

TOWER HAMLETS

LOCAL COMMUNITY FUND

THEME 3 – ADVICE AND INFORMATION

APRIL – JUNE 2020

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Summary

The Advice Tower Hamlets project provides free, confidential, independent, quality-assured advice services to anyone who lives or works in Tower Hamlets and resolve the problems they face, including welfare benefits, housing, money/debt, employment, immigration, consumer, education, community care, family and personal issues. Citizens Advice Tower Hamlets delivers the project in partnership with 13 local advice agencies and providing specialist and generalist welfare benefits advice services.

This quarter has been challenging due to the unprecedented situation of Covid-19, which brings new challenges to advice provisions and also to service users. Most advice partners have suspended face to face services and transitioned to telephone and online support from mid-March 2020, following government guidelines. This has affected numbers due to the halt of drop-in services and a decreased service due to many of our service users, largely from the BAME community possessing digital and language, as well other multiple barriers affecting their ability to engage in all our services. This quarter report reflects the impact of the pandemic situation. We have seen a change in case matters affecting individuals, such as facing employment issues resulting in sudden losses of income, thus resulting in a surge of UC claims, need of food bank support and other financial support to be provided. There is also an increased level of demand for the form filling support. Providing form filling support to clients via telephone and other digital platforms has been challenging especially PIP forms. Collecting relevant information for form filling is time-consuming as its take twice as long over the phone. We anticipate that a massive surge in demand for the face to face advice service as soon as we go back to work.

Island Advice

The project recruits volunteers, finds work placements and offers training/NVQs in Advice and Guidance for local people who want to become advice workers, delivering a 12 month training program. Volunteers attend training every week and volunteer in an advice centre in LBTH. Paid workers can also attend the training. The project facilitates the welfare rights networks, training workshops, information emails, factsheets, THCAN meetings and website.

The training course started October 2019 and most was complete when Covid started (2 cancelled sessions). Other training and meetings have been resumed using zoom. Level 3 NVQ in Advice and Guidance has continued, again digitally. Volunteers have completed their Learning to Advise training and most have now found work. The target/activity that the project could not maintain from March was volunteering. All advice centres closed their offices, staff are mostly working from home so they cannot support and supervise volunteers effectively. The training/NVQs can continue we have been unable to meet our target for voluntary work hours and anticipate this is going to be problematic for some time.

The THCAN website continues to be maintained and updated, giving full details of all LBTH funded advice providers with their opening times and service provision. This is in constant review and updated regularly to take into account emergency services during the Coronavirus crisis. The analytics website which monitors the number of views on the THCAN website has recorded 848 UK visits this quarter

Monthly Welfare Rights information emails were sent out monthly to over 300 advisors, managers, Councillors, MPs and poverty task force. It provides information on new changes to benefits system and details on Tower Hamlets advice services.

East End Citizens Advice Bureaux

Project Name: Advice Tower Hamlets

Programme:

Local Community Fund

Grant Amount: £3,234,357.00

Project Description

Project Theme:

Theme 3 - Scheme A: Advice and Information

Advice Tower Hamlets provides free, confidential, independent, quality-assured advice services to help Tower Hamlets residents resolve the problems they face, including welfare benefits, housing, money/debt, employment, immigration, consumer, education, community care, family, personal issues. This service is led by Citizens Advice Tower Hamlets, in partnership with twelve local advice agencies.

Project Start Date:

01/10/2019

Quarter Progress Update – April – June 2020

Project End Date:

31/03/2023

Type of Organisation:

Registered Charity

Area Based:

Spitalfields and Banglatown

No. of paid Staff:

37

Area of Benefit:

Boroughwide

Progress

This Qtr has been challenging due to the unprecedented situation of Covid-19, which brings new challenges to advice provisions and also service users. Most LCF partners have suspended face to face services and transitioned to telephone and online support from mid-March 2020, following government guidelines. This has affected numbers due to the halt of drop in services and a decreased service due to many of our service users, largely from the BAME community possessing digital and language, as well other multiple barriers affecting their ability to engage in all our services. This quarter report reflects the impact of the pandemic situation. We have seen a change in case matters affecting individuals, such as facing employment issues resulting in sudden losses of income, thus resulting in a surge of UC claims, need of food bank support and other financial support to be provided.

