

the charity for
your community



The Impact of Advice

Citizens

Advice

Slough

Registered
Charity No:
1106150

Annual Report 2008-09

Chairman's Report

During the three and a half years in which I have been a trustee, Citizens Advice Slough (CAS) has changed from an enthusiastic but embryonic service to one firmly established and able to lead partners in developing innovative projects in Slough and beyond.

To share just a few of the headlines:-

Access to the service has increased from three to five days a week, and we are now able to offer gateway sessions, appointments, specialist advisers, outreach services and telephone advice. Languages other than English are available and a supported self help kiosk can be used in reception. The number of clients seen has risen from 1800 to 3179.

In response to client need, a service for the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma Communities has been established and help at appeal level in welfare benefits is now available.

Three years ago funding came from two sources only, Slough Council and Citizens Advice. This profile has extended to include the Big Lottery, the Department of Work and Pensions and central government. Annual income has grown from £103,000 year in the year ending March 2006 to £ 207,328 this year.

Last but definitely not least is the workforce. The initial four full time equivalent paid and thirty four volunteers has risen to eight and forty-three. Training has been intense since inception and a hidden benefit to the town is the number of trained volunteers who have moved on to paid employment – fourteen to date. This is a mixed blessing to the bureau but invaluable for the individuals and community.

When the trustees appointed Janice Haynes as Chief Executive Officer four years ago it was with high hopes for the future. It is with admiration and gratitude that, as the retiring Chair of the Trustee Board, I now thank her and the rest of the team for meeting that challenge. I have every expectation that they will continue to support the existing service and strive to expand and develop it to reach the identified need.



Cora Carvey
Chair of Trustees
November 2009

Chief Executive's Report

Citizens Advice Slough (CAS) has expanded existing, and developed new, services throughout 2008-9; by the end of the year the bureau was open for five days per week with an outreach centre in Langley which we hope is just the first.

The improved stability of the general service meant the bureau was able to develop partnerships and take on five new projects, see below. These projects all add to the funding of the infrastructure of our organisation and contribute toward the sustainability of the total service. The result of the development of the service and the introduction of new systems was a considerable increase in client numbers, 30% in the year.

Citizens Advice Slough has always been very busy and as the recession deepened it became more and more of a challenge to offer much needed advice and information to people suffering in the economic slump.

Whereas many bureaux throughout the country find that their clients can easily access the advice they need by telephone, language and cultural differences in Slough mean that that is not the case here. We continued to operate our face-to-face "gateway" (or triage) session in the mornings, alongside telephone advice and appointments with both generalist and specialist advisers. When we surveyed a sample of gateway clients most said that this was their preferred method of contact, only four per cent would have preferred to use the phone. We are however intending to extend the gateway system to telephone service in order to free face to face appointments to those most in need.

As would be expected, clients facing difficulties with their mortgage payments featured highly and we were able to work together with our colleagues in Shelter to offer help and support. In general debt cases, creditors began to behave more aggressively and the worrying trend emerged of applications to the courts for Charging Orders, turning previously unsecured debts into those secured on the home. Clients worried about their jobs came in such large numbers that employment came within a hair's breadth of being our main enquiry area, up from third place in all previous years.

I must thank all our volunteers and trustees, without whom there is no CAB, especially Cora, who came back as Chair having stepped down. I thank very much all of our funders, Slough Borough Council, the Lottery, DWP, Maidenhead and District Housing Association, Citizens Advice.

Janice Haynes



Community Advice for Gypsies Roma and Travellers

In April 2008 this 3 year Lottery funded project began and 18 months after starting it is very successful, exceeding all targets and has been generally welcomed. This is a pioneer partnership project, over three counties, between four bureaux and the charity PACT (Parents and Children Together). This project is very much about Community Cohesion work.

One of the initial aims was to build trust with the community, and encourage them to access the advice service, and this proved much easier than anticipated. As a caseworker on the project I have been warmly received in to their homes. It is a novelty to many that there is a project which is able to cater specifically for their needs and many now have the confidence to both come to the bureau and also access other agencies such as My Council and Jobcentre Plus.

A positive outcome has been networking with the other agencies and to be able to refer clients appropriately. This has been particularly valuable in working with the Roma community who not only face the language barrier but also find it difficult to find out about their rights. Many are very keen to engage with the wider community, to get their children in to school and to settle here.

As said above the outcomes from the project have exceeded our targets and expectations and are too numerous to mention here. There are obvious achievements or “hard” outcomes, which include financial gains, the allocation of permanent housing/ new trailers, prevention of homelessness etc. In addition here are the “softer” outcomes of being more included and awareness of rights and responsibilities, rising confidence levels and feeling able to access services; these will have a long lasting effect in improving the quality of life for future generations and general community cohesion.

