


A blue circular logo with the text 'citizens advice' in white, lowercase letters.

citizens  
advice

Wandsworth

A photograph of two Black women smiling and leaning over a brick wall. The woman on the left has her arm around the woman on the right. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

# The difference we make to Wandsworth

## Our impact in the last 12 months

March 2023

# Introduction

## A message from our Chair

I'm pleased to introduce this report, which highlights the incredible work Citizens Advice Wandsworth does every day.

We support people with expert information and advice on everything from housing and money problems to employment and community care issues.

The report shows the worrying increase this year in the level of local need for advice. It is a very a challenging time for the people we help.



Wandsworth





The cost of living crisis has come hard on the heels of the pandemic – which we saw significantly reduce the financial resilience of many of our clients. Residents experiencing hardship are coming to us in unprecedented numbers and our work is more important than ever.

We are very grateful to our funders who generously support us to meet this growing need and to all the partners who work with us in Wandsworth. Together we make a difference.

Whatever the future challenges I remain optimistic that we'll continue to operate as a strong local ecosystem, resourced by funders who recognise the impact of our work.

Thank you again to the volunteers, staff, partners and funders who make what we do possible.

**Lucy Harmer**  
Chair of Trustees

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# We are Citizens Advice Wandsworth

Every year thousands of people come to us for help solving their problems.

This means we're an important part of the community, with a credible understanding of local needs.

The direct value of our advice for the people we help is over

**£4.5 million**

And the public value is over

**£36 million**





# This is Charlene

Charlene is an example of one of the people we helped recently.

In the last 12 months we helped **9,272 people** with **31,290 issues**.

Charlene's story shows how we help people solve their problems, and why this is important.



# What we do

We help people with a range of problems including issues with housing, debt, benefits, employment, relationships and consumer rights.

Sometimes people have more than one issue they need help with.



Charlene was referred to us by Wandsworth Foodbank.

Her Universal Credit had been stopped and she was struggling to pay her rent and buy food.

She was feeling depressed and anxious about her situation and the risk of her family becoming homeless.

# How we help

We work with people in different ways:



**11%** of contacts are in person



**21%** of contacts are by phone



**19%** of contacts are by email, webchat or video call



Charlene spoke to one of our Adviceline volunteers first.

They discussed her situation, what she could do about it and how much support she would need to challenge the Universal Credit decision.

The volunteer then referred her to a specialist adviser.



# How we help

People often come to us with multiple or complex problems.

We can deal with most of the issues people come to us with, tailoring our advice to their needs.



Over the next 6 months we helped Charlene successfully challenge the decision.

We worked with her social worker and the head teacher to speed up a second appeal when her Universal Credit was stopped again.

We also helped her claim other benefits she should have been getting and connected her to a mental health counselling service.

# The difference this makes

The wider impact of advice – what we achieve as a result of solving problems and providing support – is just as important.



**64%**

said they felt less stress, depressed or anxious as a result of the help they received from us.



Our advice stopped Charlene being evicted and stabilised her financial situation.

Our support has improved her mental health and made her feel better able to cope with other issues.

We've also advised her about making a complaint about how her Universal Credit claim and appeals were handled.

# Our advice is effective

Problems don't happen in isolation and can have a severe consequences. Solving them stops these situations escalating.

We help thousands of people like Charlene.



**75% of people** said their problem was solved following advice



**86% of people** said they could not have resolved their problem without us



**86% of people** said we helped them find a way forward



# Our advice has reach

Our services are for everyone, but the people who need us most are likely to come from groups that experience the greatest hardship, poverty and discrimination.

This is why we build partnerships with faith and community groups - and put Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at the centre of everything we do.

This means that people like Charlene are more likely to get help – whoever they are and whatever community they belong to.



**58%** of our clients are people of colour, compared to 32% of people in Wandsworth as a whole.



**46%** have a disability or long-term health condition, compared to 11% of people in Wandsworth as a whole.

# The impact of advice



**50%**

had more money or control of their finances



**50%**

felt they had better relationships with others



**50%**

felt their physical health had improved



**30%**

found it easier to do their job or find a job



**40%**

had a more secure housing situation



**60%**

found it easier to manage day-to-day

# Why fixing problems matters

If left unsolved, problems don't just affect the individual – they affect this community. Solving them creates considerable value to society.



