



HOUSING MATTERS

Advice • Support • Advocacy

IMPACT REPORT

April 2022 to March 2023

Charity number: 1180341
Company number: 10675390

Why Housing Matters?

A note from our Director

Last year was a year of great change for us at Housing Matters.

We hear time and time again that our clients want one thing: for their house to feel like a home.

They long for housing that is safe, secure, affordable and appropriate for their needs, in a community where they feel a sense of belonging.

To represent these needs more clearly, we made the decision in 2022 to move away from the name Churches Housing Aid Society (more commonly known as CHAS Bristol) and transform ourselves into

Housing Matters.

Over several months, we worked with clients, staff, Trustees and partners to review our vision, mission, values and visual identity to better represent what we've evolved into, and what our clients need from us.

Whilst we're delighted to share our new look and feel, we'll continue to celebrate the longstanding history of CHAS Bristol and maintain the heart of the organisation.

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has and continues to support our work.



A special thank you to our partner (and neighbour!), Proctor + Stevenson, who kindly donated some of their corporate social responsibility budget to undertake the rebrand work in collaboration with us.

Our name may have changed but we remain committed to supporting those facing homelessness and severe housing and financial difficulty.

As you will see throughout this impact report, the figures and the stories speak volumes.

Our work is crucial – now more than ever.

Handwritten signature of Alice Tibbert.

Alice Tibbert
Director, Housing Matters

About Housing Matters

Established in 1965, Housing Matters provides free, independent and specialist housing advice, support and advocacy for people in housing crisis around Bristol.

At Housing Matters, we believe quality housing is a human right.

We fight tirelessly for everyone to have a safe, secure home and escape homelessness.

We aim to find unique, long-term solutions for our clients, whatever their needs.

We push for everyone to have a place they're happy to call home.



1 Brief Advice

Through our vital helpline, clients can chat with one of our expert advisers who may be able to resolve their issues over a few phone calls.

2 Casework

For more complex issues, we offer 1:1 support over several months - sometimes even years - working to achieve long-term solutions.

3 Outreach work

Working in partnership with children's centres and community centres across Bristol, we support those experiencing social exclusion, removing barriers of travel and cost.

4 Influencing policy

We ensure the voices of local people are heard at city-wide debates and policy making forums.

Our work in numbers

2022/23

1,075

Cases

975

Households

2,143

People

Our annual caseload has almost tripled since the pandemic hit

Why we exist...

Last year, we helped over 2,000 people from 945 households with their housing struggles.

That's almost a third more households last year compared to the previous year.

Bristol is now the most expensive UK city to rent in outside of London*. Many local people simply cannot afford the live in a private rented home anymore.

Demand for social housing far outweighs supply: 20,000 Bristol households are currently on the waiting list.

The need for housing advice in Bristol has overtaken the need for employment advice, making it the most requested type of support behind debt and welfare benefits advice.

Evidence shows that early access to housing advice can help people avoid crisis point and homelessness.

Unfortunately, there are very few agencies providing this support around Bristol. Housing Matters exists to provide the housing advice, support and advocacy that the people of Bristol desperately need.

Across the year, clients came to us with a range of housing related issues...



Our impact

When we support a client, we often upskill them too. Last year, out of everyone we helped...

92%

Had a better understanding of their options, rights and responsibilities

83%

Felt better able to plan and manage their own affairs

91%

Felt empowered to take action for themselves if similar issues happened again in the future



Of the clients who came to us needing long-term support as they were either homeless or threatened with homelessness...

45%

Had their homelessness prevented, retained their tenancies or were rehoused

18%

Had their housing conditions or rehousing prospects improved

34%

Were referred to an alternative specialist, or felt empowered to take action for themselves



I am so grateful, you have help[ed] me so much...I was so worried and now I feel like a mountain has been removed from my head...



We helped our clients access

£45,000

in additional income e.g., benefits, charity grants, lodger income

Safe Housing Matters

Ubax's story: no home to return to

Ubax and her 5-year-old son, Zahi, were fast asleep when a fire broke out in the council tower block in which they lived. Ubax only woke up because smoke was coming into her flat.

