

**citizens
advice**

**Rotherham
& District**

Whoever you are and
whatever your problem we'll
help you find a wayforward.

A Message from our Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to our 2023/24 impact report. The last year was another where we experienced challenge, change and uncertainty. We have faced inflation, war in Europe, a continued housing crisis, a cost of living crisis and rapid advancements in technology. Despite these, I am proud to have been leading Citizens Advice Rotherham & District (CARD) over this past year and seeing the positive impact we have made.

This has been my first year here at CARD as CEO and what a year it has been. We have increased our reach across Rotherham through various outreaches working with other key organisations and charities. This has helped us reach those most vulnerable who are unable to travel or access our service via telephone or digital. With the cost of living crisis and other challenges we have seen the demand for advice increase which we have confronted by generating more opportunities for volunteers to support this demand.

The cost of living crisis did not just affect our clients but our staff too which had a negative impact on our service as we saw staff leave to seek higher paid work. This was hard to address with limited funding available also through cut backs. This year we have made challenging decisions to invest more into our valued team and this is now showing impressive growth to our staff retention which in turn is having a positive effect on our project outcomes.

In the last 12 months we have received additional financial support through funders including Voluntary Action Rotherham, local authority, Citizens Advice, Reaching Communities and Awards for All. We have used this funding to expand our advice service provision, offering varied routes into advice including innovative digital ways and outreaches.

We are extremely grateful to all our funders and supporters, especially Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council who awarded us with a further three year grant to provide much needed advice in our local community.

Looking forward we need to pursue further opportunities and develop new projects which will support us in being available for everyone who needs free advice in the coming years. This is only possible with the support of our passionate and committed team and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all their hard work over the past 12 months.



Duncan Gall
Chief Executive Officer

Citizens Advice
Rotherham & District

Our Impact in Numbers

Number of clients helped

9165



The top three areas we gave advice in were:

Benefits & Tax Credits 4,971

Universal Credit 4,855

Debt 3,861



Debts written off

£453,544



Income Gained

£5,257,635

Total number of volunteer days in our service

201.5



2023

April

Secured funding for the second year of the Open Arms project

Obtained funding for an advice outreach at Clifton Learning Partnership, allowing us to support the Roma Community

Sourced continued funding for our Cancer Advocacy Service

Welcomed our new CEO, Duncan Gall

2023 Year Overview

** Please note names and some details within our case studies have been changed to protect anonymity.*

Case Study: Social Prescribing

Lorraine*, a 68 year old client, lived alone and had been referred by Voluntary Action Rotherham for a benefits check. Lorraine* was receiving PIP at the enhanced rate for daily living and mobility. However, she was struggling financially and wondered if she may be entitled to any other benefits.

After an initial call with our adviser, a benefit check revealed that Lorraine* should be entitled to Pension Credit. As a result of this, our adviser arranged a home visit where they helped Lorraine* complete the online application. The application was successful and Lorraine* was awarded Pension Credit of £294.00 every 4 weeks. This also meant she would be entitled to the maximum help with Council tax Support as well as additional help in the form of warm home/cold weather payments. Lorraine* would also no longer have to pay for her dental treatment or eye tests. Overall, Lorraine* was very grateful for the help provided by our Social Prescribing team.

I was very grateful for the help provided by the Social Prescribing Team

Lorraine*

Client

This unique experience has allowed me to contribute to our shared goals in a meaningful and fulfilling way.

Martha Onyenagubo

IT and Social Media Support Volunteer

The past 12 months have provided a challenging landscape for volunteering with low levels of interest shown as well as difficulties in volunteer retention. However, we remain hopeful as 2024 is already looking to be a great success with two new volunteers already actively working within their desired roles. Including Martha, our first volunteer to join us in a non-advice role as our IT and Social Media Support .

Case Study: Immigration Casework

Marta* was currently living within the UK without any immigration status. She had already made multiple applications to the EU settlement scheme that had been unsuccessful. In July 2023, Marta* had been refused her grant of status as she had not responded to a Home Office Caseworker's request for evidence. Marta* explained to our Immigration Caseworker that due to a number of health issues that she was experiencing at the time, she had been unable to gather the appropriate evidence for the Caseworker.

After this application Marta* tried to apply twice more, both of these applications were rejected as invalid by the Home Office as they didn't agree that Marta's reasonings were good enough justification for a late application.

Our Immigration Caseworker agreed to represent Marta* and supported her to find suitable evidence to show she met the visa requirements. Whilst ensuring that Marta* could evidence her reasons for applying late.

A new application was submitted by Citizens Advice Rotherham and District on Marta's* behalf in February 2024. This application has been accepted by the Home Office and the evidence that our Immigration Caseworker helped Marta* provide should be enough for her to be granted indefinite leave to remain status. Throughout the whole process Marta* was very concerned that she may need to leave the UK even though she had lived here for more than half of her life. Marta* is now much happier with her prospects in the UK and is looking forward to being able to work and gain more independence.

