



**North
Lancashire**

ANNUAL REPORT

2014-15

The Trustees of Citizens Advice, North Lancashire present their Annual report for the year ended 31 March 2015 under the Charities Act 2011 and the Companies Act 2006, together with the audited financial statements for the year.

Citizens Advice, North Lancashire is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.

Company number: 7298912

Registered charity number: 1137309

Registered Address: Oban House, 87-89 Queen Street Morecambe. LA4 5EN



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1. Chairs Report

The last year has been an exceptionally busy year for Citizens Advice North Lancashire. The Bureau has offices in both Lancaster and Morecambe and between them serve the communities of the Lancaster local Authority with its rural hinterland.

The advice we offer to the local community is free, impartial confidential and independent. To meet these aims and principles we are continually reviewing our progress to maintain high standards.

Reviewing the work of the Bureau is an ongoing progress carried out by members of the Trustee Board. We will continue to raise opportunities and meet challenges, especially in these difficult financial times when changes to the benefit and welfare systems, imposed by Government legislation, will create a great deal of need at local level. We anticipate the services we provide will be more in demand than ever before.

As a charity we rely on funding from our supporters to deliver our advice services. The CAN (Community Advice Network) in partnership with other organisations has proved a useful and successful project for the organisations involved, ourselves and most importantly our clients.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our excellent staff and volunteers –many who work beyond the call of duty – for their dedicated commitment to the service. Their contribution is both incalculable and invaluable. Our volunteers are trained to a high standard in giving generalist advice to clients who seek our help. Indeed we could not manage the service without them. We were therefore very pleased when the Mayor of Lancaster joined us at the Midland Hotel to award training and long service certificates to 20 volunteers. Thank you to Hoffmann Machine Co Ltd and Mr John Galvin for sponsoring this event. I would also like to thank the Trustee Board members for their support, hard work and contribution in overseeing the continued success of the Bureau.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to all who have supported us financially or with other assistance. We are especially grateful to Lancaster City Council for maintaining our core funding. We are justly proud of Citizens Advice North Lancashire and trust you will continue to support our endeavours to provide a first class service to the community.

June Ashworth

Chair, Board of Trustees

2. Our value to Everyone in the Lancaster District

2.1 The Impact of Citizens Advice, North Lancashire

Last year we helped **6,034** people with **15,381** advice issues and had **10,908** visitors to our website. We have had a presence in the Lancaster district since 1939 and currently operate from two offices; 87-89 Queen Street Morecambe and 87 King Street Lancaster.

At our offices and outreaches we have 23 staff and 113 trained, knowledgeable and trusted volunteers who are ready to help through face to face, email and telephone advice, no matter who you are and what your problem may be.

We help people resolve their problems through the provision of a comprehensive advice service. We resolve problems presented to us by clients, from employment issues, debt housing or benefits. We also resolve consumer issues such as faulty goods or services, and assist people who wish to exercise their rights to obtain redress.

Through the advice we give, we turn peoples lives around. Prior to advice people often feel stressed, anxious or depressed. Their relationships are often strained both at work and at home sometimes leading to prospective job loss or ending relationships.

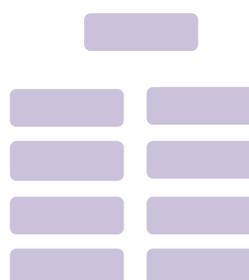
In addition to resolving the immediate issue our research shows that our advice improves the quality of life and wellbeing of our clients; with 4 in 5 clients reporting that our help led to additional benefits; worries are diminished, confidence returns and a way forward can be found at home at work and in the community.

90% of people are satisfied with our service and **95%** will recommend us to their family or friends.

Research carried out by Citizens Advice nationally shows that in 2014/15

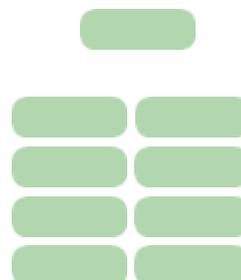
For every **£1** invested in the Citizens Advice Service we generate at least:

£1.51



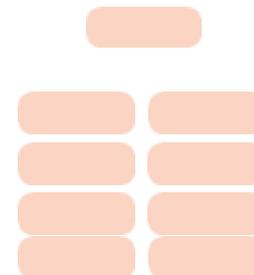
In fiscal benefits
Saving to government
 Reduction in health service demand, local authority homelessness services and out-of-work benefits for clients and volunteers
Total: £361 million

£8.74



in public value
Wider economic and social benefits
 Improvements in participation and productivity for clients and volunteers.
Total: £2.1 billion

£10.94



In benefits to individuals
Value to our clients
 Income gained through benefits, debts written off and consumer problems resolved
Total: £2.6 billion

We provide education and skills to our clients to help them avoid similar problems in future, and equip them with financial skills to help manage their budgets and avoid debt. Our financial capability worker helps clients switch to best energy deals that meet their needs and save them money.

