



RCJ advice

RCJ Advice & Citizens Advice Islington: Impact Report 2020/21

Website: www.rcjadvise.org.uk / www.islingtoncab.org

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Foreword

Welcome to our report. We are an independent charity with a number of important local and national projects. Over the past 40 years we have grown strongly within the CAB family into a unique organisation that can give legal advice as well as practical guidance. Today there is unfortunately a huge demand for our varied and innovative services, which bring effective relief to individuals and families facing misfortune, injustice, destitution or despair.

On their behalf, I thank our loyal funders, our committed volunteer legal advisers, our dedicated trustees, and our skilled professional staff. Together we are using our resources and experience to change lives for the better and contribute towards a fairer society.

We can harness the experience of our own teams with the expertise of the many lawyers who give their services pro bono, and our Citizens Advice volunteers, a combination that brings great public benefit and value.

Lord Justice Peter Jackson
Chair of Trustees

Welcome

At our festive celebration meal in December 2019, attended by staff and volunteers. I gave a short thank-you speech and ended by saying 'the next year is going to be such a challenge for people, and if anyone can respond, we can'.

Little did we know what 2020/21 would bring. As this report demonstrates, I wasn't wrong. Like many other not-for-profit advice agencies we have been exceptional in responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Although we changed IT provider just days before lockdown, with the dedication of everyone involved with RCJ Advice and Citizens Advice Islington we never failed to deliver the legal advice people needed.

I am so proud of everything that is detailed in this report and of everyone who has contributed to the achievements: Citizens Advice Islington volunteers, civil and family pro bono lawyer volunteers, staff across all our services, and my Senior Management colleagues, who led the changes.

We are committed to responding to the priority legal needs of individuals and families and I hope that when you read this report you will share our view that we are strongly placed to tackle inequality and achieve justice for the many people who need our help.

Alison Lamb
Chief Executive



'We never failed to deliver.'

Who we are

RCJ Advice is a charity. Our purpose is to promote the advancement of education, the protection and preservation of health, and the relief of poverty, sickness, and distress. Within this wide national mission, we particularly seek to benefit those who have business at the Royal Courts of Justice (RCJ) or those who live in the London Borough of Islington.

What we deliver

Civil Advice

In civil law proceedings, legal advice to litigants in person through our civil solicitors and pro bono lawyers.

- This is primarily funded by the Ministry of Justice, through the 'Litigants in Person Support Strategy.'

Legal advice in civil matters is provided through these our services:

Immigration consultancy

- Funded through a grant from National Citizens Advice.

Miscarriages of justice

- Advice and support for victims, funded by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service.

Employment Legal Advice Service (ELAS)

- Funded initially by the Community Justice Fund.

Bankruptcy and money advice services

- Funded initially through Therium Access and delivered through our Central London County Court bankruptcy desk.

Housing advice

- For those facing homelessness, repossession of their home, disrepairs or matters relating to anti-social behaviour.

Family Advice

In family law matters, delivered through our family team and our pro bono lawyers. Also funded through the Litigant in Person Support Strategy

A range of family projects in these areas:

Domestic abuse

- ♦ FLOWS (Finding Legal Options for Women Survivors), a national legal advice service targeted at frontline workers and individual women, using the award-winning CourtNav FL401, funded by the Ministry of Justice to support victims of domestic abuse, as part of government's emergency COVID-19 response.

Parenting courses

- ♦ Delivering a course that help parents understand how they can put their children first whilst separating through a contract from CAFCASS to deliver Separated Parent Information Programmes (SPIPs) across London.

Legal advice

- ♦ Delivering legal advice to Support through Court clients in a pilot that is funded through the Ministry of Justice LIP 3 funding.

Child contact

- ♦ Time Together, the only child contact centre based in a court, which offers supported and supervised child contact from within the Central London Family Court and is funded as part of our Litigant in Person Support Strategy.

Social Welfare Advice

To Islington Residents through Citizens Advice Islington, funded by Islington Council:

Advice line delivery as a first point of access

Generalist advice appointments

Specialist advice in welfare benefits, housing and debt

- ♦ Our debt team, funded as part of the Debt Free London partnership, is based in Islington.