**9 in 10 people**  
we help say that their  
problem negatively  
affected their life



**2 in 3 people**  
say they had difficulty  
knowing who to contact  
or how systems work  
before advice



**1 in 3 people**  
said their problem was  
urgent when they came  
to us



# Our value to our community (1)

For every £1 Wandsworth Council invested in our core advice service in 2022-23, we estimate that we generated:

**£5.36** in savings for government and public services (fiscal benefits).

**Total: £2,822,801**

**£40.14** in wider economic and social benefits (public value).

**Total: £21,117,040**

**£24.30** in financial value to the people we help (outcomes for individuals).

**Total: £12,783,364**

# Our value to our community (2)

The impact of our work includes:



**£308,176**

saved by local government,  
through reducing  
homelessness

Maximising the income for those we help prevents more costly intervention.

This helps reduce financial difficulty, promotes inclusion and benefits the economy.

This is only a fraction of our value to local government. We also:

- help clients negotiate local processes, such as welfare reform changes
- help local authority rent and council tax arrears to be rescheduled, and reduce the associated administrative costs

# Our value to our community (3)

The impact of our work includes:



**£478,651**

saved by the NHS, through reducing use of mental health and GP services, and keeping people in work

Many of the issues we help people with have a direct impact on their mental health.

There's also evidence of reduced used of health services when people can stay in employment.

This is only a fraction of our value to health services. We also:

- improve health and wellbeing by maximising people's income
- reduce the health costs of people living in unsafe and substandard homes

# Our value to our community (4)

We don't put a figure on everything we do so our value is likely to be greater. Our figures don't include:

- the impact after the first year we help someone
- the knock on effect of people having more money to spend in their community
- the impact of our work to improve policy and practice

Our local authority funding allows us to bring in additional funding from other sources, totalling over

**£1 million**

We use this to help more people, support our partners and deliver ambitious projects.

# How we calculate our financial value

It's impossible to put a financial value on everything we do – but where we can, we have.

We've used a Treasury approved model to do this.

From our robust management information, we've also separately considered the financial benefits to the people we help.

The model looks at:

- keeping people in employment or helping them back to work
- preventing housing evictions and statutory homelessness
- reducing demand for mental health and GP services
- improving mental wellbeing and positive functioning
- improving family relationships

# Research and campaigns

Our unique insight into the challenges people are facing means we can show big organisations how they can make things better for people.

We use research and data to understand what problems people are facing, make recommendations for how to fix these and to campaign for change.





# What we saw

Our advisers noticed a pattern of destitute people coming to us while renting from the same agency landlord. We started monitoring cases.

Their tenants were overwhelmingly single people experiencing multiple disadvantages, including addiction issues, mental health problems or being an ex-offender.

They told us that they feel they couldn't reject unfair terms in the agency's agreements and that they had to choose between having a home or an income.

The agency looked for tenants who were over 35 and claiming benefits. They were charging their tenants **£1280 a month for poorly maintained rooms in shared houses.**

Because of the benefit cap for single people in Greater London tenants were left with **£4.17 a month to live on.**

They approached us for help as they were unable to afford food or other essentials.

# What we did

We collected evidence, produced a report, and raised the issue with Wandsworth Council, who carried out an investigation. They concluded they couldn't prosecute but stopped referrals from their own (and commissioned) services.

We communicated the issues to local politicians and the then opposition party included a manifesto commitment to address exploitative landlord practice.

In June 2022, 18 months after our campaign began, we met with representatives from the agency.

They agreed to reduce monthly rent by £300 and to engage with us as advocates for their tenants. As a result **400+ tenants in Wandsworth are no longer facing destitution**, and issues of disrepair are being addressed.

Our national office gave us their award for 'most influential campaign or research project' for this work.



Our team watching the online screening of the award ceremony, November 2022

# Reports and research

Every year we publish reports and research based on the issues that our clients face and trends that our team identify.

