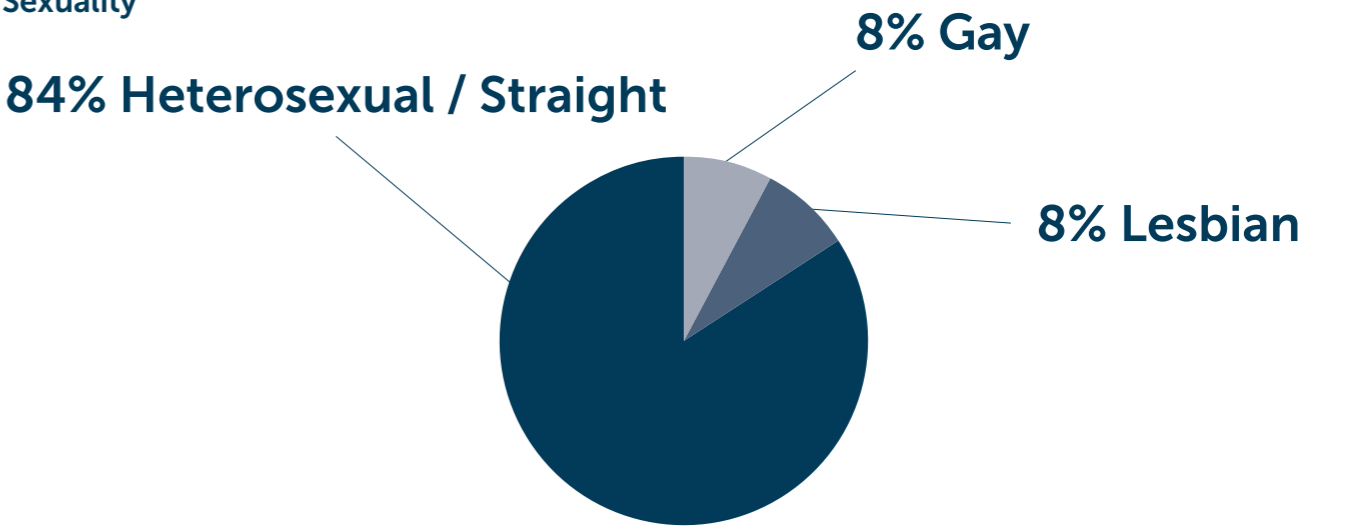


There are no members who identify as Transgender.