Delivery of help to claim for Universal Credit

- ♦ Funded through Citizens Advice.

Outreach services across the borough

- ♦ Funded through Cripplegate Foundation.



**The
Royal
Courts
of
Justice**

Achievements and Performance

2020/21 was a year like no other. As a result of the pandemic, we moved to remote working to ensure the safety of staff, volunteers and service users. Despite these unprecedented times, each of our services, and the staff and volunteers working within them did a superb job at responding to the legal and support needs arising in such challenging circumstances.

At all times we were driven by our core mission, whereby:



We exist to tackle inequality and poverty through the delivery of national and local legal advice, support and information, that ensures people resolve the issues that affect their lives.

In 2020/21 our strategic plan consisted of four main goals:

Aim 1: Ensuring that more Litigants in Person across England and Wales are able to access civil and family legal advice through a variety of channels, helping to ensure justice and meet the varying needs of service users.

Aim 2: Ensuring that vulnerable people can achieve justice through advice, information and complementary support, and that we draw attention to the barriers they face.

Aim 3: Citizens Advice Islington will enhance access to quality advice by working collaboratively in the community to ensure local residents receive the holistic support packages they need.

Aim 4: Becoming a stronger and more efficient organisation where staff and volunteers receive the resources they need to do a good job and where we are recognised as providing responsive and quality assured service to clients.

Aim 1

Ensuring that more Litigants in Person across England and Wales can access civil and family legal advice through a variety of channels, helping to ensure justice and meet the varying needs of service users.

- We are one of several partners contributing to a support strategy for Litigants in Person (LIPs) in England & Wales.
- Alongside partners such as Support through Court, Law Works, Law for Life, and Advocate (together with the Access to Justice Foundation) we are working collaboratively to address the needs of LIPs in civil and family courts.
- Our role is to deliver legal advice to LIPs, including representation via our facilitation of pro bono rotas and family support such as Time Together.

Civil Legal Services delivered from our Royal Courts of Justice site:

In 2020/21 we assisted 4175 people with 7158 enquiries: a 150% increase in people helped from the previous calendar year. This year also saw a noticeable increase in the number of people outside of London using our service.

Legal advice on our civil rota is delivered with the support of over 50 city law firms whose solicitors provide free legal advice daily. Our own solicitors support this work and deliver advice in complex cases.

A further 362 enquiries were dealt with by our London County Court desk, providing bankruptcy and debt advice.

I would just like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the timely and valuable advice and support given by your team, when I recently found myself in unfamiliar legal territory and procedures.



Jane's story

Jane was seeking to bring a disability discrimination claim against her housing provider, alleging that she had been harassed over the storage of her mobility scooter outside her house. This was despite the fire service having deemed this storage safe. Her housing provider had not provided Jane with suitable alternative storage. Jane sought an injunction against having to remove the mobility scooter. In contrast, having made allegations of anti-social behaviour, the housing provider sought a penal notice. The notice, if issued, would have had potentially severe consequences for Jane, including amounting to a breach of tenancy, such that she could be evicted. Jane felt both frightened and limited in her ability to fight the application for a penal notice. Our solicitor helped Jane to draft letters to the Defendant and the court, with our housing legal aid team then taking over to represent Jane, and she was delighted when she won the case.



Asim's story

Asim is a 45-year-old builder, married with one dependent child. Asim owns his home jointly with his wife. Following a service of a statutory demand on him by two ex-customers, Asim was facing the prospect of bankruptcy. Prior to the bankruptcy petition hearing, a member of court staff informed him about the RCJ Bankruptcy Advice Service. Our team was able to successfully oppose the bankruptcy petition. We worked to prepare witness statement and other documents, which resulted in the petition being dismissed. Asim was overjoyed and said his family could finally sleep well again.

Housing advice service:

Our Housing and Debt contract from the Legal Aid Agency has responded to housing queries through contacts based in Westminster and Islington. We also deliver an innovative preventative homelessness service with Citizens Advice Enfield and base a solicitor with them who works to ensure private and social tenants do not have to go to court.