We've reported on the impact of Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis 6 months, 12 months and 2 years after the start of the pandemic.

You can find our reports online at [www.cawandsworth.org/reports](http://www.cawandsworth.org/reports).

## 2 Years on:

The impact of Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis on our clients



citizens  
advice

Wandsworth

July 2022

# What our clients say about us

Our national office uses an independent research company to survey people who use our services. This helps us understand our impact and how we can do things better.



**87%**  
of people surveyed say  
they would recommend  
us.





We're proud of our results, they show that our advice makes a difference.

On most questions we get more positive responses than the national average, which is unusual for a Citizens Advice office in London.

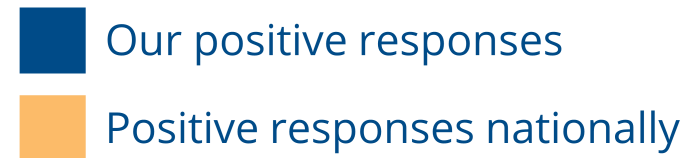
To what extent did the service help you find a way forward?



To what extent is your problem now resolved?



How likely would you be to recommend the service?







*"I was greatly encouraged by the sense of concern and desire to help. I was referred to another agency which had a dedicated interest in my particular situation. Many thanks."*

Working closely with local partners and developing referral relationships helps us help more people and stops residents from falling into the gaps between services



*“Thank you for all you do. This is an invaluable service. The staff are incredibly knowledgeable and are [on] your side. This in itself is extremely healing. Bless you all.”*



*“What can I say? Absolutely brilliant from first to last contact, it has completely changed my circumstances for the best, I would particularly like to thank Michael, for the time and effort he put in to completely resolve all my issues.”*

Michael is a welfare benefits specialist employed through our main council contract. He advises residents about benefits issues and represents people at tribunal hearings.

Funding for specialist advisers helps us to support people with complex legal issues.



*"The help I received was very good. I was treated with dignity and respect and follow up to see how I am managing. Thank you for your help."*



*“Isobel was just brilliant in supporting me with my DLA tribunal. She was really calm and clear in what she needed from me and what the process was... she was fab.”*

Isobel is a long-standing volunteer who specialises in helping people challenge benefits decisions.

She’s just one of many volunteers who give their time to help our clients.



*“As a result of the help and support I received from an [adviser] at Citizens Advice, my mental health was greatly improved. He was by far the most help and support at a time when we needed it.”*





*“The service has significantly helped my mental health... I would not have made it through [the PIP application process] without Mina... she has made an incredible difference in my life. Also my referral was made via my GP... I would never have realised CAB could help if not for that referral.”*

Mina works on our Clinical Commissioning Group Project, which allows GPs and social prescribers to refer patients directly to us.

Our health projects help take pressure off the NHS and help us reach people who might not otherwise use our services.



*“Without [your] intervention I honestly do not know what would have happened and how long it would have took... by contacting my housing association directly they were forced to act and that was the beginning of solving our problem. I am extremely grateful to the adviser and service.”*

# Our volunteers

Our volunteers give their time, skills and experience to enable us to reach as many people as we do.

There are also considerable benefits for them too, such as improved employability.

£ The value of the time our volunteers gave to help deliver our services in the last 12 months is over **£700,000**



# What our team say about us

Every year our staff and volunteers can give anonymous feedback about us and how we can do things better.



**97%**

of our team say they would recommend us as a place to work or volunteer



*“Such a friendly, welcoming & understanding environment. Everybody’s views are valued & listened to and we’re always working as team to do things better”.*





Volunteer's Week celebration event at The Kairos Centre in Roehampton, July 2022

# The wider value of volunteering

Volunteering offers training and development opportunities. It can also connect people to their community, improve their wellbeing and connect them to their community.



The public value of our volunteering roles is over **£500,000**



*"Citizens Advice Wandsworth provided brilliant training and courses. Although I worked remotely, they made me feel supported and that I was an important member of the team. All supervisors were understanding and patient".*



# Our projects, services and initiatives

We have 16 funding streams and do more than just advice.

In this section our teams introduce themselves and what they do.



