



Community Help & Advice Initiative

ANNUAL REPORT

2019-20



Aims and Objectives

- ◆ To relieve poverty in the community areas serviced by the agency
- ◆ To provide assistance in the interest of social welfare, with the specific objective of improving conditions of life of residents in the community
- ◆ To provide practical help to sections of the community in need
- ◆ To provide information , advice and support to the community

Mission

Meeting the social welfare needs of local people

Director's Report

The year to 31 March 2020 has been busy and productive across all our projects: we had new services starting while continuation of funding allowed existing projects to consolidate.

Advice: the success of the first year of Maximise! in the Liberton school cluster has convinced Edinburgh City Council to fund the project, allowing us to expand and strengthen our partnership with Children 1st. We are now in 4 clusters, totalling 20 schools, across Edinburgh. The EIJB-funded advice service successfully completed its first year, delivering advice in GP practices, Craigmillar council office, mental health hubs and drugs & alcohol recovery hubs. We started a new service, funded by NHS Lothian, in the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, where we provide advice to parents with sick children or outpatients. CHAI also provide advice and employability support in a new project, Wester Hailes Connect, with Prospect Community Housing, Whale Arts Agency, Score Scotland and Open Heavens Edinburgh.

Housing Support: the homelessness prevention service for Edinburgh SW continued successfully through the year. However, our partner Four Square decided to take the service in-house, so sadly this was the last year for CHAI to provide housing support. Our partnerships with Almond and Melville Housing Associations successfully supported several clients to sustain their tenancies.

The **Employability Support Service** and **Activity Agreement** also continued to support unemployed adults and young people overcome their barriers and progress into positive destinations.

We have also strengthened our strategic partnerships with Edinburgh City Council, The Scottish Legal Aid Board and NHS Lothian and we have contributed to the Edinburgh Poverty Commission. These partnerships allow us to not only contribute towards policy making but also to access funding, enabling us to help the numerous people that have turned to CHAI for assistance.

The Board is happy to report that we have been joined by new directors. They have made a welcomed addition to the CHAI family.

However, this has been a difficult year, as it has for many charities. We have had to make savings as we have seen our income diminish and this has been a painful process. This will have an impact in the following operational year which shall be reported in the next annual report. For 2019/2020 it is important to underline that we have a sustainable financial position that underpins a strong operational performance that has been executed magnificently by the staff, to whom the Board is grateful to.

“Really excellent advice service. Highly recommended to anyone needing clarity over benefit entitlement. I felt far more confident and informed after using CHAI's services. Thank you!”

Advice Service

Our advice service is embedded in schools, GP practices, drug & alcohol recovery hubs and mental health hubs. The figures are slightly lower than last year, reflecting the more complex and intensive nature of the work we do under the new contracts:

2191 individuals advised **3948 appointments attended**

6438 advice issues dealt with **170 appeals tribunal**

74% success rate for appeals tribunal

Financial gains: £5,972,930

Case study

A French client was refused UC due to failing the right-to-reside test and only had pre-settled status. He claimed UC but the DWP decided he was not a former worker because he had only worked a few weeks for his last employer and had a long gap between end of employment and his UC claim, as he was living off his savings. We helped him appeal this decision by gathering evidence about his previous employment and his inability to work afterwards due to temporary illness. We quoted extensive case law about aspects related to:

- His work, which was genuine and effective to qualify as a worker.
- His illness, which started after the job terminated (it was fixed-term contract), preventing him from seeking new employment afterwards.
- The long gap (which does not stop former worker status), as we argued that there is no time limit associated with worker status and that no assessment under the benefit of fitness-for-work was required during the gap.

This took place over one face-to-face hearing and an additional paper hearing, which involved us making 2 detailed submissions. The appeal was successful: the client now claims UC £317 per month plus his housing costs.

“A service that must continue to be funded. I needed help at a time when I was at my lowest ebb due to physical and mental health problems. CHAI was a lifesaver, I would have been lost without them ”

CHAI's Advice Services

Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB)

This was the first year of EIJB-funded advice services. The grant, which is the result of co-production work between CHAI, the City of Edinburgh Council, NHS Lothian and other service delivery agencies (Citizens Advice Edinburgh and Granton Information Centre) allows CHAI to offer benefit and debt advice in SE and SW Edinburgh, with services co-located in GP practices, Craigmillar council office, the 4 drug & alcohol recovery hubs and, for the first time, in the mental health centres.

In 2019-20, **1,139** individuals accessed advice through EIJB-funded projects.

In the GP practices, **920** appointments were attended, with **£543,362** raised in financial gains for clients.

Our work in the recovery hubs was very successful, with **402** individuals advised, resulting in **£1,500,894** in financial gains for our clients.