Whilst wanting to maintain their ethnic traditions the Irish Travellers, Romany Gypsies and Roma, in my experience, all share a common thread of willingness to engage with the wider community and to live in harmony.

Liz Baker
Case Worker



“Putting us in touch with social services means I have got safe steps up to the trailer and I’m no longer scared of falling each time I go outside.”

CAB goes local in Langley

The Langley Forum, covering three wards, held a consultation to discuss funding which had been allocated to each ward in Slough. Several other very good and worthy ideas were put forward but we were delighted when the majority vote was to have a local CAB service. It has enabled CAS to open a weekly advice service in Langley Library, which is an excellent location.

The first client was seen just before Christmas and by mid February was running at the capacity level of between five and six clients per session. The range of enquiries was typically wide-ranging with no particular category predominating.

As part of a survey carried out, clients were asked if Langley Library was a good place to go for advice. 100% of clients agreed that it was.

Migration Works

March 2008 saw the start of Migration works – a project to advise a specific profile of migrants from third countries. It is funded by Slough Borough Council as part of a wider Community Cohesion project. In its second year, we have again exceeded targets and it is a good example of a project entirely suited to the CAB service, with our expertise in social welfare law.

Financial Literacy

CAS joined the Thames Valley Financial Literacy Forum and obtained funding to delivered our first training project in this area which was training front line workers in agencies where the clients are in debt or need money advice. Financial Literacy work is a key areas of development for CAS in the future as part of a national strategy.

Additional Hours Service

At the beginning of March we were successful in obtaining Government Funding enabling us to extend our opening hours enabling the advice service to be offered 5 days per week from the main office. The target set for us of a hundred extra new clients per month was exceeded by twenty five per cent in the first month is currently running at an average of 122%.

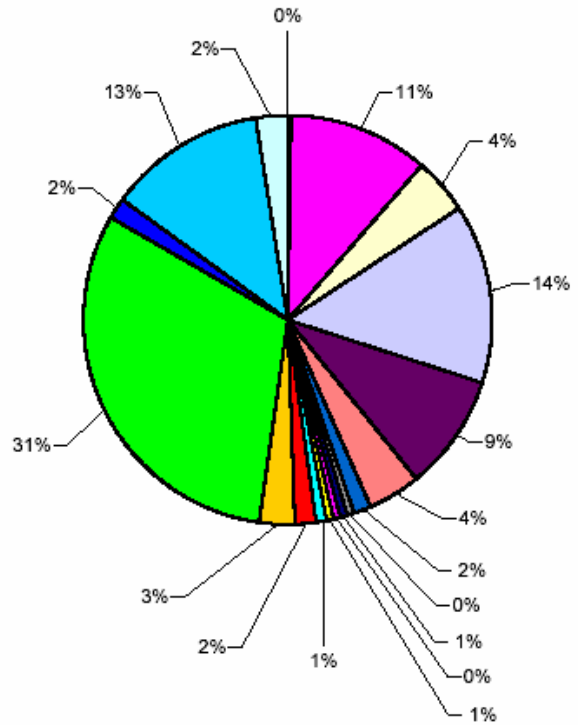


“It’s good to have CAB in Langley which is easy for Langley people to come here (sic).”

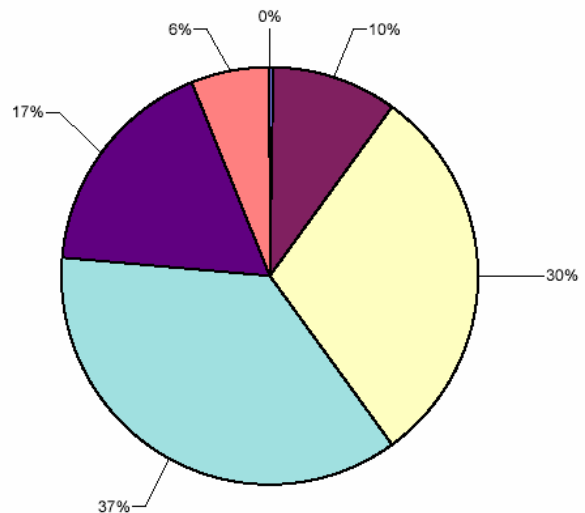
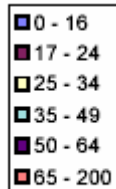
“I was seen although it was past closing time”

