



Cheetham Hill
Advice Centre

Cheetham Hill Advice Centre

Annual Report 2019 - 2020



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Introduction and Chair's Report

Message from our Chair



We are proud of the work we have carried out this year. The team have been faced with huge challenges and have risen to every one of them. I would like to thank all of the volunteers and staff at Cheetham Hill Advice Centre for the role they play in the heart of our community.

Welcome to Cheetham Hill Advice Centre's annual report for 2019-2020

This has been a busy and challenging year which the team at CHAC have responded to wonderfully. This annual report covers the period of 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. It is hard not to focus entirely on the events of March and the impact that Covid and the subsequent lockdowns have had on us all. However, it is important to look back at all the work CHAC did to shore up our position and our work to help local people have as much stability as possible.

Key achievements

We are always looking for ways to improve what we do and in the last year, we redesigned our operational model. This was a development process that involved staff, volunteers, trustees and community feedback. We have streamlined our initial assessment so that people are seen quickly and more people are able to access 'on the day' help. This has been achieved by the whole advice team being involved in our triage and assessment and has reduced waiting times on the day which has been appreciated by community members.

We are pleased to continue in our successful partnership with Citizens Advice Manchester and Shelter. In April 2019 we began roll-out of a new three year contract delivering advice across the city of Manchester. This partnership allows all partners to bring their specialist knowledge together to provide free advice across the city. This work was essential in the last twelve months and will be more essential than ever in the months and years to come.

Over the year we replaced the vast majority of our funding and have secured our financial position for the next three years. This was an entirely transitional year which we entered facing a great deal of uncertainty and exited with stability for the short to medium term. This is an achievement at the best of times and in the current environment is the bedrock that the charity will use for our future development.

We have spent time this year evaluating the impact of our services. We worked with an independent evaluator to understand the impact of our work and the elements of our charity's delivery that the people who use our service appreciate. It was heartening to understand the longer-term impact of our interventions for the people who trust us with their problems. This includes not only achieving longer-term stability but also making a positive impact on people's emotional wellbeing and sense in their ability to cope. These outcomes are at the core of what CHAC seeks to achieve and we have used the evaluation work as the basis for our development over the next two to three years.

Our thanks

We are grateful to all of our funders, our partners, our staff team, our volunteers and our trustees. We remain eternally grateful to the people in Cheetham Hill and across Manchester who trust us with their problems and support us in the work we do. It is through our shared endeavours that we will build on the successes of the last year and ensure that we can all survive in the challenging year to come.

Sarah Sedge,
Chair of Cheetham Hill Advice Centre



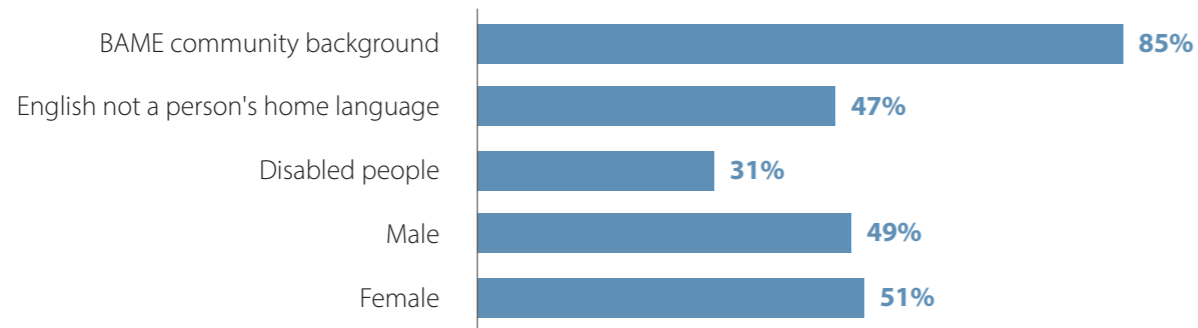
Advice Service

Cheetham Hill Advice Centre helped 2,002 people in the last year. We helped and advised people with 5,024 new cases in 2019/20 – with welfare reform and housing instability continuing to impact on people in our community. We have seen members of our community exposed to vulnerable situations and have had to work harder than ever before to secure the stability they need for a safe and healthy life.