We also use our insight and evidence from the front line to research the systemic problems and barriers that hold people back. We influence policy makers, regulators, companies and politicians to change laws, rules and regulations for the benefit of everyone. Our recent work includes the sanctions process, the impact of welfare reform and we are also gathering evidence on the increased reliance on food banks. We have also produced evidence based reports on local social welfare issues¹ which are all available on our website².

All our activities come together to benefit individuals, the government and society. Our value stems from the way problems can affect individuals, and the detrimental impact they can have on their lives. Advice and education, research and advocacy can mitigate this detriment – through resolving problems now and preventing them in future. This saves money for the government, significantly for local authorities through helping to prevent eviction and homelessness, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) through helping to maintain people in work rather than on benefits, and the NHS through improving peoples health and well-being. It also benefits society through healthier, happier people, moving forward with their lives with new confidence, participating in their community and working more productively – this is our value to society.

Our value exceeds our funding by a considerable amount. However, we cant just communicate our value in strict financial terms, as it only gives part of the story of our impact on society and would therefore underestimate our true value. Some of the crucial things we do, we cant put a pound sign on. All of this demonstrates that Citizens Advice North Lancashire has an important part to play as a strategic partner in the delivery of essential services.

How fiscal savings are attributed to specific government departments

 <p>Department for Work and Pensions through reduced out-of-work benefits £163 million</p>	 <p>Local authorities through reducing cases of homelessness £57 million</p>	 <p>Department of Health By reducing the use of health services £47 million</p>
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¹ Sanctions Report, ESA Report and Localised Welfare Provision Report

² North Lancashire Citizens Advice Bureau

3. Service delivery overview

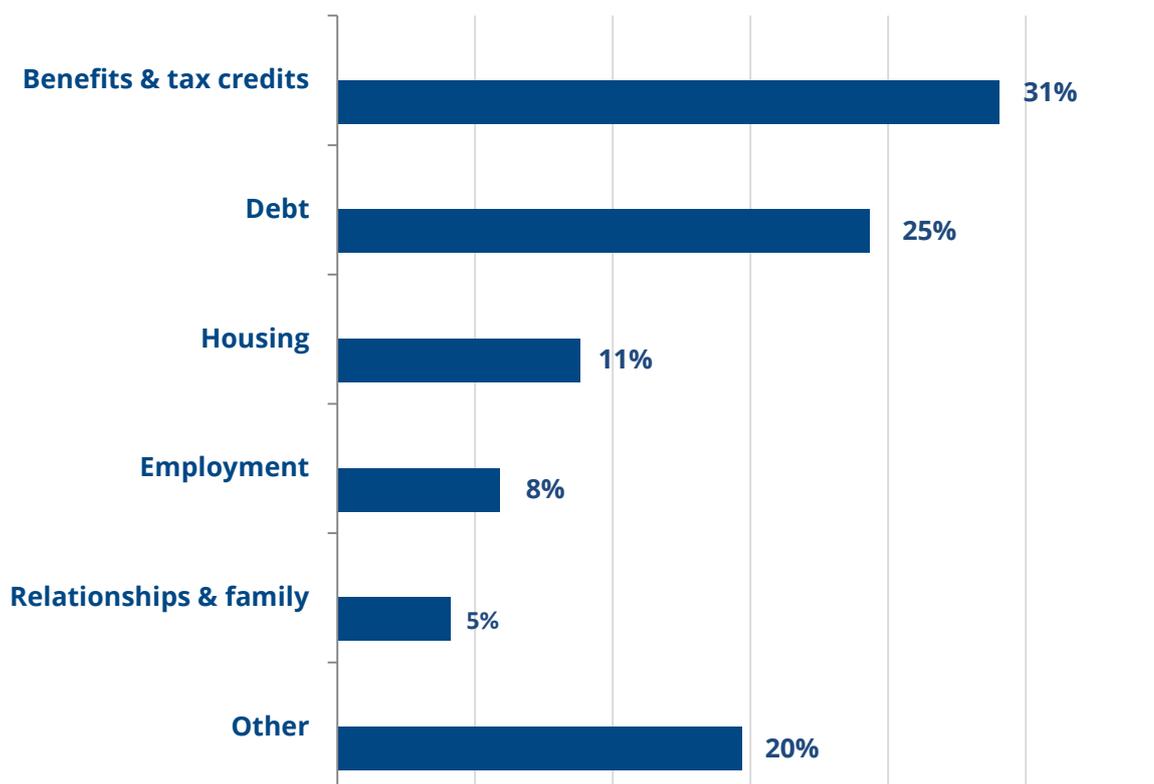
Over this past year :-

- We advised **6034** new clients face to face, by email or telephone as well as assisting our former clients with ongoing queries
- We had **14962** client contacts with our clients – face to face, phone calls, letters and emails



3.1 Advice Areas

We dealt with **15381** client problems in the course of **8876** new enquiries from clients. Benefit and debt remain the biggest categories of advice.