Our service co-located in the mental health centres was at its first year: **123** individuals received advice, with **£172,254** in financial gains.

Wester Hailes Connect

Wester Hailes Connect is a new partnership project, funded by Power Up Fund, which aims to improve the digital skills of people living in Wester Hailes. CHAI provides advice and employability support. The project started in November 2019 and in 5 months we supported **6** people improving their employability skills, with **1** finding a job and **1** vocational training and we provided advice to **15** people, raising **£35,395** in financial gains.



In 2019-20 we delivered Maximise! in several school clusters across Edinburgh. The model, which sees an inclusive and wraparound service that provides advice on benefit, debt, housing and employability and family support, has proven successful in engaging hard-to-reach families and tackling child poverty:

Advice:

- * **381 individuals received advice, with 569 appointments attended**
- * **77 individuals engaged with housing advice/tenancy sustainment**
- * **12 people were supported at Tribunal for benefit appeals**
- * **37 care experienced families engaged with advice work**
- * **£667,975 in financial gains for families**

Employability:

- * **54 people engaged**
- * **112 people supported**
- * **203 sessions held overall**

- * **6 people going into work (sustained to 4 weeks)**
- * **16 individuals going into education or training**
- * **3 individuals going into volunteering**
- * **7 people going into vocational or work placement**
- * **2 young people going into the Activity Agreement**

"Maximise made me feel that I am not alone. Every hard situation I can get help or advice. Thank you for your support"

"Really excellent advice service. Highly recommended to anyone needing clarity over benefit entitlement. I felt far more confident and informed after using CHAI's services. Thank you!"

"I thank CHAI for helping me during my tough times"

"I tried everywhere to get help before I was told about CHAI. They are amazing"

"I have on a few occasions got help from CHAI. Very helpful in times of need. Great service and helpful staff. Thank you CHAI" 😊

Edinburgh Housing Advice Partnership



CHAI continued to lead EHAP, with court representation to Council's tenants:

537 individuals represented

958 court hearings

Case study

An EHAP adviser attending the Ordinary Cause actions at Edinburgh Sheriff Court encountered Mr & Mrs X at the court door. They were attending the first calling of a petition for Mr X's sequestration. Mr & Mrs X were both retired, their only asset was the family home. They were anxious that an award of sequestration would see them lose their home. After a quick triage interview the adviser stood for with Mr X to request the calling be continued for the respondent to take advice and assistance on his options.

In addition to a secured loan for home improvements, Mr X owed over £13,000 in arrears of council tax. Mrs X had retired on health grounds, in respect of which she received Personal Independence Payment. Mr X had taken early retirement to help care for his wife and received carers allowance. Both also received private employment pensions.

EHAP helped them with a full common financial statement, a review of their budgeting and advice on claiming council tax reduction. With some changes to their expenditure the couple would be able to manage a debt payment plan for all unsecured debt within a reasonable time, but beyond the four years of a sequestration. With the case already in court Mr X also faced the added costs of the petitioner's expenses, and the possibility of judicial interest.

Mr & Mrs X chose to apply for a debt payment plan under the Debt Arrangement Scheme. The EHAP adviser helped both with the application, and further court appearances. The debt payment plan was approved and the petition for sequestration was dismissed. Mr & Mrs X remained secure in their own home.

“CHAI plug a hole in the current housing system that is desperately needed. I'm so grateful for the support offered and can't thank you enough.”

Housing Support

CHAI continued to deliver homelessness prevention service to SW Edinburgh residents in partnership with Four Square, as well as tenancy sustainment to tenants of Melville Housing Association and Almond Housing Association:

70 clients supported through housing support service

109 tenancies sustained at Melville 62 tenancies sustained at Almond

Total financial gains: £143,000

Case study

We worked with a client with severe mental health issues. Due to the severity of his difficulties, his finances (benefit income) were managed by Social Work dept: they paid his bills and he received an allocation. Through building up a relationship with the individual he expressed to us that he was unhappy with the arrangement and wanted to have full control of his finances and wanted to raise a challenge to the corporate appointeeship through his solicitor. With the client's permission, CHAI contacted the solicitor, who confirmed that the client would likely be able to successfully challenge the corporate appointeeship by relying on a consultant report which was commissioned by the solicitor. CHAI later learnt from mental health social worker that corporate appointeeship would be robustly defended by Midlothian Council if challenged.