Jan's story



Jan, with a history of depression and anxiety, was a social housing tenant. His landlord had issued a county court possession claim on rent arrears ground. During this period, Jan was working part-time in retail with an unstable income. Legal aid was granted, and we wrote to his landlord to draw attention to this unstable pattern of payment, caused by Jan's employer having been placed into administration. We also requested the employer withdraw the mandatory ground prior to the hearing. A District Judge approved the consent order agreed by the parties, adjourning the matter generally on terms manageable for Jan.

Unfortunately, Jan became unemployed prior to the first lockdown, and struggled to navigate through the Universal Credit system due to lack of technological access. His landlord served a Reactivation Notice, due once again to insufficient payment having been made to cover the full rent, and the amount agreed towards the rent arrears.

We asked his landlord to consider in detail the question of reasonableness, and in particular, the available welfare benefits. A new consent order (with a variation to the sum expected from Jan that considered his true financial circumstances) was agreed, placed before a Judge and approved.

Jan said that his history of depression and his financial circumstances would have made it difficult for him to find other accommodation if he was evicted from his property.

Immigration advice service:

Our immigration legal advice services dealt with 2168 queries across England and Wales in 2020/21 (a 50% increase in demand on 2019/20.) Our immigration team also deliver legal advice in Windrush cases and in this financial year worked on 12 Windrush cases.

Nehir's story



20-year-old Nehir is a Turkish national with 'applicant' visa status. Working part time, Nehir contacted adviceline for help with an immigration issue; Nehir had completed a masters in December 2019 whilst possessing a Tier 4 general student visa which expired January 2021. Nehir applied for a Turkish Businessperson (TBP) visa in December 2020 and is waiting for a response. This would allow self-employment only.

Nehir cannot leave the country with her current 'applicant' immigration status and cannot find work to sponsor her. She is aware of a scheme that was announced in 2019, starting June 2021, that will allow international students to apply for a visa but initially she could not find information.

We obtained advice from our RCJ Advice Advisor immigration helpline which provided a comprehensive response confirming that Nehir has continuing Tier 4 status based on her TBP application and will be eligible for the Graduate immigration route. Nehir responded: 'This is the best news I've heard in 2021! Words don't suffice to express my gratitude. Thank you.'

Employment advice service:

In December 2020, we introduced a new Employment Legal Advice Service (ELAS) in This service was developed in response to issues arising as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and from December 2020 to March 2021 we assisted 185 people

ELAS has successfully reached people in low paid employment, living in deprived communities. 34% of our clients are white British, whilst 66% represent various other diverse ethnicities. 31% of our clients are disabled.

Having a worker also based in our Citizens Advice Islington service means we are closely linked to a wide number of communities groups, and have responded to COVID-19 related queries including reasonable adjustments for health and safety (13%), unfair dismissals (13%), discrimination (34%), and furlough scheme problems (28%).

ELAS has made an astonishing impact, negotiating 27 settlements and gaining £238K for clients, with a further £563K value in offers to be settled.

We also work to achieve system change: working with LawWorks in group litigation for the victims of a complex furlough fraud involving loan agreements obtained by duress.





Sheila's story

Sheila suffered an injury at work in 2014 and developed a disability because of cervical spondylosis and the subsequent operation to correct it. In 2019 she was dismissed by her manager on the grounds that she was too disabled to do the work. This left Sheila in a dismal financial position.

When Sheila came to us her Employment Tribunal (ET) claim had not progressed as the ET said that she had entered the incorrect plea. We advised Sheila to proceed by bringing an unfair dismissal claim. Prior to the tribunal hearing, Sheila was very stressed as she had found it difficult to write her witness statement. Working with Sheila, we revised the witness statement over the course of three days, leading to a 14000 word, fully referenced and paragraphed statement which counsel described as "excellent".

We also helped refer Sheila to a personal injury solicitor and helped explain to Sheila how to both draft a 'Schedule of loss,' and meet disclosure obligations as regards the personal injury claim.

Ultimately, Sheila successfully made out her claim and received a compensatory remedy of £34,000.



Family advice services delivered from our Central London Family Court site:

Our family legal rota advised 1885 people and responded to 11166 enquiries in 2020/21. The daily rota is delivered by experienced family solicitors who give their time pro bono. Our own solicitors support this rota and deliver legal advice appointments for more complex cases.