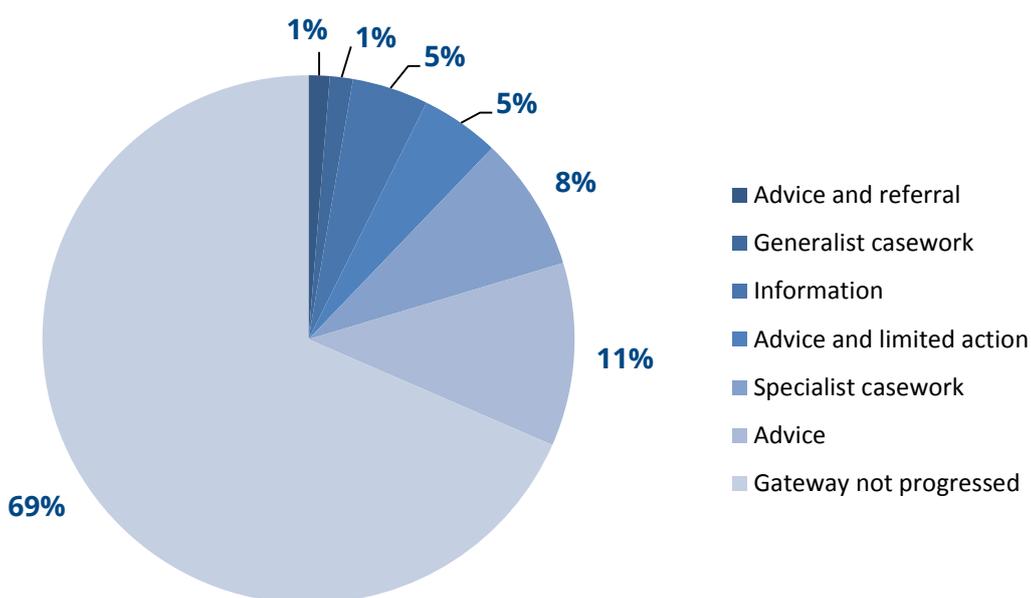
▲ Figure 1: Advice areas by category 2014-15³

³ 'Other' in chart includes Immigration, Health & Community care, Education, Consumer and Legal.

3.2 Activity Levels

Whenever a client seeks help from us with one or more problems, it is called an 'enquiry.' It may be resolved through various channels:

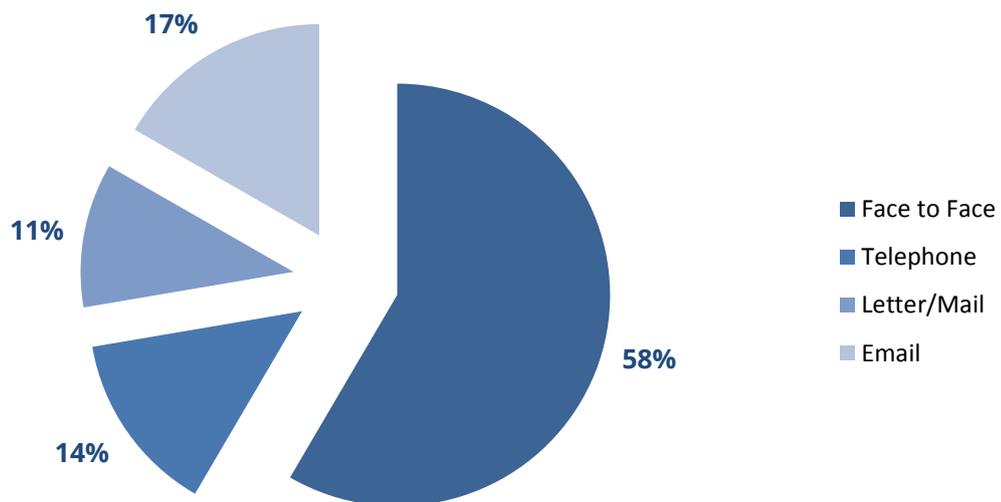
- **Gateway:** This is similar to a triage system, where client needs are initially assessed. Issues may be resolved at this level through information, brief advice, referral to an external agency or progressed to receive full advice or casework assistance.
- **Advice:** For more detailed problems that cannot be dealt with at gateway, the client is referred to one of our experienced advisers.
- **Casework:** Where a client presents with a complex case, often with various issues that cannot be dealt with by Advisers, the client is referred to one of our specialist caseworkers who acts on the clients behalf, sometimes requiring court or tribunal representation.



▲ Figure 2: Enquiries by work level 2014-15

3.3 Contact Counts

Client contacts are all interactions with clients but not necessarily reflecting the main channel of advice delivery. Third party contacts on behalf of clients and case work preparation have not been included.



▲ Figure 3: Contact Counts 2014-15

4. Service Overview

Our aim is to provide advice that focuses on positive results for the local people using our services. Despite the range of cuts to services via Legal Aid Agency we continue to deliver vital services that improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of local people.

