

Citizens Advice

Client Profile:

The client was single and living alone in a 2 bedroom privately rented property. The client was a reformed drug addict, suffering from Asthma, COPD, Lung Disease, Severe Manic depression and OCD. The client had no savings, assets or vehicles. The client was in receipt of Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit. The client was having deductions from her ESA for a Magistrates Court Fine, a Social Fund Loan and Council Tax.

The client was receiving help from a local mental health clinic and was waiting to see a psychiatrist. We discussed the Mental Health Breathing Space but as the client needed help with their energy supply they told us that they didn't require a referral for the Mental Health Breathing Space at present.

Summary of Issues:

The client initially telephoned our Adviceline for help as they had issues with their prepayment meter and was having to manage without electricity at times. The client also told our Adviceline advisers that they barely had any money for food some weeks. During our appointment they told us that they had been stealing food.

The client had rent arrears of approximately £1000 but the landlord had not threatened any action yet. As the client lived above a shop, their water bills were included with their rent.

Advice given:

The client had already made an application for Personal Independence Payments. We supported them with following up on the applications.

We arranged for the client to visit the foodbank.

We completed an application form for Discretionary Housing Payment. This was agreed and the landlord received £39 per week for 12 weeks.

Severe Mental Impairment reduction (Council Tax) – The client agreed to have the form completed by a health professional and return it to the council. We advised the client that it is possible that the application could be backdated which would reduce her arrears. We discussed that we could make a Section 13A application if there was any further debt outstanding.

Electric– We found that the client's supply had been transferred to British Gas, there was no debt and the client could continue using their existing card to top up the prepayment meter.

Gas – EON agreed to send the client a new payment card and the debt was set to be deducted from the prepayment meter at a rate of £3 per week

Action to be taken by the client:

The clients' family were able to help them apply for The Warm Home Discount.

We recommended that the client should start to pay towards the arrears and suggested £20 per month.

Social Fund Loan – We advised that the client could ask DWP to extend their payment period if it is not at the maximum repayment period of 104 weeks. This would reduce her monthly payment.

Outcome:

We completed an application form for Discretionary Housing Payment.

This was agreed and the landlord received £39 per week for 12 weeks.

Electricity - The client was able to manage their prepayment meters.

Gas – EON agreed to send the client a new payment card and the debt was set to be deducted from the prepayment meter at a rate of £3 per week.

The client made an application for a Housing Association property.

The Conservation Volunteers (Mercer Wood Case Study)

TCV volunteers carried out a major project in the spring of 2016 at Mercer wood in Gainsborough. The area at this time was very inaccessible and subject to a high level of anti-social behavior, restricting access to and use of the site by local residents.

Volunteer groups worked together to clear the and level the site, install over 400 metres of surfaced paths, steps and a slope to enable wheelchair access.

Seating areas were introduced with benches installed at locations around the site, a community orchard established, and wildflower meadows created.

The project brought together TCV volunteers, the Friends of Mercer Wood community group and adults with additional needs from the nearby Hastings Centre.

The project has continued with regular volunteer tasks run most days through the year, to maintain the site and make further improvements, including installing hand rails on the steps and slope and creating further wildflower and grassed areas.

TCV has continued to work with and help to link different community groups in the area.

The improvements to the appearance, accessibility and habitat diversity at Mercer Wood has led to the site experiencing increased use of the site from members of the local community.

Residents use the site to walk, experience wildlife and as an area to relax and reflect in.

TCV and the volunteers who work on the projects receive positive feedback and thanks from residents visiting the wood on a daily basis.

The work that has been carried out at the site has won several awards for the improvements carried out, the site is now a regular site on the Gainsborough in Bloom/Lincolnshire in Bloom route, where it has received praise for the improvements to access, biodiversity and community engagement.

The Friends of Mercer Wood were the winners of the 2019 Lincolnshire Environmental awards for their work in securing funding for the improvements to the area.

This year a Silver award was attained from Gainsborough in Bloom, and the Hastings group won the judges award for the work they carried out with TCV at the wood.

The site and activities carried out by both volunteer and community groups along with the increased use of the site by local residents has helped to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents, has increased their levels of physical activity, and led to a greater quality of life and independence, by providing a safe and accessible area for all to experience and enjoy.