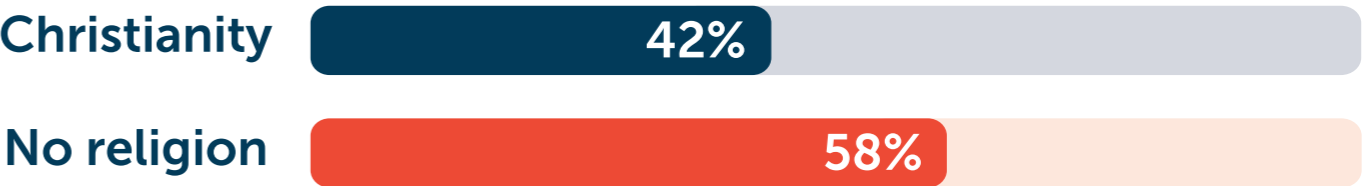
Age



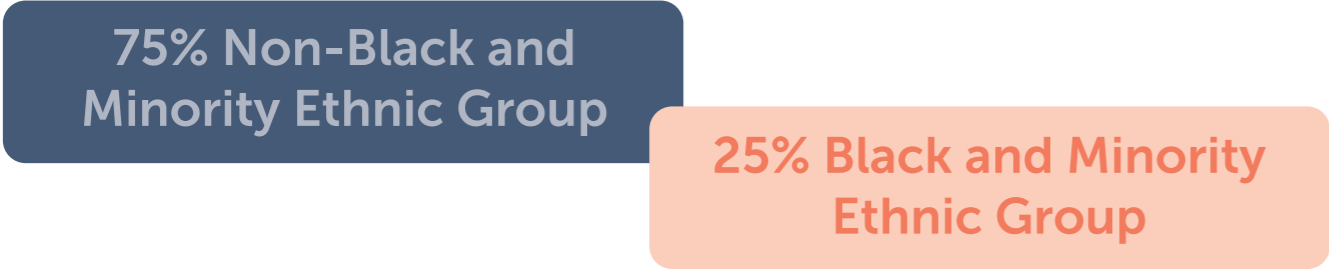
Sexuality



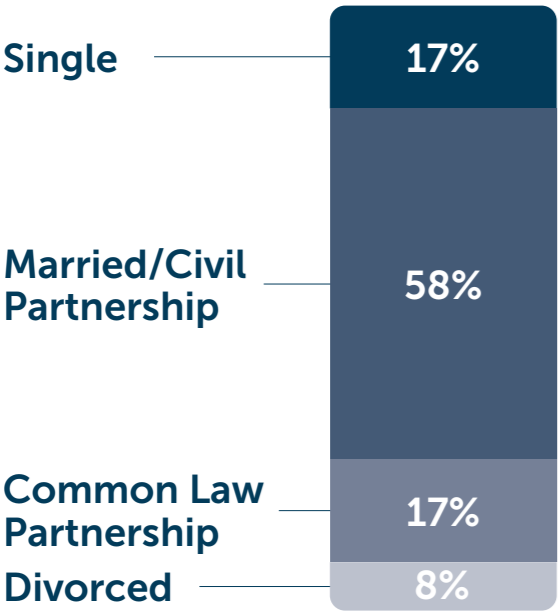
Religion or Belief



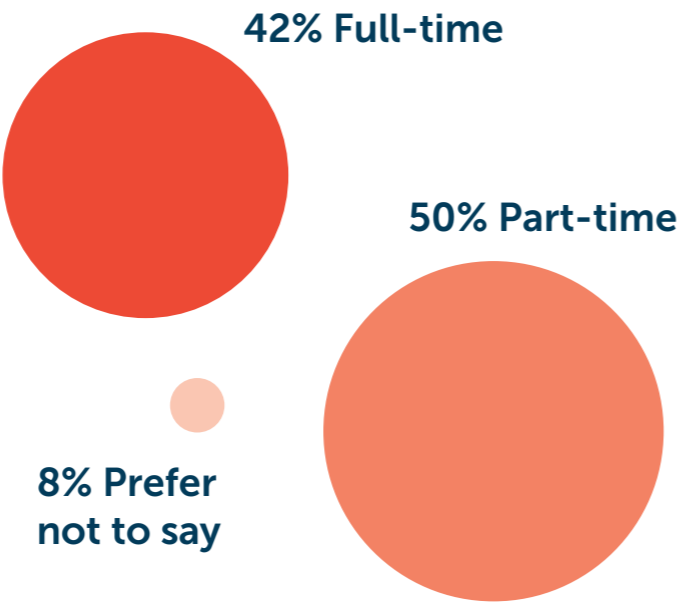
Ethnicity Group



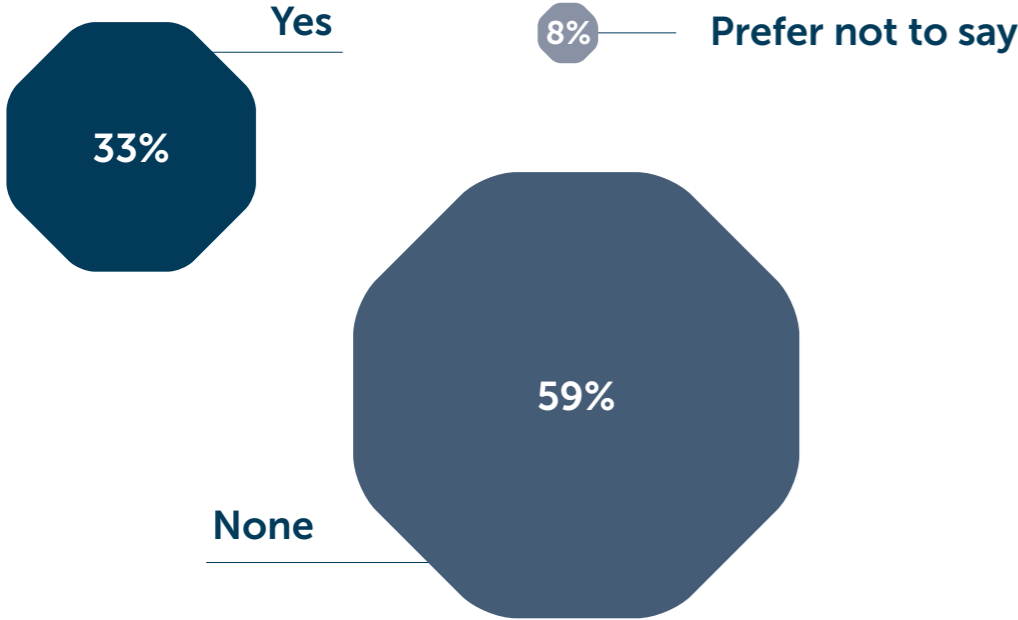
Marital Status



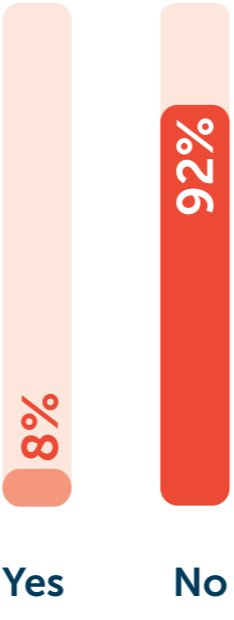
Working Pattern



Caring Responsibilities



Disability



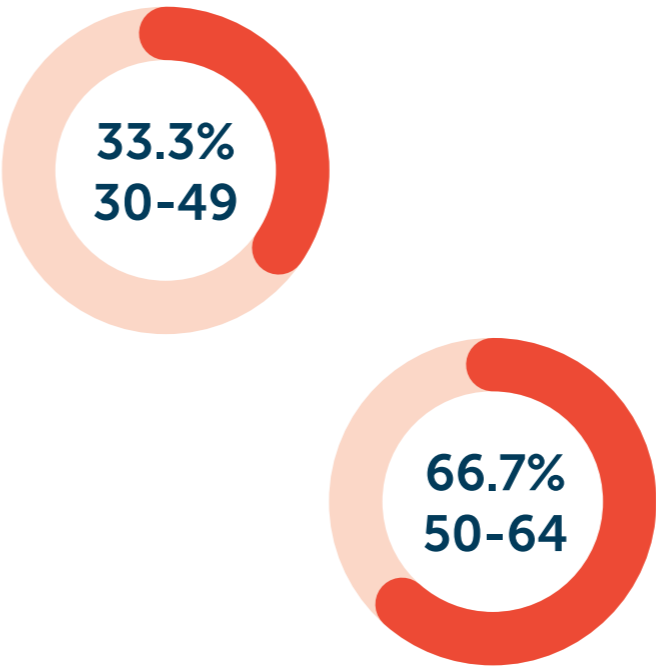
Our executive team

Gender and sex at birth

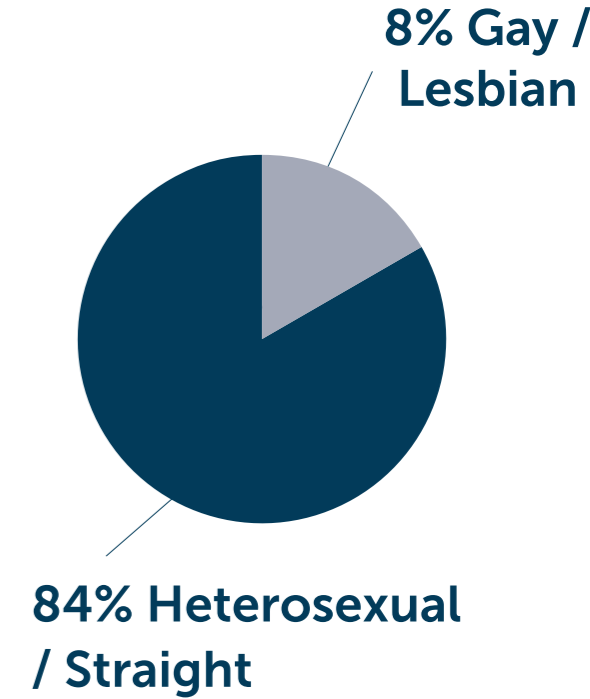


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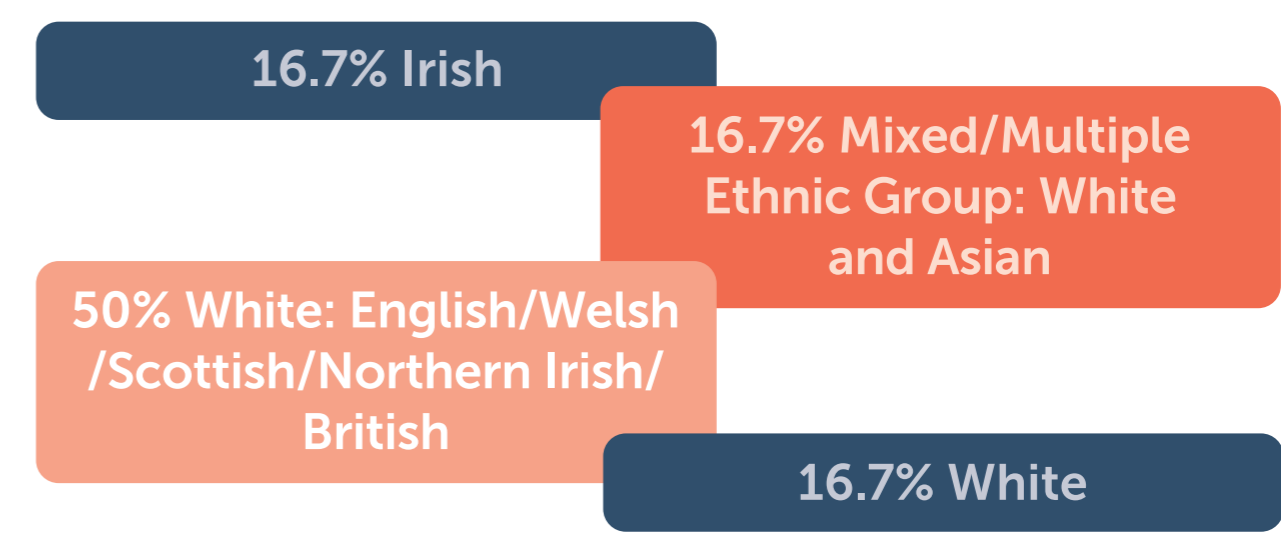
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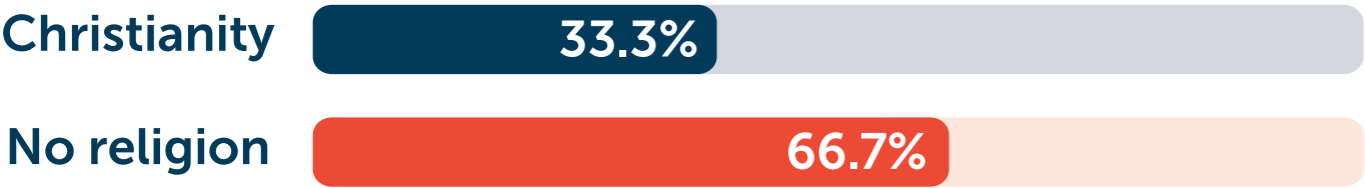
Sexuality



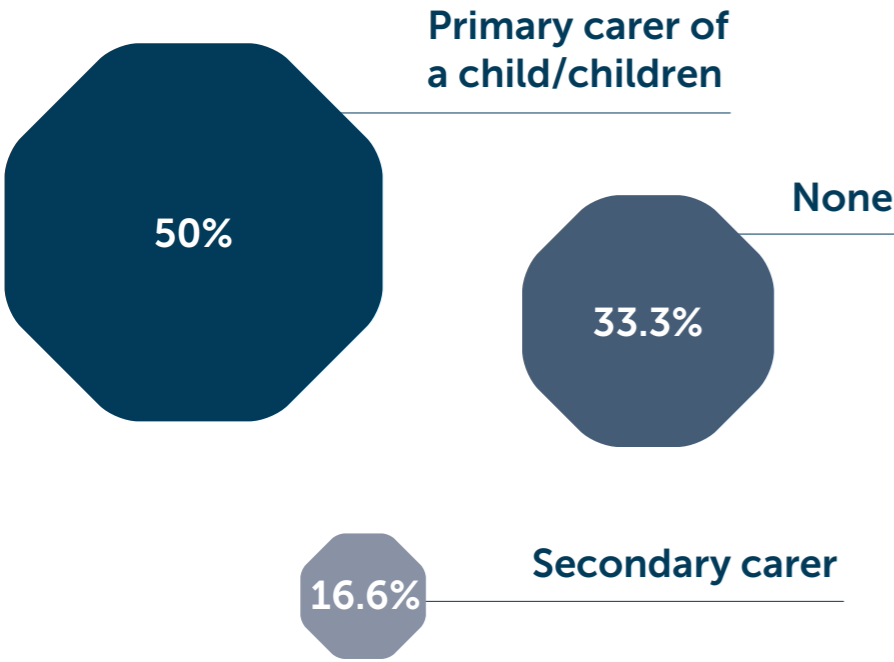
Ethnicity Group



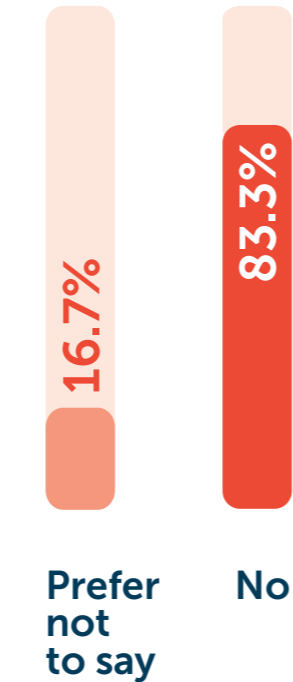
Religion or Belief



Caring Responsibilities



Disability



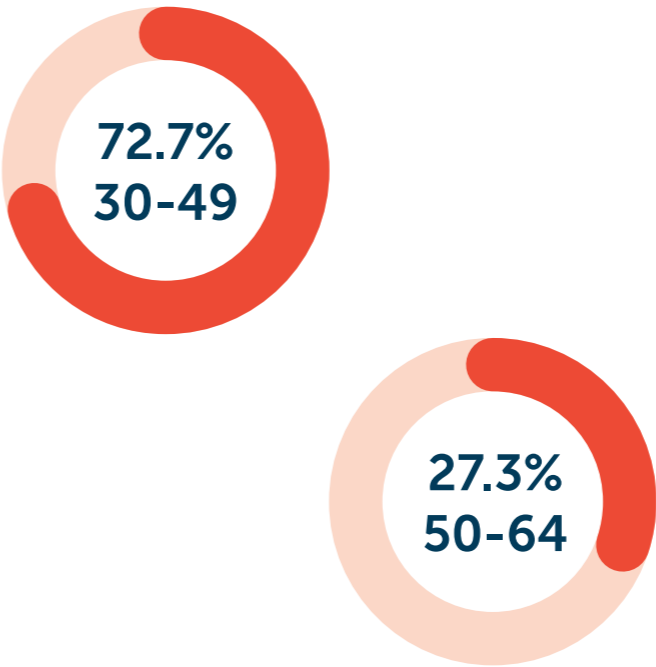
Our directors

Gender and sex at birth

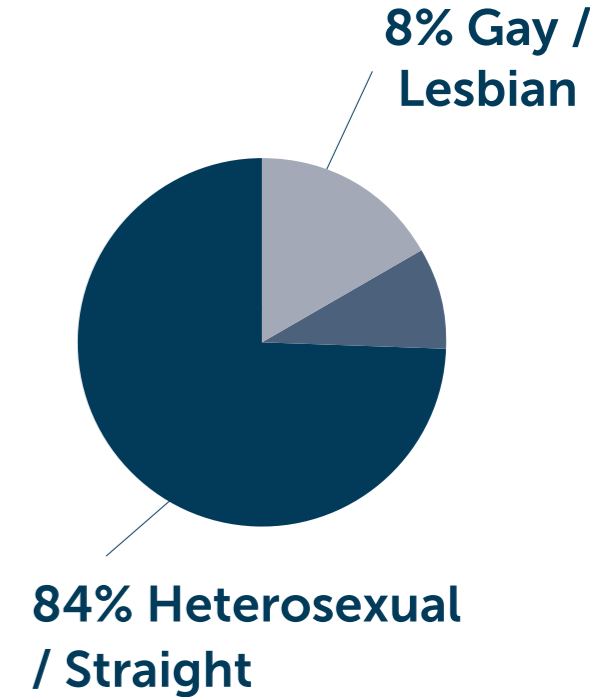


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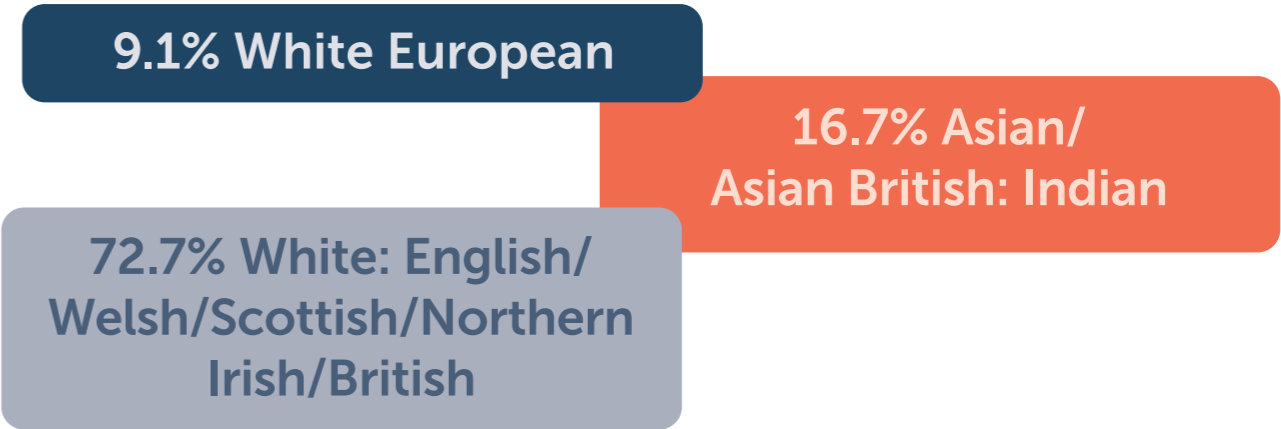
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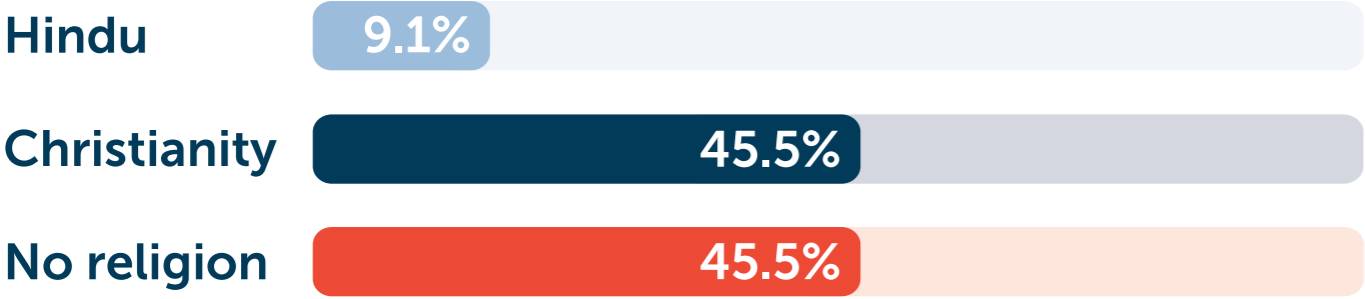
Sexuality



