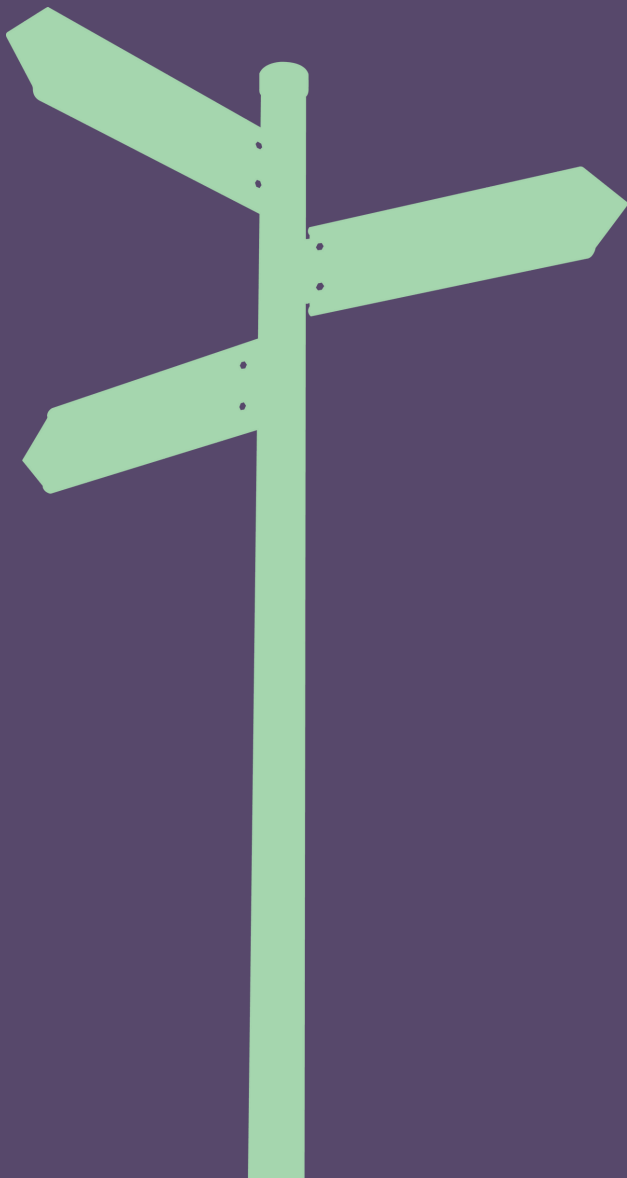


**Citizens Advice in Dorset**

# **Impact Report**

**Responding To Crisis**

**2021 - 22**



# About us

Citizens Advice in Dorset (CAiD) is a consortium of three local Citizens Advice charities in the Dorset council area, which provide free, confidential and impartial advice to help people find a way forward, whatever problems they face.

We ensure that people in the Dorset Council area have access to the best possible advice services by promoting the work of Citizens Advice, and by supporting the development and growth of the service.

We provide face to face advice from our main offices and a number of outreaches as well as advice by phone, email, letter, videoconferencing, online and webchat.

Citizens Advice in Dorset comprises the three local Citizens Advice of Bridport and District, Central Dorset, and East Dorset and Purbeck.

## Our aims

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives

## Our principles

- Free
- Confidential
- Independent
- Impartial

## Contact us

[www.citizensadvisedorset.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvisedorset.org.uk)

Bridport and District [www.bridportca.org.uk](http://www.bridportca.org.uk)

Central Dorset [www.centraldorsetca.org.uk](http://www.centraldorsetca.org.uk)

East Dorset and Purbeck [www.edpcitizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.edpcitizensadvice.org.uk)

Dorset Adviceline freephone 0800 144 8848, textphone 0800 144 8884,  
Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm



@CitAdviceDorset | @BridportCAB | @WPCAB | @WestDorsetCAB | @CitAdviceEDP



@CitAdviceEDP | @citizens-advice-bridport-district

# Chair's Introduction

**It gives me great pleasure to introduce and commend the Impact Report of Citizens Advice in Dorset (CAiD) for the year ending March 2022. The report illustrates the activities of the three Local Citizen Advice (LCA) offices in the Dorset Council area – Bridport, Central Dorset, and East Dorset and Purbeck.**

2021/22 has been another challenging year with the following strands running throughout the year – the pandemic, the Dorset Council Information, Advice, and Guidance contract, and governance arrangements.