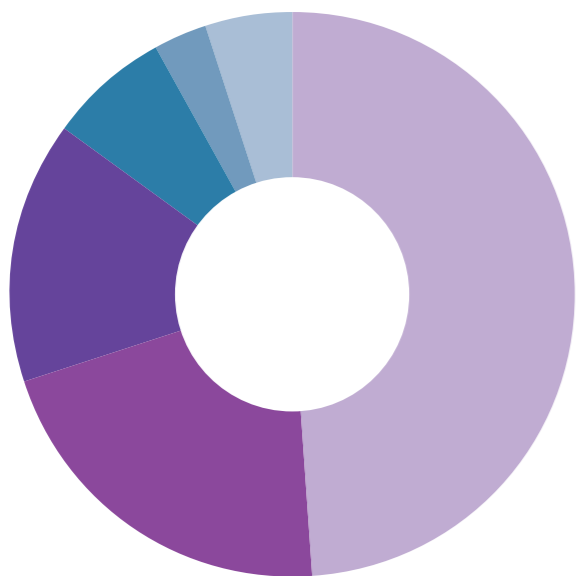
Despite these challenges, CHAC helped 2,002 people and increased people's income by £1.8 million pounds. This money enabled people to pay their rent and mortgage, meet ever-increasing utility costs as well as feeding themselves and their families. Increases in income also enabled people to move to a more sustainable financial position alongside work to manage debt of £0.9 million and in some cases to reduce or remove debt entirely.

£1.8 million in additional income

Key statistics



Ethnic origin (%)



Who we helped

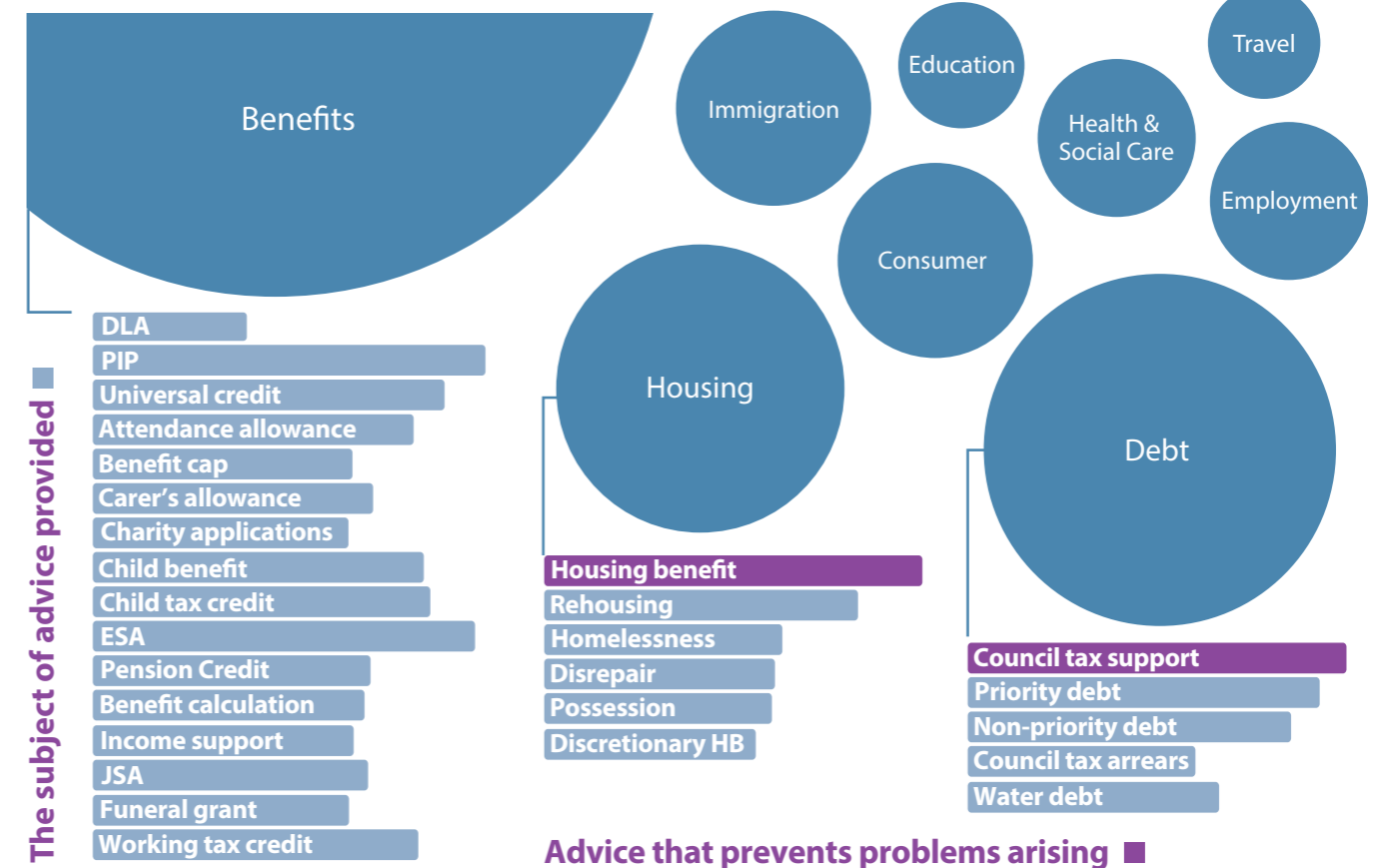
Cheetham Hill Advice Centre provides help to people in North Manchester's diverse community. Our team's mix of gender and ethnic origin reflects the local community and ensures people receive a sensitive and culturally appropriate service from us. Our advice team also provide help in Bahasa, Cantonese, German, Hakka, Malay, Mandarin, Punjabi, Pushto and Urdu as well as English. Above is a chart which shows an analysis of the uptake of our services, including good engagement with Disabled people and those who have English as an additional language. This is important to us because we know that whilst different demographic groups may be in the minority in our city, we also know they are over-represented in experiencing negative outcomes and health inequalities. It is a core part of CHAC's work that not only do we help people achieve their rights and entitlements, we also focus our work so that we are as accessible as possible to those most likely to experience direct and indirect discrimination, who have fewer resources and the least security and stability.

