

# How we have helped people 2018/19

## **Citizens Advice Sheffield is the city's leading advice service.**

Our advisers helped 20,049 people in 2018/19, across the whole city and in all communities. We have helped more people in the poorest parts of the city. We help as many people in Sheffield as are helped by Citizens Advice in any other major city in England.

We have continued to improve and expand our services. Our face to face drop in services have successfully met increasing demands for help and we helped more people in person last year than in the previous year. At the same time more and more people are wanting advice on the phone, by email and webchat and at a time and place of their choosing. We have also seen a significant increase in the numbers of people using our website (over 53,000 last year) as a source of trusted information.

We helped with more issues last year than previously and the majority of those issues related to money including benefits and debt. More of the people we help are presenting with complex and multiple issues requiring intensive casework and representation. As a result of our interventions, we helped to secure income gains of over six million pounds and over two million pounds in debt write offs.

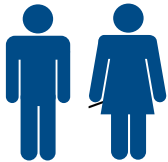
Our services are at the forefront of helping many of the most vulnerable people in Sheffield. We tackle poverty and are helping to develop a more inclusive and sustainable city. Our strategic plan supports city wide strategies including Sheffield Partnership Board's Inclusive Economy Framework and the City Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy.

The outcomes achieved for the people we help, both in terms of income gains, debts managed, homelessness prevention and improvements to health and well-being, actively support the delivery of the City's strategic plans.

We are a diverse organisation and in particular our volunteering engagement from across Sheffield communities helps connect people at a community level.

## In 2018/19

**We have helped 20,049 people**



**52% women**

**48% men**

**89% working age people**

**42% disabled or ill people**

**31% black and ethnic minority people**

**We have helped with 60,993 issues**



**9,742 people with 25,861 benefits issues**

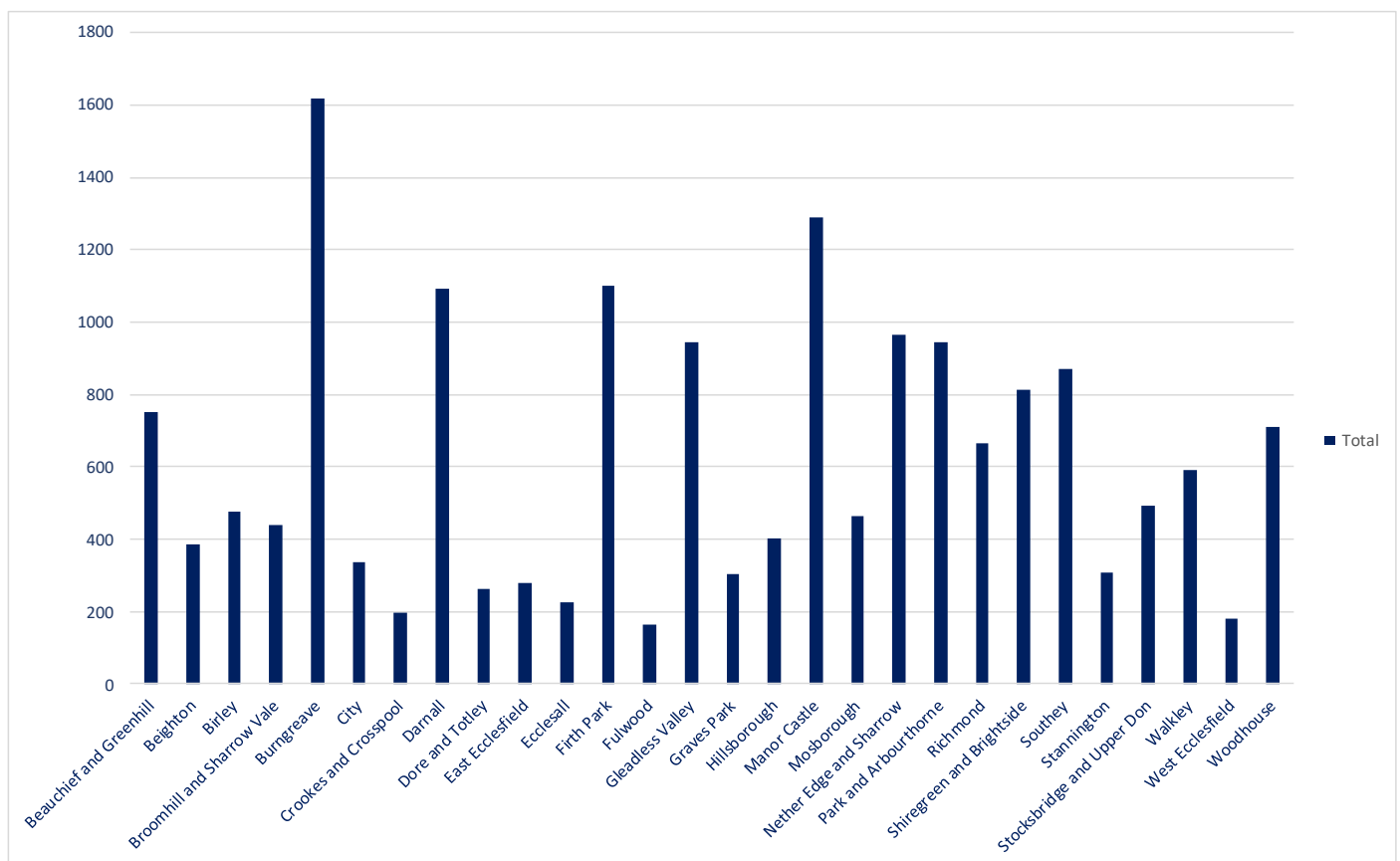
**4,458 people with 12,604 debt issues**