# Adviceline

## Who we are

Helpline delivered by volunteers and staff working in partnership with other Citizens Advice offices in London.

## What we do

We can advise you about your rights, give you guidance about how to deal with an issue yourself or refer you to an adviser for in-depth help.



Last year we helped around **7,000** people with all kinds of issues, including benefits, debt, housing, consumer, immigration and employment.

## Who we help

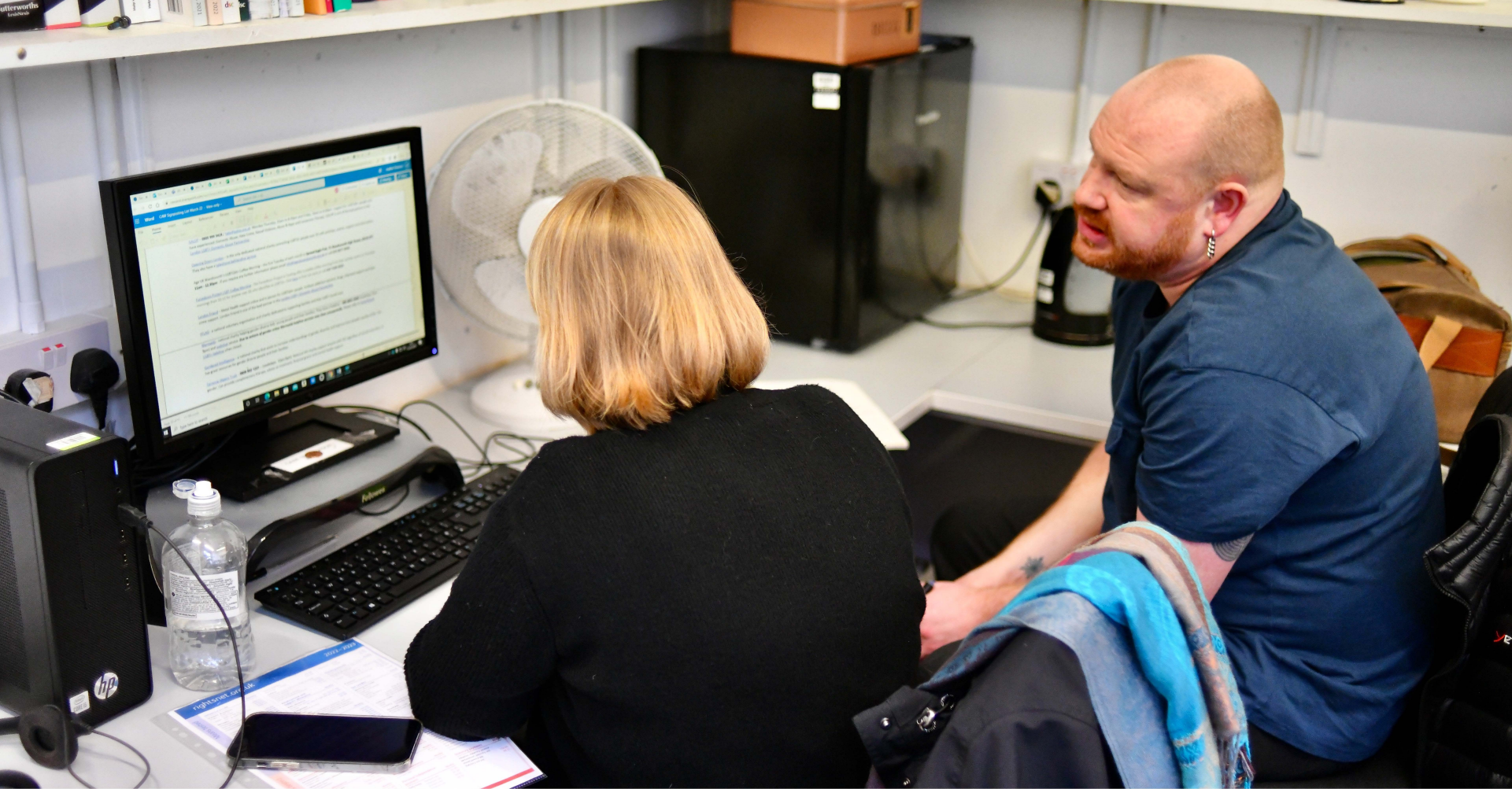
Anyone who lives in Wandsworth.

