

Key Voluntary Sector Bodies – Annual Update Summary

Tonbridge and Malling CAB (Achievements in the 10 months to 31 January 2015).

In the 10 months to 31 January 2015, Tonbridge & Malling CAB (TMCAB) assisted 1,766 clients with over 3,700 problems, which is an average of two problems per client. Many people come to the CAB with multiple problems, which are often inter-linked. For instance, someone may initially seek our assistance because he/she has lost their job, and in turn need our assistance to apply for Jobseeker benefits, deal with their debts which have become unmanageable and address their housing needs.

TMCAB has continued to provide a telephone service for Dartford CAB and Sevenoaks & Swanley CAB. The income received from these bureaux has enabled TMCAB to operate a five day telephone service which has been an enormous benefit in making our service more accessible for our local community through the week.

Through our extensive telephone service and our range of outreach services across the Borough, we are now reaching more people beyond Tonbridge Town. 55% of all our TMBC area clients now come from non-Tonbridge town locations.

In the last year to date, our top issues within the Bureau are:

Benefits 23%
 Debt 17%
 Relationships and family 14%
 Employment 13%
 Housing 12%

Advice Together

One of the major successes of TMCAB in the past year has been the Advice Together partnership between local advice providers established through Big Lottery funding across the North and West Kent area. TMCAB acts as one of the lead parties alongside its bureaux partners in the region. The main feature of the Advice Together partnership is the referral service which interconnects all advice partners so that they can easily and securely refer clients to each other's service. The most vulnerable and those in multiple need will therefore receive rapid and targeted help without needing to find the service for themselves. Over 500 clients have benefited from this service over the last year. Another feature of Advice Together has been the quarterly forums that offer opportunities to share best practice, learn about each other's services and to identify new funding opportunities to help groups of clients in need.

More complex problems

Citizens Advice, the national organisation, has found that many more people are accessing the online Advice guide information source to research or resolve their problems. People who call us on the telephone can be similarly helped through guiding the clients to find the information on this online advice source or the

information can be emailed or posted to them. However, those that have a very complex set of issues and/or unable to access the internet or telephone through vulnerability or financial constraint still need our face to face service. This changing activity toward self-help or lightly-supported help for the majority has meant that our advisers and supervisors are faced with increasingly complicated cases with multiple issues often with a more vulnerable client. The sessions can be more time-consuming than in the past and the level of support for the person can be higher with a number of follow up appointments. In the past, those on low income could access specialist help for their problems with Government-funded Legal Help. Such specialist help is now only available in very limited circumstances and the CAB is often the only source of free help for people facing eviction, welfare benefits problems or employment difficulties.

The way that the CAB supports its volunteer advisers has had to change to cope with these increasing numbers of complex cases. TMCAB has therefore assigned specialist supervisors in the fields of debt, benefits and employment to support its volunteers and to ensure that the quality of the Bureau's advice is still maintained despite the more complex environment.

Quality of our advice

We are very pleased to report that despite the increased complexity of cases and the continuing high volume of enquiries, our bureau was awarded a 100% quality of advice in our audit this year. This is a testament to the very high quality of training of our volunteers, the excellence of our quality control and specialist support functions and the willing way that our volunteer advisers adapt and respond to changing circumstances. No other bureau in the country has achieved such a high grade.

Evolving access channels

Increasingly, our clients are accessing our service using mobile devices or computers as they seek advice while on the move, perhaps in their lunch-hour at work. TMCAB is part of a pilot programme run by the national Citizens Advice organisation to give advice by webchat and email. We hope that by offering additional access channels, we can assist more people in a cost-effective manner while preserving our more traditional services for those who need them.