We also have a legal aid contract which primarily targets domestic abuse cases when a survivor is unable to find a solicitor.

We expanded the reach of our family legal advice by working together with 'Support through Court' to draw attention to the barriers faced by those trying to navigate the courts system alone and deliver family legal advice to clients through several of their court-based services.

Frieda's story



Frieda's sister (a single parent) died earlier this year, leaving behind four dependent, school-age children. Frieda immediately moved into their home to care for the children. Her sister knew that she wanted to take care of the children and felt that their home was the best place for them to be raised. Instinctively, Frieda did not think adopting the children would be the most appropriate course of action as she believed it important that they knew and interacted with their father but at the same time was committed to doing her best by the children and looking after them.

Frieda had never visited a court and did not really know where to start when it came to law. As such, she took the following steps:

- Consulted her local Citizens Advice Bureau who made her aware of the options available including pursuing special guardianship as well as adoption.
- Once Frieda knew her options, she did research online. Frieda found some useful information but nothing specific about her issues (particularly housing).
- Frieda also spoke to the local authority and found that in order to transfer tenancy of the children's home she needed to have custody of the children.
- Frieda then rang the local authority Special Guardianship office who confirmed that special guardianship was an option and Frieda ought to start with a Child Arrangement Order.
- Frieda called the 'Support through Court' phone line and they told her about the form to use for a Child Arrangement Order (C100) and how to access this form. They also made an appointment for Frieda to see our RCJ Advice solicitor.

Legal advice from RCJ Advice:


- Our solicitor talked through all the steps for the child arrangements and the special guardianship application.
- Frieda reported that 'Your solicitors know the C100 back to front' and felt relieved when she knew she could make an urgent application as the children's father was not resident in the country.
- Our solicitor also told Frieda about the court process and how it would work.

FLAWS

FLAWS is our national Domestic Abuse Legal Service designed to support victims of domestic abuse and those on the frontline working with survivors. We employ solicitors and paralegals on a full-time basis to deliver this service.

We also work in partnership with both 'Rights of Women' who deliver a discussion forum and lead on policy work and the 'North-East Law Centre' who employ our FLOWS solicitors operating within Newcastle and the North-East.

FLAWS assisted 7218 women, responding to 15657 enquiries in 2020/21 whilst also successfully supporting 2399 front line workers.



The Flows adviser was amazing, she has helped me through one of the toughest moments of my life. I don't think I would have been able to do it without her help. Flows is an amazing organisation and women who suffer from domestic violence can count on you. You provide an excellent service.



“

Farida's story

Our FLOWSl ine received a telephone call from Farida who was very emotional. Her partner had told her that if she did not give him money, he would stab and kill her. This was one of several incidents over the years. Farida felt isolated due to the pandemic. The police were called, and her partner was arrested. However, the police later took no further action

Farida could not afford the legal aid contribution and therefore we advised and supported Farida throughout the process via CourtNav. Her hearing was dealt with remotely and the Judge granted a without notice application, non-molestation order and occupation order. Farida now has legal protection in place for one year. Farida told us that she would not have been able to come this far in her life without FLOWS and hopes one day she could say to another survivor 'to be brave and keep going'. Farida told us that she has now gained confidence and will be applying for a divorce. Our family legal team will assist with this.

The combined achievements of our legal services

Our contribution to the Litigant in Person Strategy for 20120/2021 was exceptional:

We delivered legal advice, support, and representation to 6030 individuals in 2020/2021 compared to 3590 individuals the previous year: a 68% overall increase which saw our team and our pro bono volunteers delivering advice by phone, zoom and email, addressing 22811 enquiries across England and Wales.

Our legal advice services taken together worked exceptionally hard and were extremely responsive to advice needs: reaching 16065 people compared to 7380 clients in 2019/20: a 118% increase.

This increase can in part be attributed to moving quickly to providing remote advice, which would not have been possible without thanks to our operational team, a dramatic increase in domestic abuse legal queries and the introduction of new services (such as employment) in response to COVID-19.

Our civil and family rotas would not exist without the support of the City Law Firms and the family solicitors. We, and the many clients they help, are grateful to them.

170 voluntary Honorary Legal Advisers gave their time to deliver free legal advice for our clients, and all successfully moved to phone appointments during this year.