Volunteering at CARD

Our service would be nothing without our amazing volunteers' hard work and support. At present we currently have 13 trained volunteers assisting in the delivery of our service, ensuring that the people of Rotherham can access the help they require.

June

A week celebrating our volunteers with afternoon tea at Hellaby Hall



July

Secured continued funding for our advice outreach at Shiloh, that focuses on supporting the homeless.

Our team away day at Yorkshire Wildlife Park



September

A weekend spent at the Rotherham Show taking time to speak with members of our local community



October

Expanded our reach to Kiveton Park as we saw another advice centre close in the area

Commenced our 5th year partnership with Sheffield Hallam University where students complete a 19 week placement with us

November

Our pilot at Crossroads began to highlight the need for a form filling provision

Service level agreement signed and funding from Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council awarded for the next 3 years

2024

January

Awarded funding to deliver the Healthwatch Rotherham Service for the next 3 years

February

Initial plans began for office move to Upper Millgate

April

Who we have supported in 2023/24

23,341

the number of issues faced by our clients



9471

the number of cases worked on by our team



45%

of our clients experienced a long-term health condition



£453,544

worth of debt written off



£5,257,635

total income gained

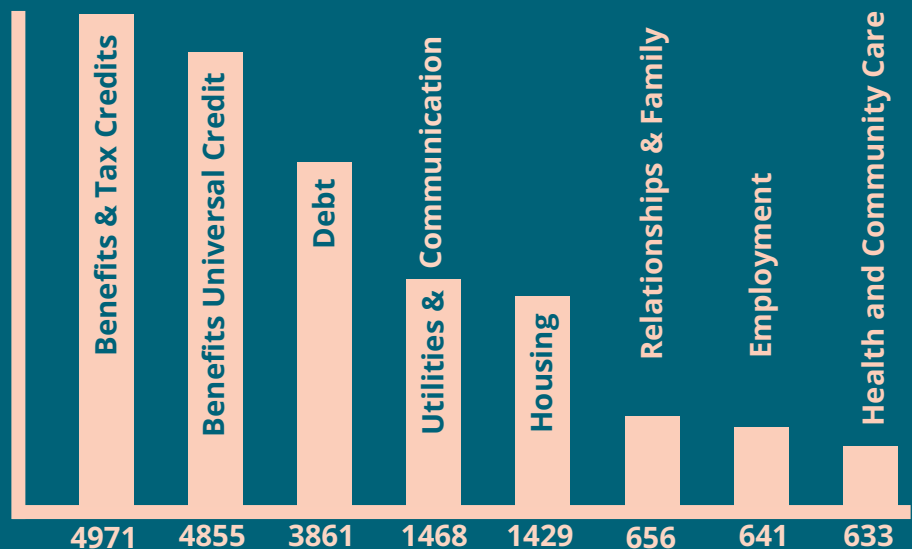


2.5

the average number of issues faced by each of our clients



Issues Faced



Top Three Benefit Issues

First **30%**
Initial Claim

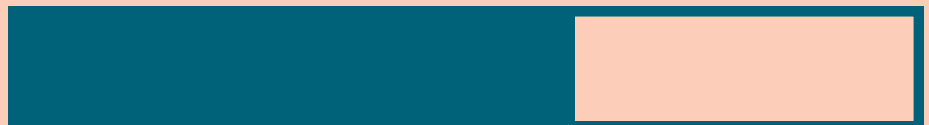
Second **19%**
PIP

Third **7%**
General Benefit Entitlement

Gender

57% Female

43% Male



Demand for our services over the years

2023 to 2024

9165

2022 to 2023

12,384

2021 to 2022

10,389

2020 to 2021

7004

2019 to 2020

10,119

2018 to 2019

6609

 **26%**

decrease in demand for our service. However, the issues we now see clients facing are much more complicated.

 **2023/24**

saw us experience a similar demand for our service as the year 2021/22. Our data therefore reflects the Cost of Living Crisis. As although, we have overcome the peak of the crisis our clients are still experiencing the impact of this.

Looking to the Future

As we move into the new financial year of 2024, we reflect back on all of the highs and lows over the past year and take lessons learnt to build and develop for the future.

We have exciting plans ahead of us with a new premises opening in July 2024, offering more opportunity for in person support for our most vulnerable clients. We envisage that our new home will increase our volunteer count as we will be offering a larger variety of volunteer opportunities.

We plan to develop our service, moving with the rapid changes of technology, exploring AI and other digital ways to support our clients. This may include new ways to provide advice through web chat and email as well as develop new advanced booking systems to make the journey for clients much more streamlined.

Whilst taking on new ventures we will continue to run our service, projects and develop new ways to advise clients through new projects. We already have some exciting new partnerships forming to enable us to deliver advice in various ways and locations across the borough.

A huge focus for us this year than ever before is our fundraising and communications strategy. We want to diversify our approach to fundraising. We have a long list of new adventures including fun runs, the setting up of donations and corporate fundraising. We want to promote our service as much as possible to celebrate our charitable work and recruit supporters that will contribute towards our sustainability.