

**citizens
advice**

Hertfordshire

NEWSLETTER

June 2023

Citizens Advice Hertfordshire is a consortium of the 10 local Citizens Advice charities:

Broxbourne

Dacorum

East Herts

Hertsmere

North Herts

**St. Albans
and District**

Stevenage

Three Rivers

Watford

**Welwyn
Hatfield**

Each local Citizens Advice is an independent charity with its own strategy and priorities, focused on the needs of its local residents.

Our Newsletter

Welcome to Citizens Advice Hertfordshire's June newsletter.

This month we share with you a summary of our county wide projects. We focus on the Three Rivers Citizens Advice service and also outline our Specialist Employment Service delivered through CA Stevenage.

Citizens Advice Hertfordshire works to maximise the voice of the 10 local offices and facilitate the county-wide delivery of services where working together is better for our communities.



Three Rivers

Focus on Citizens Advice Three Rivers

CA Three Rivers Working with Herts MIND Network

Citizens Advice Service in Three Rivers, on behalf of Citizens Advice Hertfordshire, are pleased to report that we have started a new one year project working with Herts MIND Network at their Wellbeing Centre in Watford. This project is funded by the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System.

We started delivering this service at the beginning of February 2023, working two days a week giving advice to those clients being supported across Hertfordshire by a wonderful team of MIND Mental Health Outreach Workers.

We believe that projects such as these, based in the community and delivered in partnership with other local services, are key to the future sustainability of our service.

We are also very proud to serve our residents living in the local authority area of Three Rivers alongside projects such as these which they can also be referred into.

Under this project, clients are given a pre-booked appointment, usually arranged personally for them by their MIND worker.

This can be face to face at the Centre or via a video call or a telephone call. Follow up work can be completed via these channels and also by email, depending on the individual needs of our clients.

Clients are supported by the MIND team to engage with our service and this support has been invaluable to the success of the project. Between February and May, 99 were booked out of a possible 103 slots with appointments often booked weeks in advance.

As a local Citizens Advice service we offer a holistic service. We do this by looking at the whole picture. We find that for some people moving forward means that multiple issues may need to be resolved, sometimes in a short space of time. This can be a really challenging process, particularly for anyone who may be vulnerable through ill health or have complex needs.



We can give advice during these one hour sessions on almost every inquiry area and a further appointment can be made if needed.

We can help clients to complete applications for sickness and disability benefits and challenge decisions – we have one successful outcome already representing a client at an appeal for limited capability for work.

We can help people to maximise income and manage a tenancy to empower them to move forward free from debt.

' We can give advice during these one hour sessions on almost every enquiry area and a further appointment can be made if needed".

'Clients are supported by the MIND team to engage with our service and this support has been invaluable to the success of the project'

Our Money Adviser has already completed one Debt Relief Order (DRO) application, with another scheduled for the end of the month. In some cases we can also help our clients to access a grant for the £90 DRO fee as for some, the cost of this fee is a real barrier to moving on from debt worries.

We also work with partners locally and across Hertfordshire to make appropriate referrals so that our clients have all the support they may need to manage future challenges – and the support provided by Herts MIND Network is absolutely key to this.

Summary of our End of Year Impact Report for Citizens Advice Hertfordshire

'This year alone, we have supported 46,966 residents across the county with 159,189 issues and secured £49,302,760 in financial gains.'

Working closely with Hertfordshire County Council over the last 12 months has enabled our service to provide vital support for Hertfordshire residents to help them through the Cost of Living Crisis. Each local office plays a vital role in this effective delivery model, our insights and holistic approach enable us to address local issues.

The last 12 months have continued to present challenges and uncertainty for all of our residents. We have continued to provide a robust service, adapting to changes quickly and effectively.

Having offices in each district within the county means we are able to identify trends and provide targeted support to those communities that need us most.

Top Five Issues:

- Utilities and Communication
- Charitable Support and Foodbanks
- Benefits and Tax Credits
- Debt
- Universal Credit

Our Projects in Numbers

Our Crisis Intervention Service has continued to give residents support through some very challenging times in the last 12 months:

- 4,531 unique residents supported
- £1.9m secured in financial gains
- 96% financially better off
- 96% improved wellbeing
- 98% able to access advice that suited their needs

Our British Sign Language (BSL) project provides an opportunity for deaf people to get advice in BSL:

- 181 unique residents supported
- £336,451 secured in financial gains
- 91% financially better off
- 99% improved wellbeing
- 100% able to access appropriate advice

Our Welfare Benefit Appeals project continues to support clients within Hertfordshire where unfair and incorrect benefit decisions are made:

- 381 unique residents supported
- £352,495 achieved in financial gains
- 96% success at appeal

Our Projects in Numbers

A partnership between Citizens Advice Hertfordshire and the Money Advice Unit, the Hertfordshire Economic Recovery Team, works with the most vulnerable residents who need debt and benefits advice

- 522 clients helped with 3,133 issues

Our team have helped clients to get £1,247,495 worth of debt stabilised and under control.

£537,033 worth of debts were written off and £134,720 in addition income enabling clients to move forward in a financially sustainable way.

Citizens Advice Herts has continued as a distributor of the Household Support Fund vouchers funded by the DWP to those in our community that have struggled most because of the rising cost of living.

The demand for vouchers has remained high as households have dealt with the impact of increased food and energy costs on their financial situation.

We are pleased to have been able to work with Herts County Council on such an important project this year.

"These outcomes are incredible, but we know the next 12 months are going to push our residents even further."

***Charlotte Blizzard-Welch,
Partnership and Development
Manager, Citizens Advice
Hertfordshire***

Specialist Employment Service

Citizens Advice Stevenage offers Hertfordshire residents a Specialist Employment Service at all stages of the Tribunal process.

There is a 'pay as you go' fee for this service. The Employment team offer a free assessment of any claims. If we do not think you have a viable claim, we will tell you and you pay nothing.

Following the assessment, Citizens Advice Stevenage can offer a Specialist Employment Service in any negotiations with employers and at all stages of the tribunal procedure.

If you know of anyone who might benefit from this service please email employmentlaw@caststevenage.org.uk for a referral form

'I want to thank you for all the work done during these two years. You help me through all the process to be prepared with my claim'

"Just to say I have completed reading the witness statement, which is excellent, thank you. I think you have captured everything extremely well. Thank you so much for your work on this."

The team has achieved over £2.5 million on behalf of our clients through the specialist employment service.

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advice**

Hertfordshire

How to Contact Us



**Citizens Advice Hertfordshire
Adviceline number is:**

0800 144 88 48



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their services.**



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Cath.Bennett@hertscitizensadvice.org.uk**