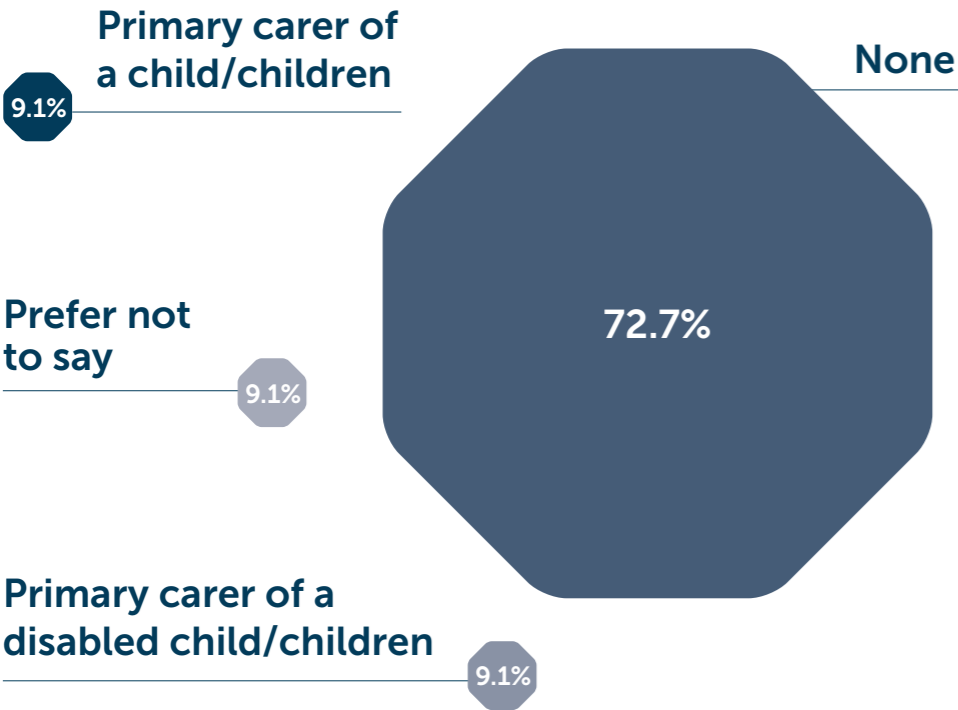
Ethnicity Group



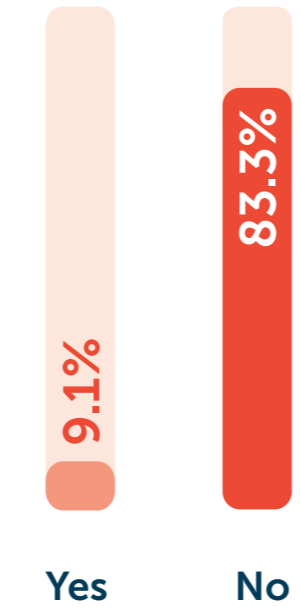
Religion or Belief



Caring Responsibilities



Disability



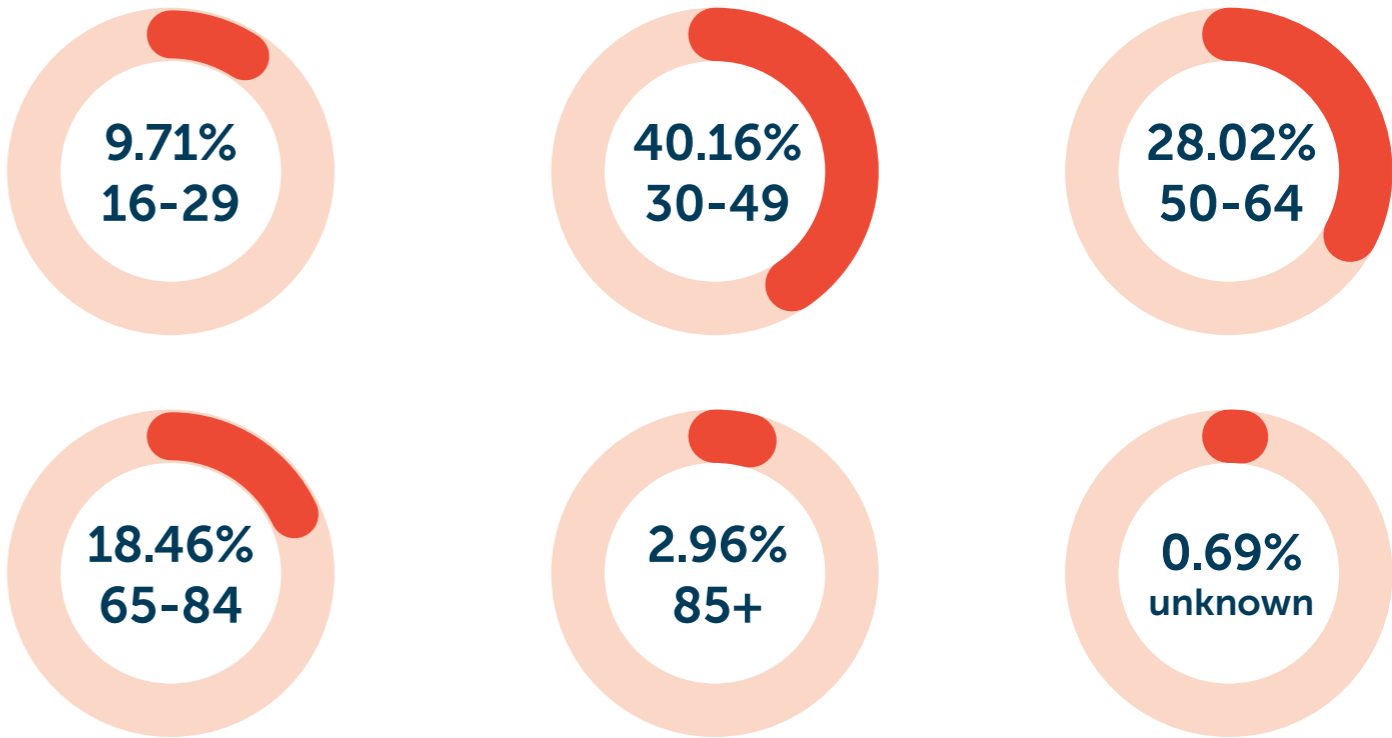
Our customers

Gender and sex at birth

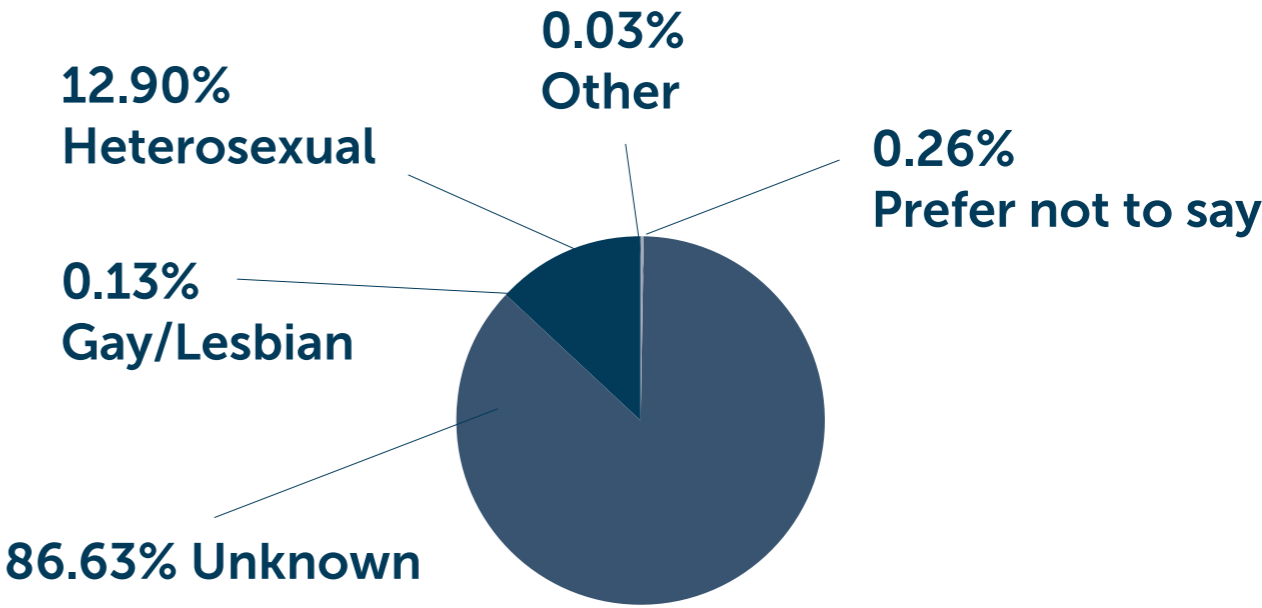


There are no customers who identify as Transgender.

