

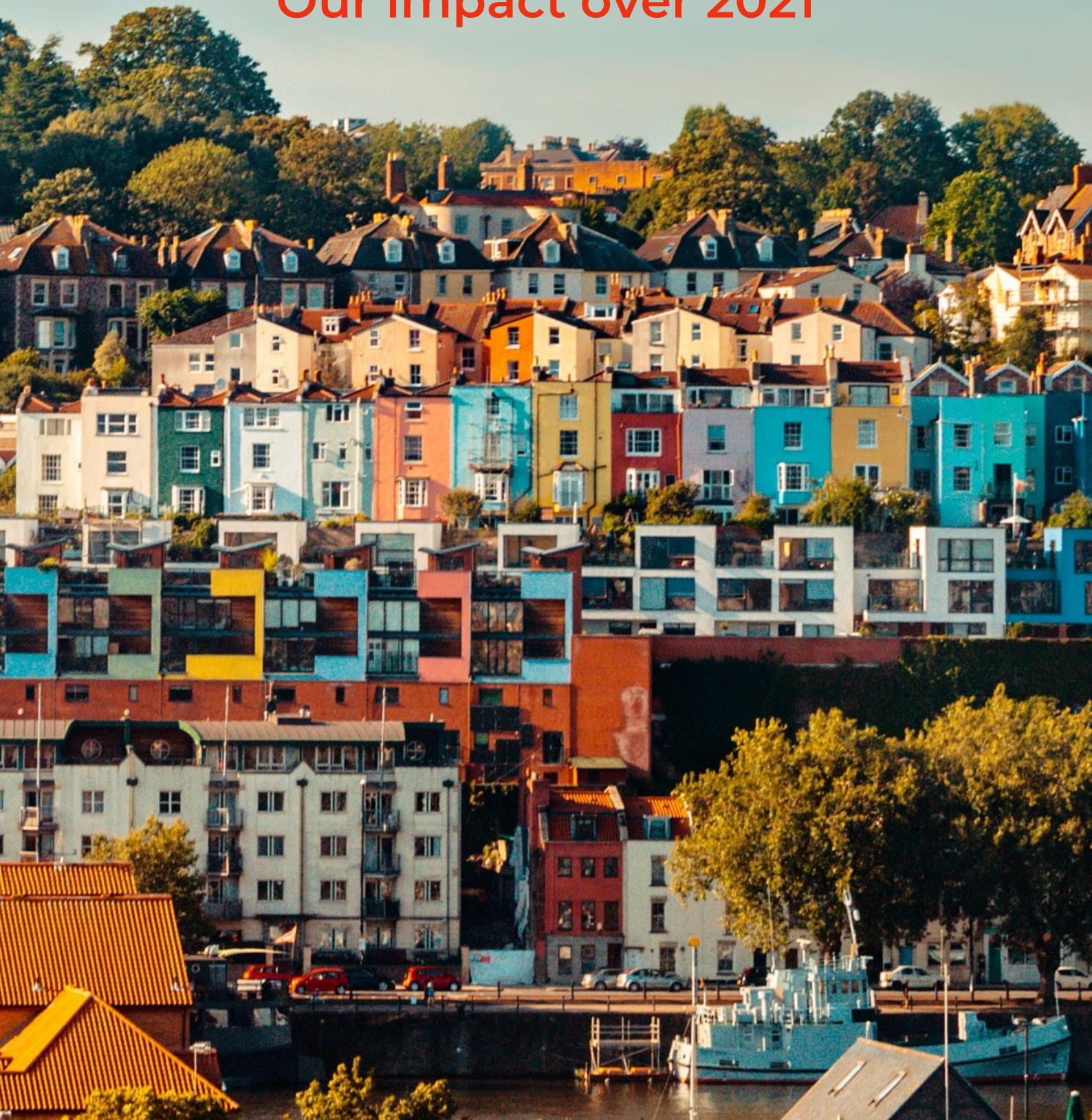
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CHAS BRISTOL

Housing Advice Service

Our impact over 2021



What we do

Established in 1965, CHAS Bristol provides **free, specialist advice, practical support and legal advocacy** for people in housing and financial crisis in Bristol and surrounding areas, particularly where there are high levels of deprivation. We aim to find **lasting solutions** – a safe, permanent home appropriate for all of our clients' needs.

Our **vision** is a 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 & activities



OUR CHAS ADVICE LINE | Our expert housing advisors are on call to clients who may be able to resolve their issue there & then.