## How to get help

- call us Freephone on 0808 278 7833
- visit [cawandsworth.org](http://cawandsworth.org)



*"I was very impressed with the adviser... she was very understanding and knowledgeable, and the information she gave me really helped me to sort out my difficulties".*



Adviceline and Cost of Living Project staff working together, February 2023

# Advice First Aid

## What is it?

Training to increase the capacity of partners at faith, community, voluntary and statutory organisations to:

- identify advice issues
- provide accurate and useful information
- know how, and when, to signpost and refer to specialist advice providers



AFA builds trust in local Citizens Advice services and builds links between different groups and organisations, reducing the risk of people falling between the gaps in services.



We now offer AFA across London, in partnership with the Mayor of London.

## **How to get involved**

Check [cawandsworth.org/crisis](https://cawandsworth.org/crisis) for upcoming dates.



**75%** of attendees say they are more effective at helping people plan for their future.

**87%** said they use what they gained from the course every day.



Bridgelink and ACAA taking part in AFA training delivered in partnership with Citizens Advice Hounslow, February 2023



# CCG Project

## Who we are

Team of advisers funded by local NHS to work with GPs and Link Workers.

## What we do

We help people with non-medical issues that affect their health and wellbeing.

We can provide in-depth support with complex issues including challenging benefits decisions.



Mara is a single parent with a health condition that doesn't have a clear diagnosis. She was referred by her GP because this was making it difficult for her to get disability benefits and support her family.

## Who we help

Anyone registered with a Wandsworth GP.

## How to get help

A GP or Link Worker can refer you.



We advised her through all stages of the appeal process and as a result she is now **£155 better off every week** and has received a back-payment of several thousand pounds.



Member of our CCG Project team working in Battersea Library, February 2023

# Cost of Living Project

## Who we are

Team that works alongside our core advice service, giving additional capacity that allows us to respond quickly and ensure we can help people facing immediate hardship.

## What we do

We provide information, advice and casework support about financial issues and cost of living.



We help people by providing:

- emergency help with essentials like food and fuel
- support to increase their income
- support to reduce their expenditure

## Who we help

Anyone who lives in Wandsworth.

## How to get help

- the council's Cost of Living Hub can refer you
- call us Freephone on 0808 278 7833
- visit [cawandsworth.org](http://cawandsworth.org)



We also provide in-depth advice to resolve complex, underlying issues that can lead to hardship





Cost of living presentation hosted by Mushkil Aasaan, December 2023

# Crisis Project

## Who we are

Team of staff and volunteers who work with Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network.

## What we do

We empower local communities to access services and support themselves through our innovative Advice First Aid training. We also provide advice about benefits, debt, housing and in-depth help to vulnerable people at risk of hardship.



*"[The team are] so approachable and unbelievably thorough and helpful... they deserve the highest praise".*



## Who we help

Anyone who lives in Wandsworth.

## How to get help

Local community and faith organisations can refer to us at [cawandsworth.org/crisis](http://cawandsworth.org/crisis).



**100%** of people surveyed were happy or very happy with the help they received from us.



Help Through Hardship Crisis Project conference, July 2022

# Disability and Social Care Advice Service

## Who we are

Team who were previously an independent organisation supporting disabled people in the borough.

## What we do

We provide advice and in-depth support with benefits issues, completing forms, managing applications and challenging decisions. We can visit people at home if they can't come to our offices.



On average our advice means someone we help is nearly **£9,000** better off.

## Who we help

Anyone who lives in Wandsworth who has a disability, or who cares for someone with a disability.

## How to get help

- a social worker or council officer can refer you
- visit [cawandsworth.org/dascas](http://cawandsworth.org/dascas)



*"I was surprised and extremely grateful that a member of DASCAS came to my house.... I would be lost without [you]"*

# EU Project

## Who we are

Team who work in partnership with South West London Law Centres, SPEAR London and Wandsworth Council.