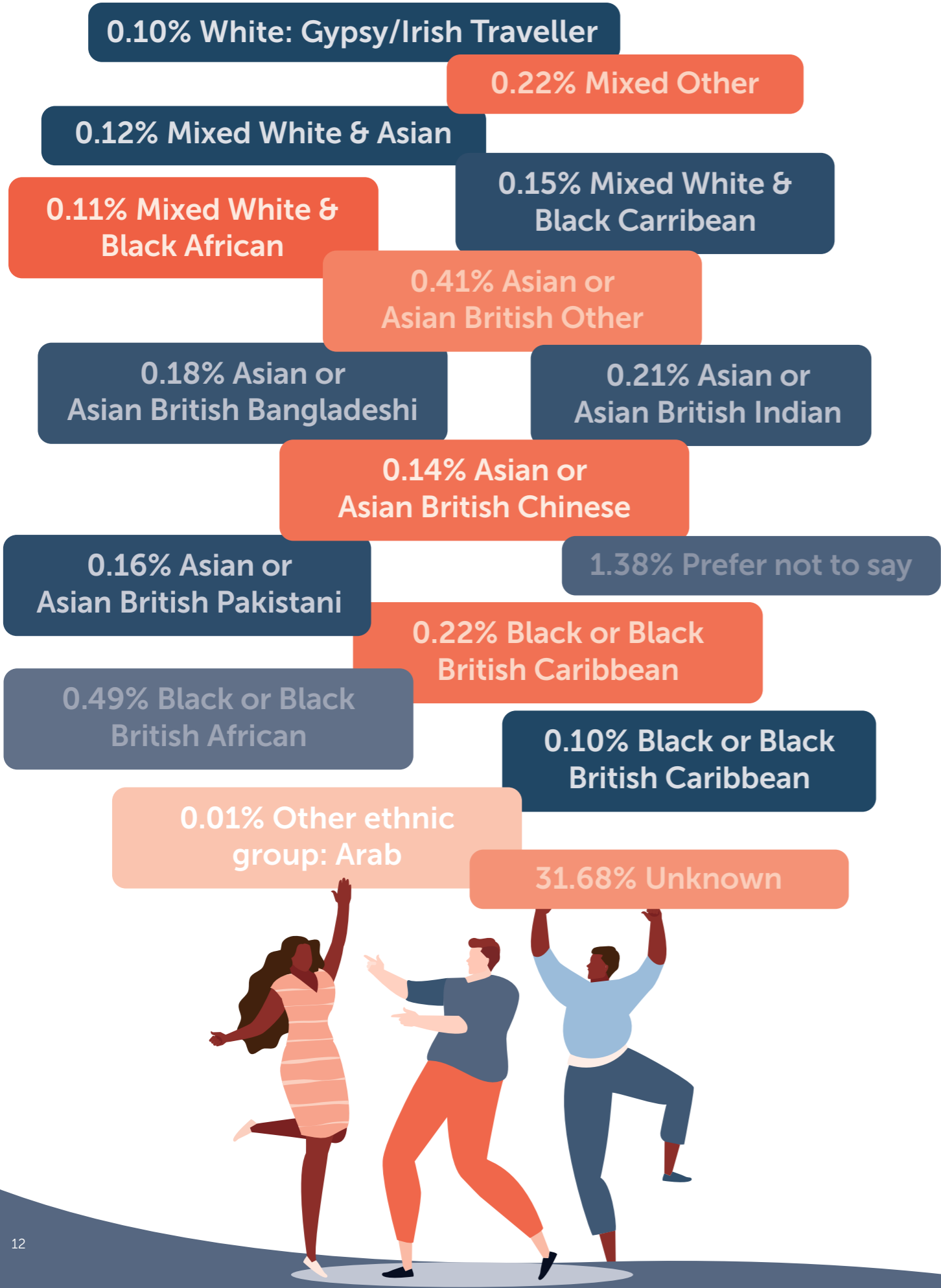
Age



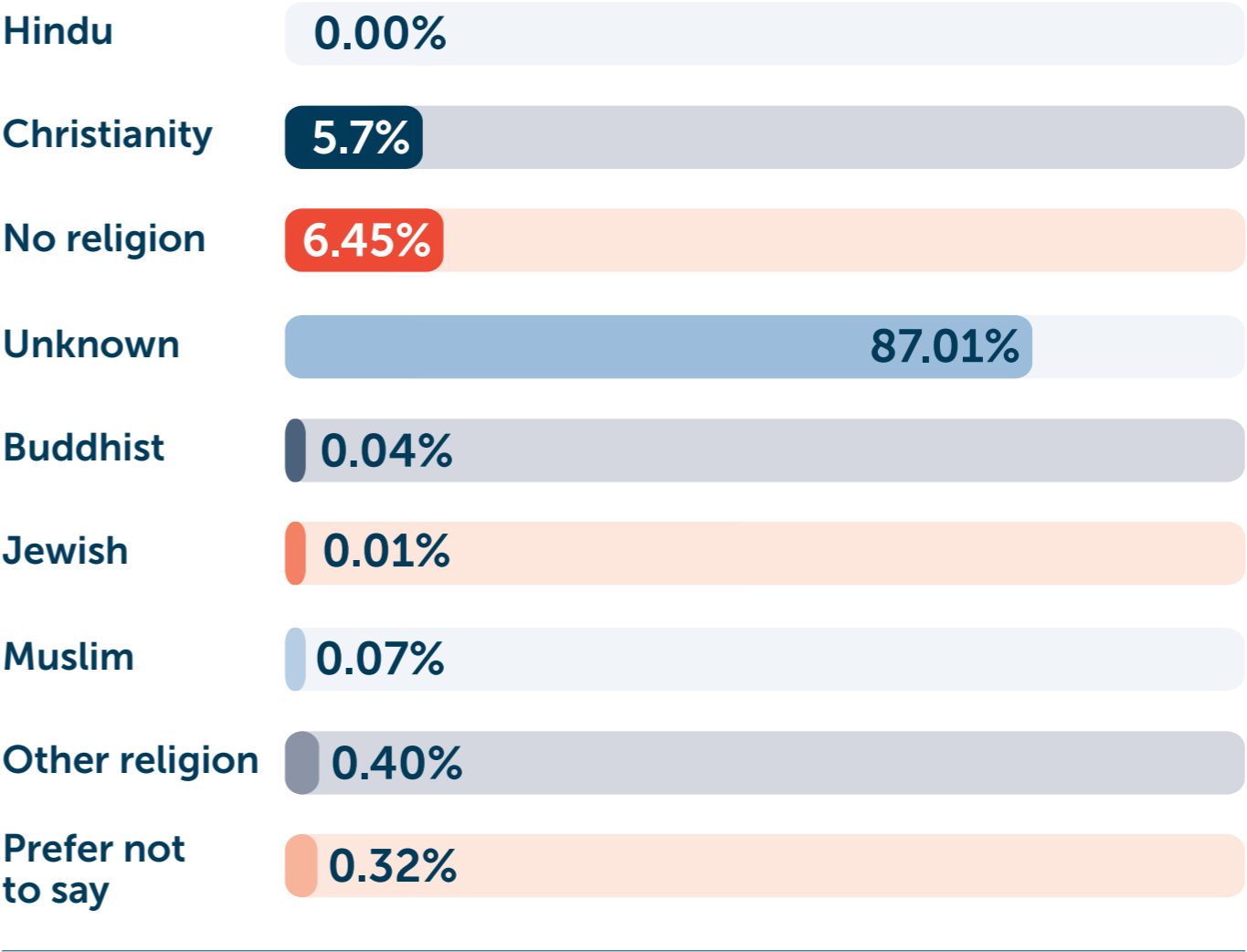
Sexuality



Ethnicity Group



Religion or Belief



Disability

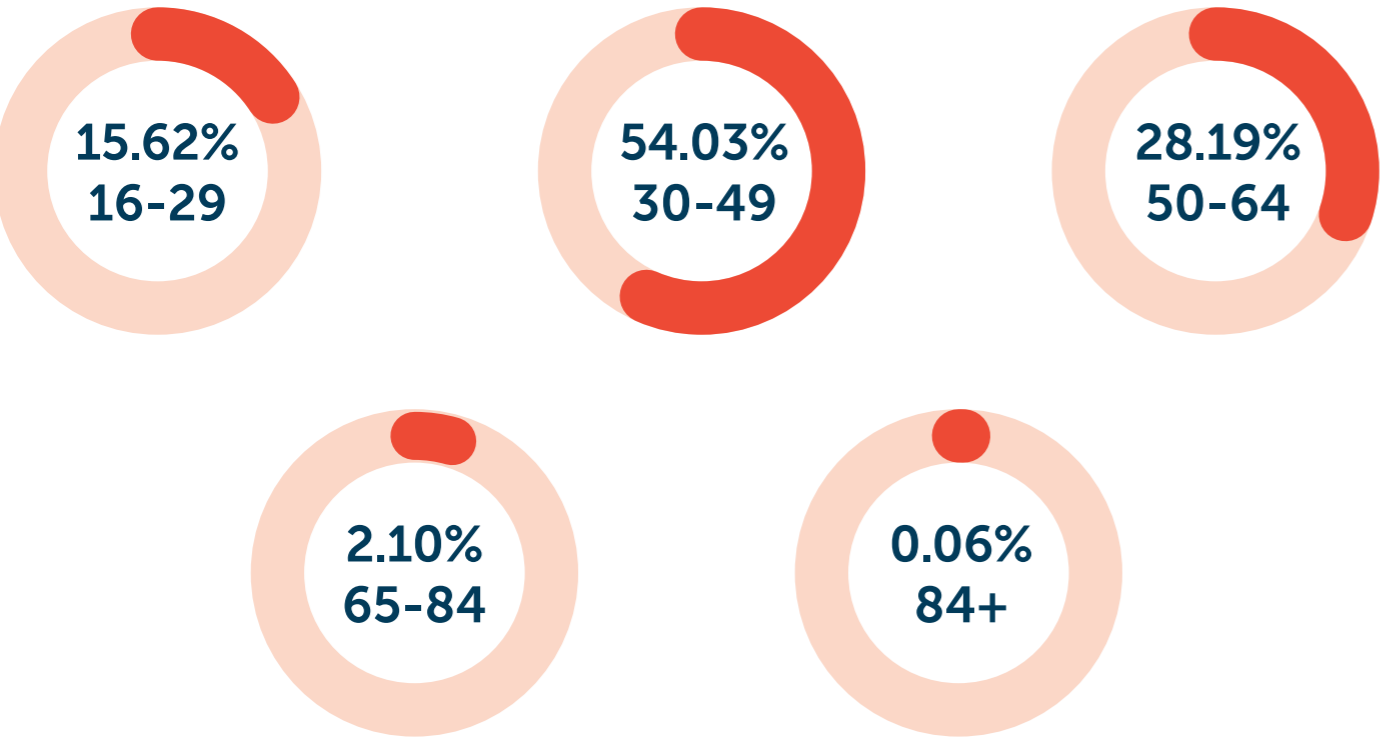


Our colleagues

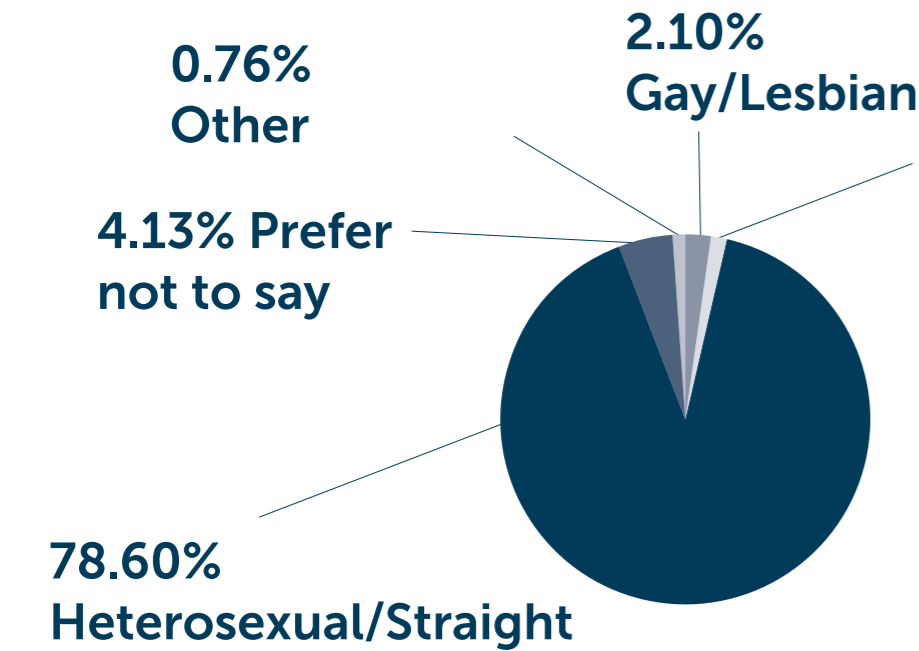
Gender and sex at birth



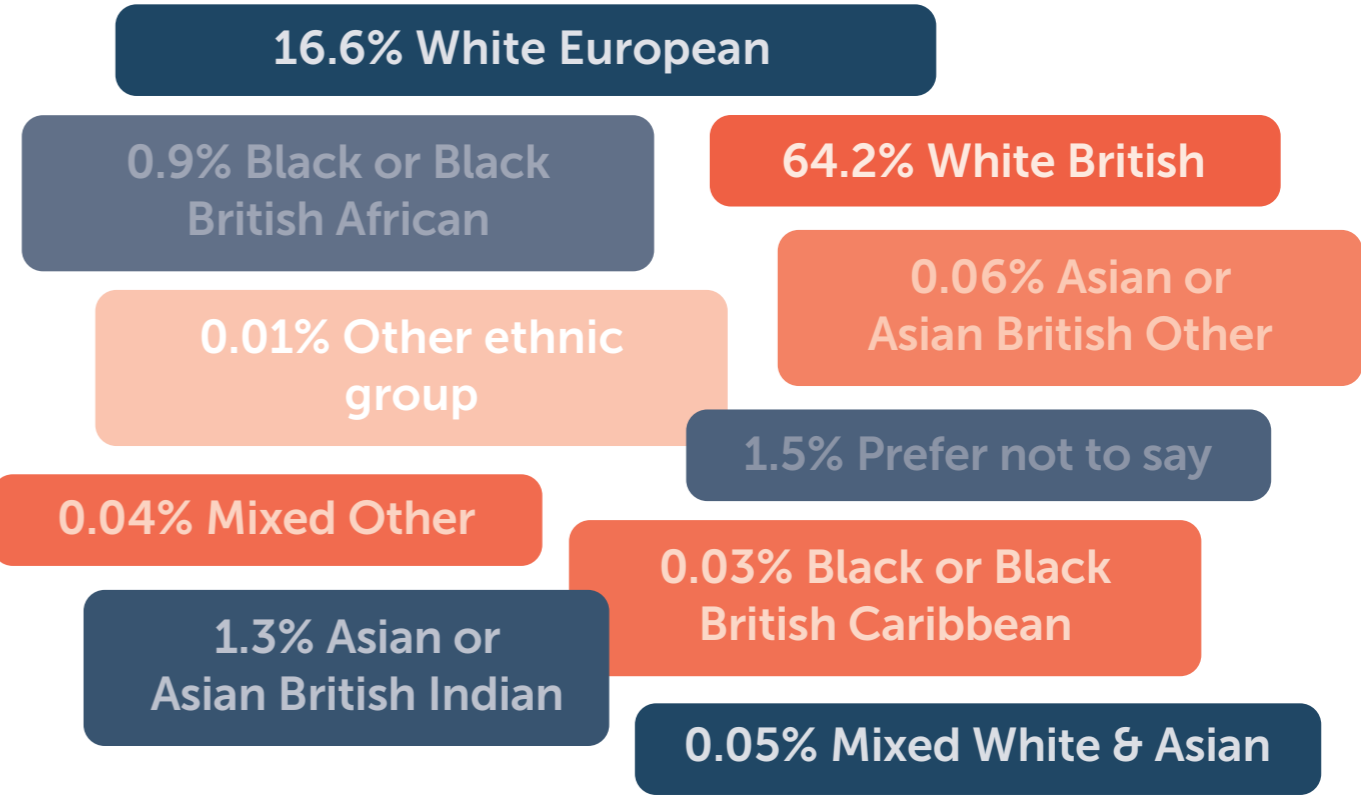
