

Annual Report

2017-18

The difference we have made to Harrow people with the support of our funders



Harrow

Chair's report

I would like to say a big thank you to all our staff and volunteers. We could not deliver our service to Harrow residents without the commitment and support of our chief executive and her dedicated team who work so hard on our behalf throughout the year.

The past year has, as always, been a demanding one, with us delivering our advice and information services in our main office, at children's centre buildings as well as supporting an increasing number of outreach services to reach other Harrow residents at St Luke's Hospice, Northwick Park Hospital, Catalyst Housing and Canons High School.

We are fortunate that we can use Citizens Advice information systems which enable continuous monitoring of our performance to ensure that we maintain and improve our service. We can also use their central resources to help us deliver the training and development of our staff and volunteers.

This year we were pleased to be successful in securing the advice and information services contract from the London Borough of Harrow which gives us some financial security for the near future. However, this does not give us enough funds to fully support our charitable service and so we continue to seek out every opportunity to maintain and increase our resources and to find new ways of supporting the needs of our residents. We are grateful to all those who provide funds to keep our service afloat.

As always, I am grateful to our trustees for their commitment to Citizens Advice Harrow and for all their help and support during the year.

Frances Logan - Chair Citizens Advice Harrow



Chief executive's report

We were delighted when we were awarded the Harrow Council contract for generalist advice and information; this has provided Citizens Advice Harrow with a strong foundation on which to build and much to celebrate. We've had more than 11,500 client contacts in the past year with our funders enabling us to deliver high quality advice on more than 13,500 advice issues. Harrow residents have accessed advice face-to-face, over the telephone and by email and webchat. This was down to the hard work of the staff and the incredible volunteers who gave an estimated £158,435 worth of time. We're continuing to explore how we can make our funding more sustainable, our service more resilient and help even more residents over the next 12 months. We are looking to get more volunteers who would represent the community that we serve, to ensure our services are accessible, and to continue collating the rich data source which will help us obtain a clear picture of the problems

people face and their underlying causes. The top three issues which have been presented to us are benefits, debt and housing. It is easy to see that for many life is a struggle; we have captured the stories of a handful of these people on pages 4 and 5 of this report, stories that are typical of the many who use our service during the course of the year.

Our work brings benefits to individuals, government and society as a whole. If we can reduce people's stress and worry and enable them to remain in their homes and retain their independence, they benefit and so does the public purse through reduced costs to local services.

Our fantastic team is here to help everyone who needs us.

Tajinder Nijjar - Chief Executive



Treasurer's report

Whilst times remain financially challenging, I must first thank our funders for their continued support, without which we would not be able to provide our advice services to the residents of Harrow.

First among these funders remains the London Borough of Harrow, with whom we continue to work closely in supporting disadvantaged local residents with their problems. Also my thanks go to our other supporters during the year, principally the Henry Smith Foundation, but also to Scottish Power, Catalyst Housing, Northwick Park Hospital, St. Luke's Hospice and Canons High School.

My continued thanks go to my fellow board members and especially to Tajinder, our chief executive, who continues to remain positive, even at times when our offices can be overwhelmed with clients. I would like to extend my continued appreciation to our other staff and volunteers for all their goodwill and dedication, without which we could not maintain our desperately needed advice services for the residents of the borough.



David Wood - Treasurer

Accessing our services



61%
in person



23%
phone



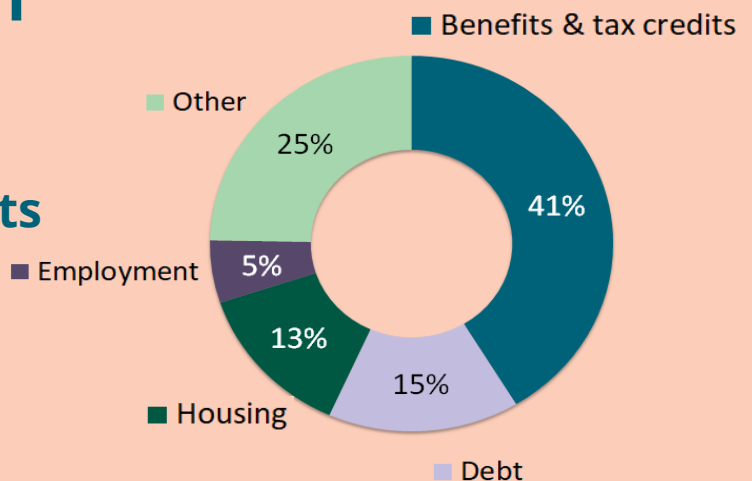
16%
webchat & email

What we helped with



11,731 client contacts

13,619 issues



In 2017/18 we saw an increase in demand for our services. We are helping more clients with more issues than ever before.