We are seeing an increasing number of clients who are facing financial difficulties due to the cumulative impact of austerity and subsequent welfare reform. Low income families in work are dealing with a combination of issues which impact heavily upon their already stretched incomes.

For those in work an increase of low paid jobs, zero hours contracts and part time work is making life very difficult. Many are at the same time experiencing reductions in disposable incomes due to some of the following factors:-

- spare room subsidy (bedroom tax),
- low Local Housing Allowance rates (Housing Benefit),
- high private rents
- high child care costs

For those on out of work benefits such as Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and Universal Credit (UC) the problems outlined above are combined with and exacerbated by:

- stricter criteria for eligibility
- prolonged waiting times for disability benefits
- benefit sanctions
- benefit caps

Any crisis from a broken washing machine to being on short term sick leave can plunge such families into a spiral of debt, and distress. When these are combined with an increase in living costs which include the essentials of utilities, food, clothing, petrol and transport, it is clear that many more people are accessing our service for a complex range of issues and advice needs.

At the same time that demand has increased for our services, we have had to make staff redundant as a direct result of the cuts to legal aid and other budget limitations. Our fantastic and dedicated team of volunteers are having to deal with more complex cases many of which would have previously been supported by specialist caseworkers



**78% of our
clients**

**said they would
not have been
able to solve
their problem
without us**

or solicitors. Our training has been adapted to these needs to ensure our quality is maintained even during times of high demand.

4.1 Food Poverty

There has been a continued rise in the number of people who come to us in food poverty. This is consistent with the national picture where 1,084,604 people were given 3 days emergency food and support.⁴ Never before has our local service seen such extreme need. For each referral we make to the food banks we explore the advice need that has led to food shortage and offer advice in order to alleviate the need for repeated food parcels. A food parcel referral by us is dependent upon the clients addressing their advice needs. The main provision of food parcels to our clients come from Morecambe Bay Food Bank and Olive Branch in Lancaster.

We and the food banks keep records of the reason a food parcel is needed and this shows a high proportion of need is due to a benefit delays, sanctions and low income.

More recently, there has been a steady increase in the number of people needing foodbanks out of general poverty rather than any specific crisis, where in some areas 19% of people using foodbanks had someone in the household currently in employment.⁵



Last year, we issued
950 food vouchers



These vouchers fed
1524 adults
275 children



Food parcels are issued
due to delays to benefits
sanctions, low income
& general poverty⁶

⁴ [The Trussell Trust](#)

⁵ 'Emergency Use Only – Understanding and reducing the use of foodbanks in the UK' by CPAG, Church of England, Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust

⁶ Reasons why clients use food banks; records form Morecambe Bay Foodbank and Olive Branch, Lancaster

5. Our funders and Projects

5.1 Core advice services supported by Lancaster City Council (LCC)

Lancaster City Council provides the core funding for our volunteer advice service and has enabled us to develop and respond to the changing needs of clients and to further develop our digital services. We have built up very strong partnerships with our colleagues at LCC. The support from LCC allows us to recruit and train more people from the local area to provide our advice services within the district to members of their own community. The project work we do is dependent upon us having this core funding, all the work we do is built upon this solid foundation. This funding has enabled us to develop new ways of delivering our service.



Access to advice through our new website has increased the numbers of people accessing self help service.⁷

We are working hard to increase our access by telephone and plan to enter into the Citizens Advice – AdviceLine telephone service in 2015.⁸

5.2 Housing advice through the Legal Aid Agency

We are the only agency in North Lancashire with a Legal Aid contract to deliver specialist housing advice. Our small specialist housing team is made up of a specialist caseworker and a solicitor. This year we provided specialist legal advice to **203** clients. We cover a range of housing issues including:

- threat to the loss of the home due to mortgage arrears,
- homelessness
- loss of tenancy due to landlord possession proceedings for rent arrears
- those faced with loss of the home due to landlord being in mortgage arrears.



203 clients given specialist legal advice



67 clients facing repossession represented in court



Homelessness prevented in 90% of cases



65354 managed in rent and mortgage arrears

⁷ In 2014-2015 we recorded 10908 unique visitors to our website

⁸ Citizens Advice North Lancashire joined the national AdviceLine service in May 2015

A client was living with her two children in very poor accommodation with a landlord who would not carry out repairs. We helped her to complain about the disrepair but the landlord preferred to carry out the repairs when the property was vacant. The repairs were not serious enough for the Housing Standards to order the works to be done immediately. We helped her to apply to the Local Authority as effectively 'homeless at home'. She was subsequently rehoused quickly. Without our intervention it is likely that she may have spent years living in poor accommodation.

We deal with all aspects of these cases from advice, review and formal appeal and representation at the county court. By focussing on the prevention of homelessness we meet one of the local priorities to improve the health and wellbeing of families.

