

Housing & Welfare report for 18-19

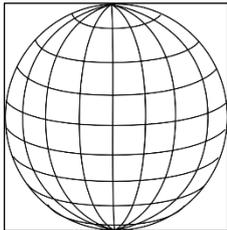
By

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Numbers seen

Last year we saw 1,189 people, slightly down on the previous year of 1,249 but in line with the increased level of activity we are having to do for the clients – the number of consultations per client has increased by 32% on average and the number of client visits has increased by 16%



Where did they come from?

The largest contingent came from Accession countries providing 30% of those seen by the Advice & Welfare team. The major concerns for this group are the ability to remain in work and thus exercising treaty rights which many are doing which should give them entitlement to help with housing costs and other benefits. That said, the DWP are making poor decisions in terms of awarding benefits where they are justly warranted. Let's look at an example. We have been working with an Italian citizen (from the wider EU) who is self-employed, is definitely earning enough for his work to be deemed "genuine & effective" – the phrase used by the DWP to classify anyone earning above an average of £166 (in 2019/20) per week over 3 months but was continually being refused benefits – in fact, he was earning £1,200 nett per calendar month. There was no doubt that he met the criteria for being considered a "retained" worker even if he had to rely on benefits. We have taken him through the mandatory reconsideration stage of appealing a decision not to award him any benefits as he was out for the country for 4 weeks organising to bring his family over to the UK. Thanks to our efforts, this hardworking gentleman and his family are now in receipt of the benefits they are entitled to but it is a continual struggle to contest poor decisions by the DWP.

The second largest group are of African lineage. Many of these are established in the UK - 41% of all those living in London come from Black & Minority ethnic backgrounds. Research has shown that this group tends to be more economically disadvantaged so it is no surprise to see that nearly 18% come from this background.



Help with housing

32% of all our clients – 398 in all came to us looking for help with housing – some needing permanent housing, some just needing a temporary resting place while they sought work. Overall, we managed to put 78% of those clients into some form of housing. We have been blessed by being able to use some of the funds that our supporters and friends have generously given us as well as having acquired funds from external trusts and funds to help pay for deposits and rent in advance. As private renting is one of the major sources of housing – in this year about 35% of all housing came from this source, we need to support our clients by finding up-front costs to assist. Placement progress in other areas is slower, particularly hostel placements where we are still experiencing longer waiting lists – more than ever true when it comes to clients who are under 35. London's population has a much greater proportion of people aged under 35 than other parts of the country – the population in Inner London aged 20-34 stands at 31% compared to 18% across the rest of England. This is against a background where housing provision for this group is contracting, certainly among the housing providers that we can refer to.



How else are we assisting our clients?

The money bags picture represents the most rapidly growing area of work apart from housing and that is what we call 'income maximisation'. Effectively, this means obtaining grants or providing funds for such things as identity documents, travel costs to help people get to work or vital appointments relating to immigration or to jobcentre appointments, assisting them while they are awaiting a benefit decision when they have no funds and perhaps have been refused an advance payment by the DWP, getting items

when clients are resettled into more permanent accommodation. It has increased from 16% to 19% in this financial year.

After 'income maximisation' the next largest area which people sought help with was benefits – setting them up with Universal Credit and helping them to maintain their Universal Credit accounts as well as contesting decisions that the DWP have made including supporting appeals and Tribunal hearings



Forging new partnerships

Part of our work includes exploring ways in which we can expand services for our people. Thanks to partnerships with the Eastern European Resource Centre and the Public Interest Law Centre we have been able to introduce two much needed services.

The Public Interest Law Centre (PILC) and The Eastern European Resource Centre (EERC) are running sessions here to help our European clients apply for settled status in the UK - if they are proposing to remain in the UK post-Brexit. PILC offer advice to all Europeans and provide a weekly session whilst EERC work specifically with those from the 10 accession countries providing a drop-in session once a month here at the Manna Centre and ongoing support for any client seen at that session at their offices in Hammersmith.

Connections at St Martins/Praxis are providing immigration advice once a week to those clients who are in need of it – many of whom are destitute. We are not immigration accredited so having a specialist in this area is helping us with learning more about this area of work and they are also providing training to further develop our understanding.

Overall, we are moving into a new era in our Advice & Welfare work with a new database commissioned and a new grant that is helping support our Advice & Welfare services which focusses more on building resilience, confidence and wellbeing – so our aim over this fiscal year is to liberate our clients so that with a little help from us, they can feel that they have better control over their lives and a better quality of life – not bad aspirations for our team to make a contribution.