The Chief Officers' report covers in detail how the service managed and changed through the pandemic in the provision of advice. Our involvement with Dorset Council and the role CAiD has played with other agencies during the pandemic has been very successful. The Central Dorset Chief Officer continues to attend regular weekly meetings with Dorset Council officers and other voluntary and statutory sector organisations which enabled us to assist and support Dorset Council in achieving its objectives.

CAiD were awarded the Dorset Council Information Advice and Guidance contract initially for a 3-year period from October 2021. The CAiD Board has worked effectively to govern the delivery of the contract. A Contract Monitoring Sub Committee has been established to monitor progress against the contract on a quarterly basis. Six monthly review meetings are held with Dorset Council and the first review was very positive.

As part of the governance arrangements a Task & Finish Group was established to review the funding to each LCA from the Dorset Council contract. In determining the allocation, the criteria set out in the contract was used offering a holistic service for all Dorset residents, as well as targeting support where it is most needed. The Board approved the revised funding formula with transitional arrangements operating from October 2022.

CAiD also reviewed their funding to each LCA to reflect the input from each LCA into the efficient running of CAiD and a revised allocation was agreed from October 2022 which will be reviewed annually at budget time.

Finally, National Citizens Advice require CAiD to complete an annual Leadership Self-Assessment. This was undertaken and building on last year's outcome the result this year was even better with top scores in all areas. An excellent result which reflects the progress made over the last two years.

An essential element of partnership working is to identify the needs of residents at an early stage and there is no doubt that Citizens Advice is well placed to understand the priorities for local people. During the year additional funding was received from Dorset Council to support various Council initiatives which highlights the importance of Citizens Advice in helping deliver Council objectives.

The Trustees express their thanks to the Chief Officers and their volunteers and staff for all their hard work during the year and ensuring that Citizen's Advice has remained key to the future of advice services.

**Alan Breakwell**  
**Chair of Trustees**

---

# Chief Officers' Overview

## Responding To Crisis

The events of the last two years have meant that we've been responding to an ongoing crisis that nobody could have predicted in terms of scale and impact. This Impact Report sets out the collective response from Citizens Advice in Dorset to improve the lives of residents in the Dorset Council area.

We continue to meet the increasing needs of people in our community; these needs are driven by Covid as well as the widening cost of living crisis and all the financial pressure that this brings to our community.

The cost of living crisis has grown in scale and impact, with inflation reaching a 30 year high and continuing to rise. Energy bills rose in April when the price cap increased, pulling around two million people into fuel poverty overnight. Citizens Advice is most worried about those on the lowest incomes - our advisers are seeing people face desperate choices between heating and eating. The scale of this crisis is unlike anything we've seen before, even in the pandemic. Strikingly, we are helping more people with crisis support like food bank referrals and access to grants because they simply cannot pay the bills or put food on the table.

Our ethos is to always challenge inequality and injustice and for accessible advice to have full meaning we must reach out to those who are hardest hit. We have targeted poverty and done all we can to alleviate it through good timely advice providing the widest possible financial support.

We have progressively and safely moved back to providing a full range of advice channels as our face to face venues reopened post Covid. We have adapted existing main offices and developed our outreach venues to be as flexible as possible. We have learnt from our time providing exclusively phone and digital services and these are now more effective and accessible. Our Adviceline service is now a Freephone 0800 number which assists those with limited means to get help. These elements are best achieved through partnership working and we have developed work with new organisations in order to maintain our aims and principles. The community is altogether more open and collaborative as a result of the pandemic and we have seized this opportunity over the last year. We are addressing the challenges of demand for our phone service by undertaking a targeted recruitment campaign and intensive training for new telephone assessors in the autumn.

As well as delivering our core holistic service, this year has seen us not only maintain but develop new specialist projects which meet specific needs. Our work with food banks is highlighted elsewhere in the report and allows us to reach out to those residents who often have complex needs and are facing extremely tough times. By working in partnership with food banks we can learn from their local knowledge and effectively increase our capacity.