We provide, advice, negotiation and representation in Lancaster County Court on a bi-weekly basis. In 2014/15 we represented a total of **67** people who were facing repossession of their home. We prevented homelessness for over **90%** of these cases. We helped our clients deal with **£65,354** of rent and mortgage arrears.

We have also been working with the District Judge to look at the provision of help and support for litigants in person. Litigants in person in this context are often those who have no choice but to represent themselves in family matters as a direct result of the loss of legal aid for such cases.



5.3 Debt Advice through the Money Advice Service

The Money Advice Service (MASDAP) have provided funding for this project up to 2017 allowing us to continue to provide all aspects of debt advice across the district. All our advice volunteers are trained in basic debt advice. They are supported by our two specialist debt caseworkers who take on more complex cases. This year volunteers have dealt with **794** debt cases and our specialist caseworkers dealt with **579** of the more complex debt cases. Debt continues to be one of the largest areas of advice need among the local community and we expect this demand to increase throughout the next few years as the impact of welfare reform and low wage economy makes a greater impact.





**61 Debt Relief Orders
resulting in £1,217,075.00
written off**

**26 Bankruptcy cases
resulting in £1,225,095.00
written off**

**5 Individual Voluntary
Arrangements resulting in
£131,481.00 written off**

Our client, is a single woman with a long standing history of mental health problems. She lost her job and her home and moved into private rented accommodation. Faced with a substantive mortgage shortfall debt and a number of other debts totalling £38,000.00 and pressure from her former mortgage lender, was impacting on her mental health. We advised her to consider bankruptcy as an option and assisted her with two applications for financial assistance with two charities. We were successful in obtaining the sum of £650.00 from both charities and this enabled the client to petition for bankruptcy. We also assisted her with the application and submission, and the court made an order declaring her bankrupt and discharging the above debt. Our client contacted us to say that she felt a weight had been lifted from her shoulders and she also felt that her mental health had improved significantly.



5.4 Outreaches at Children’s Centres

We provide an outreach advice service at Lune Park Lancaster and four children’s centres across Morecambe and Heysham. The provision of this service is vital because it meets the advice needs of those who do not use our main offices. Our statistical analysis of our clients shows that without this service many clients could not access the advice they need at the time they need it.

Since the cuts to Legal Aid in 2013 we are seeing more and more clients who have no access to justice. There is now no legal aid for family law cases except for those who provide evidence of domestic violence in the



previous two years.

We will be working next year to recruit a pro bono solicitor who can provide some advice to these clients.

The Children's Centres see the advice service we provide as essential to those using their services and we appreciate the support they provide to us to work within the centres. Last year, our part-time adviser dealt with **154** client enquiries at the children's centre where advice was delivered on a range of issues including benefit, debt and child access.

'a weekly Citizens Advice drop-in session, ease families' access to essential services. This helps to enhance their health and economic wellbeing significantly'
OFSTED⁹

5.5 Financial Capability through United Utilities Energy Best Deal



Total Debt managed
£1,494,076.00
64% of clients on
benefits only
income
18% on pension
related income

We employ a full time caseworker who delivers this project providing debt advice and financial capability guidance to those in fuel poverty. We have worked in partnership with LESS who provided weekly energy clinics in our offices. Our priority under this project is to take action to alleviate fuel poverty and ensure clients are living in affordable adequately heated and insulated homes. We work with the Home Improvement Agency and other partners to address emergency need for heating.

155 clients under this project were referred to Disability online and **119** referred to our general advice service for additional benefit claims or issues. There were ten training sessions delivered as part of this funding. A total of 12 frontline workers and 83 end users benefited from direct training on energy saving initiatives and switching tariffs to reduce energy bills.

⁹ OFSTED inspection, Balmoral Children's Centre Morecambe February 2015

5.5.1 Energy Best Deal Extra Project



Average client saving £275 per annum. Gas and electricity debts managed £69,351 Client gains for the year £240,933.00

A further **50** clients received direct support through this additional project to complete a 1:1 price comparison check to find a cheaper energy supplier and then move to this new tariff. On average clients saved between £250 and £300 per annum but for those who had never switched and been loyal the saving rose to an average of £500 per annum.

All financial gains whether benefits claimed or debt rescheduled, increase disposable incomes which are spent within the local community.

A retired client was experiencing severe financial hardship. She was in severe arrears with gas, electric and water and she had sold or pawned all her worldly goods. She was extremely tearful and depressed and explained that she hadn't had a proper meal in ages as she had gas, electric and water debts to pay.

We assisted the client with an application to the United Utilities Trust Fund Project and she was awarded a payment towards the water arrears, and her liability was reduced to £2.25 per week. We also helped the client apply for and receive the warm homes discount of £140. In addition, we offered her full financial capability training to help her take control of her finances and further referrals were made to external agencies on her behalf.



5.6. Employment Advice through Probono Solicitor

We have an employment solicitor who provides advice to people needing more specialist employment advice. This is a very valuable service bridging the gap left by the Legal Aid cuts.

