

Life through lockdown



IMPACT REPORT 2021

**citizens
advice**

Uttlesford



www.uttlesfordca.org.uk

“CAB have been a lifeline to me in one of the darkest periods of my life.”

OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

2,382

WE HELPED 2,382 PEOPLE, MANY ON MULTIPLE OCCASIONS, TO MANAGE OVER 9,000 ISSUES

54%

54% OF OUR CLIENTS WERE LIVING WITH A DISABILITY OR LONG-TERM HEALTH PROBLEM

13,800

WE HANDLED OVER 13,800 PHONE CALLS, EMAILS, WEB CHATS AND VIDEO CALLS

£4.15m

WE GENERATED OVER £4 MILLION IN VALUE TO OUR CLIENTS (INCREASING INCOME, DEBT WRITTEN OFF, BENEFIT TAKE-UP)

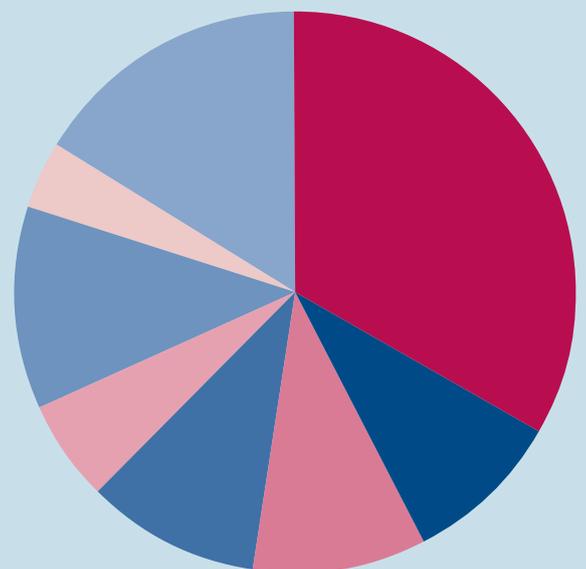
£18.48

FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED IN OUR SERVICE, WE PROVIDED £18.48 OF PUBLIC BENEFIT

68

68 VOLUNTEERS GAVE AROUND 20,000 HOURS TO SUPPORT OUR CLIENTS

CORE ADVICE ISSUES 2020-21



FOREWORD

The Coronavirus pandemic has drastically affected our lives and the way that we work.

Our offices remained closed and home visits suspended for much of the last year, in line with Government advice. But we have managed to keep the service running and available to clients through a multi-channel approach, primarily phone and email based but with the option of a face to face appointment for vulnerable individuals that need it. This has involved extensive working from home, without the social engagement and interaction that is part of working in an organisation like ours but it has been crucial in continuing to help local people in need of support and advice and while maintaining a high quality standard. For this, we are immensely grateful for the support, creativity, resilience and commitment of our staff, volunteers and trustees during what has been a uniquely challenging period.

We have now made a gradual return to the office, but still retaining a flexible and hybrid approach on home/office working and ever mindful that the pandemic is by no means over. And conscious that the economic and social effects of the pandemic continue to affect our clients, financially and in terms of mental and physical health.

The facts and figures in this report speak for themselves, demonstrating the real positive impact that our work has on local people and the significant value and public benefit generated by the efforts of our staff and volunteers. We remain extremely grateful for the support that our funders have continued to provide throughout the pandemic and we believe the return



“THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC CONTINUE TO AFFECT OUR CLIENTS, FINANCIALLY AND IN TERMS OF MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH”

for them and society as a whole on the money that we receive demonstrates the wisdom of this continued investment in our service.

As ever, but particularly so now, the future is an uncertain picture, but we can face the challenges ahead confident that we will be here to help our clients when they need us, whoever they are, and whatever their problem.

Richard Armitage
Chair of Trustees

“The adviser was professional, sympathetic and really listened and gave me great support on a day when I was feeling very depressed. Even though we made the decision not to proceed she was patient, non-judgemental and I would really like to thank her for all her help.”

TIMELINE 2020



2 million people have moved into a financially fragile situation since February 2020

Uttlesford unemployment rates now over 4% - quite a jump from a previous 1%

MaPS funding allows us to recruit 2 new trainee debt advisers

We start working with Mind in west Essex to improve mental health and wellbeing support for our debt clients

We support local volunteers to set up Children's Clothing Bank

We are helping more people who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) during the pandemic

2.1million households are behind on their energy bills

Our new freephone number goes live!