OUR CASEWORK | We provide long-term, multi-agency support over several months - even years - until an adequate solution is found.



INFLUENCING HOUSING POLICY | We ensure voices of Bristolians are heard at citywide policy debates & decision making forums.



CREATING PARTNERSHIPS | We work with other local organisations to reach more people & provide more holistic support.

In 2021, we helped over 800 clients directly. That's 142% more than the previous year!



In 2021 we...



prevented homelessness for/helped rehouse **32%** of our clients



got housing conditions improved for **34%** of our clients



empowered **22%** of our clients to take future action themselves



accessed **£19k+** in additional funds for our clients

Why we exist

Bristol is in housing crisis: rents are amongst the highest in any UK city and are still rising. Thousands of Bristolians and their families are in desperate need of social housing yet **demand far outweighs supply.**

People who urgently need to move because they are at significant risk of harm now **must wait 2-3 years to be rehoused into social housing.** Within the space of a week in autumn 2021 the furlough scheme and the ban on evictions both ended – these were a lifeline to so many of our clients.

The pandemic has exacerbated the situation – **almost half our clientele came to us threatened with homelessness last year, compared to a third just before the pandemic hit.**

Benefits have not increased in line with the sharp inflation rise occurring nationally. Vulnerable people who are already struggling to feed themselves and heat their homes can expect to have their **benefits cut by an average of £500 over 2022.***

Many of our clients face **extra barriers** that make it harder to access appropriate housing e.g., mental health illness, language barriers, digital exclusion or discrimination.

People often come to us feeling **anxious, unsafe and overwhelmed** because of overcrowding, disrepair, rent arrears, domestic abuse, repossession orders or racial/other forms of harassment.



Of our clients...



54% are families with children



85% partially or fully depend on benefits



20% don't speak English as a first language



51% have a mental health condition



31% have a physical health condition



48% are from a UK minority ethnic group

* The Bristol Post, 2022: <https://bit.ly/3kbE702>

Helen's story

We have been working with Helen since 2019. Her story shows the complexity of issues people in housing crisis often face.

Having to deal with several problems at the same time, Helen was completely overwhelmed. She was consumed by grief after her son had recently passed away in their home. It had traumatised her, which was triggering distressing psychotic episodes. She was really struggling as she found it extremely painful staying in the same home where she had lost her son.

As she now had a spare room in her council property, she was subject to the bedroom tax, which is essentially a cut in housing benefit. This came at such a cost that she couldn't afford to feed herself properly.



Helen was also a wheelchair user but the chairlift she used to access her home was broken, meaning she couldn't get out of the house at all. Feeling desperate and isolated, she turned to CHAS.

We were the first service Helen had engaged with, so the first thing we did was listen to her so she could finally feel heard. We helped her with foodbank referrals so that she could eat enough. We also referred her to Bristol City Council's Disabled Adaptations Team to get her chairlift repaired.

There was a long wait, but we got in touch with her Social Housing Officer, informing

them of the severity of Helen's situation so they could speed up the process. It was a success – her chair lift was repaired and she could finally get out of the house again.

We then joined forces with our partner, North Bristol Advice Centre, to tackle Helen's financial situation. We managed to get her a discretionary housing payment (one-off emergency payment) from the council to cover the cost of her bedroom tax and increase her income.

Next we contacted HomeChoice, Bristol City Council's service that people use to access social housing. We explained that Helen couldn't afford to stay in her home, along with the long-term and very serious impact her housing situation was having on her mental health.

We made numerous appeals until we were able to secure Helen an award of Band 1, meaning she would be prioritised for rehousing. This was a fantastic result for her.

Helen struggled with technology and experienced digital exclusion, making it very hard to place bids for social housing herself. To support her through this, we called her every week to discuss which properties were available and then place bids on her behalf.

Due to Helen's disability, she needs a bungalow with wheelchair access. These are scarce in Bristol, so it is taking a long time to find something suitable. However, at CHAS, we remain in close contact with her, continuing to provide her with emotional and practical support and staying by her side throughout this process.

Kalu's story

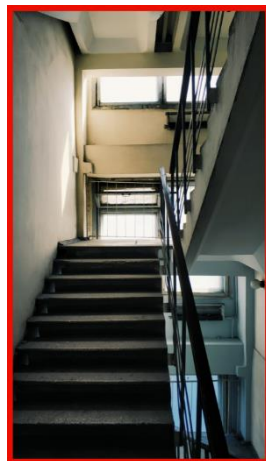
Our client, Kalu, turned to CHAS soon after he lost his job as a care worker when the pandemic first hit in 2020. For health reasons, he was deemed extremely vulnerable to the virus so couldn't continue working.