There is also an increased level of demand for the form filling support. Providing form filling support to clients via telephone and other digital platforms has been challenging especially PIP forms. Collecting relevant information for form filling is time-consuming as its take twice as long over the phone. We anticipate that a massive surge in demand for the face to face advice service as soon as we go back to work.

Outcomes:

21,000 Tower Hamlets residents each year have increased access to social welfare advice and income from benefits through provision of a client-centred and integrated advice service.

Much has been done by partners in terms of advice via phones , emails , zoom and teams supporting clients through these very challenging times. We and our partners have dedicated advice phone lines for clients to contact us. We also have text via voodoo SMS where clients can contact us by texting 'Help' if they cannot call and we will call them back. There is an increased demand on resources from clients on staff in readjusting to the evolving changes in all areas of law from Central Govt in supporting the clients and helping them understand their rights. The main areas that have seen a large increase is employment and benefit issues and new UC claims. Our outreaches continue, and clients booked and contacted via telephone and advised. This includes help with forms where clients are unable to read and write any issues they may have with UC verification and inability to log into their UC accounts, advice to the self-employed.

70% of Tower Hamlets residents using our debt advice and money management services each year

We are all liaising with our partners for updates on services and there availability. Any requests for food are referred clients to the food banks for further support.

We continue to promote community cohesion through partnership working which

have improved personal budgeting, financial stability and reduction in personal debt through advice and support intervention by our advice service.

70% of Tower Hamlets residents using our welfare benefits and housing advice services each year are helped to reduce negative impact by welfare reforms and housing repossessions through advice and support intervention by our advice service.

70% of Tower Hamlets residents using our advice services each year are more informed about their legal rights and their housing rights as a result of using our advice service.

60% of Tower Hamlets residents using our advice services each year have increased employment security and resolved employment issues as a result of using our advice service.

1,000 Tower Hamlets residents using our immigration advice services each year including migrants and EU citizens have increased access to immigration/asylum advice and casework and 60% of Tower Hamlets residents using our immigration

helps improve understanding of rights and improve circumstances for clients. Co-production meetings that had been arranged unfortunately been cancelled due to the current circumstances but this is an ongoing commitment and meetings will commence very soon on return.

All the partners are at this time look into exit plans and getting back to working in there office space again. Discussions are being had by all and we will keep LCF partners and council staff aware of any changes that happen in the very near future.

Praxis

We also advised 20 individuals with NRPF on making a change of conditions; five applications were submitted this quarter and three of these have been successful. Three clients (/families) can now access universal credit and support with housing (note: this has not been recorded as a financial outcome).

Age UK

Obviously, Covid-19 has closed our I and A Hub at Royal London which operated 7 hrs a week. We have had to repurpose our services to remote working only and there has been no face to face advice. I have allocated our TH advisor to this contract 7 hrs a week and included 20% of our phone advice helpline figures from TH to make up for the lack of any drop in. We continue to include referrals from our staff in the RLH and resulting case work. At this time we are planning for the return of face to face advice, but there are no dates for the return of our drop in services on the horizon. When we do have face to face back it will be appointment only with strict risk assessment of clients, locations and staff. I'm sure you know that everything takes longer at the moment so our case progression and outcomes are reduced. There has also been a notable drop off in referrals in TH from our usual sources and less enquiries about benefits than usual. We anticipate that this will increase and there will be a marked upswing once people start to address the issues that have been allowed to drift, like evictions and benefit renewals. The number of people with NRPF and domestic violence issues have been notable increases.