Voluntary Action Within Kent

Tonbridge Volunteer Centre- Jan to Dec 2014

- 229 volunteer enquiries
- 181 (79%) volunteers registered for volunteering
- 164 volunteering opportunities registered by 82 organisations across TMBC area
- VAWK facilitates the West Kent Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum- 103 members representing 77 organisations. 4 meetings per year- covered topics including recruiting volunteers with criminal records, managing conflict, youth volunteering and volunteer recognition

- Volunteering team carried out 20 Good Practice Visits with new and existing organisations based or operating in TMBC area, delivered short talks to 5 Pathways to Employment course groups (39 attendees in total), and had stands at Student Volunteer Week and Fresher's Fair at K College, West Kent Skillfest and Trench Community Event
- We have 31 volunteer drivers in our Dial 2 Drive community transport scheme who have delivered (year to date) 2896 drives for 312 clients in TMBC area.
- Youth Volunteering – we have 8 young volunteers supporting the BOB café which has totalled approximately 90 hours of voluntary service. Also we have 25 young volunteers as active members of Safe Committees that are based within various schools in the Borough each giving up at least an hour of their time each week.

Voluntary Action Maidstone

The Volunteer Centre's aim is to enable anybody and everybody to improve their communities through volunteering. We do this primarily in the following ways:

Connecting local people to opportunities in their area:

Since April 2014 we have helped connect 82 people from the Tonbridge and Malling area with volunteer involving organisations. This represents almost 1/5 of the total number of individuals that we have connected to organisations so far this year. A good return on the £5,000 TMBC grant which represents 10% of our income. Our statistics show that predominantly we connect these individuals with organisations that aim at reducing the isolation of others (elderly, young people or disabled) through befriending roles and increase organisational effectiveness through administrative roles.

The time that individuals give to local organisations obviously benefits volunteer involving organisations, of the 54 organisations we asked 100% agreed that the volunteers we referred made a difference to their work. However, it should be noted that volunteering also benefits the volunteers themselves. Our research shows that volunteering increases or significantly increases people's happiness, self-esteem, skills set and employability (particularly important when over a third of those who wish to volunteer are unemployed).

Helping local organisations develop worthwhile and interesting roles:

We currently support 34 organisations and 41 opportunities in the Tonbridge and Malling area representing 17% of the total number of organisations that we support. Of these organisations and opportunities we have registered 3 new organisations this year and helped develop 7 new opportunities 15% of the total of new opportunities. As local specialists in volunteering we do not act solely as brokers but also as advisors to organisations looking to involve volunteers. We inform, advise and guide organisations so that they are fully prepared to involve volunteers successfully with 78% of organisations telling us that this service made a difference to the service they offer.

Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge

Over the last year we have continued to provide Information & Advice (I&A) services to people living in the Tonbridge area, offering office-based interviews, telephone support, home visits and support to apply for benefits (including Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and Blue Badge applications).

In 2014 we carried out over 140 home visits in Tonbridge and supported 47 people to apply for Attendance Allowance.

We have enhanced the services in Tonbridge to include the Support At Home service, the Independent Living Support service, counselling and a local Lunch Club.

We are currently making improvements to the Age UK office facilities in Tonbridge to enable us to extend the opening hours and to provide a private interview room to enable us to further enhance services.

Age Concern Malling (Transport Services 2014/15)

Day Care services are offered at Rotary House (specialist Dementia Day Care 5 days a week), West Malling, Leybourne, East Malling, Borough Green and Walderslade. The Day Care service offers clients the opportunity to socialise, make friends and engage in numerous activities including seated exercise classes, quizzes and entertainment. Foot care, hairdressing and bathing services are available at Rotary House.

At Age Concern we have 6 mini buses and 1 Kangoo which can accommodate 1 wheelchair and two additional passengers. The transport is used to convey clients to Day Centres, outings, holidays, assisted shopping trips and Medical Appointments.

In 2014/15 Age Concern Malling will have made 9,408 return transportations equating to 196 individual transportations per week.

