

December
Newsletter
2019

Citizens Advice Runnymede & Spelthorne

www.randscab.org



CHIEF OFFICER

It has been a busy autumn here at CARS as we respond to the increasing demand for our service. We are working to a new business plan with three strategic priorities driving our work and some forthcoming changes. These are

- Delivering a **sustainable service**
- Modernising **delivery**
- Building **stronger partnerships**

Central to changes that will be taking place is making it easier for people to access our service. We are exploring a new telephone service and looking at how we co-locate and collaborate with partners more effectively. We are also working hard to increase, skill, and broaden our volunteer workforce.

I would like to thank Runnymede Borough Council for their decision last month to grant us funding for the next 3 years and for recognising the increasing demands our service is facing. Your support makes such a difference.

Can I take this opportunity to wish all our partners a very happy Christmas and new year and I look forward to working with you all in 2020.

Becky Whale

CARS AT KNOWLE GREEN

CARS is delighted to be working with Spelthorne Borough Council and Spelthorne Rentstart at Knowle Green, where we are supporting Rentstart clients to tackle debt. This new service began at the beginning of December.

CARS to host Royal Holloway Legal Advice Centre

CARS is very excited to be working with the Royal Holloway Legal Advice Centre pilot starting up in January. As well as working closely together we will be hosting the clinic once a month from our Addlestone office.

CARS AT THE JOB CENTRE PLUS COMMUNITY HUB

In order to expand the reach and accessibility of our service we have teamed up with the Jobcentre in Staines to become part of their community hub, a one stop shop to provide residents with access to a variety of advice and support services within their community. Each Wednesday one of our experienced advisers is on hand to offer information and advice on a variety of issues.

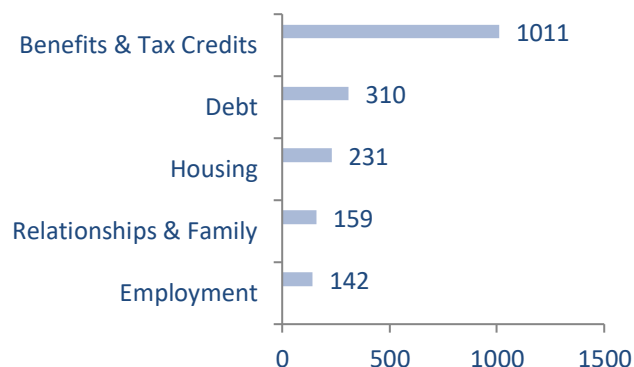
AUTUMN DATA

CARS data October to December 2019:

910 clients helped with 2,277 issues.

£359,351 gained in client outcomes averaging £394.89 per client

Of the clients helped 48% were disabled or otherwise dealing with a long term health condition. Benefits & Tax Credits made up the highest proportion of client issues at 44%, followed by Debt (14%) and Housing (10%).



CASE STUDY

We recently had great success with a client who had originally been turned down for Personal Independence Payments having been moved from Disability Living Allowance last year. This money had been vital to pay for their care costs and without it they had been struggling to manage. The client had multiple health conditions affecting their heart and kidneys as well as limited sight and mental health concerns which made expressing themselves extremely difficult.

We assisted with their appeal, drafting their appeal letter and gathering medical evidence to present at the tribunal. After many hard months of waiting they were finally able to attend the tribunal hearing and were successful in being awarded the enhanced rate of daily living, the standard rate for mobility and the severe disability premium on top of her Employment & Support Allowance.

As a result they were able to recover some £22,000 in backdated payments they had struggled to live without.

TRUSTEES

In accordance with our Constitution, at the first trustee board meeting after the AGM, the Board elected me to be the Chair and elected Alison Dalton as Vice-Chair. It is a great honour to serve as Chair and I take the responsibility with great confidence in our new Chief Officer, Becky Whale. I would also like to formally welcome Mick Creane to the Trustee Board, who was co-opted during the first meeting after the AGM. Mick, who has recently retired, has a background in cyber security and will be leading on ICT matters and risk management.

I would like to say a big thank you to our outgoing Chair Ian Blowers who served in the post for nearly six years and Trevor Mudd, who has served on the board for over ten years, many as Treasurer, who has also recently stood down.

Since Becky has joined Citizens Advice Runnymede & Spelthorne, a lot has been accomplished and she has stepped up tremendously to the challenges that the bureau currently faces. As we move into 2020 I know that the bureau under Becky's leadership will continue to address these challenges head on. On behalf of the Trustee Board, I would like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a successful New Year.

Andrew Fraser - Chair

BREXIT IMPACT

There has been a continual increase in demand for Brexit-related advice over the last year. The most common issues are around the Settlement Scheme and the Habitual Residence Test (HRT) and queries over the appropriate applications for dependent children, which can be complex.

For advisers, changes in regulations have increased the complexity of issues around benefit entitlement as those with settled status are entitled to Universal Credit without having to pass the Habitual Residence Test, while those with pre-settled still need to pass the test. We have seen a number of clients, with dependent children, who have been refused benefits under the HRT despite having a legitimate right. These clients require intensive, specialist assistance in order to prevent precipitation into destitution as benefits and housing are lost. From December 2020, benefits will only be accessible to those with settled status. We anticipate that there will be a rush for settled status in 2020 leading up to this, and that those who haven't applied will face significant issues around benefits and consequent housing problems.

We have also seen a rise in employed EEA nationals being challenged on their right to reside as both potential and existing employers have become increasingly confused, and concerned, about establishing workers rights to be employed.



VOLUNTEER TELEPHONE ADVISERS

We are recruiting for volunteer telephone assessors to join our service, starting in the New Year. If you have great communication skills and are interested in helping people, learning about a range of issues such as benefits, debt, housing etc. and making a positive contribution to the community please get in touch.

Time commitment is for a minimum of 6 months for 1 full day or two half days. We can be flexible so come and talk to us.

volunteer@randscab.org.uk



Runnymede & Spelthorne Citizens Advice

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