BBBC

The coronavirus pandemic lockdown has meant Tower Hamlets Law Centre have not been able to see clients for face to face appointments since the 20th March 2020 as all clients are assisted remotely via telephone, email or written correspondence. Our evening face to face pro bono advice sessions were suspended in March due to the coronavirus pandemic and these sessions have resumed via telephone appointments since the 20th April. The court duty housing clinic has suspended during this quarter due to coronavirus.

TH Law Centre

Due to the worldwide Coronavirus pandemic and crisis, the UK government has issued strict guidelines in order to protect people and to prevent the virus from spreading. This has meant the deafPLUS office has had to remain closed until further notice and most of our frontline staff are continuing to work from home.

This has been a difficult time and negotiating adjustments to our services in order to continue to support our clients has not been easy. We have worked tirelessly and proactively to deliver 100% of our services digitally as much as is possible, including a move to video calls e.g. FaceTime or Whatsapp video calls for meetings and one to one appointments, simultaneously working via Zoom with interpreters.

Lime house project

Part 1 refers to questions/part 2 narrative on the service

advice services each year resolve immigration matters such as right to reside.

Increased engagement of 4000 older Tower Hamlets residents (aged 55+) each year with social welfare advice services and increased confidence in use of digital tools to make online benefit claims including UC, and gain better value for money.

Our project will contribute to reducing poverty with Tower Hamlets residents, by helping to reduce debts, increase incomes to the value of £15 million each year through benefit entitlements including in-work benefits with those who are currently under-claiming.

Our CRM which was due to change this quarter, due to the Covid 19 this has been postponed. This is further highlighted in the narrative part 2 section.

Q7; We do not deal with employment law cases-we refer to other organisations that provide this specialist support.

Q8: This number reflects 'preventing homelessness', as we see an array of tenancy related issues as a result of claimants defaulting on their rent payments due to welfare benefit reform, or changes in their personal circumstances e.g. reduced housing benefit payments causing individuals to struggle to meet this, causing a potential risk of homelessness. We still see clients unaware of what they can claim and that their current benefit includes HB, facing eviction or with low understanding of rent changes and poor financial management causing accrued rent arrears, thus risk of homelessness. We intervene by mitigating this risk by providing the information, advice, guidance and practical support e.g. negotiating payment plans, making applications to DHP or other financial aids and allocation of housing applications. We refer clients at severe points of crisis such as section 21 to specialists within our consortium. Other form of support for provision to access and housing allocation is also provided.

Q14 from client intervention of benefit applications awards, estimates and one off payments/grant support for income gains. This is a yearly projected increase of awards-this was highlighted with the consortium lead who advised a yearly projection.

Q15 Due to our current CRM system, the current reporting has proved difficult. We are currently reviewing our evaluation and monitoring process to better accommodate the report to reflect income gains/backdated with a new CRM. This is currently in process. Our CRM meetings will be rescheduled once government guidelines relating to Covid-19 are changed. Talks and proposals are in process.

Toynbee Hall

There has been a reorganization at Toynbee Hall regarding both team structure and management and the systems used in order to record debt advice. Due to this it is not possible for outcome measures to be reported on this quarter but this will be resolved and outcomes for this quarter will be added to the Q2 reports retrospectively.

OSCA

Due to Covid 19 still we have limited clients. we encouraging client to call us and we are very keen to support them.

Other

Most the partnership due to COVID 19 is now working remotely all face to face advice has been stopped for the time being and all partners are providing heal support advice and guidance via phone , Email, voodoo SMS , Teams ,Skype and a host of other internet based contacts. THCA are also unfortunately losing the great skills of our service manager Benno Altman his last days of work will be mid May.