Money worries have remained a key theme over the last year. Funding from Dorset Council has allowed us to enhance our debt casework model and to offer a more consistent service; regardless of where the resident lives. By assisting residents to find long term solutions to deal with debts, it allows them to move on and be more resilient and independent in the future.

---

# Chief Officers' Overview

## Contd

We have been able to make use of an 'Energy Bus' to enable our advisers to get out in the local community to ensure that people are aware of the support that they may be eligible for, and to offer appointments to those who need more detailed advice.

We processed Surviving Winter grants on behalf of Dorset Community Foundation and supported Dorset Council to administer the Household Support Fund.

Finally, additional funding has allowed us to work with small and medium sized businesses to support them to be more inclusive. As highlighted elsewhere in the report, being more accessible and inclusive can generate more trade for businesses as well as doing the right thing.

Our Dorset Communications Officer has delivered coherent and consistent messaging on behalf of the service. This has allowed us to better publicise our services amongst clients and partners. It has made our services more accessible; including for those who face digital disadvantage. Rather than duplicating work locally, this resource has effectively connected with the Dorset Council Communications Team to provide much needed messages to cope with the crisis.

Campaigning has also never been so important. The sheer level of demand surrounding energy bills is replaced by the outcry over soaring energy bills. We have used all our links, locally and nationally, to get the true extent of this crisis communicated to the policy makers. Where proposals fall short we have demonstrated our independence by calling them out and proposing solutions which are practical and achievable.

Our extensive project work around energy has been developed over the last year. The Dorset Energy Unit reached more people than ever and has played a key role in tackling fuel poverty in Dorset. Using reliable local data from our Casebook recording system, we have supplied evidence to local MPs, Councillors and other decision makers. In particular, we have argued for more targeted support which addresses the cost of living crisis. One of our campaigns involved arguing for the most effective and efficient support via the benefits system. We are pleased to see a move in that direction over the last year and the evidence of Dorset residents has played a role in effecting this change.

The people that make up our team have shown tremendous energy and resilience. We have supported them through flexible working and a focus on wellbeing which matches the concern we show our clients. The year has demonstrated that we must provide support for remote working including ICT, and robust supervision. We are a volunteer based service and their dedication and commitment has remained whilst coping with the challenges that have arisen for us all. Their collective effort has allowed Citizens Advice to reach many more clients than it would have without them.

We look forward to continue to meet the challenges faced by our residents over the coming year.

**Rovarn Wickremasinghe**  
**Chief Officer**  
Citizens Advice Bridport and District

**Daniel Cadisch**  
**Chief Officer**  
Citizens Advice Central Dorset

**Helen Goldsack**  
**Chief Officer**  
Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck

**In 2021-22**  
**Citizens Advice in Dorset**  
**gave advice:**



**to 11,764 clients**



**on 46,124 issues**

---

**Top issues:**



**Benefits, tax credits  
& Universal Credit**  
**19,210**



**Utilities/communications**  
**3,255**



**Debt**  
**5,319**



**Financial services &  
capability**  
**2,448**



**Housing**  
**3,979**



**Employment**  
**2,163**



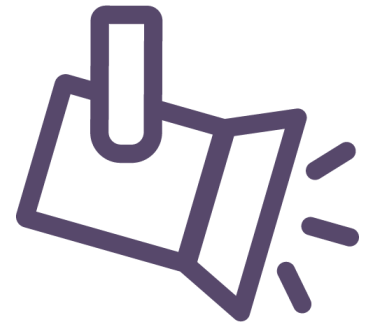
**£7,117,476 - Financial outcome: income gains including additional benefits awarded**

**£1,057,426 - Financial outcome: debts written off**

**£1,117,258 - Financial outcome: other including charitable grants and food parcels**

# Spotlight on...

## Energy Advice & Support



The Energy Advice Project, Fighting Fuel Poverty, is funded by The Energy Industry Voluntary Redress Fund to support people across Dorset who are on a low income and at risk of fuel poverty. The energy unit has four caseworkers who, during the period April 2021 to March 2022, helped nearly 900 clients. Over 65% were people with health conditions and disabilities, over £459,000 was raised in benefit income gains and £63,000 in energy saving measures and grant applications/other savings.

