

**citizens
advice**

**South
Warwickshire**

Newsletter June 2018

Yvonne Hunter , Chair of Citizens Advice South Warwickshire



Welcome to this latest newsletter from Citizens Advice South Warwickshire. I'm keen to keep you in touch with the work we are doing in our area, any changes and expansion to our services as well as look for opportunities to work with other groups who serve South Warwickshire.

Two of our local M.P.s have been to visit us recently which helped cement our relationships with them. While they might often send their constituents our way to help them with advice, we also have found their help invaluable in escalating difficult cases. Both Jeremy Wright MP for Kenilworth and Southam and Matt Western MP for Warwick and Leamington appreciate that Citizens Advice sees first hand how Government policy is playing out for local people - both the good and the bad!

Last month we have also celebrated our first year of working together at Citizens Advice South Warwickshire following the merger of our services based in Stratford and Warwick districts. We held a development day for staff and our volunteers on 23rd May to assess how the merger is working out and plan for our future. Working smarter and learning how to deliver more for less will be the challenge. But it was marvellous to see the determination to deliver the best for our clients still at the forefront.

In June we took part in National Volunteers Week, an opportunity to celebrate the work of volunteers in all sectors. In this newsletter you can read about Andy Bolam who is based in our Leamington office and his role as a volunteer for us. So, if volunteering is in the back of your mind and you want to find out more, please contact us at newsletter@casouthwarwickshire.org.uk we would be happy to hear from you.

Help at home for those in need in Warwick

Generous grants of more than £25,000 have secured the future for our vital Reach Out and Help service for people in need in Warwick town.

The Charity of Thomas Oken and Nicholas Eyffler and Warwick Town Council has given us the money to support the service which helps people in crisis who aren't able to access help at our normal advice sessions.

Since September 2016 one caseworker has helped 71 people in Warwick town, some of whom are very socially isolated. But the new funding means that the service could help about 132 people with issues such as benefits, debt and money management issues as well as getting access to the health and social care they need.

You can read more about the grants and an interesting case history of a couple helped by Reach out and Help [here](#).

Our work to prevent homelessness



Helen Knight is CASW's Court desk worker, helping to prevent homelessness in the Stratford and District area. Her aim is to help clients remain in their homes by affording their rent and avoiding the devastating effect of losing their home. Referrals can come from anyone and the earlier Helen can get to people who are struggling, the better it is. She works cooperatively with landlords, housing association and the council to find solutions and help people overwhelmed by the complex benefits system and court proceedings. You can contact Helen direct at helen.knight@casouthwarwickshire.org.uk and read more about the work of the court desk service [here](#).

Meet our volunteers

In South Warwickshire our volunteers far outnumber the paid staff and we are so grateful for their hard work and contribution to the service. There are always opportunities for new people to come and join us and here's a profile of one of our specialists who helps people with difficult to resolve money problems.



Andy Bolam is a money advice caseworker based at the Leamington office of Citizens Advice South Warwickshire. He started his volunteering in 2010 after a career that had given him wide experience in finance, consultancy and commercial life in sectors as varied as gas pipelines and military aircraft.

“But I soon realised that I wasn't here to use my own knowledge and experience. Citizens Advice has a very structured approach to helping people, so I had a lot to learn”.

Andy is a specialist within Citizens Advice and he helps people with debt problems. He appeals for people to come for help before they are frightened and at rock bottom.

With an ever-changing benefits system, he sees things getting tougher for many clients. “Nowadays it is getting unusual to have a client whose income is enough to even meet their expenditure. But our role is to take on any problem and look for solutions.”.

Part of what he enjoys about volunteering is that he has to keep up to speed with money advice and is continually learning. And he sees first hand that clients feel much happier when they start to tackle their debt problems.

If you are interested in being a volunteer for Citizens Advice South Warwickshire, [here are details of who to contact](#). Full training is given and there are many backroom roles available, supporting people like Andy.

The right help for people with mental health problems

One of the worrying statistics in our review of our services is the number of our clients who have mental health issues. At the moment 41% of our clients have some disability and nearly one third of those have a mental health condition. But problems often begin because many service providers do not have mental health users in mind. And support for those who try and engage with with their service providers is sparse and difficult to access.

Nationally, Citizens Advice is concerned at the number of people who are struggling with their essentials services - such as energy companies, water, telecoms and financial services.

They have some new reports on the real experiences of people with mental health problems and these service providers. There are also good practices guides showing how things could be improved. Here's where you can [read more](#).

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