

April 2020

Dear All

Welcome to our final newsletter of our financial year ended 31 March 2020. It has been another busy year for PWCAC, we have helped 827 individual clients and made a record-breaking 4,461 client contacts in total. Our volunteers gave 4,466 hours of their time during the year and we are grateful to them for their dedication and commitment.

Highlights from the last twelve months include:

- On 2 April 2020 we celebrated our **Eighth Birthday!**
- In the year ended 31 March 2020, our dedicated team of volunteer advisers secured a staggering **£1,246,766** for our clients in unclaimed benefits, debt relief and other savings
- We represented **32 clients at an appeal** in the first-tier tribunal to challenge benefit award decisions. This is 50% more appeals than we conducted in the same period last year! We won 30 of those, giving us a 94% success rate (the national average is 71%¹)

Covid-19 Outbreak

We have seen an extraordinary end to our financial year with the national Covid-19 outbreak affecting everyone so significantly. Whilst we are not presently able to offer face to face appointments, **our wonderful team of volunteers continue to provide advice from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday by telephone and email.** We have access to all of our resources and it is business as usual for our specialist debt and welfare benefits advisers as they undertake regular casework to progress client cases towards a successful outcome. We are also working with several of the newly set up local Covid-19 support groups to ensure the most vulnerable within the communities we serve are able access the services they need.

IT Infrastructure Refresh

We are thankful that our IT Infrastructure Refresh project was successfully completed in December 2019. This has meant that our transition to remote working has been smooth and we have been able to maintain our free confidential and impartial advice service at a time when people so desperately need our help. We would like to express our gratitude to all who offered help and support to us in the planning stages and in particular to;

Heliocentrix for delivering this project professionally and efficiently;

Kent County Council, in particular **Councillor Sarah Hamilton**, for supporting the project with a significant award made through the KCC Combined Member Grant scheme;

The Skinners' Company Lady Neville Charity for awarding us a grant towards the purchase of new laptops as part of the project;

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2019>

Angela Hattingh, IT Training & Support at **Cripps Pemberton Greenish** for providing free training to our volunteers on the new systems.

Referral Network

We have continued to build our referral network over the last year, developing existing partnerships with other local organisations such as **Brains Matter Charity**, **Compaid**, the **Community Storehouse** (Paddock Wood Food Bank), the **Department of Work and Pensions** Complex Needs Forum and the **Hospice in the Weald**. New referral partners include **Involve Kent** and the **Kenward Trust** who are referring a growing number of clients to our service. We have also established a link with the **Family Law Café** which has enabled our clients to access pro bono advice from a Family Law Barrister.

We also subscribe to several umbrella organisations whose knowledge and experience we can draw upon in order to achieve the best results for our clients. These include **Advice UK**, the **Citizens Advice Bureau's** AdviserNet service, **Child Poverty Action Group** (CPAG), **Righthnet**, **Shelter** and **WiserAdviser** (from the Money Advice Service). We would also like to thank Imago, the Kent Community Foundation and Stronger Kent Communities, through which we have been able to network with many other charities and organisations this year. If you are involved with a locally based organisation and think that we could work more closely together for the mutual benefit of our clients, we would love to hear from you. Please email us on info@pwadvice.org.

Client Feedback

We have recently completed our annual client satisfaction survey and we are now reviewing the results so that we can celebrate our successes and identify areas of opportunity. We would like to share with you some of our positive feedback we have received:

"Just would like to say a big thank you to you both, for your help and assistance ... You both kindly sorted the situation out and so quick. Especially when I didn't have an appointment, I really don't know what I'd have done without your kindness and help, or where else I could have gone! Much appreciated, thank you so very much"

"I want to thank you for all your amazing help!"

"Thank you, you are so brilliant there!" (from the Information and Guidance Co-ordinator at Hospice in the Weald)

We would like to thank all our trustees, volunteer advisers, supporters, funders, referral partners and clients, without whom the above would not have been possible.

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

Yours faithfully

Paddock Wood Community Advice Centre