He provides this service on a pro bono basis (undertaken for the public good without any payment). Half hour interviews are provided for clients who have more complex legal advice needs. He has also taken on full blown cases especially in the area of discrimination. His service means we are able to provide all levels of advice to clients. In addition the solicitor trains some of the law students as legal assistants who volunteer with us. This provides them with invaluable client experience, enhancing their career prospects. Last year, he helped 170 clients with their employment issues, 13 of those cases received a total settlement of £67,000.¹⁰

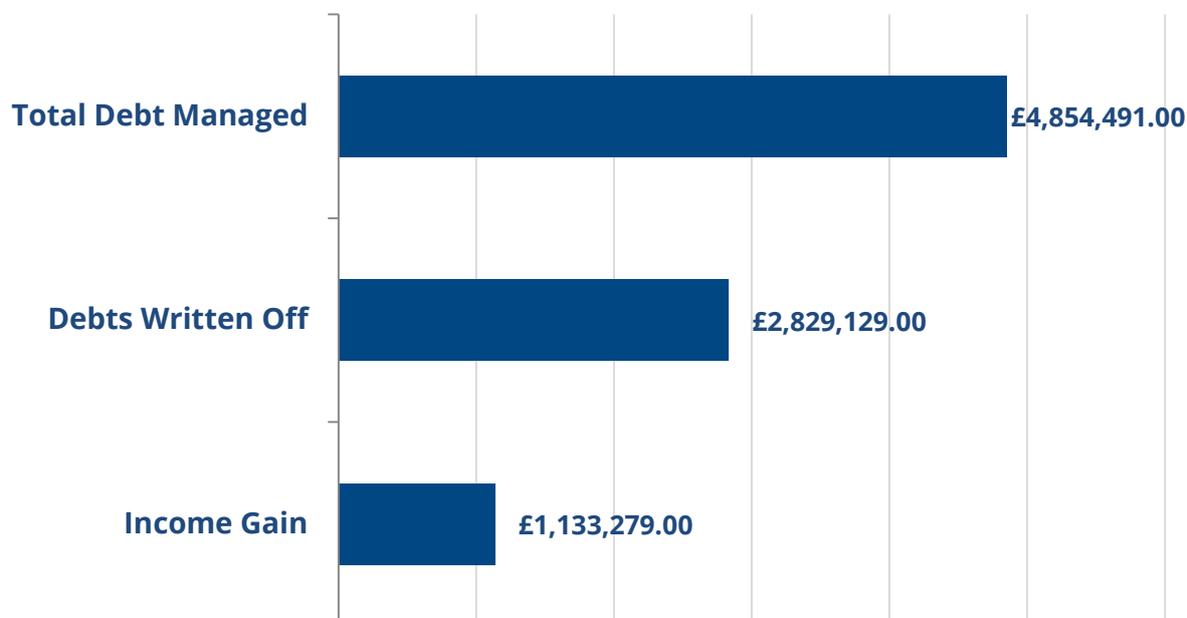


170 clients helped

13 cases settled

£67,000 awarded as settlement

6. Financial Outcomes for the period 2014-15



▲ Figure 4: Financial Outcomes 2014-15

¹⁰ Total settlement awarded including costs

7. Volunteering

Volunteers are vital to our service, allowing us to reach many more people than if we were purely staff-run.¹¹ They take on a wide range of roles from assessing and providing advice, supporting the running of the service, campaigning in the community and acting as trustees.

Last year, the service benefited from **113** volunteers who gave an average of 8 hours per week.

7.1 Volunteer Recruitment

We are always looking for volunteers to join our advice team. We work in partnership with Lancaster CVS and Lancaster University Students Union, who refer prospective volunteers to us. In addition, the national headquarters, Citizens Advice has a volunteer application link and form on the website and we receive many referrals by that route.



Last year we had 160 enquiries from potential volunteers. Each potential volunteer is invited to a meeting at one of our offices or in some cases to an open session when we have a lot of applicants. These sessions enable potential volunteers to see our offices, understand the volunteer roles available and to talk about what they can offer and what they themselves are looking for.

Out of those 160 enquiries we received approximately 100 application forms and following shortlisting and interviews, 71 new volunteers were recruited.

Following successful recruitment all volunteers go through an induction period learning about our aims, principles and policies before going onto their chosen training route as

‘I’ve worked in the Morecambe office for 18 years and I can’t now imagine not coming in every week! Its part of the structure of my life. I enjoy talking to clients on the whole and to other volunteers and staff.’