Since the start of the project in August 2020, we have seen significant changes impacting Dorset residents. From the lasting impact of Covid-19 on energy bills, including higher electric, gas or oil usage due to the requirements to stay at home for extensive periods, reduced income levels, then most recently the surge in energy costs, with the average energy price cap increase of 54% which immediately affected homes with pre-payment meters.

For households on credit meters the impact going forward will be felt by the increase in direct debit payment requests from suppliers. This is likely to increase again with winter usage and the further rise in the energy price cap in October, added to this over 30 energy companies have gone bust and one company has gone into special administration causing stress and worry for many people.

We have been assisting more people who are 'going off supply' as they cannot afford to add money to their pre-payment meter. We are able to provide emergency energy advice which then allows time for a full energy advice appointment to assist clients in the longer term.

We are no longer able to save money for households by changing to a cheaper supplier and as a result there is a higher level of importance for our advisers to give information to households so they understand how to use heating and hot water systems cost effectively. They also advise about properties which are damp and cold, suggesting behavioural changes in using less electricity. This has had the biggest impact for many of our clients which adds to our income maximisation element of the project.

With the cost of living crisis many more households are in fuel poverty across Dorset. We are seeing an unprecedented demand for our services. Nationally, our energy advisers are assisting as much as possible to help households to stay warm, safe and avoid cold-related health problems whilst managing their energy costs.

**Ros Dignan**  
**Project Coordinator**

# Spotlight on...

## Surviving Winter & Household Support Fund



We worked with Dorset Community Foundation to issue Surviving Winter grants of £200 per household to residents in the Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council areas. A total of 307 Surviving Winter grants were issued during the winter of 2021-2022.

The grants were made available through fundraising by Dorset Community Foundation, who ask for winter fuel payments to be donated to help support vulnerable households. Grants were available to households in Dorset and BCP Council areas, with applications for a grant being submitted by all local Citizens Advice offices in these areas.

In addition to the 307 grants, a further 125 grants were awarded from the match funding provided by the Energy Redress Fund in support of the Citizens Advice East Dorset & Purbeck Energy Project: Fighting Fuel Poverty, which Dorset Community Foundation worked with us as a partner.

This enabled Surviving Winter grants to be issued to a total of 432 households across Dorset and BCP, allocating a total of £86,400 to households who were really struggling to manage to heat their homes.

In addition to the Surviving Winter grants, we were involved in the delivery of the Household Support Fund (HSF) for both Dorset and BCP Councils. HSF funding was provided to local authorities by the Department for Work and Pensions, with the support priority being households with families who were struggling to meet food and energy costs, but individuals were also eligible for this support.

The match funding and additional grants made available through the Fighting Fuel Poverty project (FFP) for a second year has been a bonus, enabling us to issue additional Surviving Winter grants as well as providing households with both energy and income maximisation advice through the FFP project.

Citizens Advice is again very grateful to Dorset Community Foundation and to all the donors for their generosity in making these grants available. The availability of the Surviving Winter grants enabled us to provide direct support to households who are in need, giving them much needed security around their energy provision through the winter months.

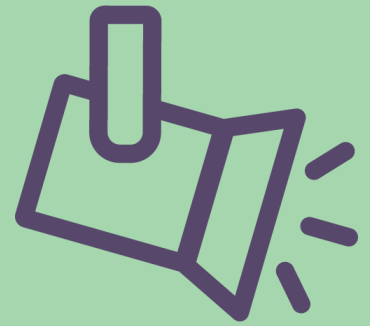
**Kate Pryce**  
**Project Manager**

---



# Spotlight on...

## Help through Hardship



Help through Hardship is a national project, a partnership between Citizens Advice and The Trussell Trust. We are involved in the telephone helpline project and have received funding to provide local face to face services. During 2021-2022 we helped 1,144 clients, with a financial gain of £538,871.

Our advisers empower clients to look for long-term sustainable solutions out of the hardship they are experiencing. Once emergencies have been managed this can be through income maximisation work to identify additional benefit or grant entitlements and sources of discretionary help available, or budgeting advice.

Advisers also signpost and refer users to services for further advice and support including local Citizens Advice offices and partners such as MIND. Most callers are experiencing some sort of financial hardship and find themselves in a situation when they cannot afford to buy food and often are in need of immediate assistance. A Trussell Trust network of foodbanks provides that emergency support.