**1,416 people with 3,339 employment issues**

**1,536 people with 2,702 immigration issues**

**1,883 people with 2,875 housing issues**

**We have helped more people where help is most needed**



**We have helped people achieve better outcomes**

**£6.635 million income gained**

**£2.306 million debts written off**

**Four in five people are positive about the experience of using our service**

	Positive or very positive
Please rate your overall experience of the service	88%
How easy or difficult did you find it to access the service?	75%
To what extent did the service help you to find a way forward?	72%
To what extent is your problem now resolved?	59%
How likely would you be to recommend the service	88%
Overall	77%

**We have managed our resources effectively**



**156 paid staff  
140 volunteers**



**£2.5 million income for our advice services**



**48 locations from which we have provided advice**

## **We have helped improve public policy**

We have sustained our work to improve public policy dominated by the roll-out of Universal Credit. We produced our “First Impressions” report which concludes that a Root and Branch Review of Universal Credit is essential. Immediate improvements are necessary in arrangements for “Non-Digital” claimants- this campaign is ongoing. We have contributed to a national campaign calling for an external regulator for bailiffs and used insight from our Advocacy service to try and influence the shape of the Mental Capacity Act. We published research (Just about Managing) into the barriers to work and pay progression faced by low paid part time workers.

# Added Value

This report focuses on our advice services which we deliver to Sheffield communities. But those services are stronger and more resilient in part because they benefit from our skills and experience of delivering services in other areas. Those services are equipped to respond to local demands, drawing strength and resilience from being connected to a wider range of skills and experience across the organisation's diverse delivery areas.

Our staff deliver a range of specialist advocacy services including statutory advocacy provision through Sheffield Advocacy Hub.

We also deliver national advice services, including being a partner in the delivery of the national Consumer Service and the national Universal Credit Help to Claim service.

Our clients benefit from seamless referrals to this wider range of services where appropriate and we make the most of our collective skills, experience and knowledge shared across all of our services. Each week our advice services provide 63 hours of "drop in" advice at 15 different locations in the city, where the community can seek advice without appointment.

In addition we provide advice for food bank users at nine of the City's food banks. Our advice services provide approximately 300 appointments per week across 48 different locations.



Each week we provide advice services targeted at particular communities, service users and patients and delivered where these groups are already, including:

Deaf BSL users

Users at Weston Park Cancer Information and Support Centre and at Childrens Hospital

People with severe mental ill health including inpatients at Michael Carlisle Centre and Longley Centre

People being supported to move into or remain in paid work via Working Win service, Sheffield Working and Pathways to Progression

Social housing tenants to help prevent eviction

People engaged with St Lukes Hospice

Older people via Age Better service

People receiving treatment at Spinal Injuries, Head Injuries and Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Trauma Units

People with a diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease

Refugees and Asylum Seekers at City Of Sanctuary and Victoria Hall service

People seeking settled status via EU settled status scheme

Support to people affected by Windrush

Sheffield Carers

Advice to families through the Building Successful Families programme

People over 50 needing information and guidance about their pensions and options for the future

**In addition to Sheffield City Council our services are supported by over 40 other funders and the organisation's finances are also more resilient because of this.**

### **Our total income for 18-19 shared out like this:**

Advice services	£2.5m
Advocacy services	£1m
National consumer service and pension wise service	£0.6m
Total	£4.1m

Sheffield City Council provided £841,536 as a Core Service Grant for our advice services – 34% of our total funding for our advice services—giving us a ratio of almost £3 additional income for advice for every £1 invested through Sheffield City Council Core Service Grant and almost £21 for every £1 of Core Service Grant invested overall.

# Volunteering at Citizens Advice Sheffield

Last year saw an increase in the number of local people supporting our work through volunteering with us. 140 people collectively contribute on average almost 1000 hours a week of their time in the delivery of our advice services. Our volunteers come from across Sheffield communities bringing their own skills and experience – just to give you a flavour, our volunteers come from 14 different ethnic groups, from all age groups and include people who volunteer with us for a short period of time and those who give up large amounts of their time over more than a year.

