

# The case for advice

## **People need advice services now more than ever**

Unexpected events such as illness or redundancy can throw lives off course. Losing your job is a stressful event which can lead to money problems, worries about housing costs and relationship breakdown<sup>1</sup>. When faced with these problems, people need advice. Local authorities are experiencing large increases in demand for debt and welfare advice services, social housing and provision for the unemployed<sup>2</sup>. In the last year advice enquiries in areas such as housing, employment, welfare benefits and debt have risen by nearly a fifth<sup>3</sup>. Without the help that the advice sector provides, many people will be unable to cope and will face poverty and destitution.

## **Without advice, people's problems can escalate and cost the public purse more**

The average cost to the public of one person's debt problem (including lost economic output) is estimated to be over £1,000, with more serious debt problems costing many times this amount<sup>4</sup>.

Homelessness and the problems typically associated with it can cost the state thousands of pounds in temporary accommodation, health services, police and criminal justice services and lost output through unemployment<sup>5</sup>. The average quantifiable cost of a mortgage repossession is £16,000<sup>6</sup>.

## **The advice sector reaches the most disadvantaged**

The sector includes national organisations, such as Shelter, and local centres such as Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centres. Most advice agencies are rooted in their communities. Some focus on particular groups such as young people, older people, disabled people and ethnic minority communities.

**advice**  
**services**  
**alliance**



# The contribution that advice makes

Advice has a positive impact on at least four aspects of our lives:

- **health and well-being**
- **creating opportunity**
- **promoting fairness and overcoming disadvantage**
- **improving public services and cutting waste.**

There is a growing body of research evidence to support this.



## Health and well-being

“It does save lives, literally, literally saves lives you know and I think that can’t be said enough.”

**Housing advice client**

There can now be no doubt that problems lead to ill health and to increased burdens on health services.

Research<sup>7</sup> published in 2006 found that adverse physical and mental health consequences follow over a third of civil justice problems and that



27% of civil justice problems led to stress-related illness. Nearly a quarter of the people affected by stress sought medical treatment, with an average of 9 visits each to a general practitioner.

Advice services can have a positive impact on health and can alleviate the pressure on medical services. A report on the impact of debt advice<sup>8</sup> found that 12 months after receiving debt advice two thirds of participants stated that their health had improved. 90% of those said that this improvement was strongly associated with the advice they received.

Advice agencies have developed services in conjunction with health services. In a study of advice delivered in GPs’ surgeries in Wales, 73% of surgeries felt that “the advice worker had taken a lot of work off the shoulders of health workers and thus released them for other activities<sup>9</sup>.”

**Mr Llewelyn is a retired farmer. He lives in a small rural community. Most shops and services are in the nearest town, over 15 miles away. He developed a serious lung condition that left him breathless and meant that he found walking difficult. He was unable to manage a lot of his personal care tasks without help from his wife.**

**He phoned Age UK after his claim for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) was refused. Age UK helped Mr Llewelyn get medical evidence from his GP and represented him at the appeal tribunal. The refusal was overturned and Mr Llewelyn was awarded the Higher Rate of DLA and a backdated payment of £1,075.**

**Age UK advised Mr Llewelyn that he was eligible for a range of other benefits including the Warm Front grant scheme, a blue badge for disabled parking and exemption from road tax.**

- 1 *Recession and demand for civil legal services* Pleasence P, Balmer J, Focus 60, June 2009
- 2 *Council Leader survey on the impact of the economic downturn on local authorities* Local Government Association, March 2009
- 3 Citizens Advice annual advice statistics 2009/10 [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/pressoffice/press\\_index/press\\_20100517.htm](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/pressoffice/press_index/press_20100517.htm)
- 4 *A helping hand: The impact of debt advice on people’s lives* Pleasence P, Buck A, Balmer J, Williams K, LSRC 2007 [www.lsrc.org.uk/publications/Impact.pdf](http://www.lsrc.org.uk/publications/Impact.pdf)
- 5 *How Many, How Much? Single homelessness and the question of numbers and cost* Kenway P, Palmer G, Crisis 2003  
Looking at 6 different homelessness scenarios Crisis found that the cost ranged between £4,500 and £83,000 per individual scenario
- 6 *Homeowners Support Package Impact Assessments*, DCLG, September 2008
- 7 *Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice* (2nd edition) Pleasence P, 2006, page 60, TSO
- 8 *Impact of debt advice – advice agency client study* Williams K, Sansom A, Ministry of Justice Research Series No.6/07, August 2007
- 9 *Welfare Advice in General Practice – The Better Advice Better Health Project in Wales* Borland J, Owens D, 2004



## Creating opportunity

A large proportion of people working in the advice sector do so on a voluntary basis. Around 40% of advice organisations have between 1 and 10 volunteers and 20% of organisations have 11 to 20 volunteers<sup>10</sup>. Volunteering promotes economic development, enables active citizenship and increases social involvement<sup>11</sup>.