Hardship can arise due to problems with benefits or debt but more recently the rising cost of living is having a major impact. People for whom welfare benefits is their only source of income find themselves in the situation when they have to choose between buying food or paying bills – their unchanged (or reduced) level of income has become too low relative to their basic living expenses which have gone up dramatically.

Often long-term health conditions, disabilities and injuries are contributing factors to financial hardship.

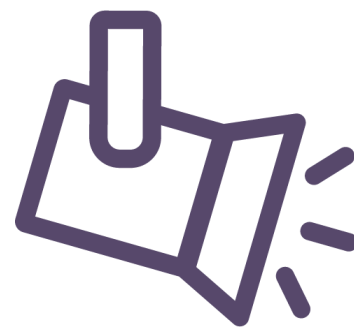
When immigration is an issue, clients are often vulnerable for a wide range of reasons and progressing their issues towards short- or long-term resolution can become complex, especially if there is a language barrier and an interpreter is required.

The Trussell Trust also provides funding for advisers to be embedded within the food banks providing face to face support, as is the case locally in the Gillingham Food Bank. Such crisis support can be vital in helping some of the most vulnerable engage with services.

**Kristina Zadunaiskaja**  
**Help through Hardship Helpline Adviser**

# Spotlight on...

## Equity, Diversity & Inclusion



The role of Dorset Inclusivity Officer is a new post which became active in February 2022 and is currently job shared. The project is funded by Dorset Council to develop and integrate a consistent approach to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) across the local Citizens Advice offices in Dorset; and to support Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in retail and hospitality across Dorset in their EDI strategies and processes in an effort to increase customer satisfaction, employee attraction and retention, and 'regenerate the highstreet'.

The main objectives of these two strands are similar and include:

- Reducing isolation and supporting inclusion of marginalised groups.
- Improved connection with the local community.
- Improved access to information for communities.

We are working closely with Prejudice Free Dorset and the Dorset Council EDI Officer to promote good EDI practices in SMEs with a business conference planned for the autumn.

We are also a member of the Dorset Council EDI Reference Group, where various organisations contribute to Dorset Council policy and inform and improve each other's practice, and have recently joined the Dorset Disability Equality and LGBT+ Voices Forums as well as connecting with Dorset Race Equality Council and Kushti Bok (through the Central Dorset Citizens Advice liaison) to ensure our work is regularly informed by individuals and communities who have been historically marginalised.

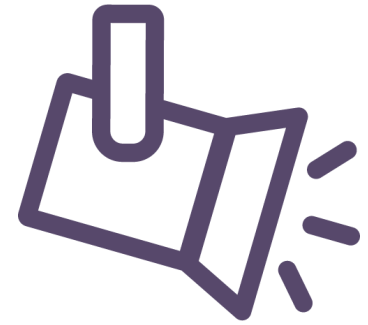
This role is very new but we have received positive input and feedback and hope to make lasting, structural changes so that the service at Citizens Advice and SMEs across Dorset is more accessible to more people.

**Rowan Hedley**  
Dorset Inclusivity Officer

**Katrina Ford**  
Dorset Inclusivity Officer

# Spotlight on...

## Macmillan Welfare Benefits Service



Citizens Advice continues to be funded by Macmillan Cancer Support to provide advice to local people who have been diagnosed with cancer and to support their families and carers. We work very closely with five hospitals and hospices and take referrals directly from them. Clients can also self-refer. This last year showed how important these relationships were to provide a seamless system for the best results for our clients.

Our four experienced caseworkers cover the whole of the Dorset Council area between them and have built strong relationships with a wide range of health professionals including cancer nurse specialists, consultants and GPs. The two brands of Macmillan and Citizens Advice are well respected and trusted by clients and partners alike.

Over the year we helped 512 clients through this project. We gained £2.1m for these clients which included benefits claimed and other sources of financial help, of which £52,000 were individual one-off grants.

The Covid-19 pandemic set an unprecedented challenge to delivering our service as well as the wider cancer services and our partners. The impact for clients awaiting screening, diagnostic tests and treatment had a devastating effect as well as those who had cancer surgeries postponed or cancelled. Our service has carefully moved back towards face to face support whilst learning valuable lessons on how to support our clients remotely.