As an agency worker on a zero-hour contract, he wasn't entitled to company sick pay, so had to depend on a small amount of statutory sick pay. Other than this, he lost all of his income.

Kalu began to fall behind on his rent, and ended up being in significant debt to his landlord.

As well as this, because of his immigration status, he had no recourse to public funds. This means that, although Kalu had every right to live and work in the UK, he was not able to access support from the council to clear the debt owed to his landlord, nor could he apply for universal credit.

Kalu's health was suffering as his house had no hot water, no heating and a rat problem. On top of all this, Kalu's landlord then tried to evict him. This was illegal as it was during a time when the Government had placed a ban on evictions due to the pandemic. It was then that Kalu turned to CHAS.



Kalu came to us in despair. He was feeling very vulnerable, particularly because of his health condition.

His mental health had taken a huge hit and he had become depressed and anxious.

We could see how distressed Kalu was and set out to help him. Firstly, we got in touch with Bristol's Rogue Landlord Unit to stop his landlord's illegal behaviour.

We then advocated for him to have the no recourse to public funds restriction lifted. This made a big difference as he could now claim universal credit and access support from the council to clear the debt owed to his landlord.

We then referred Kalu to the Environmental Health Team at the council who inspected and improved the conditions of his housing.



Following this, we attended a meeting with the council's Homelessness Prevention Team, the Rogue Landlord Unit and the Environmental Health Team. Kalu's accommodation was deemed unsafe and he was rehoused into temporary accommodation. However, it was unsuitable for him and he felt very at risk.

We helped Kalu register for HomeChoice, the council's service used by people to bid for social housing. Whilst temporarily staying at his partner's place and with more financial security, he is now in a good position to find somewhere suitable and permanent so he can finally feel settled, at peace and safe.

How we work with partners

We regularly partner with other local organisations. This means we can reach more of the vulnerable, harder-to-reach communities in Bristol and surrounding areas. We often co-work cases with our partners in order to provide more holistic support e.g., with mental health illness, energy poverty and debt.



Some of our current partnerships...

HomeFull

In partnership with Talking Money, the local debt advice charity, we run our HomeFull project for families. In 2021, we worked with support workers in children's centres in Central Bristol to help parents (often lone parents) tackle debt, bills, benefits and housing issues.



Aashyana

Aashyana, meaning 'beautiful home', is our partnership with Citizens Advice Bristol and St Pauls Advice Centre. Through this partnership, in 2021, we provided targeted support for Bristol's South Asian communities with housing and income e.g., helping them to access benefits and charity grants. We also supported them to make money saving changes like switching their utilities or taking in lodgers.

Boost

We partner with Talking Money, the Wellspring Settlement and West of England Works to provide a drop-in service for the community in Lawrence Hill, Bristol. Local people can get advice on and support with bills, benefits, budgeting, employment and housing.

Early Doors

We began our Early Doors project in 2021 in partnership with the local homelessness charity, Caring in Bristol. We aim to prevent homelessness through education and earlier intervention e.g., by expanding the reach of our Housing Advice Service in East and South Bristol. We work with members of the community to design new projects in order to best match their needs.



Thank you to our supporters

We would like to say a huge thank you to our kind supporters, without whom our work helping vulnerable people over 2021 would not have been possible. In addition to our individual supporters, we are extremely grateful to our key funders: *The National Lottery Community Fund, The Access to Justice Foundation, The Garfield Weston Foundation, The John James Bristol Foundation, The Lloyds Bank Foundation, Quartet Community Foundation, The Nisbet Trust, The People's Postcode Lottery, Clarion Housing Association, The St Stephen and St James Trust, The Singer Foundation and The Society of the Holy Child Jesus.* We would also like to thank our other funders, including *The Albert Hunt Trust, The Burden Trust, The Christadelphian Samaritan Fund, The Renishaw Charities Committee, Sir Harold Hood's Charitable Trust and The Souter Charitable Trust.*

If you would like to prevent vulnerable Bristolians and their families from becoming homeless, you can donate to our work.

DONATE HERE



"Thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you've done for me"
- CHAS client

Get in touch



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