Ethnicity of Clients

Total number of clients seen - 3962



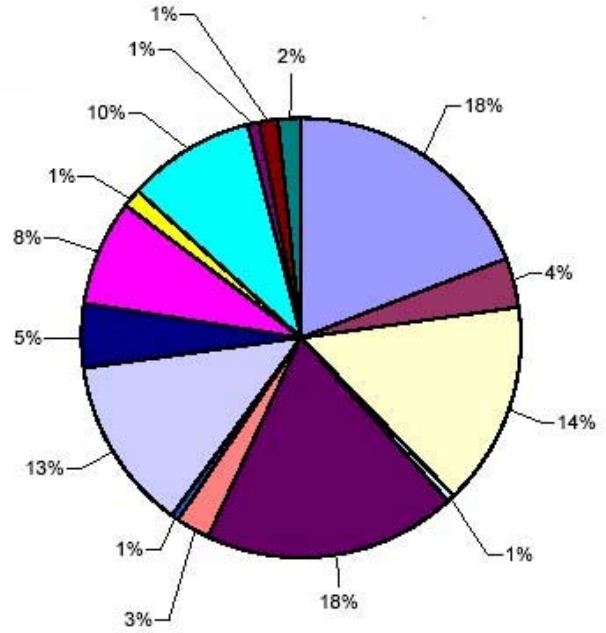
Age Groups Seen in 2008/2009



The economic value of our volunteers to the community is £161,339.

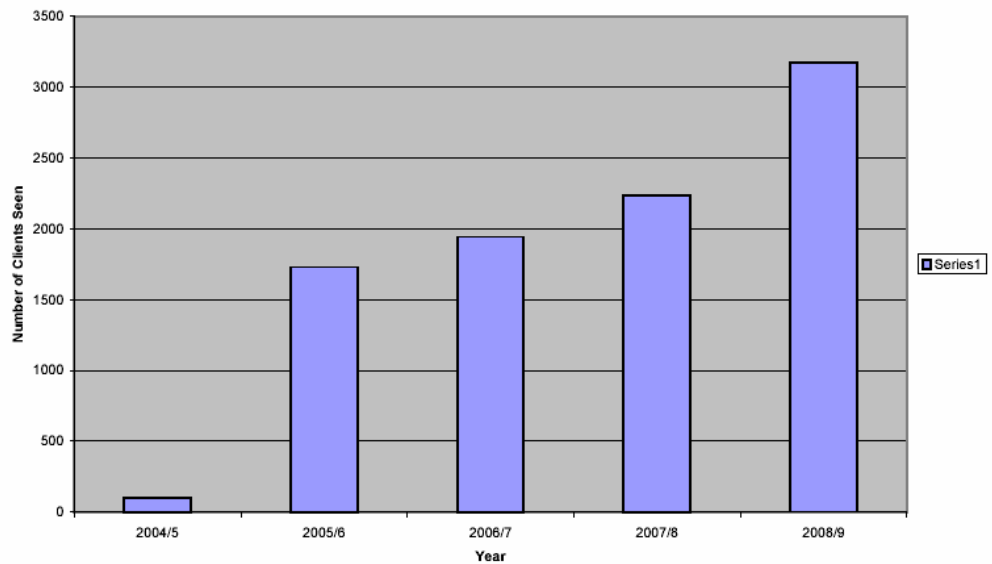
Enquiry Type

Total number of Enquiries - 3571



Clients Seen

Clients Seen



3176 clients were seen on 7474 issues.

Financial gains for clients totalled £310,065

Case Studies

A client was deemed by CSA to owe maintenance going back 12 years. Exploration showed that he had been unemployed for the majority of the period. This could not be proven as the DWP unemployment benefit computer was closed a number of years ago. Adviser traced unemployment benefit record through the NI office and established awards of NI credits for unemployment benefit claims. Result of this work means that maintenance owed has reduced by £12,239.

An elderly lady had her Attendance Allowance withdrawn. Our work on her appeal resulted in the tribunal allowing her case. Her AA was reinstated, arrears paid. Additionally we gained a Severe Disability Addition to her Pension Credit. In total she gained £8,556 in benefits.

A young man with learning disabilities was given an overpayment decision by DWP. They stated that he had not provided medical certificates in support of his Incapacity Benefit claim. Prolonged and persistent questioning of DWP resulted in an admission that they had written to him years previously and advised him that he no longer needed to submit med certificates. Our work has resulted in an overpayment being written off. This amounted to £10,475

"Thanks for showing me how to stand up for myself, I'm now dealing with the planning department and the council tax department myself and will see it through to the end. I'll still need you to read my letters and advise me about anything I don't understand."