We found:

- Our Pro bono volunteers were very positive about the move to phone appointments, and we thank all the volunteers who gave their time and skills to assist our clients.
- Our civil and family front line teams responded by producing processes and tools to aid remote working which included the creation of an online rota booking, document review in advance of appointments and utilising encrypted document sharing
- Service users responded well, and non-attendance was rare.

Pro bono representation was limited as most hearings were conducted remotely. The CLIPS scheme delivered by the Chancery Bar Association was the only scheme operational during this year and represented 72 Individuals. We are working with the courts to agree the return of the other advocacy schemes.

Central Family Court



The Court of Protection

Aim 2

Ensuring that vulnerable people can achieve justice through advice, information, and complementary support, and that we draw attention to the barriers they face.

Under this aim we responded to an increased need for different channels and designed support packages for specific groups, such as our national Miscarriage of Justice Support Service and adapted existing services such as Time Together and SPIPS to online delivery. With the public launch of our award winning CourtNav tool, we led on a digital initiative to support domestic abuse survivors with court applications.

Miscarriage of Justice Support Service

Our Miscarriage of Justice Support Service (MJSS) works with people who have served a prison term prior to a successful appeal against their conviction. Our team is skilled at working with group, prioritising daily contact with clients as they were particularly vulnerable during lockdown. This included a responsive text messaging service, curating a Facebook account for MJSS and producing a well-received quarterly newsletter.

The service worked with 20 vulnerable clients throughout the year. Contact was regular and consisted of 2932 phone calls, texts, and letters.

The service delivers a high level of emotional support, and we fund Local Citizens Advice partners around the country to deliver localised support.



Craig's story

Craig is a 37 year old Housing Association Tenant with complex mental health needs. He is a recipient of disability benefits. He was the victim of a miscarriage of justice. Craig requested support for furnishing and equipping his flat as well as advice regarding removing his name from the Sexual Offenders Register following a successful appeal.

Our team made charitable applications for equipment for the flat and for money towards the cost of other essential items. We liaised with national and local Police forces and the Police Public Protection Unit which had been responsible for monitoring Craig in accordance with the statutory requirements set out under the Sex Offenders Act 1997 (as amended by the Sexual Offences Act 2003).

We were successful in obtaining white goods and other kitchen equipment for Craig. In addition, following our intervention, we received confirmation from the Police Public Protection Unit that following his successful appeal, the client's Violent and Sex Offender Register record was now closed, and the Police National Computer (PNC) had been updated. In addition, we received written confirmation that the client was no longer subject to the Notification Requirements in accordance with the Sex Offenders Act and that the client no longer held the status of a registered sex offender. Craig was relieved to have this in writing and commented that after years of checks and monitoring, he was pleased to know that his ordeal was finally over.

Time Together Contact Centre

Time Together, our child contact service is the only court-based contact centre in the country. Although the number of referrals to the service dropped in 2020/21 due to lack of hearings, Time Together did still hold 90 child contact sessions via Zoom. The team is able to offer supported and/or supervised sessions which are observed, and a report is prepared for the court.

The following case study demonstrates the care and safeguarding considerations addressed to successfully deliver Zoom contact for non-residential parents and their children.

Dave's story



Dave, a father four, was referred to Time Together who were asked to set up 6 sessions of supervised contact, once every 3 weeks. Separate pre-visit meetings were set up to enable both parents and children to visit the centre, meet the staff. Both parents were positive about the referral and the support and resources Time Together could offer.

Both parents expressed concern about how to engage the children given their age and expected level of concentration. Time Together staff talked through some possible activities and strategies that could be used to keep the children involved. The children's mother shared with staff what the children's current interests were and this was passed on to Dave.

Mum acknowledged that the sessions had gone well, much better than when she tried to encourage the children to speak to their dad on the phone or WhatsApp. As the sessions progressed the children have become familiar with the format and have fully engaged with their father.

At a time when face to face contact was not possible, Zoom contact has provided an opportunity for children to reconnect with their dad and maintain the relationship until face to face contact can be safely arranged.