Here are some pen pictures of some of our volunteers

**Irem** got the idea for volunteering with Citizens Advice Sheffield having been very impressed with the approachable and professional help she received herself when seeking advice about the requirements to come and settle in the UK as the spouse of a British Citizen. She came to settle permanently in November 2017 and spent some time researching the volunteer role online before deciding to apply in April 2018.

Irem has trained as an Adviser and is volunteering alongside her part time post graduate law studies. She really enjoys her work, so much so, that when her studies became more demanding she gave up her part time paid work but stuck with her volunteering.

Irem works as an adviser at the London Road office. She concentrates on seeing clients in appointment sessions which means that she often help people who are challenging benefit decisions by requesting Mandatory Reconsiderations or setting out arguments for an Appeal.

Irem finds it very satisfying to help other people through her volunteer work- every week she feels she has done something positive to help others. As someone whose first language is not English she feels she has particular skills in helping clients with language barriers, not so much because there are many who share her first language, but because she has a deep awareness of how difficult it can be to understand complex ideas in English (such as the benefits rules), and the importance of avoiding too many colloquialisms that can be mystifying when interviewing a non-native English speaker.

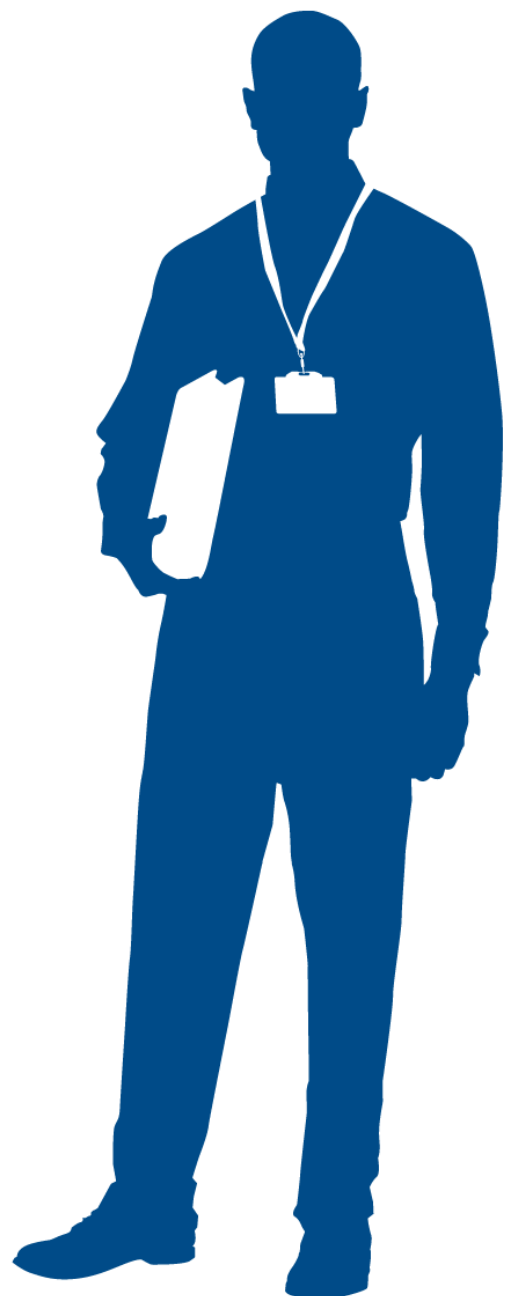
As well as the satisfaction of helping others, Irem feels that her volunteering has given her a much deeper understanding of British society (and certainly more useful and relevant than studying for the “Life in UK test” which seems to be strangely focused on topics such as Cricket and Rugby!)

**Jacob** enjoys his job as a Software Engineer but wishing he had more opportunity to work directly with real people. This gave rise to the idea of volunteering with Citizens Advice. Jacob was pleased to find that his employers were sympathetic to his proposal to compress his full-time working hours so that he would be able to commit to regular weekly day time sessions as a volunteer. Volunteering is totally different to his paid employment but just as stimulating, in a different way.

He volunteers as an Advice Assistant in one of our offices. This provides the opportunity to meet many different people from a wide range of backgrounds giving him a broader perspective on society and a much better insight into the lives of other people in his community. He also says it has made him more aware of his own advantages and privileges.

As a trained Advice Assistant he sees people by appointment who may need help with various applications. Some of these are Online applications like Council Tax Support applications or managing Universal Credit claims but also paper applications like Personal Independence Payments.