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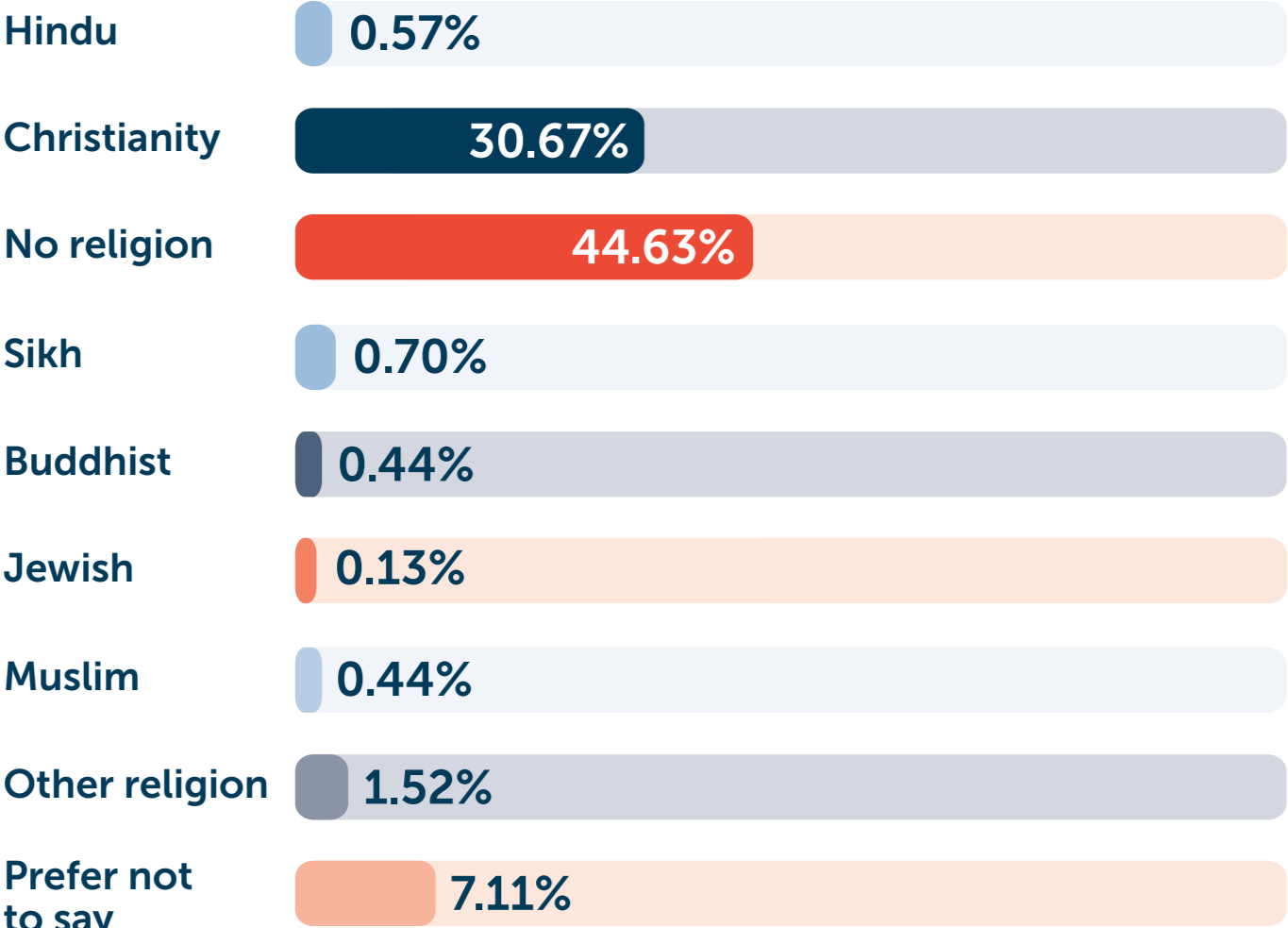
Sexuality



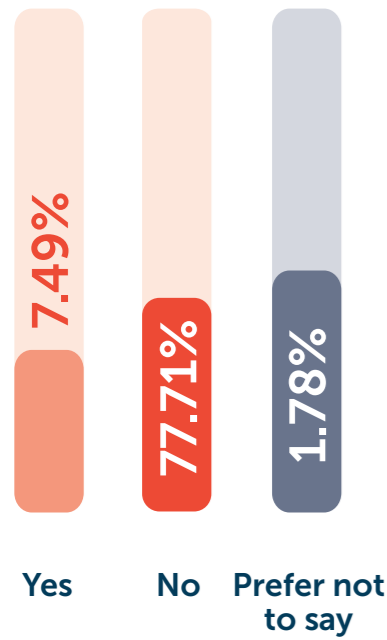
Ethnicity Group



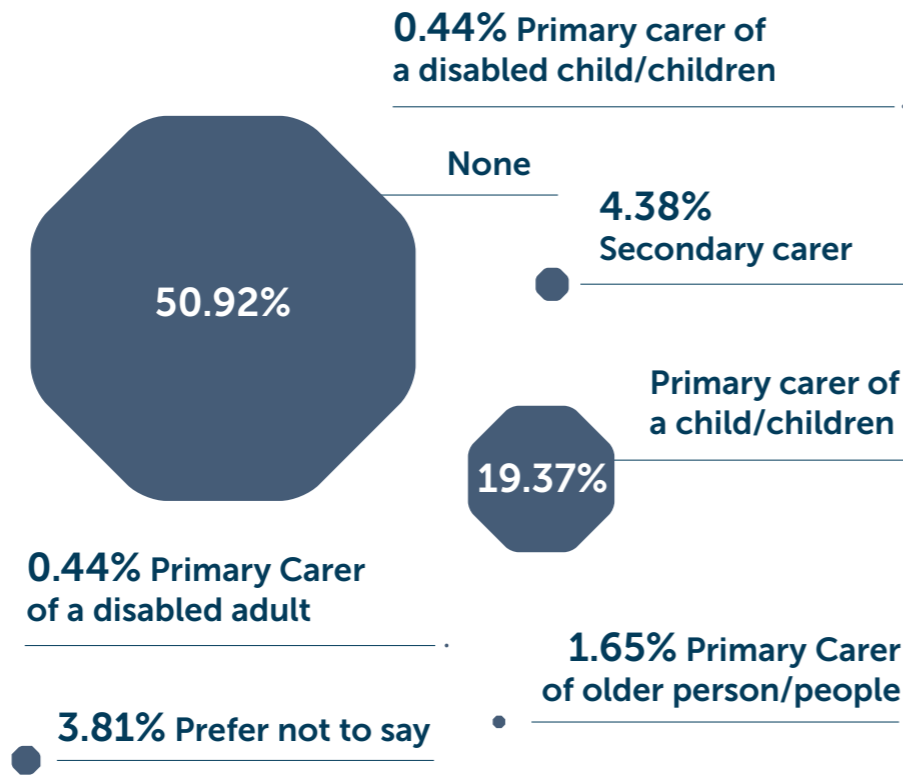
Religion or Belief



Disability



Caring Responsibilities



Our Gender Pay Gap

The table below provides an overview our Gender pay gap.