Separated Parent Information Programmes (SPIPS)

The Separated Parents Information Programme (SPIP) is a course which helps parents understand how to put their children first whilst separating from one another, even though they may be in dispute.

The course educates parents about the fundamental principles of managing conflict and dealing with the difficulties of a separation. Most people are referred to SPIP via CAFCASS. Usually, both parties separating are referred to complete the programme.

OUR SPIS team delivered 471 sessions over Zoom in 2020/21.

REVIEW FROM A CLIENT:

- Very professional program host who took time with each participant to explain what was needed.
- Felt there was no judgment and that the host was extremely knowledgeable and passionate who offered tailored solutions for conflict resolution.
- I am very glad I did this course and particularly appreciated being able to interact with other mothers and fathers as you can support each other and draw upon shared experiences.

CourtNav FL401

One of the digital tools we deliver played a major role in responding to the pandemic. CourtNav is an online tool developed in partnership with Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer. The tool was initially devised to respond to divorce applications. CourtNav enables an individual to create an account and answer a series of simple questions which are then used to populate the relevant court form. The user cannot access the form until a solicitor has checked it.

In addition, FLOWS responded to the dramatic increase in instances of domestic abuse, exacerbated by lockdown, by launching CourtNavFL401 to the public. Prior to this we had taken care to test this tool with both solicitor partners and potential clients.

In response to the increase in domestic abuse we:

- Worked with HMCTS to get CourtNavFL401 out to the public via Gov UK and the national Citizens Advice website.
- Enabled survivors of domestic abuse to self-register onto CourtNav so they did not need to contact us, or a front-line organisation first, which was especially helpful if they were self-isolating with their abuser
- Ensured CourtNav was available 24 hours a day thanks to our 80 domestic abuse accredited legal aid partners
- Extended the service to Wales

22636 CourtNav applications were created once CourtNav was launched in May 2020.

During 2020/21:

- 9165 survivors were made safe through CourtNav preparing for their initial statements, non-molestation, and occupation orders.
- Solicitors across the county reviewed and successfully submitted 7998 applications, with our FLOWS team reviewing 1167 applications.

CourtNav user feedback is collected whilst they are using the system and 884 respondents reported that 97% of them found CourtNav questions easy to understand, and CourtNav easy to use. We also increased the number of legal aid partners who respond 24 hours a day to CourtNav referrals from 60 in 2019/20 to 80 in 2020/21.



Rosa's story

Rosa had completed a CourtNav application. She was working full time and was unable to afford the calculated legal aid contribution. Therefore, she chose CourtNav. Rosa had been subjected to severe domestic abuse, with the most recent incident being a physical attack where she was thrown through a glass door by her now ex-partner. This resulted in significant injuries. When Rosa contacted us, the police were investigating the matter and she had protection in the form of bail conditions.

Rosa was contacted by the police to inform her that they were going to continue with their investigations but that the bail conditions would come to an end soon. This concerned Rosa greatly, as she was to be left with no protection and had a very short time she had to obtain protection in a different form..

We worked with Rosa that evening, to prepare her emergency ex-parte application for court. Using CourtNav, we were able to prepare the FL401 and a comprehensive supporting statement quickly and efficiently. Rosa was given an emergency hearing the next day and her order was granted. She informed us that she was not asked many questions by the Judge as her case was set out in the prepared statement.

Rosa was extremely grateful and relieved. Without CourtNav, she could have been left without protection for the weekend, due to the police providing her with a lack of notice that her bail conditions were to be dropped.



Aim 3

Citizens Advice Islington will enhance access to quality advice by working collaboratively in the community to ensure local residents receive the holistic support packages they need.

Our Citizens Advice Islington services assisted 6176 people with 16454 enquiries.

Welfare benefits continue to make up the highest proportion of enquiries, especially given changes to Universal Credit. We helped with 2592 welfare benefits enquiries and 5594 Universal Credit (including help to claim) queries.

We also dealt with 3321 debt enquiries, 2389 housing enquiries and 2564 employment enquiries.

Our outreach services moved to remote working, but we ensured we maintained access to advice through by working with Help on Your Doorstep.

Adviceline delivers main access to our advice services and is delivered by a small number of paid staff and volunteers. Volunteers often start on adviceline and develop key information and advice-giving skills. During the pandemic the team have worked hard to ensure continued access to information and advice as well as providing signposting to our own services and other advice agencies.