Advice Issues

People come to CHAC with all kinds of problems, stresses and worries. Sometimes people also come having experienced positive life events such as a marriage, the birth of a child or after having received their first job offer. Our team of trained staff and volunteers guide people through the bureaucratic processes that often accompany both joyous and difficult life experiences.

The team help people with their initial enquiries and then dig deeper to uncover any hidden causes or unrealised opportunities. This may be taking an eviction notice and working out that there is a huge range of debts that the person owes. It may also involve working with a client to work out that they have been over-paying on their utilities or are entitled to benefits that they had yet not claimed.

Types of advice queries



Throughout our service we aim to stabilise people's situations as much as possible. This includes maximising income, reducing debt, obtaining secure housing and ensuring smooth changes at times of transition. A breakdown of the specific types of advice we provide shows how we are able to achieve longer-term stability by focusing on prevention and stability and well as responding

to crisis and helping people recover. For example, we ensure people increase their income as much as possible to avoid debt from accruing. We help to obtain and maintain secure housing to prevent evictions and homelessness. We help clients to gain confidence to deal with their financial situation, subsequently to alleviate poverty, improve mental health and wellbeing and achieve positive living.

I've had problems with my electricity bill. I didn't realise about sending in the meter readings so the supplier was estimating the bills. They sent me a bill for £2,832 – for a small one bedroom flat! They were constantly sending me threatening emails and leaving phone messages. I was really panicking and stopped paying the electricity bills. CHAC took up my case with the energy supplier – it took months for them even to send out someone to read the meter. I recently got my updated bill and my account is actually in credit by £53. CHAC have shown me how to read the meter so I feel more able to do things myself...CHAC are absolutely essential to helping to sort my particular problems.

Karen

Impact

Impact at key moments of transition

There are key moments when people's lives can tip in one direction or another. These are sometimes joyous events and are sometimes traumatic or devastating moments. Ensuring these times of transition are managed effectively can make all the difference in the world to a person's future.