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

A huge 'win' for the warm homes team - an increase of over £7,000 in annual income for a client, plus council tax arrears written off!

Our first 'virtual' AGM takes place!

We work with Uttlesford foodbank to provide families who are struggling with a Christmas food parcel



"Citizens Advice supported me a great deal. I was referred to them through my GP. They stayed in touch with me every step of the way, reassured me and helped me. I am very grateful they were there for me."

TIMELINE 2021

"The disability benefits team are invaluable in trying repeatedly to get my claim awarded. I would be lost without their knowledge, expertise & support. Thank you so much."

1 in 6 are struggling to afford their broadband during lockdown

Many of our clients are worried about the removal of the £20 uplift to UC in April

The number of people on Universal Credit has nearly doubled since March 2020

Ofgem's latest update to the energy price cap will see it increase by £96 for default tariff customers, and by £87 for pre-payment meter customers

There will be a six-month extension to £20 uplift in Universal Credit – however millions still face a financial cliff edge in the autumn

Our advisers offer support to families who worry how they will cope during the Easter holidays

JANUARY

Our advisers receive training on changes in immigration and new rules for EU nationals – always something new to learn!

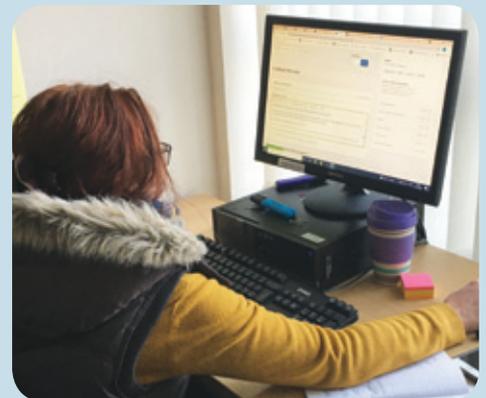
FEBRUARY

Our facebook post: "You don't have to be on benefits to get help" reaches over 7,600 people

We have our annual membership audit and are found to be good or excellent in all organisational/ leadership categories!

MARCH

486 clients advised on over 1,000 issues this month alone!



TIMELINE 2021

Work starts on new interview space in Great Dunmow Library - Stansted to follow!

Another adviser passes her City & Guilds Level 3 Award in Energy Awareness - she is now a guru of boilers, heaters, thermostats and lots more!

APRIL

We welcome three new trainee advisers!

The new Library Remote Access point opens in Great Dunmow!

The ban on evictions comes to an end. Almost 1 in 10 private renters are behind on their rent

DWP announce they will revisit all claims made in the early stages of the pandemic - meaning lots of work for our disability benefits team

MAY

Our debt team are trained on new legislation as the Breathing Space and Mental Health Crisis Debt Respite Schemes come into effect

36 million adults in UK have been targeted by a scammer since January

Cita auditors say that we are doing a brilliant job in giving good advice and supporting our client's journey!

2 student volunteers join our team along with 4 more trainee advisers!

JUNE

We foresee increasing fuel debt problems as an energy price rise looms

"I'm grateful for the advice I was given. I was able to opt out of a will that I was previously talked into making, only to find out I didn't really need. The company involved also tried to charge me more than I agreed over the phone, because of your help I got my money refunded and the policy was cancelled."



"The advice and help I was given has helped me live without the worry of facing each week wondering if I can make it to my pension payday."



Recruiting begins for new volunteer Trustees to join our board and help steer our charity

We see a big increase in clients asking for help with budgeting and income maximisation

Almost 1,100 calls and emails handled this month alone!

UCA remote access point opens at Touchpoint in Stansted

We thank our volunteers with a tea party in late summer sunshine!

Three new members of staff join our team to support our work on warm homes, help to claim and volunteer support

JULY

22 clients with fuel debt issues supported this month



AUGUST

We undertake our annual volunteer and staff survey to help us identify how we can better support our team

£13,949.77 back payment secured for a client following a PIP appeal!