In addition to adviceline Citizens Advice Islington ensures access by delivering generalist advice both at 222 Upper Street and in outreach sites across the borough. We work closely with Help on Your Doorstep who visit people in their homes and book advice appointments. During this year all appointments were delivered by phone or Zoom and achieved considerable outcomes.

Aurelia's story



Aurelia suffers from longstanding mental health issues, including alcohol dependency. Aurelia was referred to us by Help on Your Doorstep as we had previously seen Aurelia in an outreach setting. Aurelia was a recipient of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

Having submitted a new claim for PIP without any assistance, this resulted in no award being issued resulting in a loss of income to Aurelia of £83.30 a week. In addition, she lost an additional £66.95 weekly which previously came from her Severe Disability Premium.

We assisted Aurelia in submitting an appeal to the Social Security Tribunal. The DWP swiftly reversed their decision and withdrew the case. This is particularly noteworthy due to its rarity. All benefits were fully restored and backdated by seven months – estimated to be in the region of £4,200. Aurelia was delighted.

At our main site, 222 Upper Street, we have a team of experienced volunteers who deliver generalist advice appointments. Our housing team and welfare benefits specialist are also based at 222.



Ken's story

Ken is a 50-year-old man shielding due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the help of friends, Ken submitted a claim for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) that was ultimately refused given that he was deemed to need no help with his care or mobility needs. A mandatory reconsideration had been requested by phone, but the original decision of nil award was upheld.

We contacted Ken during lockdown and assisted him in drafting an online formal appeal, submitted this to the DWP and solicited additional supporting medical evidence from his GP practice.

Our caseworker obtained a copy of the appeal bundle from Ken with which we were able to prepare a written submission to the court. Ken subsequently received a tribunal hearing date, to be conducted via telephone.

Prior to the hearing our caseworker prepared Ken over the phone explaining the tribunal's procedures and the likely questions he would face from the 3-person panel.

On 10 March Ken received the decision notice from HMCTS awarding him the enhanced rate of both PIP components. In addition, the court specified that it was to be a five-year award, which essentially gives the client some financial stability and certainty until 2024.

Our Help to Claim team is funded as part of a national Citizens Advice contract with DWP to assist people to claim universal credit. The team are based in job centres in the borough and during this year moved services to a national phone line. Our team secured £1,050,242 of Universal Credit entitlement for clients.

Our debt team was one the highest performing in volumes for the Debt Free London partnership and achieved 105% of the targets responding to over 3000 debt enquiries.



Iris and Jim's story

Elderly couple Iris and Jim, who are social tenants, were affected by bedroom tax as they under-occupied their property by one bedroom. They were at risk of incurring rent arrears which could lead to homelessness. In addition, they had recently been encouraged to take out a loan through someone who had knocked on their door.

Our team drew up a budget for Iris and Jim which helped identify they had no income to pay the additional rent. Our team made an application for discretionary housing payment This application was successful and provided income for Iris and Jim to pay the arrears and cover the additional rent for the remainder of the year.

We worked with our local authority consumer enforcement team and identified that the door-step loan had been obtained illegally. The local authority team worked with Iris and Jim to ensure their contributions were returned. Our team worked with Iris and Jim to devise a budget that would ensure they did not go into debt. Iris and Jim were so relieved and pleased and thanked our debt team.

Aim 4

Becoming a stronger and more efficient organisation where staff and volunteers receive the resources they need to do a good job and where we are recognised as providing responsive and quality assured service to clients.

- We successfully integrated our service over to Office 365 and Microsoft Teams. This enabled us to move effectively to remote working.
- We enhanced support to staff and volunteers including by hosting regular social events.
- We have achieved Lexcel accreditation for our legal services and are a London Legal Services Trust Centre of Excellence.
- We have retained our 'Cyber Essentials' accreditation.
- All staff and volunteers achieved GDPR awareness accreditation.
- We comply with, and receive high scores for, every component of our Citizens Advice membership scheme.
- We continue to explore flexible working options and have introduced wellbeing support packages for staff and volunteers.
- Under the LIP Strategy we are providing a range of services to local Citizens Advice Services and advice agencies. Both our Citizens Advice Islington service and Miscarriages of Justice Support Service work with other Citizens Advice services.
- We generated a small amount of unrestricted income through fees for supervised child contact and private SPIP places.
- We have successfully maintained Casebook for our Citizens Advice Islington Services, Cross Data for our legal advice services and Advicepro for our legal aid contract services.
- We maintain Twitter accounts for RCJ Advice and Citizens Advice Islington. Our FLOWS service has established a high-profile social media presence.