Case Studies

Advice and help with a DLA claim for a child led to DWP revising their original disallowance. Our work proved that the child did meet the criteria for satisfying the conditions for receipt of DLA. This also led to a disability element being awarded for Child Tax Credit. Total benefits gained £7,413

A retired person was helped with his NI record and it was proved that he had paid additional contributions to gain extra State Retirement Pension. His Pension Credit claim was checked and errors found. This work led to the client gaining additional benefits of £6,117

A Client's Pension Credit had stopped due to a change of address. It was argued that the client who speaks only Serbo-Croat would not have understood the need to meet deadlines. DWP admitted that they had previously provided an interpreter and this should have been taken into account when writing to her. Benefit backdated along with Housing Benefit. Total gain £8,435



"Thanks for sorting out our benefits, we couldn't read the letters about rent arrears but were told we owed a lot of money. No one else helped us to understand what was happening let alone tried to help us sort it out."

Training and volunteering

Training in the Bureau has developed enormously and we are now designing it according to our own needs.

This year we were able to

- take on more groups
- take on an additional guidance tutor, for 2009-10
- begin developing different “modular” training roles In response to a pool of volunteers who are on average younger and seeking work.

Training in CAB advice work is quite demanding, can be time consuming and up to two thirds may drop out before they gain their certificate. Not every one has the resources in money, time or ability to do the lengthy route to full adviser, so we are developing other roles such as triage advisers, information gathering and support workers to help the generalist and specialist case worker.

Our trainee groups are always diverse and this year we have welcomed volunteers from Poland, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Moldova.

The advantage of CAB on your CV

Despite the difficult climate, time spent volunteering with the CAB continued to be a pathway to work and there are also opportunities within CAS to do paid advice and supervisor work.

Two volunteers, new to the UK with poor language skills, found paid employment after spending time volunteering on reception. Five advisers also took paid work, three of whom continue to give their time as volunteers.

Volunteers are the essential lifeline of the organisation without which the service could not operate. Volunteer numbers have gradually increased and CAS encourages those who wish to find paid work and this year has made two appointments of paid staff from its own volunteer base.

Sharmila Dikbas
Training Officer

Heather Allen
Senior Supervisor



“I’m not interested in a luxury home all I want is a warm place where my kids are safe and they don’t have to go outside in the bitter weather to the utility block. Thanks for making that possible.”

Trustee Board

Robert Alsop*, Ray Barkley, Terry Brennan, Cora Carvey (Chair)
Hirak Chakravarti, Eleanor Cryer (vice Chair) David Mansell, David
Knibbs, Mai Knibbs*, John Lynch

Paid Staff

Heather Allen, Elizabeth Baker, Sharmila Dikbas, Dawn Budda*,
Janice Haynes, Alice Penney*, Daljit Randhawa, Steven Scarrot,
Rumnie Vasir*, Elizabeth Winfield

We lost three highly skilled supervising members of staff throughout the year, all of whom contributed valuable experience and knowledge and did added a great deal to the continued improvement of the Bureau. Rumnie and Alice are both still within the CAB service, but our colleague Dawn Budda died young and unexpectedly; she was a warm generous and funny personality and her influence is still missed.

Volunteers

Anne Bolton, Shabana Azam*, Kuljit Bajwa*, Helen Beck, Wendy Collins, Sopinder Dehal, Katarzyna Di Virgilio, Naima Farooq*, Ghazala Gilani, Dilini Goonawardhane, Alex Gutu, Farhana Hakim*, Margaret Keen, Ozlem Kemal*, Shaney Lakhanpaul, Susan Murphy, Dave Palmer, Anita Patil, Snehal Pawar*, John Peniket, Gagandeep Phull*, Anna Piaseczna-Zyla, Sheila Quinlan, Jenny Sawtell, Ruth Schofield, Mike Singer, Adrian Smith, Zahra Soltani, Zoe Sullivan, Bal Swami, Pauline Underwood, Christopher Weatherly, Cecilia Winkett, Dorrett Wynter*.

Solicitors

We would like to thank Chambers Solicitors for the time they give free to our clients.

*Left during the year



Opening Times:

Drop in (Slough):

Monday.....10.00-13.00

Tuesday10.00-13.00

Wednesday.....10.00-13.00

Friday.....10.00-13.00

Drop in (Langley Library):

Wednesday.....9.30 - 12.30

Telephone Advice:

Monday.....14.00-16.00

Wednesday.....10.00-13.00

Friday.....14.00-16.00

**The bureau is open for specialist
appointments five days a week.**

Internet kiosk available for public use.

How to contact us:

**27 Church Street
Slough
SL1 1PL**

**Advice line only:
0845 120 3712**