SEPTEMBER

A worrying number of local families are struggling to afford to get their kids to school due to high bus fares and rising petrol prices

Lots of calls from worried clients as furlough ends & the £20 Universal Credit uplift is removed - utility bills are rising as winter approaches

A TYPICAL WEEK



MON

A client calls – she has long covid and has been signed off from work. Her employer has told her that she is not entitled to sick pay because she already receives Universal Credit and she is worried that she will not be able to manage financially. Our adviser assures her that this is incorrect.

Later on, we help an elderly couple apply for a blue badge – they can't use the internet and don't have a camera, so have struggled with the application process.

TUES

Fantastic news! We have been supporting a homeless client who has been sofa surfing for 5 years – he found out today he has been housed by the council! We help him to open a bank account and make a claim for Universal Credit. He can't believe he will finally have somewhere to live – we have to keep reassuring him it is not a mistake.

WED

Our trainees come into the office to shadow some of our volunteers. They are 9 weeks into their training and almost ready to start taking client calls. Over tea and cake we discuss how they have found the training – what has worked well and how we could improve. It's useful feedback for us to reflect on as we start the recruitment process again.

We process a foodbank referral for a young family who are paying over £60 in bus fares each week to get their children to school.

THUR

A single client comes to see us because he is struggling to manage after the reduction in Universal Credit. He works full time, but after rent and bills he has just £36 a week for food, transport, prescriptions and clothes. He has done all the right things and cannot cut his expenditure any further. We refer him to the foodbank and feel despondent that we can't do more to help.

We run a virtual drop-in session for anyone who wants to find out about volunteering with us. People join us from many different backgrounds and with a wide variety of motivations for volunteering.

FRI

A great end to the week. Our Disability Specialist helped a client win his appeal for Personal Independence Payment! He was awarded both enhanced daily living and standard mobility, which opened up passported benefits such as access to the motability scheme – and he received a back payment of £11,032.67!

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS HOW OUR SERVICE MAKES A DIFFERENCE



We help anyone that contacts us, across a huge range of problems, so we have a unique insight into the way problems are linked and the challenges people are facing.

Sometimes solving a problem can be about having the right skills or equipment. We help people complete online forms, photocopy documents and make phone calls. Knowing how to take action isn't always obvious – many of our clients have difficulty finding out who they should contact or feel unsure of the way systems work.

Problems can be unexpected and often follow a big life change, such as job loss, bereavement, relationship breakdown or illness. We offer holistic support, easing financial worries and relieving stress and anxiety by providing people with the information they need to make informed decisions. Working closely with other local statutory and non-statutory services, we refer clients to specialist services when they need additional help.

As a key provider of emergency support, we work closely with the council and other local charities to help people who are struggling to afford food, clothes, medication, and fuel or who are without a safe place to sleep. Once their immediate needs have been met, we concentrate on the root cause of the issue, helping people apply for benefits, resolve housing issues or work towards a debt free life.

Uttlesford is a beautiful place to live, but the rural location can itself lead to hardship. Poor internet access and mobile phone reception can cause difficulties when applying for jobs or benefits. A lack of public transport and high bus fares can make running a car a necessity for people to effectively access work, education or healthcare. We are increasingly finding clients worried about making ends meet as utility bills and the cost of petrol continues to rise.

As an important part of the community, with a credible understanding of local needs, we use our knowledge and the evidence we collect to highlight underlying problems and show local and national organisations how they can make things better for people.

“I would be lost without you guys! I have mental health issues. You have guided me through bankruptcy and all my PIP assessments. I'm very thankful and thank you for the excellent service you provide.”



In 2013, with the support of a number of other organisations, we applied for a Big Lottery Grant to build our first pilot for a multi-agency referral and signpost system in Uttlesford. Moving on eight years, Frontline is still developing and expanding across West Essex, East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne; there are now 212 local services listed on Uttlesford Frontline alone!

This project works because everyone involved from funders to users believes that, with the right tools, services will generate referrals and signposts to better support their patients and clients – and we have the proof! During the last 6 months Frontline generated 3,145 referrals to 197 different local services across West Essex, which represents an 18% increase over the previous half-year. 378 services in West Essex were signposted 4,134 times in the same period.

A huge thank you to everyone that has championed Frontline over the last eight years!

3,145

3,145 REFERRALS WERE GENERATED USING FRONTLINE SITES IN WEST ESSEX

“My husband has complex medical issues. It’s so exhausting. Someone recommended Frontline – and it’s great! I know all the services are available in our area.”