This quarter has been challenging due to the unprecedented situation of Covid-19, which brings new challenges to advice provisions and also service users. We have suspended face to face services and transitioned to telephone and online support from mid March 2020, following government guidelines. This has affected numbers due to the halt of drop in services and a decreased service due to many of our service users, largely from the BAME community possessing digital and language, as well other multiple barriers affecting their ability to engage in our services. This quarter KPI report reflects the impact of the pandemic situation. We have seen a change in case matters

affecting individuals, such as facing employment issues resulting in sudden losses of income, thus resulting in a surge of UC claims, need of food bank support and other financial support to be provided. We have seen a great response from all partners and outside colleague that have amalgamated in to an amazing support network we have been working with the likes of Red Cross , Children's society ,Food Banks holding zoom meeting across the UK with other CA bureau to see the challenges other are facing in the north and south of the UK and the response has been amazing in all corners of the UK.

Key Performance Indicators

KPI	Target	Actual	Comments
A minimum of 21,000 clients assisted p/a	21,000 per year	4,920	Our target is 5250 we are under by 330 which is due to Covid 19
A minimum of 35,000 New Matters Start (NMS)	35,000 per year, 8,750 per quarter	8,814	Target achieved
14,998 New matter starts successful by challenging decisions. Each category will be reported on individually.	14,998 per year	3,901	Target achieved
3700 Clients supported to increase/maximise incomes.	3,700 per year	1,009	Target achieved
£3,000,000 debt reduction/write offs resulting in reduction in amounts of personal debt. Each category will be reported on individually (Managed/ Written off).	£3,000,000 per year	£912,719	Target achieved £912,719
£23 million income increased and/or backdated. (Is anyone better off)	£23,000,000 per year	£6,305,291	Target achieved

Grant Officer's Comment

The project has 5 out of the 6 KPIs. The project has met all the grant conditions and has provided a detailed and satisfactory report.

Island Advice Centre

Project Name: Tower Hamlets Advice Training and Capacity Building Project

Programme:

Local Community Fund

Grant Amount: £175,000.00

Project Theme:

Theme 3 - Scheme A: Advice and Information

Project Start Date:

01/10/2019

Project End Date:

31/03/2023

Type of Organisation:

Registered Charity

Area Based:

Blackwall and Cubitt Town

No. of paid Staff:

9

Area of Benefit:

Boroughwide

Outcomes:

10 local volunteers recruited

Advice Centre has volunteer advice worker placed with them

10 Law (or other) students recruited

10 advice centre staff access Learning to Advise course

THCAN website facilitated

Project Description

The project improves capacity, training, quality and access to the boroughs advice services. We will develop coordination and cooperation between advice and other sectors providing: recruitment and training for volunteers, facilitation of the THCAN network, updated website of advice provision and information / factsheets, coordination of meetings, delivering formal training.

Quarter Progress Update – April – June 2020

Progress

The project recruits volunteers, finds work placements and offers training/NVQ's in Advice and Guidance for local people who want to become advice workers, delivering a 12 month training program. Volunteers attend training every week and volunteer in an advice centre in LBTH. The training covers: Advice Skills (policies and procedures), Benefits, Housing and Debt (they gain a nationally recognised certificate Learning to Advise). Paid workers can also attend the training, either the whole course or select days/units. We facilitate; welfare rights networks, training workshops, information emails, factsheets, THCAN meetings and website. The training course started October 2019, and most was complete when Covid started (2 cancelled sessions). Other training and meetings have been resumed using zoom.

Level 3 NVQ in Advice and Guidance has continued, again digitally. Volunteers have completed their Learning to Advise training and most have now found work.

The target/activity that we couldn't maintain from March was volunteering. All advice centres closed their offices, staff are mostly working from home so they can't support and supervise volunteers effectively. So although training/NVQs can continue we have been unable to meet our target for voluntary work hours and anticipate this is going to be problematic for some time.

The course is available however to advice and other sector workers and training to social prescribers, mental health other support workers has been carried out through Zoom. We are aiming to increase training to support workers on basic 'advice' issues in order to address the gap/need that volunteer advisors were filling.