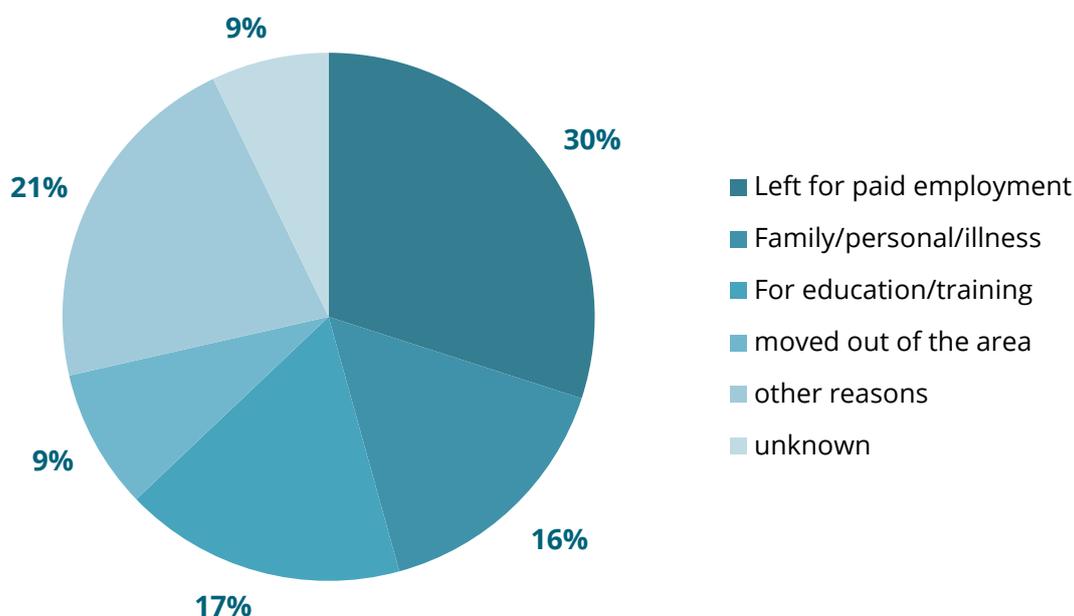
a gateway assessor, administrator, research and campaigns assistant, receptionist or telephone assessor.

It doesn’t end with induction though, all our volunteers undertake regular training on subjects and skills relevant to their roles. With new legislation coming in all the time, our advice and assessment team and specialist caseworkers all undertake regular training to ensure there are up to date with current rules, regulations and procedures.

¹¹ To provide a staff-run service for the equivalent provided last year will amount to 14,076 worth of delivery hours, as well as the overhead costs applied as the ongoing cost of enabling volunteers

7.2 Value of Volunteering with Citizens Advice North Lancashire

Last year, we also said farewell to 70 volunteers. Their reasons for leaving are shown below.



▲ Figure 5: Volunteers reasons for leaving 2014-15

By training and investing in our volunteers, we help to develop individuals' personal abilities, and the way that they feel about themselves, their skills and their community. This can have a significant impact on volunteers' lives, for example:

- All Citizens Advice volunteers gain at least one practical skill from volunteering
- 4 in 5 believe that they have increased their employability
- 9 in 10 have an increased sense of purpose or self-esteem
- 4 in 5 believe volunteering has had a positive effect on their health
- 9 in 10 feel more engaged with their community

When I retired, I struggled with not feeling useful. I find Citizens Advice a worthwhile way to volunteer'

'I love the variety of queries customers bring to Citizens Advice North Lancashire. I also love the buzz when customers leave all happy and are pleased with our service after coming in all emotional and distressed'



Volunteers are an essential part of the service that we offer.

- Volunteers help reflect and build a bridge between us and the community we serve
- Volunteers bring diversity which enriches Citizens Advice North Lancashire
- Volunteers bring a range of qualities, skills and expertise that we may not get from the paid staff i.e. languages, cultural understanding, specialist skills, personal experiences
- Volunteers can demonstrate that we value our community and clients and their experiences, and that we want to invest in their future by training them to provide a quality service.

Volunteering also has additional benefits for society through happier, healthier and more productive citizens:

- We reduce the barriers that prevent people moving into work: 9 in 10 agree that CAB volunteering is helping them to move into employment, education or training
- 9 in 10 feel better equipped and empowered to deal with issues in their lives - with 4 in 5 also helping friends and families
- All retired volunteers believe volunteering keeps them mentally active
- 3 in 4 feel better equipped to be an advocate for their community

This has a value in terms of volunteer contribution to society. Strengthening communities and bringing people closer together improves social cohesion and gives people a greater stake in their local area.

*'Challenging, but rewarding.
Excellent training programmes
for new volunteers and
experienced and supportive
staff, always helpful'*



**£370,300
worth in
volunteering
hours donated
by our 113
volunteers**



**47% of our
volunteers
leave for paid
employment
or training**

8. Research and Campaigns

Through research and campaigns, we address social policy issues which have an adverse impact on vulnerable people. We have undertaken a wider range of activities in the past year given extra weight and strength by evidence and input from the partner agencies that make up the CAN Help Project.