“Frontline is a fantastic digital referral platform that we are lucky to have in the west.”

FIONA BAILEY

Lead for Partnership Delivery,
West Essex – Essex County Council

“Having so many local organisations in one easily accessible platform means we can be efficient in our signposting and response time.”

ANNE-MARIE BLACK

Head of School

“Frontline is the first place I go to if I’m looking for any support for my clients.”

JULIE HARKUS

Social Prescriber Link Worker

“Uttlesford Frontline provides a service which any of our personnel regardless of rank can access with ease.”

SERGEANT TOM LIVESEY

Welfare SNCO

“Receiving our referrals via Frontline makes the process for us very smooth. We feel safe in the knowledge that the information being shared with us is appropriate and confidential.”

HANA HAINSBY

Foodbank Manager

18%

18% INCREASE YEAR-ON-YEAR

“What an extraordinary professional, expert, helpful service. A group of people who care and are committed to helping others.”

OUR VOLUNTEERS

68 lovely volunteers currently undertake a variety of different roles from advising clients to working on research and campaigns to taking a strategic view as a member of our board. Between them, they contribute nearly 400 hours each week on average – their donated time is worth over £300,000 each year!



“Volunteering with Citizens Advice allowed me to do something meaningful with my time whilst learning new skills that will really benefit me in the future. I really valued the responsibility I faced when helping people, and enjoyed the everyday challenges of the experience.”

ARIANA

Student volunteer



“Constant learning, clearly directed training and on-site support from our dedicated supervisors has proven to be very effective in enabling me to deliver the best advice and support we have available. I feel that I have made a real and positive impact to many within our community.”

PETER

Volunteer adviser

400

THEY CONTRIBUTE NEARLY 400 HOURS EACH WEEK ON AVERAGE

£300,000

THEIR DONATED TIME IS WORTH OVER £300,000 EACH YEAR!

COULD YOU VOLUNTEER?

If you have some time to spare and want to make a real difference, why not join us? We're looking for people who:

- enjoy helping people
- respect other peoples' views, values and culture
- can use a computer and the internet
- are able to commit one day or two half days per week

Our volunteers come from a diverse range of backgrounds and all bring different skills and experience. So what are you waiting for?

Call 01799 618840 or email volunteer@uttlesfordca.org.uk for more information.

RESEARCH & CAMPAIGNS

Throughout the year we record evidence to enable us to campaign on both local and national issues. Our aim is to use our clients' experiences to attempt to help everyone by tackling the root cause of a problem and trying to influence policymakers to change.

THIS YEAR WE SENT LETTERS TO LOCAL MP KEMI BADENOCH AND GOVERNMENT MINISTERS TO HIGHLIGHT:

- The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on disability benefit applications
- Continuing issues with Personal Independence Payment applications and appeals
- Why the Government should retain the temporary uplift in Universal Credit – our student volunteer Jonah made a great video!



WE ALSO CAMPAIGNED ON:

- Clients' struggle to access covid testing
- The issue of reverse digital exclusion
- Scam awareness
- Clients' difficulties completing blue badge applications
- GP surgeries charging vulnerable clients for medical support letters

THANK YOU!

A huge thank you to Uttlesford District Council, Saffron Walden Town Council, Essex County Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Great Dunmow Town Council, and many of Uttlesford's parish councils for continuing support and encouragement as well as the grants and donations that help to fund our core service. Targeted funding from the DWP, MaPs, National Citizens Advice, Essex Community Foundation and Essex County Council has enabled us to continue to undertake specific projects this year and target support to the most disadvantaged sections of the community.

We are always grateful for the support of our local community – your help in promoting our service, training our team and supporting our clients is very much appreciated. But, as ever, the final word of thanks must go to our volunteers and staff, for their tireless dedication and unwavering commitment to helping everyone who needs our advice.

Uttlesford Citizens Advice Bureau Company Registered no. 3771142
Charity Registration No. 1078222. Citizens Advice Bureau Member no.65/0048

If you are interested in finding out more about our charity, would like to join our team of volunteers or perhaps offer your support in other ways through fundraising, helping with publicity or by providing pro bono services for our clients, we would love to hear from you! Please get in touch with our team on 01799 618840.