### Leela's story

**"After being at home with my two young children for many years I was keen to get back to work. The CAB offered me the opportunity to do stimulating and challenging work and to receive personal fulfilment from helping others. Volunteering helped me to build my confidence in the workplace again, offered well-supported training and hours that fitted with my home commitments.**

**Without that experience I wouldn't have had the confidence to apply for teacher training and the voluntary work at the CAB was looked on very favourably by the university.**

**But the best thing about volunteering was the friendships I made and the sense of community I felt."**

Research<sup>12</sup> with young people found that legal problems act as barriers to study, work and enjoying and achieving in life. 35% of young people interviewed reported increased engagement in education, employment and training as a result of getting advice<sup>13</sup>.

**"I would have been homeless. [Now] my outlook has changed, I know that I need to do things for myself ... I don't get into trouble now."**

**Young people's advice agency client**

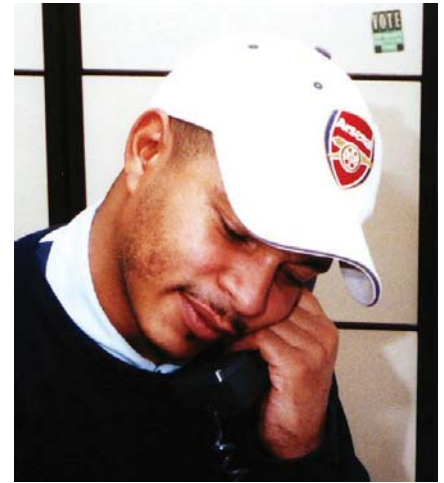
## Promoting fairness and overcoming disadvantage

**"I wanted justice against my employer. When I worked for them I tried my best. When I needed help from them, they didn't help me."**

**Employment advice client**

In a democracy, the law protects our civil liberties and our rights. Disadvantaged people, in particular, need help to safeguard their rights as, more than most, they rely on the law to protect their personal safety, homes and incomes.

It is important that the law is seen to be fair and that everyone, regardless of their means and personal characteristics, is confident of having equal access to justice.



**Lucio worked as a hospital porter. He suffered serious racial abuse and name-calling from his supervisor and manager for two years. He tried to deal with the problem by himself but his employer was adamant he didn't have a case. By the time he went to his local CAB he was depressed, anxious, was losing sleep and his doctor had put him on medication.**

**The CAB solicitor helped Lucio take a grievance against the employer but the employer ignored it so he issued a claim in the employment tribunal. The tribunal found that Lucio had been racially harassed and awarded him £37,500 in compensation. Since the hearing Lucio's employer has started training for all staff to prevent any future occurrences of harassment or bullying.**

**It meant a lot to Lucio that the tribunal had found he'd been telling the truth. He is now off medication and getting his life back on track.**

10 *Advice Forward: developing skills for the future*, ADP Consultancy, 2006

11 *Volunteering works*, Institute for Volunteering Research and Volunteering England, September 2007

12 *Transforming Lives: Youth Access' Rights to Access Project* Michael Bell Associates Research & Consultancy, 2007

13 *Youth Advice Outcomes Pilot*, Widdowson B, Del Tufo S, and Hansford L, Evaluation Trust for Youth Access, 2010

**Mike had lost everything. The haulage company he worked for had gone bust and the lorry he lived in had been repossessed.**

**After ten days on the streets and with only 17p to his name, he was put in touch with the local Law Centre. The Law Centre solicitor helped him to get housed and to obtain a grant to furnish his new place.**

**As a result, Mike started to feel much more positive and volunteered to help out at the Law Centre as a receptionist and handyman. Soon, he was applying for jobs. He credits the Law Centre with saving his life.**

## Improving public services and cutting waste

Advice agencies see the effects of poor public service delivery on clients. They play an important role in feeding back to government where things are going wrong and helping to improve public services.

In Nottingham, a group of advice agencies, working with AdviceUK, identified that over 30% of their capacity is taken up dealing with demand that is generated by the failure of external organisations to act or get something right for clients<sup>14</sup>. They are now working together with public bodies to identify ways to minimise unnecessary demand, support service improvement, reduce the cost of administration, and produce better outcomes for local people.



**Gloria suffers from multiple sclerosis. She was living on her own but was finding it increasingly difficult to look after herself and was worried that she would have to move into residential care.**

**Her son wanted to move in to help with her care but Gloria was worried that this might mean that her income would be reduced as the council had told her she would lose her housing and council tax benefit.**

**Gloria went to her local DIAL (Disability Information and Advice Line) for advice. They carried out a full benefits check and told her that she would not lose her housing and council tax benefit if her son moved in to care for her. They also discovered that the DWP had not been paying her all the benefits she was entitled to and helped her to make a claim for backdated benefits.**

**Gloria is now better off and her son has moved in with her and is helping her with her care.**



14 AdviceUK, *Radically Re-thinking Advice Services in Nottingham* Interim Report of the Nottingham Systems Thinking Pilot, November 2009

## Advice Services Alliance

6th Floor, 63 St Mary Axe, London EC3A 8AA  
Tel: 020 7398 1470 • info@asauk.org.uk • www.asauk.org.uk

Company Limited by Guarantee No. 3533317. Registered Charity No. 1112627.



LOTTERY FUNDED

**The following organisations are full members of the Advice Services Alliance:**

AdviceUK • Age UK • Citizens Advice • DIAL UK (Disability Information and Advice Line)  
Law Centres Federation • Shelter • Shelter Cymru • Youth Access

August 2010