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Shennel Allen
Kenny Anedozi
Tasnima Begum
Penny Barker
Kathy Bayne
Jacqueline Belgrave
Matilda Brody
Philip Burns
Shanta Brindle
Seymona Cole
Sue Culligan
Sue Culkin
Julie Docker
Cath Dunn
Gail Ezra
Will Fahra
Alex Findley
Anna Foxell
Faiza Hassan
Nana Grigolia
Christine Holligan
James Hutchfull
Denise Ingamells
Ipek Karatepe
Georgia Kerby
Sarah Lake
Sarah London
Alex Lowry
Aura Loranzo
Nike Maguire
Jerry McBride
Tom McDonald
Rachel McGrath
Esme Moore
Ruby Noorani
Rosaline Ogunro
Victoria Oruzu
Ross Peters

Housing Solicitor
Debt generalist caseworker
Immigration Paralegal
Specialist Debt Caseworker
FLOWS Solicitor
Immigration Project Manager
Time Together Supervisor
Customer Care Manager
Civil Support Officer
Specialist Welfare Rights Caseworker
Housing Solicitor
Immigration Paralegal
Time Together Head
Time Together Supervisor
MSS Health Co-ordinator
FLOWS Wales Solicitor and Project Co-ordinator
Generalist Advisor
Legal Assistant (to March 2021)
Specialist Employment Caseworker
Generalist Advisor
FLOWS Solicitor
Specialist Debt Caseworker
Operations Manager
Enfield Housing Solicitor
Head of SPIPS
FLOWS Paralegal
Family Solicitor: Support through Court Project
Advice Service Co-ordinator
Family Solicitor
CourtNav Solicitor and Promotion
Help to Claim Adviser
Immigration Solicitor
Civil Solicitor
Housing Caseworker
Three Advice Projects Caseworker (to December 20)
CourtNav Digital Support Officer
Help to Claim Adviser
Adviceline Adviser
Specialist Bankruptcy Caseworker
Billing Clerk (to May 21)

Paul Poulter
Kate Prager
Debbie Prendiville
Ross Reiss
Linda Reitsis
Cleo Robbie
Sameya Ruby
Susan Ryan
Luqman Talubi
Jack Thorpe
Tom Rowland
Alison Rycroft
Summyia Shaikh
Somera Shah
Richard Smith
Wendy Smith
Amanda Stewart
Denise Worland

Civil Emergency Solicitor
FLOWS South Solicitor
Advice Service Co-ordinator
MJSS Caseworker
Adviceline Adviser
Pro Bono Advocacy Support Officer
Family Emergency Solicitor
Advice Service Co-ordinator
Generalist Debt Caseworker
Immigration Paralegal
FLOWS Paralegal
Employment Caseworker
FLOWS Paralegal
Help to Claim Volunteer
Generalist Adviser: Welfare Benefits
Advice Service Co-ordinator (to Jan 21)
SPIPS Administrator
Family Support Officer

Citizens Advice Islington Volunteers

Melanie Anderson
Sorrel Brookes
Bruna Costa (to December 2020)
Gabrielle Dunn (to January 2021)
Yvonne Hammond
Richard Horn
Mary King
Josh Isbitsky
Venisha Johnson
Rosalind Levacic
Angela Melamed
Pauline Nee
Mona Nooreyesdan
Margaret Pitt
Pauline Xydas
Sarah Yeldham

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Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP
White & Case LLP
Winston & Strawn London LLP

Family Solicitor Firms

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Registered Office:
C/O 20 Farringdon Street
London
EC4A 4EN

admin@rcjadvic.org.uk

www.rcjadvic.org.uk/other-advice/citizens-advice-islington