In the past year, changes to the way welfare benefits are being implemented have prompted evidence gathering and the production of our report on DWP sanctions¹² which has led to wide media coverage. The report focuses on the impact benefit sanctions were having on local claimants.

CAB is worth it weight in gold advice and guidance plus they help people in need. An iconic service to die for nothing else comes close. A truly first class service to all. I wish the organisation every success in the future

Client Comment

“This is the second time I have used this excellent service. I cannot tell you how helpful and valuable the advice I received. A welcome face to talk to, great signposting, quick follow-up appointments, sensitive and kind approach. I received the information, guidance and advice needed for me to follow up and progression. This gave me the strength and the knowledge needed at a time of stress. Thank you so much you are a remarkable service”



¹² 'Benefit Sanctions – Stick, Carrot or Penal System?' available at [North Lancashire Citizens Advice Bureau](#)

It included studies of claimants who had their benefits stopped for periods of three months or more, often without warning leaving them with little option but to apply to food banks and high interest lenders to get by. After publication of the report, DWP officers from the job centre met with us to work together on a less punitive way of administering the legislation.

Last year, we raised 356 Research and Campaign issues. Currently we're working on two campaigns – the cost of medical evidence for people needing help with benefits appeals, housing applications and disability requirements; and a housing campaign at national level – “Settled and Safe” – working for better protection for private tenants’.

“I found all the staff i.e. (workers) very helpful, down to earth, not judgemental and above all very fair. Much appreciated the time and help I received by the staff”



It is inspiring to see the results which active Research and Campaigning can achieve, especially in improving the lives of vulnerable people across the district. Citizens Advice North Lancashire thanks its CAN Help partners for their input and its own team of volunteers for processing and analysing the constant stream of data which is all derived from issues raised by our clients.



The CAN (Community Advice Network) project has been running since October 2013. North Lancashire Citizens Advice Bureau are leading a project with 14 partners to ensure quality advice services are available and sustainable within Lancaster District.

In 2014-15, the project has continued to develop with fantastic commitment and energy from the partners and wider community. The project is funded by Big Lottery Fund and as such, is subject to stringent funding requirements and outcomes. However, within this, we have been able to work with them to ensure a great deal of flexibility when we have identified new risks or opportunities which help us ensure the future sustainability of advice services within the District.

Over this year, our partnership has experienced the full range of challenges within the Third Sector, including funding difficulties, changes of key service providers within the District and an ever increasing demand for services. We were also sad to see the unexpected closure of One Voice, leaving a huge gap in advice and support services for people with disabilities. Although challenging, it has greater demonstrated the strength and resilience of partnership working.

As a partnership, we have been pleased to develop the project to work alongside and support a number of fantastic local Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector organisations. One of our aims is to develop a number of 'Access Points' across the District to allow our community to have better access to advice and information. Within Lancaster District, look out for this logo. Anywhere displaying it will be able to give you information and ensure you get the advice you need.



www.lancastercanhelp.org.uk

The project has been working on our digital presence to ensure that information about local services and quality, updated self-help advice is available to as many people as possible. The above website provides the hub of our digital presence but is supported by Facebook and Twitter to keep our community updated with important information about advice and support services within the District.



www.facebook.com/lancastercanhelp



[@CANlancaster](https://twitter.com/CANlancaster)

Our Partners:



Is CAN making a difference?

The CAN Help project continues on target to meet the project outcomes and has received very positive feedback from Big Lottery Fund, partners and the community in general. BUT, what difference have we seen?

- The CAN Help website (www.lancastercanhelp.org.uk) was launched in October 2014 as a resource for the whole community to access 'self-help' advice or find the most appropriate advice partner to support them. The website is receiving over 1000 hits per month.
- North Lancashire Citizens Advice Bureau has registered as an Assessment Centre with Skills for Justice Awards to offer Legal Advice Qualifications to staff and volunteers across the partnership. We are aiming to have 50 newly qualified people by the end of the project with a further 60 – 70 receiving other training from the project team.
- The project has been working with a much wider group of Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector groups as it has grown. This has led to the continued development of CAN Help Access Points to ensure that advice is as accessible as possible across communities in Lancaster District.
- The partnership has completed a Gap Analysis which identifies the key priorities for advice service provision within the District. This Gap Analysis provides a blue-print for our future work.
- The partnership has responded to the closure of One Voice to 'fill the gap' left. A group of Disability Advice providers have worked together to ensure services are available and to work on ensuring they are sustainable going forward.

What's next?

The project funding is due to end on 30/09/2015 and as such, the completion of the project outcomes and the ongoing sustainability of the network are our key focus.

We have learned so much throughout the life of this project and are confident that the work done will provide a springboard to further development of advice services within the District.

The reality is that advice and support organisations are receiving an unprecedented demand for their services. The CAN partnership provides an opportunity for the District providers to work together to ensure everyone in need of advice and support is able to get it as easily as possible.

We have a dedicated partnership who are committed to work together and ensure we tackle the needs proactively and in collaboration.