Client Benefits and Outcomes:

Many of the clients utilising Age Concern Services would not be able to attend without assisted transport. As such transport is an essential component of service provision. The transport service is a life line in reducing isolation and maintaining independent living. The Age Concern Services aim to reduce emergency admissions to hospital and delay the need for residential care provision. The majority of the transport trips include escorts to ensure the safety and well-being of the clients, many of whom require assistance in moving from their accommodation to the transport. The Transport is not only moving an individual from point A to B, it is the experience itself, being in the company of others and enjoying the journey and the surroundings. Such journeys stimulate conversation and reminisces.

For the relatives and carers of our clients, utilising the services at Age Concern Malling, the services give vital respite from caring duties and the opportunity of personal time.

Transport Costs:

The motor vehicle expenses in 2013/14 were £63,286 some of which is offset by client fees and of course the contribution from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. The difference is incorporated in the overhead of the organisation through voluntary contribution. Further funding will need to be sought to maintain the service.

Maidstone and West Kent Mediation Services

Maidstone Mediation and West Kent Mediation are registered charities and voluntary organisations. Both have a long tradition of delivering high quality services. Maidstone Mediation was established 1989 and West Kent in 1996.

Both Services have always worked co-operatively with one another and delivered services across Tonbridge and Malling. (Maidstone Mediation covering the north of the Borough and West Kent Mediation covering the south.)

The Mediation services have a small core of paid staff and a large cohort of highly trained and supervised volunteers. All volunteers are DBS checked and adhere to Policies and Procedures in line with the Legal Services Commission Quality Mark.

Services Provided in Tonbridge and Malling are:-

- Mediation for neighbourhood disputes
- Parent and teenager mediation
- Mediation / restorative practice in schools
- Peer mediation training in schools

Definition of terms

- **Mediation** is the intervention of a neutral third party (mediator) to help clear up misunderstandings and miscommunications, identify problems and facilitate parties reaching agreement on the way forwards
- **Restorative practice** is mediation focussed on issues thrown up when one party causes harm to another e.g. By committing a crime

Conflict

The mediation services are experts in both analysing and resolving conflicts . They clear up misunderstandings , misperceptions and miscommunications . They balance out power differences. They help people focus on the issues. They use restorative techniques to heal hurts. They help people to future focus. They help people view issues as shared problems which can be worked on together.

Mediators invest time into visiting people in their homes and listening to their situation. Mediators work hard to help everyone to understand each other's point of view, including feelings and needs. Agreements are reached based upon what the parties think is fair and reasonable. This means that the parties own the agreements

and because the issues are looked at in a shared problem solving way, rather than adversarially, there are no winners or losers, so no-one loses face.

Mediation is particularly beneficial when people need to be able to continue to co-exist e.g. Neighbours, family members, work colleagues, school colleagues/ fellow pupils. It is also very powerful when there is a need for an injustice to be acknowledged and reparation made e.g. Criminal justice, e.g. verbal abuse, bullying, hate crime e.g. When there has been a betrayal in a relationship.

Figures for 2014-15 (January to January)

- 134 households with neighbour disputes
- 8 Restorative conferences in Schools
- 225 children receiving peer mediation training
- 800 children using peer mediators
- 16 families accessing parent/ teen mediation

Benefits of Mediation

1. Community Safety – Mediation reduces conflict and prevents an escalation to violence or crime. Through mediation in schools, young people are enabled to stay engaged with education and not be on the streets.

2. Quality of life – Most ASB reports are neighbourhood disputes. Through mediation there is a reduction in ASB and the misery that it causes.

3. Saving money- Mediation saves Council officer time, Police officer time, Community safety officer time, Housing officer time and any costs relating to court cases.

4. Improving community cohesion – Mediation helps people to work together to solve problems for mutual benefit.

5. Prevention of Homelessness- Through mediation between parents and teenagers, young people are prevented from being homeless. (A report by the Youth Offending Team highlighted homelessness as a direct contributor to offending behaviour)

6. An army of peacemakers - Over the years the mediation services have trained hundreds of volunteer mediators.