When he started he wasn't sure what to expect but is happy with the support he receives and enjoys working with his Citizens Advice colleagues who he describes as "very grounded". He would recommend volunteering to others as a way of expanding your horizons whilst providing an essential service that is not readily available elsewhere. He has recently taken on another volunteer role as an "Appropriate Adult" role for young people and vulnerable adults in police custody.



# A focus on some of the people we have helped

Much more of the help we provide is now via the phone, email, webchat and skype. Face to face support is still very important for some people but others prefer another way of being in touch with us.

## Carol's Story

Carol sought help from us because her employment was ending because of her ill-health. She wanted to be clear about what benefits she could access. Our adviser gave her a detailed assessment of her position in relation to a range of benefits including Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment. The adviser gave Carol detailed advice about the claims process and also how to ensure that her employer issued her with the correct documentation following the end of her statutory sick pay.

Carol's health prevented her from getting out of the house and she also suffered from acute anxiety which prevented her from using the phone. At her request all the advice was given via email. At the end of the case Carol told our adviser -

*"I am just very thankful I've had advice from you and I am extremely grateful for all you've done for me. It makes me want to get myself fully well and start my next journey ..."*

We work very closely with carers and support organisations to ensure clients can access tailored advice and support.

## Jameila's Story

One of our advisers was helping a woman who had been trying to find work but was really not well enough to do this. She found it difficult to understand what the adviser told her and, at her request, wanted her father to be involved. It was difficult for them both to attend a face to face appointment because her father was at work during the day.

Our adviser agreed to phone his client out of normal work hours – the client's father joined the call and was then able to support our client in understanding the advice given and taking the required action. This way we could continue to provide the advice particularly in relation to a complex claim for Employment Support Allowance but the client was empowered to take the necessary action herself.

Our service was sufficiently flexible to ensure that she got the help she needed alongside the support from her father.



## John's Story

John initially visited us regarding a debt issue. English was not John's first language therefore he was referred to one of our bi-lingual advisers who spoke the same language—Kurdish. After further exploration it was clear John was not receiving all the benefits he was entitled to. The adviser identified that the client should have been receiving additional benefit because of his ill-health amounting to amounting to over £60 a week and more than that, he was entitled to the additional benefit backdated over several years. This backdating amounted to over £14,000.

The adviser also assisted with the migration from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment. Once John's income had been maximised, one of our specialist debt advisers advised on the most appropriate debt strategy for John. They agreed that applying for a Debt Relief Order was the most appropriate. Fortunately for John, the payment of backdated benefit did not affect his eligibility to apply and once it was in place, over £7000 of his debts were effectively written off.

This was a great outcome for John. He had benefited from two specialist advisers working on his case, seamless referrals were made, comprehensive advice was given in two areas of law and the financial outcome for client was impressive. The burden of debt was removed and John's mental health and overall health and wellbeing was significantly improved.

## Tomasz' Story

Tomasz is a 52 year old single man who was made redundant earlier in the year. A few days later he received a final payment from work of around £2000 made up of redundancy pay, notice money, outstanding holiday pay and his final two weeks wages.

He claimed Universal Credit several weeks later. Two days after his claim was lodged his ex-employer made a further payment of just £16.00 which they had calculated as a small balance owing to him.

In early April he got a note in his Universal Credit online journal to say he wasn't going to get any Universal Credit until the beginning of May because he had a 'third party deduction from wage' of £1880 in his first monthly assessment period. He had no idea what this referred to and tried to use his online journal to query and challenge the "decision" but became frustrated by the whole process.

He rang our Help to Claim helpline and was referred into the Sheffield Help to Claim team for face to face help. By this time he was left with just £90 in the bank and was facing a further month without any income both to live on and pay his rent.

The Assessment and Support Worker who saw him had already identified that the money paid on finishing work could not be taken into account as assessing income for our clients Universal Credit claim, as the claim was made after the payment was received. The only income that could be counted was the £16.00 balance payment which was received after the claim was made. We contacted the DWP who struggled to explain their error but eventually agreed that it was likely that an error had been made. Tomasz called back the following day to say that he had been told he would be paid his full universal credit, minus the £16.00.

Worryingly, although the journal was used to communicate by both parties, no coherent explanation for not paying him was given apart from “third party deduction from wage” and no decision notice, which would have explained his legal routes of challenge, was issued.

So through our intervention, Tomasz received the Universal Credit to which he was entitled and also felt more confident to manage his own claim going forward.



# Our phone lines are open every weekday

Adviceline 03444 113 111 Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm

Universal Credit Help to Claim 0800 1448 444 Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Consumer Advice 03454 04 05 06 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

## How you can help us

If you are interested in volunteering, please take a look at our website.

Citizens Advice Sheffield is a charity.

If you would like to support us financially, please see our mydonate page.

**[www.citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk)**

Email: [getintouch@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk](mailto:getintouch@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk)

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