## What we do

We help EU nationals secure their right to live and work in the UK after Brexit. We offer one-to-one advice and information sessions for organisations and community groups.



*“The staff from the EU Project were amazing – they were willing to work flexibly to support our clients... [who] have a background of homelessness, and can be chaotic and difficult to engage at times. Their communication was clear and concise, to both our clients and our staff, and the team were always on hand to clarify any information as necessary. It has been, and still is, an absolute pleasure to work with [the project]”.*



## Who we help

EU nationals and family members living in Wandsworth.

## How to get help

Our funding ends in March 2023 but the Generalist Advice Service can help with issues related to the EU Settlement Scheme and the rights of EU nationals in the UK.



We've delivered **146 outreach sessions** with nearly **2,500 attendees**

We've provided **1,157 households** with advice and information.



# Foodbank Advice Project

## Who we are

Team of staff and volunteers who work in partnership with Wandsworth Foodbank.

## What we do

We provide advice and casework support to help solve the underlying issues that lead to hardship and people needing to use food banks.



*"You were absolutely brilliant. Thanks to you my life will change completely. I was not aware that I am entitled to more money. This lump sum will allow me to clear all my debts and have a new, fresh start. I am so grateful".*



## Who we help

Anyone getting help from Wandsworth Foodbank.

## How to get help

The team at Wandsworth Foodbank can refer you to us.



*"I think that this service is excellent... you have not only helped me practically to improve my financial situation, but you have made me feel so much better. It eased my thoughts".*





Member of our Foodbank Advice Project team at a welcome centre, October 2022

# Generalist Advice Service

## Who we are

Team of staff and volunteers based in our centres in Battersea and Roehampton.

## What we do

We provide advice about a wide range of issues, including benefits, charity grants, employment, health and community care, housing, immigration and finances.



On average, when we resolve an issue, the person we help is over **£9,000** better off.

## Who we help

Anyone who lives in Wandsworth.

## How to get help

- visit one of our centres
- call us Freephone on 0808 278 7833
- visit [cawandsworth.org](http://cawandsworth.org)



*"I think it's an amazing service - wonderful to know its there in case I would need help again".*





Our main centre in Battersea Library, February 2023



# Homelessness Reduction Act Project

## Who we are

Adviser who works with Wandsworth Council's Housing Options team.

## What we do

We provide advice and in-depth support about benefits, debt and housing issues, helping prevent and relieve homelessness.



In the last 12 months we've helped the council prevent or relieve homelessness for over 20 residents. Each prevention saves the council **£8,681**.

## Who we help

Anyone who lives in Wandsworth who is threatened with homelessness.

## How to get help

The Housing Options team at Wandsworth Council and our projects and services can refer you.



Mark is an unpaid carer who runs a business affected by Covid-19. We worked with him for over 6 months to make him exempt from the benefit cap and stop his eviction.

# Macmillan

## Who we are

Team of advisers who work with Citizens Advice Croydon and Macmillan Cancer Support.

## What we do

We provide advice and in-depth support to people affected by cancer, helping them with benefits and money issues. We also run outreach sessions at local hospitals.



*"My advisers approached me with great respect and made me feel less stressed... I appreciate them so much and wish them well in their job".*

## Who we help

Anyone living in Croydon or Wandsworth who is affected by cancer or being treated for cancer at a local hospital.

## How to get help

- call us on 0207 042 0332
- visit [cawandsworth.org/macmillan](http://cawandsworth.org/macmillan)



*"I might not have applied for the benefit, let alone been awarded it, without the help of my Macmillan adviser".*

# Major Trauma

## Who we are

Adviser embedded at St. George's Hospital, working in partnership with Cardinal Management.

## What we do

We provide advice about issues such as benefits, housing and employment, helping people return to their normal lives after a traumatic injury.



*"The adviser was great, did all the research, and gave me all the answers I needed. I would not have been able to do that myself at that time and helped me to take some of the worry away".*



## Who we help

Anyone being treated for major trauma at St. George's Hospital.