A cancer diagnosis can affect the emotional health of patients, families and caregivers. Roles at home, school and work can be affected and the addition of Covid-19 added to people's anxiety and isolation.

We have adapted our advice service to continue to provide the best quality advice and to support our clients with accessing benefits, employment issues, tribunals and grant applications. With delays to processing benefits and contact with accessing government departments this was a challenging time for people whose only means of support is often benefits. We are also fortunate as Macmillan professionals to be able to access a one-off Macmillan grant to elevate hardship when needed.

Macmillan's new research reveals the sheer scale of the financial burden faced by people living with cancer. Four in five (83%) people are, on average, £570 a month worse off as a result of a cancer diagnosis. Income goes down and expenditure rises at a time when money worries should be the last thing on people's minds. The national Macmillan Support Line (0808 239 5724) has continued to offer confidential support to people with cancer and their loved ones, providing medical advice and telephone buddy support to people who are alone.

**Christine Land**  
**Project Manager**

# Our team

**229 volunteers  
generously  
give their time  
each week...**



**..the value of  
volunteering  
across the  
Dorset Council  
area in  
2021/22 was  
£1,371,071**



**We have  
86 paid staff**



**Volunteering  
benefits our  
volunteers  
socially, mental  
wellbeing, fun,  
fulfillment, job  
training**



**... and 30  
Trustees bring  
their expertise  
and  
knowledge to  
oversee our  
work**

# Alice's Story

## Case Study:

*Alice is of pensionable age and has a number of health conditions. She recently lost her husband and has been dealing with bereavement while also trying to sort out finances.*

*Alice lives alone in a three-bedroom property as the owner-occupier. She receives her state pension, plus a small occupational pension. Alice has been struggling to adjust to life without her husband and has been gradually sorting out her finances and other areas. One such area was her energy bills, where she had accumulated a debt. Alice requested help with getting back on top of her energy bills.*

## Outcome:

- *Identified potential eligibility for Attendance Allowance, Alice was supported with the application to increase her income, this could be £60 p/w or more.*
- *Supported access to Surviving Winter Grant of £200 to help reduce £359 total energy debt owed to SSE. Alice was able to use this grant, alongside a contribution from her, to wipe her debt and negotiate a better payment plan.*
- *Identified the need for access to NHS Low Income Scheme as Alice mentioned the cost of dental care. Alice was supported with the application.*
- *Provided with practical energy saving advice to help Alice lower her usage and subsequently reduce costs.*
- *Supported with access to third party schemes such as LEAP and is also receiving funded loft insulation from Ridgewater, who have also made other small changes to Alice's property such as draught exclusion and energy saving light bulbs.*
- *Smart meter installed by SSE after discussion with adviser. Alice was also made aware of how smart meters can be used to monitor usage and assist with reducing usage.*
- *Alice was offered a smart meter in prepayment mode. The benefits and drawbacks associated with PPMs were explained, allowing Alice to make an informed decision.*
- *Alice was made aware of the Warm Home Discount and will apply again for the upcoming year.*
- *The Council Tax rebate of £150 in April 2022 and the energy bills rebate of £200 in October 2022 were explained. Alice is aware that there is support available for rising energy costs.*



# Simon's Story

## Case Study:

*Simon was homeless and had been living in a tent for some time and has physical and mental health issues. He cannot read and write and initially had no phone. During the winter months, Simon's tent became very damaged and his clothing was inadequate including shoes with no soles.*

*Simon came to us for support for homelessness and benefit advice. Simon was in receipt of Universal Credit recently aided by Citizens Advice.*

## Outcome:

- Financial gains of £9933.00 including Universal Credit and housing costs, charitable grants and the Emergency Local Assistance Fund.*
- We assisted Simon to apply for Personal Independence Payment which has been awarded at enhanced rates for both care and mobility of £156.90 per week (£8158.80 per annum) with an added amount of over £3000 in backdated payments.*
- A housing application was successful in finding a home.*
- Help to claim Universal Credit and help to claim housing costs after being housed.*
- There were a large number of grants via vouchers, in kind, payments direct to services, from a wide variety of sources including the Summer Support Grant, Warm Home Discount, Wimborne Food Bank and Dorset Council Emergency Local Assistance Fund.*
- Wimborne Food Bank provided food and when he was housed they helped financially, buying various necessities directly and arranging delivery to his new home. Dorset Council via DHP enabled Simon to buy white goods and furniture from Dorset Reclaim.*
- Simon was given a phone and a local shop let him charge his phone there. An outdoor sport shop manager donated a hat, gloves and scarf, the summer support fund provided £200 which was spent on shoes and essential clothing.*