CHAI's initial assessment in relation to our client's mental health would largely support social work assessment, but felt that a small increase in autonomy (over spending money only) for a brief trial period could be worth trying as it would allow the client to increase his responsibilities in a measured fashion. And if this went well perhaps it could be increased in partnership with the other agencies supporting him. We helped the client to look at the positives and risks of this situation and together we agreed a plan. When a meeting with social work and other professionals involved was arranged, the individual found

this difficult and stressful and subsequently his behaviour and language became animated and critical towards social work and his care worker. The professionals involved would only agree to an initial small amount every week (£160) which the client was unhappy about. However, the plan went ahead and whilst the client decided not to continue with CHAI's support we have been advised that the new budget arrangement has been working well and we are happy to have helped facilitate increased autonomy in this person's life.

"CHAI has changed my life - thank you so much"

Employability Support Service

In 2019-20 the employability support service helped **117** people in South West of Edinburgh improve their employability, with **29** individuals progressing into positive destinations:

11 found and sustained a job to 4 weeks

7 into vocational training

2 into employment training

4 full time qualification

4 volunteering

1 education

Case study

Client, a lone parent EEA national whose first language is not English, fled to the UK in August 2019 to escape domestic violence, and engaged with the employability service in early January 2020 at a local event.

Client lives in temporary accommodation with her four children, all under ten years of age, including a two-year-old. She is an experienced hospitality worker, but because she has no support network, needed any work to take place during school hours as she was not able to get help with childcare. It was agreed that a school meals assistant would be a suitable initial route to take. The development worker (DW) sourced funding for an online food hygiene course, as client could not claim benefits and relied heavily on help from local charities.

The course would also help satisfy the person specification, along with her experience in a customer focussed food environment. The client passed with the course with a high percentage score.

The DW helped the client to apply for a school meals assistant job on the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) My Job Scotland website. The client was then chosen for interview, for which she did preparation with the DW, who also helped find out the bus route and the appropriate clothing for interview. The DW issued the client with bus day savers to enable her to get to the interview, and also made a referral to Smart Works for her to acquire the smart clothing that would give her confidence a boost. DW also gave the client bus tickets to enable her to attend the Smart Works session.

The client was successful at interview and was offered a job in a South Edinburgh school, subject to PVG checks. DW sourced more funding to enable her to purchase footwear for the job, which needed to be kept on the premises.

As the client came from a European Economic Area in the recent past, the PVG took longer than usual, so her job start date was pushed back, and coincided with the school closure due to Covid 19. However, CEC honoured the job offer. Being in work also now gives client access to Universal Credit, which gives her a financial safety net.

Although this particular outcome was complex and difficult for CHAI staff, the client's resilience and determination in the face of adversity, along with her skills and experience, made this a particularly successful outcome and great achievement for the client, who could easily have made the decision to return to the abusive situation for the sake of feeding and clothing her family. However, she now has an income and aspires to move her family to permanent accommodation.

Activity Agreement

In 2019-20 the Activity Agreement supported **30** young people, with **15** achieving progression. Throughout the year we received additional funding to support our activities, including funds for residential stays, for outdoors activities and for work to support young people's mental health:

P/T education: 2

Employability training: 3

F/T Education: 3

F/T education sustained to 13 weeks: 3

Qualification gained: 4

Case study

A young woman shared during our individual support sessions that she had an interest in cooking and cake decorating; with this in mind, a volunteer placement was arranged at a cake company. However she found the adult environment intimidating and overwhelming. Despite positive feedback from the company, she lacked in confidence and the placement was ended. We ensured she continued to get lots of support and opportunity to participate in different food-related employability activities to help her build on this set back and find something that suited where she was at. One of these opportunities was a cooking course facilitated by Edinburgh Food Social. This was a very hands on cooking course taught over 4 weeks as part of the Activity Agreement group-work programme. She really enjoyed this aspect of the programme and clearly felt much more confident in her social skills and abilities to try to gain more experience in this area. Following discussions with one of the founders of Edinburgh Food Social, a placement on their JET programme was offered to her, which she was due to start on 21st March. However due to Covid-19 this was postponed. She started a form of apprenticeship with Edinburgh Food Social in August and has been thoroughly enjoying it. We continue to support her through this journey.

Other Services

Through the year we assisted **145** clients with several grants for food and living costs, with a total of **£31,150** being awarded to them.

CHAI is a referral agency to food banks and in 2019-20 we made **436** referrals for food support.

“The people from chai where very understanding and very welcoming thank you for the service you provided”



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our partners and funders for their support through the year: City of Edinburgh Council, NHS Lothian, Scottish Legal Aid Board, Melville Housing Association, Almond Housing. Moreover, Community One Stop Shop, Dunedin Canmore Housing, Prospect Housing Association, Four Square, Children 1st, Granton Information Centre. Thanks to CHAI staff and volunteers for their hard work and to the Board of Directors for the support. Last, but not least, special thanks to our clients, for placing their trust in us.

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