Abri

Metric	2021	2022	Change
Mean Gender Pay Gap %	16.8	10.7	Down 6.1%
Median Gender Pay Gap %	16.5	9.8	Down 6.7%
Mean Gender Bonus Gap %	82.1	71.3	Down 10.8%
Median Gender Bonus Gap %	0.0	0.0	No change
% of males receiving bonus	97.2	90.4	Down 6.8%
% of females receiving bonus	95.3	92.8	Down 2.5%

What lies behind the gender pay gap changes?

The following tables show the percentage of males and females joining, leaving, or receiving a change to their hourly pay rate during the year, Band D being those within the highest paid quartile and Band A the lowest paid quartile.

Quartile Band	Hires (352)		Leavers (365)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
A	41%	59%	36%	64%
B	35%	65%	52%	48%
C	83%	17%	67%	33%
D	68%	32%	72%	28%
Overall	57%	43%	57%	43%

The following factors are likely to have contributed to the decrease in the Gender Pay Gap.

- There were more male leavers than female in 2021/22 (208 versus 154). 59% of the male leavers were in the two upper pay quartiles and this contributed to a reduction in Abri’s pay gap.
 - There was a 10.8% pay gap across new hires in 2021/22 but this was significantly less than Abri’s 2021 pay gap of 16.8%. This, coupled with the effect of leavers, contributed to a further reduction in Abri’s pay gap.
- Salary increases had a positive impact overall by increasing the average Abri female hourly rate from £16.31 in 2021 to £16.98 in 2022.
 - 84% of Special Responsibility Allowances were given to females. The salary of the average female recipient was 15% higher than the average female overall and this combination of a high proportion of higher paid females contributed towards the reduction in the pay gap.

Calls to action

In keeping with our previous Gender Pay Gap report, our actions are focused on attracting, progressing and keeping women in the workforce, and on continuing to ensure that the right culture exists within Abri to create a sense of belonging for all female colleagues. We have a Gender Pay Gap action plan based on the information and data that was available at the time of writing this report.

A summary of our action plan is outlined below.

- Ensure hiring managers consider the impact of recruitment and pay decisions on the Gender Pay Gap.
 - Identify how recruitment and pay decisions at a group level have the potential to increase or reduce the gap. Develop and implement targeted interventions to reduce the gap.
 - Continue to use specialist software to analyse pay gap data regularly.
 - Encourage women in senior roles to come forward and speak about their journey.
 - Create safe spaces to enable women to come together and discuss issues that impact on their lives.
 - Continue to create learning opportunities to support understanding of subjects that are not normally discussed and which impact female colleagues such as the menopause and fertility.
- Create a culture where agile working is accepted as the normal way of working and not an exception.
 - Create male allies across Abri who can lend their voice to support their female colleagues.
 - Use Gender Decoder to remove the potential for bias in our job adverts.
 - Create a women’s network to support women at all levels in the organisation.
 - Develop a “first steps into management” and “future leaders” programme aimed at female colleagues.
 - Affirm our zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment in the workplace and create a positive environment and sense of belonging for all our female colleagues.
 - Use the LEAP talent and succession module to identify a talent pipeline within Abri.
 - Use equality impact assessments to identify any adverse impact in our restructuring or reorganisation proposals.
 - Consider becoming signatories of the Tech Talent Charter and Tech She Can Charter.



Progress against our wider EDI objectives

In 2021 we created an EDI strategy and action plan as a blueprint for creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels that they belong at Abri, customers and colleagues alike. It provided a framework for building on our engagement and involvement with customers and set out some new activities that might differ from what housing associations have traditionally done.

We have now refreshed and refocused our EDI strategy to reflect on what we learnt in 2022. This refreshed strategy has been published alongside this Inclusion and Belonging report.

Here’s a summary of the progress we’ve made against the eight specific objectives set out in our 2021 EDI strategy and action plan.

1 Embed a culture of inclusion within the organisation

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group meet once a quarter to discuss issues relating to inclusion and to hold Abri to account for taking positive action. Our Group Chief Executive attends the meeting as Board EDI Champion, while the meeting is chaired by members on a rotation basis. Our EDI Champions meet once every two months and they promote, celebrate and raise awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion issues within Abri.

Our board provides oversight and scrutiny of the EDI committee through our People and Culture Committee (PACC). Throughout the year, PACC provided a high level of challenge on what we’ve done as an organisation to promote inclusion and belonging and what we’re planning to do next.

We seek to create an environment where people can be their authentic selves.

Our Elephant in the Room series provides a safe space for anyone to reach out and share their experience. For most of us, we spend more time at work than doing anything else. But life doesn’t stop just because we’re at work. And at times, we’ll be experiencing personal situations that will impact us all in different ways. That means encouraging conversations, continued learning and, ultimately, caring for each other. Our Elephant in the Room sessions invite colleagues to open up the conversation around those traditionally ‘off limit’ topics, and we’ve had sessions on the menopause, anxiety and depression, bereavement and on Pride. By doing this, we’ll support inclusion across Abri and hopefully connect colleagues who are experiencing similar things.



We want to acknowledge and celebrate all voices and experiences across our organisation and give colleagues the option to include pronouns in their email signature if they’d like to. We think including pronouns in our email signatures has a powerful and positive impact, communicating that everyone is welcome at Abri.

We’ve learned more about the people we work with and we undertook a big data collection project, which included a census week in April. This data helps us to identify and address areas of concern and improvement. We have also carried out equality impact assessments to remove the potential for bias and adverse impact within our work here at Abri.

To support women in the workplace, we have created a menopause support group and monthly meetings for colleagues to meet, and we have developed menopause guidance to increase awareness and understanding, along with some practical guidance on how managers and colleagues can support one another.

We also continue to provide guidance to our managers on supporting colleagues during Ramadan, and during National Inclusion Week, we place a big focus on our communications by sharing colleague stories.



2 Make a commitment to diversity and inclusion at all levels

Let’s start with the fundamental injustice that Abri is here to correct. It’s simply not right that people in our communities are priced out of renting or owning their own home and that some people do not have access to a home at all.

That’s why, **over the past year**, we have built 1,018 high-quality and well-designed social, affordable and shared ownership homes across the south of England to give more people the opportunity to get a place they can call home and to reduce the stigma that can be associated with lower cost housing.

Income disparities exist because not everyone in our communities has equal access to employment, training or the necessary skills as they should. Our employment teams focus on helping more Abri customers to get a job or a better job, and over the past year, the teams have helped 576 people. Giving them the skills and knowledge they need to set up their own business or to access the job market.

We know that some people within our communities are disproportionately affected by crime and are more likely to suffer discrimination, harassment or domestic abuse. Our housing teams work closely with our statutory partners to protect vulnerable people from harm by investigating and addressing all reports of anti-social behaviour and domestic violence.

We also continue to offer training to improve our customers health and wellbeing, and have specific mental health training available for our customer facing colleagues in our housing and trades teams.

In the medium-term, by the end of the life of our current corporate strategy in 2025, we will invest £15 million in tackling some of the country’s most deprived areas and help 2,500 people into employment. We will improve mental health and wellbeing, address social isolation, provide employment opportunities and tackle anti-social behaviour and homelessness. We will report on the impact of our investment and interventions every year.

We will also actively exploit synergies with the emerging green economy to improve access to employment, training and to improve our customer’s health and wellbeing.

Our long-term (2030) vision is that in Abri’s communities, the best chances in life are available to all, as evidence in our social impact measures and results.

3 Provide high-quality services that are accessible to all and continuously improve to meet the changing needs of our customers

Our work in communities is led by the needs of those who live there, and we know that the success of any initiative will be dependent on how relevant it is to those who will use it.

Last year, we expanded our holiday hunger club to support more families. We set up the Good Grub Club (GGC) in 2017 to tackle food inequality during the school holidays and combat social isolation. It's helped hundreds of families over the years. In August 2022, we partnered with local organisations to expand the club into more communities and support even more people. We provided £56,000 from our Partnership Fund to six organisations to run GGC for 12 months in.

And we've continued to support partner organisations to run the club this year. We've provided £32,000 for GGC to run in the below areas and are looking to invest a further £18,000 into new areas.

- Chard, Somerset, by Project Food
- Littlemoor, Dorset, by Top Club
- Millbrook, Southampton; and Whitehill and Bordon East Hampshire; by CM Foundation



123 young people attended the clubs between July 2022 and March 2023.

We held slow cooker workshop courses in Windsor, Millbrook, Mansbridge, Littlemoor and Chard to support customers with the cost of living crisis. The sessions included support and education on using cupboard store ingredients as a healthy, low-cost energy option for cooking. A slow cooker only costs 40p to run for eight hours.

At each session the group were given ingredients to prepare a meal. They took the prepared food home with them to cook later. They also got to taste the meal at the session as the cookery teacher brought a pre-prepared meal along with them.

And thanks to funding from partner organisations in each area (and our Community Fund), participants were also given a slow cooker, recipe book, weekly ingredients to make a meal for four, and store cupboard ingredients for every household.

Community pantries allow customers to access food for a fraction of the cost of supermarkets and help reduce food waste. Our pantry in our Round About Café, Mansbridge, which opened in December 2021, was so popular we decided to open another one in our Café 1759 in Whitehill and Bordon.

We now have 220 members, with around 73 shoppers using the pantry at Café 1759 once a week. We receive a weekly delivery from FareShare, a charity network aimed at relieving food poverty and reducing food waste in the UK.

We've also supported local pantries, fridges, and food projects across our geography, including a community pantry in Westfield, Somerset and a community fridge in Salisbury.

We know the cost of living crisis is impacting our customers and communities in all aspects of their daily life. So, as well as food and energy advice and support projects, we also delivered other initiatives, such as clothes swap shops.

We have provided funding to The Cowshed, a crisis charity that provides emergency provision of clothing, bedding, toiletries and other essentials for families in need across Berkshire. The funding provided 15 Noah's Boxes - a kitchen essentials kit of over 35 items such as pots, pans, crockery, cutlery and more to support those going into their own accommodation.

Our customers wellbeing is extremely important to us, and we work with organisations to help address health inequality.

We have provided funding to Caafi Health, a grassroots organisation that works to improve the health and wellbeing of the diverse populations in Bristol, north Somerset and south Gloucestershire to run a series of health and wellbeing events for our customers in Castle Park View.

Caafi Health provide relevant and relatable health information, advice, support and education. They work with healthcare providers and local communities to improve the trust and respect that communities feel from service providers, and to give access to optimal levels of healthcare.

We also offer virtual wellbeing sessions to our customers, which are designed to provide self-help techniques and to help build and manage confidence.



4 Encourage and facilitate involvement from our customers in shaping the delivery of high-quality and accessible services

As part of our community investment work, we identify and work with community leaders of the future to drive and continue our impact in the long term, ensuring we promote sustainable change.

In the Westfield area of Yeovil, we're working with a customer who supports a number of our Community Investment projects. The resident also volunteers to attend Abri events and team meetings at our Independent Living schemes to share a customer's perspective of what's going on, and how to get involved.

