

July 2018

Dear All

Welcome to our newsletter for the first quarter Apr to Jun 2018.

As usual, we would like to provide an update of our statistics for the last quarter. From the beginning of April to the end of June 2018 we saw 139 new clients and made 1,004 client contacts. The most common issues in this quarter were;

1. Benefits – 684 contacts (22% increase vs. 2017)
2. Debt – 81 contacts (16% decrease vs. 2017)
3. Housing – 70 contacts (34% increase vs. 2017)

Our volunteers gave 843.5 hours of their time during that three month period and we are grateful to them for their dedication and commitment. Based on the mean hourly pay rate for all employees in Tunbridge Wells of £18.83, as detailed in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2017 (provisional), the financial value which could be attributed to volunteer time during this period is nearly £16,000. We are delighted to welcome one new adviser this quarter and we currently have 16 volunteers and one paid part time employee.

As most of you will be aware, Paddock Wood Community Advice Centre offers free, confidential and impartial, independent advice, on a wide variety of topics, including debt, benefits, housing, employment, family and relationship issues. Our belief is that it is essential to provide face-to-face advice and support to clients, many of whom have no internet access and need help to consider the options available to them. But we also offer assistance by telephone or by responding to email, website or social media enquiries. We help clients in a variety of ways, including drop-in assistance, appointments for more complex matters, outreach and through representation at Employment or Benefits Tribunals. We continue to run a successful home visiting service which is available to the elderly and vulnerable who, for various reasons, are unable to travel into the office.

Recently, we have been focussing on improving outreach initiatives and on building up our referral network. Over the last few months, we have been pleased to establish new ties with a range of organisations, extending our existing partnerships. Our relationships include the Town & Country Housing Group and its charitable foundation, Parkinson's UK, Mental Health Resource (MHR) and Cogent Mediation, Compaid, Headway West Kent and Paddock Wood Primary School. We continue to receive an increasing number of referrals from Kent County Council Social Work teams, particularly from the Early Help Service and Adult Mental Health Teams. We are always very interested to hear from any organisations who are interested in developing partnership working.

Paddock Wood Community Advice Centre relies upon a limited number of sources for its annual income, the main sources being grants from town, borough and parish councils which are generally constrained by extremely tight financial budgets.

We are very grateful for the continued support received from the Kent Community Foundation, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Paddock Wood Town Council, Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council, Capel Parish Council, Lamberhurst Parochial Church Council, East Peckham Parish Council, Paddock Wood and District Lions Club, Waitrose, several private individuals and many of our clients. We would also like to thank the Hurst Brown Family Fund, the Glenn & Phyllida Earle Family Fund, the Polebrook Fund and the Big Lottery Fund (Awards for All England) who have provided us with funding during the first quarter of 2018-2019.

As mentioned in previous newsletters, Tunbridge Wells is moving to a full service area for Universal Credit at the end of November 2018. Universal Credit will affect households of working age who claim in-work and out of work benefits, including Income Support, Income based Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. We are already helping clients from other areas with Universal Credit enquiries and all volunteers are undergoing extensive training in the next few months to enable them to help clients who have difficulties with the change to the new system.

Achievements:

- During Q1 2018-2019, our dedicated team of volunteers secured over £133,000 for our clients in unclaimed benefits, debt relief and other savings.
- Since April 2018, we have already represented 4 clients at an appeal in the first tier tribunal to challenge benefit award decisions. We won all 4 of those appeals, giving us a 100% success rate this calendar year to date. We have submitted a further 33 appeals which are expected to be heard at some point in the next twelve months.

We look forward to your continued support so that we can maintain our service to the residents of Paddock Wood and surrounding areas.

Please do remember to 'opt in' to continue receiving our quarterly newsletter!

Yours sincerely

Paddock Wood Community Advice Centre