We have produced a new Factsheet: SEISS

The THCAN website continues to be maintained and updated, giving full details of all LBTH funded advice providers with their opening times and service provision. This is in constant review and updated regularly to take into account emergency services during the Coronavirus crisis. An additional tile with details of telephone/email provision and referral information has been collated and added. It also has details of factsheets and welfare rights advisor's monthly information emails. The analytics website which monitors the number of views on the THCAN website has recorded 848 UK visits this quarter

THCAN meetings
 Advisors Forum
 Monthly Information emails and factsheets
 Advice Work Training courses

Monthly Welfare Rights information emails were sent out monthly to over 300 advisors, managers, Councillors, MPs and poverty task force. It is also available on the THCAN website. It provides information on new changes to benefits system and details on Tower Hamlets advice services. The list has been expanded to a further 100 volunteers/professionals that are involved in supporting vulnerable people during the current crisis.

Other
 All staff working from home, attending office one day per week, work laptops/mobiles

We have increased our networking and partnership work with non advice centres. A lot of the work that volunteers contributed work can no longer be carried out by them such as basic advice/support and form filling. We have ensured that other agencies/individuals working with clients (foodbanks, social prescribers, mental health support workers) are included in the information mail out on advice issues. This includes full details on accessing advice services, important changes to benefit/housing/debt law, information on other services and referrals. We have amended the thcan website to give details of changes in services and covid related advice issues

Key Performance Indicators

KPI	Target	Actual	Comments
10 Volunteers and 10 law students recruited, 8 organisations have placements referred	10 volunteers, 8 organisations	0	<p>We were unable to recruit new volunteers this quarter and will be looking into alternatives/delaying recruitment and requesting amendments to our current KPI's to reflect this.</p> <p>The KPI for 2019-20 were 10 volunteers, 14 law students but didnt fully meet the 8 organisations having placements but it was actually only 6. We may ask for a reduction in the number of future agencies as some agencies are better equipped to place volunteers</p>
25 days of 'Learning to Advise' Training delivered and 10 WR advice workshops	25 days training	22	<p>This is the full annual training session requirement for 2019-20 funding. Details of courses delivered are attached We did 22 of learning to advise (some cancelled due to covid but due to be delivered digitally July 2020). Delivered 11 WR advice workshops</p> <p>This quarter we delivered 4 training sessions on Zoom 30/6 Advice Pro 9/6 NVQ information session 1/6 Housing and covid (NHAS delivered we facilitated for TH advisors) 28/4 Benefits and covid</p>

5 volunteers find work p.a.	5 in paid employment	5	
10 LCF funded advice centre staff access learning to advise and 'other' courses/units.	10 attend LtA or individual units of LtA	15	Can't really put all the actuals into the one box but all these KPIs were exceeded for 2019/2020 - 10 LBTH staff attended Learning to Advise (the registrations were previously supplied) - 19 Learning to Advise certificates were awarded (11 to volunteers and 8 for staff) 11 Full certificates 5 one unit only 2 completed 2-3 three units
Quarterly advice provider meetings and updates provided to frontline advisers	1800 hits per annum, 3 factsheets p.a., 10 emails p.a., 4 WRAF p.a.	848	Cant put all actuals into this one box but KPIs have all been met for 2019/20. I have amended the analytics report so that it only includes UK website from now THCAN website hits for the year 4,423 Factsheets 8 Email welfare rights newsletter 10 Welfare Rights Advisors Forums 4 All evidence is available on the website www.thcan.org.uk This quarter 848 visits on website New factsheets self-employed income support scheme Email information newsletters sent April/May/June Welfare rights advisor forum 24/4, 14/5, 11/6 (we're doing them monthly rather than quarterly during current crisis)
4 THCAN meetings per year	4 per annum	2	The final quarters meeting was due in March which didn't happen Two physical meetings were held, and other contact/networking done digitally - minutes attached

Grant Officer's Comment

The KPI relating to volunteer recruitment has been problematic due to lack of placements because of the C-19 situation - otherwise the project has continued to deliver digitally. The project has met all the grant conditions.