In Amesbury, one of our customers runs Amesbury Green Fingers. They apply for funding and materials to run the group, and are well connected with the community. They're a thriving leader and have recently won an award for their contribution to the community.

And in Weymouth, Top Club is being chaired and managed by a member who lives on the estate. Their passion is to support young people, and their families on the estate and provide them with a warm, safe space to go where they can thrive and enjoy life. Local residents believe that the club is having a positive impact on community cohesion. Abri has worked closely with Top Club, and Big 4 Littlemoor to deliver housing support at the facility when it's open, and introduce interventions such as The Good Grub Club (GGC), A Littlemoor Street In The Park (a young adult performing arts club), and the recent Slow Cooker Project. Abri has also supported them with funding to deliver the GGC and supported financially to launch their warm hub.

5 **Gather and securely hold EDI-related data on our customers, employees and Board members, and use this to identify areas for future service improvement**

Data has been critical in helping us to continue making progress towards our EDI commitments and to keep improving the lives of our customers.

In our first annual Inclusion and Belonging report, we showed that we’re missing a lot of equality data for our customers. And without knowing fully who our customers are, we don’t know how to best support them or what services to provide. So in the past year, we carried out an equality and diversity data collection survey to help us better understand our customers. This will help us improve the services we provide to them, making them more efficient and accessible.

What data did we collect?

- **Age**
 - **Sex**
 - **Disability**
 - **Ethnicity / Race**
 - **Sexual Orientation**
 - **Gender re-assignment**
 - **Ex-military personnel or veteran**
- **Religion or Belief**
 - **Primary Language**
 - **Employment Status**
 - **Specific support needed/received**
 - **Household Income**
 - **Government Benefits**
 - **Digital Access / Inclusion**

We surveyed a total of 29,787 households and received 8,948 responses (equivalent to 11,148 customers) – that’s 30% of everyone we reached out to. This means we’ve increased the overall baseline for equality, diversity and inclusion data we hold on our customers, which is great news.

Protected characteristics are some of the most important pieces of data we collect on our customers. These are protected under the Equality Act 2010 and it’s against the law to discriminate against someone because of them. Thanks to the EDI customer survey, we’ve been able to increase the baseline data we hold on all of these (apart from age), particularly in the gender reassignment, religion and sexual orientation categories.

We’ll now look to combine the data that was collected through the EDI customer survey with the data we already have on our customer systems. This will help us carry out analysis to better understand who our customers are and how we can improve our services to best support them.

This work includes comparing our data with the data from the 2021 census, to identify types of customers who might be over or underrepresented when compared to the UK as a whole. For example, we know that we have a greater amount of customers with a disability and where they live, so we can understand where we might need to target or tailor services and support.

Over the course of the next year, we will continue to deepen our understanding of our customers by improving the information we hold about them on their protected characteristics. We will use this information to identify where inequalities exists and to ensure that everyone can access the products and services they need.

As housing professionals, it’s important that our colleagues reflect the diversity of the communities we serve and are fully supported by Abri to be the best they can be.

This means creating a culture of belonging and inclusion so that everyone feels they can be their true self at Abri and access the same opportunities.

So, over the next 12 months, we will complete the collection of information on our colleagues’ protected characteristics and start to use this information to inform our policies and practices, identifying and tackling any disparities among specific colleague groups which suggests they are not treated equally or fairly, or that they simply don’t have the same chances to develop and grow as other colleagues.

We will also establish networks for colleagues who identify with the following groups: women, race and culture, disability and LGBTQ+.

Over the next year, we will also review our learning offer for colleagues, and embed this in our Housing Professional of the Future Programme.

In the medium-term, we will complete a review of all colleague touchpoints and map colleagues and their characteristics against these to identify any hidden disparities and take action to address these.

Our long-term vision (2030) is that, as a result of insights generated and action taken, Abri is a truly diverse organisation, one that is representative of the customers and communities it serves.

6 **Recruit, develop and retain a diverse, talented and motivated workforce that reflects the communities we work with**

To make Abri an even more inclusive employer, and to ensure that our workforce is representative of the customers we serve we are currently carrying out a number of reach outs in places of worship and community groups that we know historically haven’t been proportionately represented in our applicant pool. We are currently working with:

- **Job centre plus: Eastleigh, Slough, Fareham and Southampton**
 - **Southampton City Council**
 - **Working Chance**
 - **Microlink**
 - **DFN Search Project**
 - **Itchen College and Havant Federations of Schools**
 - **Universities**
 - **Travis Perkins**
 - **Rexel**
 - **Landport Community Centre**
 - **Paulsgrove and Cosham Community Centre**
 - **We are also working with the refugee employment network and attending a number of job fairs specifically for neurodivergent candidates.**

We are signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant, and this year we are creating an armed forces community for our colleagues.

To help tackle any unconscious bias in our recruitment and to attract the best talent, we run Inclusive Recruitment sessions for our managers. In the past year, we have trained 37 managers so we can get this right together. In these sessions we explore all aspects of the recruitment process, from writing inclusive job descriptions to advertisements, shortlisting, and interviewing.

We are also working with community radio station, Unity 101. Based in Southampton, Unity 101 is a voluntary organisation catering to the Asian and ethnic minority communities in the area. We feature on a monthly community hour, where we share a whole range of information and opportunities for the Southampton community and beyond.

7 **Facilitate the ‘employee voice’, supporting involvement from all staff to promote innovation, create a sense of belonging and make this organisation an employer of choice**

We celebrate the diverse voice of our employees, and our Peakon survey gives our colleagues the opportunity to air their voice on how they feel Abri is delivering on its commitment to inclusion and belonging.

Last year, we added some important questions about equality, diversity and inclusion to the survey. These include the following recurring statement which we repeat in each survey to track colleague’s attitudes over time:

‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I’m satisfied with Abri’s efforts to support diversity and inclusion’.

Our latest survey result puts us in the top 25% of the Peakon benchmark, and we have scored in the top 25% for all EDI Peakon Drivers, which are:

- **A diverse workforce is a clear priority at Abri**
- **At Abri, people of all backgrounds are accepted for who they are**
- **I’m confident I won’t be discriminated against at Abri.**

The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales included a new question on the armed forces community. As a progressive organisation, we have now included a similar question on the diversity screen of our HR system.

Although not considered to be a protected characteristic under current equality legislation, many organisations recognise that veterans and armed forces personnel may be discriminated against when both trying to find employment or once in employment. Organisations such as local authorities, NHS trusts and education providers now have a statutory duty to make provision for or consider the needs of veterans or members of the Armed forces across their policies and practices.

As a forward-thinking organisation, we want to ensure that we are exceeding good practice and by asking colleagues to share their data in relation to being members of the armed forces enables us to undertake meaningful analysis and implement targeted and focused initiatives to make a real change to our workplace culture, and mitigate the risks of unconscious bias and discrimination.

8 Make the organisation a safe, fun and enjoyable place to work where everyone is encouraged to be their authentic self

Safety is a big priority for us here at Abri. In 2021 the tragic and appalling murder of Sarah Everard highlighted the need for all of us to do more to promote zero-tolerance of violence against women. This is equally pertinent for Abri in the workplace and in the communities where we work, where everyone should feel safe.

To enable us to better understand colleagues' experiences and understanding of violence against women and girls, we held several listening groups and carried out a survey among our wider colleague base. This resulted in the launch of a Safer Streets action plan, which sets out a number of goals which when achieved, will greatly improve the level of safety among both our colleagues and customers.

To help colleagues feel supported whilst they are preparing to be parents, going on and returning from maternity, adoption, paternity and parental leave, we have put Parent Buddies in place at Abri.

The role of the parent buddy is to provide parents and carers with the opportunity to access one to one support and to address individual needs. This scheme aims to make the transition back to work easier by matching individuals with people who have experienced it themselves and who are able to provide support based on their own real-life experiences.

We're committed to providing a stimulating, supportive and inclusive work environment free of harassment and bullying and have introduced the following policies and procedures to support our colleagues.

Respect at Work Policy and Procedure. This policy raises awareness of acceptable behaviours and unacceptable behaviours. It also shows the steps that we take if a colleague suffers from harassment at work. Here at Abri, we have a zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment in the workplace.

Gender Reassignment Policy and Procedure. We're an employer who celebrates values and diversity, and this policy sets out the steps Abri takes to welcome and support colleagues who may identify themselves as transgender. Time off is given to attend medical appointments and to undergo gender reassignment surgery. Support is also available after surgery dependent upon each colleagues needs.

Domestic abuse policy. We want to promote safe communities where everybody can live free from fear, intimidation and violence and we provide a supportive working environment for our colleagues. We condemn all incidents of domestic abuse, and this policy sets out how we are working towards preventing and combating domestic abuse.

At Abri we celebrate Pride Month

And each year, we send out communications that help our colleagues learn more about the LGBTQ+ community.

We also mark religious festivals and heritage months

By providing our colleagues with interesting facts, and encouraging our colleagues to share how they celebrate with loved ones.



Community Investment zones

We are investing £15 million over five years in eight Community Investment Zones (comprising 13 neighbourhoods) to improve employment and training, health and wellbeing, safety and community empowerment.

Abri's tenancy sustainment activity helps to address poverty and income inequalities. Over the last year, Abri supported 840 customers in the first year of their tenancy and a further 161 customers who were at risk of losing their tenancy. Abri's Welfare and Benefits team worked with customers to help them secure an additional £3.2 million in income and provided support valued at £155,000 to address appliance poverty. During the year, Abri also dealt with 886 cases of anti-social behaviour and 402 cases of domestic abuse.

Case studies

"I have a proper future now, thank you"

Mokhtar was 19 years' old when he fled to the UK to seek asylum from the war, with no surviving family left in Sudan. After a brief spell in Portsmouth, he's settled in Southampton. With English not being his first language, he didn't feel like he fitted in or there was a future for him in the UK. Through support from our Employment Services and our Project UP, Mokhtar has been supported to learn new skills and improve his English. He worked at the Isle of Wight Festival through our Abri Work Academy, and we've recently helped him enrol at Fareham College in a construction course. He said: *"My confidence has really grown and I feel so much better knowing I have skills and I am confident to use them. It has totally changed my life and I can see not only a future for myself but a happy productive one. I always wanted to have a family and now I think that could happen. I have a proper future now, thank you."*



"I will be able to provide for the children and pay my bills"

Kirsty, a customer living in Somerset, had never worked since leaving school. Having recently separated from her partner, she was now main carer for five young children and needed to work to support her family. With support from our Employment Services, she took part in an NHS swaps programme, which helped boost her knowledge and skills. She also completed a GCSE maths course with Somerset Skills, and a training course supported by Abri in partnership with City Plumbing, which had a guaranteed interview on completion of the training. And we're pleased to say Kirsty secured a part-time customer service role. She said: *"I am more confident; I will be able to provide for the children and pay my bills. The service you gave me was amazing – all of it - you put me on courses and did much more. All you did for me made a difference to me on my journey. I did a lot in a year to get where I am now, and the kids love it that I go to work."*

Helping adults in Southampton to read and write

There are 2.4 million adults in England alone – over 5% of the working age population – who can barely read or cannot read at all.