At the moment, CHAC are helping me to apply for a council house. When I need to come, I usually see the same advisor but they have all my details on file so everyone knows what has happened in the past and what to do now if she's not available. I am very happy and satisfied with what they have done. They play a very important role in my life.

Wahid

Key moments of transition

Evidence of wider impacts to wellbeing

CHAC worked with an independent evaluator in the last year to measure if CHAC was having an impact on people's wider wellbeing. The evaluator designed an outcome questionnaire and set up the process for a sample of CHAC's clients to report on their experience over the spring of 2019. The evaluation findings included people reporting improvements in wellbeing, less worry about debt and a reduction in stress generally.

Outcome	
Work or skills outcome of volunteering, obtaining employment or improving their employment skills	36%
Worrying less about debt specifically	69%
Improvement in emotional wellbeing of feeling less stressed, less anxious or happier and more positive	91%

Without help from CHAC, I would not have been able to get anywhere. It's been a very difficult process. I was very depressed and thinking about ending my life. My mind was toast. I had counsellors from the GP coming to my house and am still on medication. CHAC have helped me get back on my feet and I feel much happier, despite my ill health. I am able to provide for my family again and stay in this country where I have been settled for so long.

Samira

Impact of volunteers

CHAC had 35 volunteers in the last year. The volunteers delivered key roles within the charity including providing advice, welcoming clients, proving help with on-line and digital services, attending community events, consulting with people and translating into multiple languages including Amazigh, Arabic, Azeri, Bengali, Cantonese, Chinese, Edo, French, German, Hakka, Hindi, Ibo, Italian, Kashmiri, Kurdish, Lingala, Pahari/Mirpuri, Pushto, Persian, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Urdu and Yoruba.

I truly enjoyed every moment at CHAC. My supervisor and the other staff have left a good impression in me and I will not forget you. You were supportive and kind so a huge THANK YOU.

A note on the future from our Chief Executive

The events of 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 will forever be viewed under the shadow of Covid-19 and the following illness, lockdown and economic impact. It can be difficult to remember the positive work that was happening before and to reflect on the successes and achievements.

We have been fortunate enough to be part of partnership work, community participation, system design and campaigning. We have worked throughout the year in areas that enrich our community and which will hopefully improve things for the future. The photos below show our involvement in Manchester Poverty Truth Commission and the movement to involve people with lived experience of poverty at the heart of solution making, our work with local Health partners to strength the links between the voluntary sector and health services, our work on the panel to strengthen North Manchester's VCSEF sector (Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise and Faith Sector) and our involvement in The Pankhurst Trust's '16 Days of Action' campaign to encourage employers to provide support for women experiencing domestic abuse.



At Cheetham Hill Advice Centre we exist within the heart of our community and are privileged to be trusted with some of the most sensitive and important moments of people's lives. What has struck us most in compiling this annual report is the impact that we were able to have right up until the moment when Covid struck. Right up till that moment and beyond. However, never has the impact of increasing people's stability been more evident than as a result of the pandemic. We are grateful for all the people who came to us in the last year so we could reduce their debt, to the people who allowed us to help them ensure they had a secure place to live and that the rent was being paid. We are relieved for all the people who we registered with a GP and explained about any appointments for specialist treatment. We are thankful for all those who trusted us to help them register their children and those who we worked with to have their work as carers recognised.



What we know now is that every small piece of successful advice provided another brick in people's stability, a bedrock, an anchor. So that when the pandemic hit, people in our community were less likely to be swept away. We know that there are still waves to come – waves of infection, waves of long-term illness and waves of economic shock. We are thankful and grateful that we were able to provide the work described in this report because it has never been more needed or more necessary.

My confidence has grown so much. I can now take a case from triage when I know what to do without having to check with the supervisor. I always reflect on what I have done with a client and try to improve. There are a small group of volunteers here on the same day and we support each other.

Tanesa, Volunteer



Cheetham Hill Advice Centre

A copy of our full accounts is available
from the Centre upon request

Independent Account Examiners

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Finance Worker

Karin Stamp

IT Support

Bytesize

Banker

Co-operative Bank
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Manchester

Funding

Our main Funding comes from The National
Lottery Community Fund, Manchester City
Council and The Henry Smith Charity.

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