Immediately, she grabbed her son and they ran barefoot through the smoke and flames to escape onto the street – 16 floors down. Thankfully, they got out in time but were completely traumatised.

When we met Ubax, they'd been moved into a hotel as an emergency measure and were assured they'd soon be given more suitable accommodation. However, the first offer the council made was in an area known for discrimination. As people of Somali heritage, and with Zahi having autism, Ubax felt very unsafe moving there.

Her only other option was to move back home. This would have been extremely triggering, and they were both terrified of another fire breaking out, especially after learning their neighbour across the hall had tragically lost his life whilst trying to escape out of the window. Zahi kept calling it 'the fire house'.

Ubax was in a state of extreme distress. At Housing Matters, we began the long and challenging process of negotiating with the council on her behalf. After several weeks, the council finally agreed to permanently rehouse her and Zahi somewhere safer and within their community.



This was such a relief for Ubax – she could remain close to her support network, and her son, who found change particularly hard due to his autism, could stay at his school.

Feeling much safer in their new home, Ubax and Zahi have been able to start processing what they went through and building back their lives.



I want to thank you all for your support during a difficult time. I want to thank you all for being by my side emotionally and physically. I want to thank you all for giving me the best advice. You all are truly amazing, the best team.



Our clients

Many of our clients face extra hurdles when trying to access appropriate housing, for example, language barriers, discrimination, health issues and financial struggles.



52% are households with dependent children



87% rely on benefits, either fully or to top up their income or pension



30% speak English as a second language



64% are from a minority ethnic group



42% have a mental health condition



38% have a physical disability or health condition

To help reduce potential hurdles, we offer an interpretation service during appointments. Our office is fully wheelchair accessible. By coming to clients in children's centres and community hubs across Bristol, we reach more socially excluded communities, removing barriers of travel and cost.

Fair Housing Matters

Emir's story: the power of brief advice

Emir, a full-time student, had been served a Section 21 eviction notice. This is when a landlord can evict a tenant without having to give a reason.

Emir was becoming increasingly stressed as he struggled to find alternative private rented accommodation. He had no family in the UK, so if the eviction went ahead, he'd be homeless.

He decided to dispute the eviction notice. Now, the landlord had to go through court to progress it any further.

To prevent the eviction, Emir needed to prove to the judge that the Section 21 notice was invalid. Unsure how to do this, he contacted Housing Matters.

It was clear to us how anxious he was. Worryingly, all the signs suggested that the eviction would happen.

Section 21 notices are hard to dispute because, as long as a landlord has followed the correct eviction process, the eviction can go ahead.



Joseph, one of our Housing Advisers

“ If it wasn't for your advice, I wouldn't have got to this point & I'll be forever grateful. ”

However, there are several things a landlord must do at the start of a tenancy such as providing certain documents. Otherwise, any Section 21 notice they serve will be invalid.

We educated Emir on his rights and responsibilities. We recommended that he go through all of the documents he received from his landlord when he moved in to check if anything was missing.

Emir did just that. He found that he'd been given an incorrect document when he'd moved in, and hadn't been given a gas safety certificate. Both of these are needed for a Section 21 notice to be valid.

Empowered by our brief advice, Emir presented his landlord's errors in court. The judge agreed that the Section 21 notice could indeed be invalid, and suspended the hearing to give Emir time to put his defence together properly in writing.

Emir breathed a sigh of relief – his imminent homelessness had been avoided for the time being, and he felt more hopeful that the eviction wouldn't go ahead at all.

Thank you

We'd like to say a huge thank you to our funders and other supporters - it was because of you that our work last year was possible.

We'd also like to thank our partners for their teamwork and expertise.

Finally, thank you to our amazing clients for their insight, commitment and determination.



Support us

Join us in helping the people of Bristol navigate the path to a safe, secure home.

Donate

Contact us



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