To help adults in Southampton fulfil their potential and live life to the full, we are supporting Café Revive, a community café in Southampton to work with local charity Read Easy to support with reading and writing skills. This is to encourage adults to develop their skills, whether that be to help them with future employment, supporting their children or just to make day to day life easier.

Whilst at the café, we had noticed from conversations with the café customers that lots of adults in the Millbrook area have relatively low reading skills. This was impacting on their ability to deal with things like understanding bills, housing benefit or being able to help their children with homework.

We therefore decided to partner with Read Easy at the café to enable local residents to access this free support in a relaxed way.

Café Revive’s aim is to bring in services that the community can access, as well as functioning as a normal café.

Man with a Pan

A free cookery course for men to learn to cook and look after their health

We found that in Southampton there were no cookery courses aimed at men. We know that in Mansbridge, there is a high concentration of single men living alone who often have housing management issues and higher levels of financial vulnerability, and we wanted to create positive change.

We know that a healthy diet can play a role in prevention and treatment of chronic illness, but some people can face challenges such as poor cooking skills and may need a better knowledge of how to eat healthily on a budget.

To help improve the health and wellbeing of our male customers in this area, we worked with Community Chef, who have helped thousands of people improve their cookery and nutrition skills.

Community Chef ran Man with a Pan, a five-week cookery course at our Round About Café in Mansbridge on Friday afternoons throughout August and the first week of September 2022.



The project offered a free cookery course for men to learn to cook and look after their health. The course taught them how to cook a portfolio of healthy, low-cost nutritious dishes, cookery techniques, menu planning and food hygiene and helped:

- **improve participants’ ability to access a healthy diet, increase self-confidence, and general food knowledge**
- **to promote healthier eating and lifestyles within our communities**
- **tackle loneliness and isolation and build community spirit**
- **with practical advice on shopping, home economics and local food initiatives.**

The project also helped to increase both the mental and physical health of our participants. Man with a Pan reduced social isolation by giving the group a chance to meet new people, and provided a routine and structure to the day.

Researchers at Newcastle University found that people eating homemade meals more than five times a week consumed 62.3g more fruit than people who rarely prepped their own food. They also ate 97.8g more vegetables. In general, regularly eating homemade meals was linked to having a normal BMI range and body fat.

In the near future, we will be on the look-out for new community leaders who can be trained as Community Cooks to teach other people in the community to cook healthy, low-cost nutritious food. We will also be providing community cooking courses run by volunteers.

Breaking bias: women in trades

One of our key priorities is to make all of our communities more inclusive, which includes the community of colleagues we have here at Abri. In particular, we want to help diversify our repairs and maintenance team by encouraging more women and non-binary candidates to apply for roles with us.

It goes without saying that there are less women than men pursuing careers in the trades profession. Just 1% of all skilled trades professionals working in the UK construction sector – such as joiners, bricklayers, electricians, plumbers, and carpenters – are women, according to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics.

We know that having a diverse workforce is really important. The diversity of colleagues brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to our business, and we want to encourage these differences. Having a more diverse team here at Abri will also help us to better serve our community of customers.

We’ve set some ambitious targets for the next five years. We want:

- **15% of our new apprenticeship intake to be women or identify as non-binary**
- **to achieve 95% completion rate of our apprenticeship programme amongst female and non-binary apprentices (this is equivalent to our male target)**
- **to retain a minimum of 80% of our female and non-binary apprentices into onward positions with us (this is equivalent to our male target)**
- **to at least double our current % of trades in female roles (currently at 1.74%).**



“I grew up in Southampton with my younger sister (who also works at Abri). I eventually flew the nest when I was 19 and earned my degree in the USA on a football scholarship – it was here that I learned the most about myself. I had to grow up fast and learn how to be independent and self-sufficient. After graduating I began working at a youth football company in a dual admin/coaching role. The hours were long, and I gained vital work experience in some tough environments. I am now enjoying working at Abri in the trades team.

“There were a few hurdles I experienced during my time in the USA. The biggest was the racial divide. I was fortunate enough to not be directly impacted by these divisions, but it was clear in day to day life that their history is quite different from the UK. Returning to the UK was refreshing, and I am forever grateful for my time overseas and for all the great people I met.

“There can also be challenges working in the repairs and maintenance world, but I think Abri does a great job of negating these issues. It’s often assumed all trades are male, so things like assumed pronouns can be common. There is also the preconceived gender roles around administration that I find can be problematic at times.

“The best advice I can give to the younger generation is to try to be open-minded to all experiences, the rest will follow. I think having experiences are the single best way we can grow as people. Even the negative experiences can often generate a positive outcome in time.”

Materials and Contracts Team Leader

Zoë Collingwood-Dane, Head of Central Support Services talks about her role and why we’re trying to attract more women into trades roles at Abri.

Almost 700 of Abri’s colleagues work in repairs and maintenance roles, ranging from electricians and gas engineers to schedulers. There are often preconceptions that this industry is male dominated, so increasing diversity and inspiring more women to feel comfortable and to see the range of opportunities available to them is a really important focus for us.

I started at Abri as a housing assistant temp and since then, I’ve worked in Independent Living and Partnership Living, before working as an executive assistant for the operational director at the time. That led me into my current role as head of central support services.

The best thing about my role is definitely the people. We have a fantastic group that I work with who are all really supportive. They’re dedicated, they’re motivated, and they just love what they do.

The repairs and maintenance industry is typically seen as quite male dominated, but at Abri, the gender balance in the leadership team is equal with three female heads of service. However, I would love to see more women entering this industry at all levels and in all professions. It is such a diverse directorate; there’s lots of different roles whether you prefer being in the office or getting out and about. From plumbing through to surveying or contract management, there’s something for everyone. And there’s loads of room for development too.

We offer loads of apprenticeships, which is great not only for younger people but for career switchers as well. We’re working our way towards getting 50 rolling apprenticeships across repairs and maintenance; from business admin to plumbing, electrical and gas roles. We’re also looking at how we can use apprenticeships to upskill, especially as we look towards green technologies, and how we can make our homes more environmentally friendly.



Over the last year, we took on 18 new apprentices from business administration to electrical, taking our total number to 36 apprentices. 3% of our new intake is female, and we want to continue to use our apprenticeships to attract women into trades. To do this, we are running a Women in Trade campaign, making sure all our advertising always includes diverse representation, and attending more schools and colleges to let everyone know the incredible opportunities that come with being a skilled tradesperson.

There’s also lots of different courses available to help colleagues develop within their roles. We also have colleagues undertaking Chartered Institute of Housing apprenticeships and becoming Tetra Inspectors. So, everyone is getting in-depth, technical knowledge to be able to get our homes up to the standard they need to be.

We’re seeing more and more women enter this industry which is fantastic. But there is always more work to do. We believe our gender should never define what we do, which is why we’re so committed to creating diverse and inclusive organisation.

What’s next

Our EDI strategy is constantly evolving and we want to ensure that it is both relevant and impactful

Here are some of the actions we’ll be taking over the next 12 months:

- continue to collect and maintain adequate customer EDI data to support planning and delivery of our services
- build more high-quality and well-designed social, affordable and shared ownership homes to give more people the opportunity to get a place they can call home and to reduce the stigma that can be associated with lower cost housing
- do everything we can to help our customers sustain their tenancies, put food on the table and heat their homes by ensuring they get the support and benefits to which they’re entitled
- focus on helping more Abri customers to get a job or a better job over the next year, as well as provide thousands of courses to give people the skills and knowledge they need to set up their own business or access the job market
- complete a full analysis of customer complaints to identify any customer groups who might be disproportionately affected by service issues so that we can tackle the root causes
- continue to secure external funding on behalf of our customers to improve their communities and ensure everyone has access to the same chances in life
- deliver mental health training to our front-line colleagues. This training will help colleagues gain an understanding of what poor mental health is, how to spot it in our customers, how to open up the conversation, managing the mental health impact of difficult conversations, living with mental ill health and the importance of self-care and wellbeing. There will also be an adapted version for managers of front-line colleagues.



Targets and commitments

Two years on from the beginning of our inclusion journey, we are refocusing our inclusion strategy to right where it belongs: on our customers, our homes and our communities.

This refreshed inclusion strategy, informed by Abri's customers, is based on a bold new vision: "In our community, the best chances in life are available to all."

Delivering this vision will challenge everyone at Abri to think and act differently — about the homes and communities they help to build, the services they provide and how they engage with every single type of customer. And it will require Abri to create a truly diverse workforce that understands and is sensitive to the attitudes, needs and behaviours of all its customers.

To achieve this vision, and to address the priorities of our customers, Abri will focus on the following four themes:

1. Inclusive community engagement

We will:

- use data to understand our customers better at a regional and organisational level, creating the regional leadership, governance and operational structures to do so
- act upon the specific issues faced by the significant proportion of Abri's customers that report a disability
- work with local partners, especially local authorities, health providers and other statutory service providers to share data, insight and best practice on how best to communicate and engage with all parts of the community
- build greater cultural awareness and understanding of the attitudes, needs and behaviours of all our customers, by holding and/or taking part in 'know your community' events and cultural festivals
- increase the diversity of resident panels to ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

2. Improved life chances for all

We will:

- prevent homelessness by helping our customers to maintain their tenancies
- increase the supply of affordable housing and build on the successful pilot of Housing First to address homelessness in our communities
- focus interventions on supporting our customers with the cost of living crisis, including those most affected by income deprivation, especially fuel and food poverty
- continue to create investment zones in areas that are most deprived to create strong, stable and cohesive communities
- raise awareness of social mobility, its impact and benefits through participating in social mobility awareness days
- create employment initiatives to support underrepresented and/or deprived communities into the workplace
- review our policy and approach to new development schemes to ensure they support increased social mobility and do not reinforce social stigma.



3. Zero tolerance of discrimination, abuse, anti-social behaviour and hate crime

We will:

- build a greater understanding of the differences between anti-social behaviour and harassment so that our colleagues can respond appropriately
- encourage reporting among all of our customer groups to enable us to have a better understanding of issues affecting our neighbourhoods
- empower our customers by engaging with them and communicating our actions where appropriate
- respond to complaints of ASB/harassment/domestic abuse quickly and effectively by using a range of methods including prevention, early intervention, support and enforcement
- create safe spaces where customers can report ASB/hate crime/domestic abuse, using the 'Safer Streets' and the 'Ask for Angela' initiatives.

4. Creating a diverse, learning organisation

We will:

- grow and diversify our candidate pool by recruiting differently
- use touch points such as community events to raise our profile within the communities we operate in to attract a wider potential pool of candidates
- use data to understand where there are areas of underrepresentation within Abri
- understand what drives our pay gaps and take steps to reduce them
- provide equal chances for all colleagues to grow and progress within Abri, recognising that we may need to support positive action initiatives to do this
- add social mobility questions to the EDI data questions Abri holds on our HR system to understand and inform our recruitment practices and to provide equal life chances for all
- improve managers' understanding of disability in the workplace and its impact so they can support disabled colleagues more effectively
- adopt a storytelling approach, including real life examples, to celebrate diversity
- build on our current EDI learning offer to increase awareness and understanding of inclusion among all colleagues
- build employee networks to create safe, inclusive spaces for colleagues to come together to share lived experiences and to create a sense of belonging at Abri
- develop a good practice data hub so colleagues can share 'what works @abri'
- develop a calendar of events to celebrate diversity and inclusion, encouraging both customer and colleague participation.



