

Charity number: 1180341
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CHAS BRISTOL

Housing Advice Service Impact Report 2019-20



What we do

CHAS provides specialist advice on complex housing issues, through both short-term advice and long-term holistic casework and support. We work in close partnership with community groups and organisations, and take pride in our welcoming, supportive approach.

CHAS has a **vision** of society where all members of the community have a place they can call home. Our **mission** is to help Bristol residents obtain satisfactory housing conditions, focusing on those in greatest need.

Our Services



Trusted and Timely Advice

When people call us, they get through to an expert advisor quickly, preventing crises from escalating.



Casework and Support

Some cases require longer-term, holistic support from advisors- often for many months or even years.



Community Partnerships

We work with local community groups and organisations to deliver support, promote early intervention & increase community resilience.



'Your help has given my family a home. I cannot thank you enough'

Hani and family in their new home

In 2019/20...



384

cases worked on



46%

rehoused/had homelessness prevented through our help



£55,784

was secured for clients in benefit claims, DHPs, grants...



28%

had housing conditions improved through our help



98%

of cases we worked on had a positive outcome



89%

of our beneficiaries felt empowered to take action themselves

SUZANNE'S STORY

Suzanne, her partner, and her 9 children were living in an overcrowded 3-bed house when their landlord gave them 2 months' notice to leave. She was in a very difficult position, as the size and vulnerability of the family made it hard for them to be rehoused all together in a suitable home.

Our caseworker helped Suzanne bid on private rental properties each week, supported her with weekly check-ins & helped deal with various problems that came up along the way. Negotiating with Bristol Law Centre and Suzanne's landlord, the eviction was put off until after Christmas. During lockdown, the family were housed together within Bristol in spacious temporary accommodation and eventually rehoused permanently in a large house on Bristol's outskirts with enough space for the whole family.



BALBIR'S STORY



Balbir was registered as homeless by the council when her landlord asked to leave the room she was living in. She hoped to move to an area close to her friends, community and temple, but given her heart problems and her difficulty with stairs, this proved very difficult.

We worked with the Council to assist Balbir throughout the rehousing process, using Punjabi interpreters to discuss the best approach to being rehoused. She has found a comfortable place and will look to swap her current home after a year to be closer to her Sikh community.

'I'm so grateful for everything you have done for me and can't thank [my caseworkers] enough. You have turned my life around'

Sarah

'Thanks for giving me some hope at a time when I felt hopeless and as if no one cared or was listening'

Anna

How we've responded to Covid-19

When lockdown began in March, we were able to continue advising and supporting clients online/by phone with no interruption to service. We quickly recognised that people citywide were becoming more isolated and less able to access advice. To address this, we called all open-case clients to see what additional support they might need. We also responded through citywide outreach to promote early interventions and launched new project partnerships, too, alongside existing outreach and partnerships. We're also launching new projects and partnerships as we move into 2021 to make sure we continue to reach the groups who need our advice in the community.

In 2020 ...

ACFA outreach project

We worked with ACFA (a network of advice agencies) to circulate flyers to Bristol North, South, and Central, signposting residents on where to get advice should they need it. CHAS and partners also worked with community magazines Up Our Street and Vocalise to develop a **Covid-19 Directory**.

Housing Support Handbook

We worked with Caring in Bristol to develop this free emergency resource that informs people of their rights and where they can get help. This helped us meet the increased demand for housing advice and support services in Bristol, even though we could not interact with communities in person.

And beyond ...

COVID-19 Community Advice Project

This project, in partnership with St Pauls Advice Centre, provides communities with holistic advice covering housing, debt, immigration, and benefits. This will support those in precarious circumstances and improve their understanding of obstacles, options and rights throughout the turbulence of Covid-19.

HomeFull

This partnership with Talking Money works with families in central Bristol children's centres, supporting parents with issues such as debt, housing and benefits. Collaborating with family support workers means our advisers can both pass on their experience & ensure families receive effective and early preventative advice - which is even more important in this moment.



Housing Support Handbook (credit: Caring in Bristol)



ACFA leaflet

Covid-19 directory

'You have been the best agency for checking in with me, to check I am doing OK, I really appreciate it'

John

In 2020, people needed our help more than ever.

Even before Covid-19, Bristol had a housing crisis on its hands. Homelessness in Bristol increased by **128%**⁽¹⁾ in the last 3 years. Rents are also rising fast, and council housing waiting lists continue to grow, meaning there is a real need for specialist housing advice.

Covid-19 is likely to worsen these trends in housing insecurity. Many jobs have and will be lost, and benefit claims are spiking (Universal Credit claims are up **100%**⁽²⁾ in Bristol). Given that the furlough scheme and regulations banning most evictions from taking place have been in force for much of the pandemic, the full impact of Covid-19 on homelessness has yet to be realised. Nonetheless, a report by Shelter in December 2020 found that **253,000**⁽³⁾ people in the UK were homeless or in temporary accommodation—the highest figure for **14 years**.

Since the start of the pandemic:

162% increase in demand for our service Jan 20-Jan 21

61% of our clients were threatened with homelessness (up 19%)

31% of our clients were homeless or in temp accommodation

‘Those of us already struggling to keep our heads above water have often been hit the hardest [by Covid-19]’

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK Poverty Report 2020/21



One of our advice workers, Esme, with Suzanne outside her new home

Who We Work With

On top of this difficult local landscape, the people we work are often facing the recurring structural barriers that prevent people from accessing the housing they need. These can be things like health issues or language or cultural barriers.



57% have mental health issues



51% are BAME



11% prefer to speak a language other than English



39% have physical health issues

Thank you!

We are extremely grateful for the continued support of our funders, without whom our work would not be possible. In addition to our individual supporters, we are thankful to key funders: *The Henry Smith Charity, John James Bristol Foundation, The Nisbet Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation* and for the grants received from trusts and foundations including *Singer Foundation, St Stephen and St James Trust, Alec Van Berchem Charitable Trust, Pat Newman Memorial Trust, Souter Charitable Trust, Allen Lane Foundation.*

As lockdown continues into 2021 and economic support winds up, the housing situation is likely to get worse. **We need your support to meet this need.**

You can support us by visiting www.chasbristol.co.uk/donate/

For further information on how to donate please email us at admin@chasbristol.co.uk



Contact Us & Keep In Touch



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Footnotes

1) <https://www.emmausbristol.org.uk/about-us/homeless-in-bristol/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20homeless%20people,of%20homelessness%20across%20the%20country.>

2) https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/fclga-research-report-financial-hardship-and-economic-vulnerability/modarea=E06000023&mod-group=AllUnitaryLainCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup#chart-9

3) https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/homeless_in_a_pandemic_253000_people_are_trapped_in_temporary_accommodation_