# Caroline's Story

## **Case Study:**

*Caroline called to request a foodbank voucher because she had been off work with a knee injury. Her income consisted of Universal Credit and Statutory Sick Pay which was not enough for her to cover the rising cost of food and energy bills. Through routine background exploration the adviser learnt that Caroline's injuries happened at work.*

*After a benefit check the advisor was able to provide Caroline with information to make an application for Industrial Injury Disablement Payment. Caroline was also given information about grants to help her pay her energy bills and reduce her expenditure.*



# Halimah's Story

## **Case Study:**

*Halimah, a Nigerian national client with 'no recourse to public funds' requested a referral to a foodbank because she did not have enough money to buy food and her attempts to contact immigration centres had been unsuccessful.*

*After calling the helpline, Halimah received a £60 supermarket voucher from a neighbouring local authority within 2 hours and was referred to a foodbank, a law centre and a local community group for further support with immigration issues.*

# Toby's Story

## **Case Study:**

*Toby worked as a carer for a number of years; visiting customers at home to provide care and support. He worked for an agency and due to an injury, was unable to carry out his duties for a short period of time. The agency effectively dismissed him without following any process and did not pay him notice or holiday pay. Toby was unclear what they had done and what money he was owed; he knew that he had not been fairly treated. The company insisted that he had resigned and that they did not owe him anything at all.*

*Our volunteer adviser went through the details of the case and advised him of his employment rights and responsibilities and his options to challenge the actions of his employer. The volunteer was supported by our employment specialist who in turn sought expert advice from our national team. The case ran for 14 months in total.*

## **Outcome:**

- *We advised Toby how to raise a grievance in order to set out everything he was owed and to clarify the actions of his employer.*
- *We involved ACAS who acted as conciliators between the employer and Toby. We provided detailed specialist advice to allow Toby to make his case.*
- *After a potential claim for Industrial Injuries was identified, we supported the client to make a claim.*
- *The adviser helped Toby to make a claim to an Employment Tribunal, helped prepare witness statements, and calculated the potential claim.*
- *When the employer made threats to claim money from Toby, we advised that they did not have a case and were trying to intimidate him into withdrawing his claim.*
- *Toby held his ground and just before the date of the tribunal hearing, the employer made an offer of £2,000 to settle the case. This was accepted and we helped prepare a legal document to complete the case.*





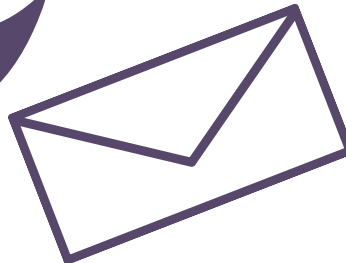
# Clients say...

*The lady I spoke to was extremely helpful and understanding, she was non-judgmental about my situation. I genuinely appreciate the initial call and the follow up help I received.*

*I felt like I had a friend in my corner helping me navigate the system.*

*They were extremely professional and capable. I received a telephone call the next day about my issue and was offered legal services as well. I would definitely recommend CAB to others.*

THANK  
YOU



*My call was returned promptly and I got an appointment within days with great wheelchair access. You were non-judgemental and knowledgeable. I'm feeling less anxious.*

*I have never been in such a mess in my life and the staff make you feel at ease and they are so easy to talk to. No problem is too big for them.*

*I now have my own home and a lot less money issues. I don't know what I'd have done without the life changing support I was given.*

“ ”

# Thank you to our supporters

## **Councils**

Dorset Council and all supporting Parish and Town Councils across the Dorset Council area

## **Project-funding**

Access to Justice Foundation  
Dorset Community Foundation  
Macmillan Cancer Care  
Money Advice Service  
National Lottery  
NHS  
The Energy Saving Trust  
The Trussell Trust  
Valentine Trust  
Wessex Water

## **Special Thanks**

To the many individuals, businesses and donors who have supported us in different ways by donating their time, resources and expertise.