## How to get help

Clinical teams at St. George's Hospital can refer you.



*“Rather than speculating with patients about their rights and how they can proceed with support, [referring] allows us to focus our time on other issues... and challenges”.*

# My Roehampton

## Who we are

Award winning capacity building project that supports the development of a thriving community and voluntary sector in Roehampton.

## What we do

We work directly with people, groups and charities to help them become more confident, engaged and effective at addressing issues impacting their daily life.



We've collaborated on raising **£45,000 for 66 grass roots projects** in Roehampton.

We also boost communication and collaboration amongst community leaders, groups and statutory bodies.

We co-ordinated the Roehampton Response Network during the pandemic and started Roehampton Community Week as an annual event in 2021.

### **What's next?**

With a year of Wandsworth Public Health seed funding left, we're working to establish an independent charity so the great, community-led work continues in the long term.



We helped launch the **Roehampton Women's Network** and have helped social enterprises like **Estate Arts** to flourish.





Roehampton Community Week, July 2021

# Refernet

## What is it?

Local referral platform for voluntary sector and statutory services.

## What it does

Organisations and groups can use our platform to refer directly to us and 40 other organisations in Wandsworth who provide specialist support.

Referral partners also come together twice a year to talk about service delivery and emerging issues.



Refernet enables people to get help from multiple specialist organisations without having to make an extra phone call or contact. It also prevents them from falling between the gaps in services.



## How to get involved

Email [harriet.plows@cawandsworth.org](mailto:harriet.plows@cawandsworth.org).



In the last 12 months Refernet helped us facilitate **1610 referrals** between partner organisations.



Wandsworth  
**Mediation**  
Service

LOVE TO LEARN  
working with new communities  
supporting education & learning



**enable**  
leisure & culture

**contact** For families  
with disabled children



**healthwatch**  
Wandsworth



**SPEAR 30**  
homelessness to independence



Thinking  Works  
for a brighter tomorrow

**POhWER**  
advocacy, making your voice heard



**welcare**

# Specialist advice

## Who we are

Specialist advisers who can help with complex housing, welfare benefits and employment issues.

## What we do

We offer advice and casework support, advocating for and representing residents to help resolve their issues.



In the last 12 months we've helped residents get over **£1 million in financial gains** just by appealing welfare benefits decisions.

## Who we help

Anyone who lives in Wandsworth.

## How to get help

- call us Freephone on 0808 278 7833
- visit [cawandsworth.org](http://cawandsworth.org)



*"What can I say? Absolutely brilliant from first to last contact, it has completely changed my circumstances for the best".*

# Ukrainian Support Project

## Who we are

Team of staff and volunteers who support refugees from the war in Ukraine, in partnership with Wandsworth Council.

## What we do

We advise people from Ukraine and their host families about a range of issues, helping them with the transition to living in the UK.



*"I found myself with a lot of problems because of the war... my doctor referred me to Citizens Advice, who from the first day of our acquaintance began to help me with everything I needed...."*



## Who we help

Refugees from the war in Ukraine and host families.

## How to get help

Visit [cawandsworth.org/ukraine](https://cawandsworth.org/ukraine).



*"...[my adviser] marched everywhere, always called and wrote to me, even though I was not the only one with her and she always had a lot of work. I want to say a huge thank you for her help and support".*

# In the last 12 months we also...

Helped launch a **Domestic Violence One Stop Shop** in Roehampton, a joint initiative with Hestia, WBC and the Roehampton Women's Network.

Took part in the London Legal Support Walk, **raising £1,255 for our client crisis fund**, money that helps us respond to people facing immediate, serious hardship.

Helped Wandsworth Council with the design of their **discretionary support schemes**, feeding back about how best to target support and make application processes work better for residents.

Continued to work on developing **pan-London services** in collaboration with other Citizens Advice offices in London.

Through our Trust for London funding, launched a learning and development programme to **increase the capacity of the voluntary sector across London to provide employment advice.**

Helped **community and faith organisations build their in-house advice capacity** by linking Advice First Aid training and WCEN's community physical and mental health hubs, as well as sharing our training resources so local volunteers can help people in their community.