Our clients often come to us for help with multiple interrelated and interconnected problems. The strength of a holistic advice service such as Citizens Advice is that we can help our clients with a range of problems. Often the most pressing and serious problems are not those that the client initially presents and we strive to identify and address the underlying issues.

The impact of our work

We help thousands of people and the overwhelming majority say their problems could not have been solved without our support and they feel more confident and knowledgeable about handling similar problems in future.

The work of Citizens Advice changes the lives of individuals positively and has massive benefits for the local community.

In 2017/18 we received funding totalling £409,904. Our financial model estimates the value to society of the advice we have given over the period to be £14.2 million.

£409,904 from our funders



£1.1 million in savings to government and public services

By helping stop problems occurring or escalating, we reduce the need for public services (health, housing, out-of-work benefits).



£5.6 million in wider economic and social benefits

Solving problems improves lives - and this means better well-being, participation and productivity for the people we help.



£7.4 million in value to the people we help (financial outcomes following advice)

As part of the advice, we can increase people's income, through debts written-off, benefits taken up and consumer problems solved.

Vulnerable client avoids eviction

The client has severe depression. His wife and child left their home because of these issues, so he lives alone in a privately-rented property. He had accumulated substantial rent arrears and was threatened with eviction by the landlord. He was not allowed contact with his child.

The client had been refused Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) because the DWP had assessed that he had failed the habitual residence test as he is an EEA national. His housing benefit claim had also been closed. We sought a review of the ESA decision and our challenge was successful; his ESA was awarded and backdated for six months.

We also helped the client successfully apply for Personal Independence Payment (PIP): he was awarded the enhanced rate of the daily living component. PIP would allow him a further discount on his council tax.

We successfully negotiated with the landlord to get more time in order to sort out his benefits. We helped with his housing benefit claim which was then awarded and backdated. We also assisted with a discretionary housing application to help with his rent because housing benefit did not cover his full rent.

In addition, we referred the client to our family solicitor to understand what rights he might have regarding access to his child. The client also contacted MIND at our suggestion for further mental health support.



Freedom and personal independence

The client was an in-patient in the mental health unit at Northwick Park hospital and had a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia and multiple drug use. He had been living in supported housing prior to admission but was currently homeless. He needed help with applying for a Disabled Person's Freedom Pass, benefit problems and debt issues.



The client was only in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), although he had applied for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) several months previously, he had not followed it up because of a chaotic lifestyle.

The client had three non-priority debts totalling about £1,500 and only ESA in payment. We managed to get the debts written off by submitting a debt and mental health evidence form.

We helped him apply for a Freedom Pass which was awarded with medical evidence from the consultant. (He did not automatically qualify as he was not in receipt of PIP at that time.)

We contacted the DWP and were informed that the client's PIP claim had been terminated because he had not attended a medical assessment several months previously. The occupational therapist provided us with a letter explaining his medical condition, which we sent to the DWP with a letter asking them to reconsider the claim.

This was successful and eventually the client was awarded the enhanced rate of the daily living component and the standard rate of the mobility component at £104.10 a week. This was backdated for one year giving him £3,807.



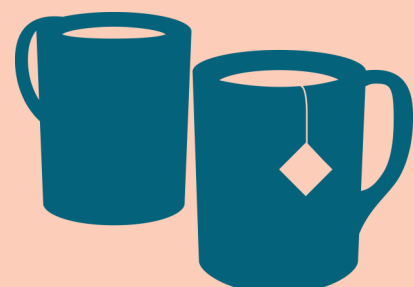
"I could not have asked for a better advisor! You showed me kindness and compassion from the start. You took on my case and due to all your hard work, support and patience, after some 16 months we finally got the outcome we both wanted."



"I'm so grateful to you all for making my six months at the bureau so welcoming: it was a real pleasure to be there. I came to the bureau straight out of university, disorientated and not quite sure what to do, but I have really grown into myself which is thanks to you all at Citizens Advice."



"You have fought long and hard on my behalf and you never gave up on me! I want to add that without all your hard work and support I would never have got this outcome. I am so grateful to you for the compassion you have shown me."



Thanks to our funders



The
Henry Smith
Charity



Central and
North West London
NHS Foundation Trust

London  Catalyst



Thanks to volunteers and staff

Without the incredible work of our volunteers and the support of our paid staff our service simply could not exist.

This year we lost a deeply-valued member of staff, Netsai Zimbandi, who passed away in November 2017. We pay tribute to her. She is sadly missed.



Citizens Advice Harrow is the operating name of Harrow Citizens Advice Bureau Service Ltd, a charity and company limited by guarantee.

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