Lincoln Area Dial-a-Ride

Client 1 – Angela (not real name)

Angela is a resident of Cherry Willingham but has been in a care home since breaking her leg and is confined to a wheelchair. Her husband is in a nursing home with Alzheimer's disease and because of the covid 19 pandemic and the fact that her daughter lives abroad, Angela had not seen her husband for nearly three years.

Angela's daughter Anne phoned the DialaRide office from abroad two weeks before visiting England, to ask if we could help get her mother out and about whilst she was here and especially so that she could visit her husband. With great cooperation from the drivers and flexible timing we managed to get Angela out and about in her wheelchair 12 times in a two-and-a-half-week period. Angela and Anne were so impressed with the service that they did write numerous feedback forms about DialaRide.

What does the service mean to you?

"Independence – the ability to get out"

"The freedom for mum and I to spend time together outside the home"

"It meant my mother could go out of the home- her well-being enhanced"

"This service means my mother was able to go out for the first time since becoming disabled in a wheelchair. She was able to see my father" (First time in three years)

"IT MEANT EVERYTHING"

Client 2 – Adam (not real name)

Adam is a young adult with learning difficulties who resides in Cherry Willingham. Four days a week he attends an educational day centre that focuses on living independence, work experience and basic education. He gets very anxious about most types of travel, so he relies on DialaRide to get there and back.

Since joining our scheme in May of 2021, we have provided transport for Adam 459 times. Not only have we saved Adam hundreds of pounds in comparison to a taxi service we also provide the extra care and comfort that Adam requires.

What does this service mean to you? (answered by Adam's mum)

"It means that Adam can attend his day centre 4 times a week. We looked around when looking for transport and this is the only means that Adam could use knowing that he is safe and guaranteed to be collected at our front door and dropped off at the front door of Diversity. Adam has built up a wonderful relationship with his drivers too"

Gainsborough Adventure Playground Association

Case Study 1 – “S”

S is 9 years old. She lives with her dad, step mum and two younger sisters. She has been coming to GAPA unaccompanied since she was 5, and attends most sessions. S has Autism and struggles to control her emotions and behaviour. She is not allowed to play out in the street with friends. GAPA is the only place she is able to meet them as her dad does not believe she will be safe anywhere else. Her Step- Mum says that S is very innocent and trusting, which makes her extremely vulnerable. S's Dad adds that she wouldn't feel comfortable letting S out where he can't guarantee people are thinking of her best interests.

When S first started coming to GAPA she found it difficult to interact with the other children appropriately. Her moods were quite unbalanced and she would often disrupt other children's play by throwing resources at others when they were making something in the playroom. This caused a lot of arguments between the children. S told us that when she first started coming to GAPA, she remembers feeling worried and not sure what to do. She used to get really distressed and irritated and she didn't know what to do about it. The playworkers realised that S had difficulties identifying and responding to social situations.

Staff spoke with her parents and worked out a plan to help her adjust and to settle in. S responded well with adults, so staff spent a lot of time with her; doing activities and encouraging positive behaviour within a group. Staff also worked with S, on methods to control her behaviour and expressing her emotions.

Overtime, Staff found S was more comfortable with children, S was able to respond to them and was more settled during activities. She began making clear friendships and joined in more with planned activities, even coming up with ideas for playschemes.

Since S started coming to GAPA there has been clear improvements in her confidence, behaviour and social interaction. Her Dad says that this has been the case at home too.

Dad says that thanks to the regular talks staff have had with her, he has been able to work with her at home. He continues that he would hate to think what S would be like if she hadn't had the support from GAPA. He doesn't know what he would've done if there was nowhere for S to go as sometimes, she just needed a break from home.

S loves coming to GAPA. She loves how there is always someone here for her, all her friends and the staff. She says that GAPA is the only place she can see everyone properly because her friends are in different schools. S said she doesn't know what she would be doing if she didn't come to GAPA, but she would probably be at home on her PlayStation.

Case Study 2 – “T”

T is a 13-year-old boy. He has been regularly attending GAPA for just over 3 years. When he first started coming to sessions, he would refuse to eat countless types of food. T really didn't like to exercise and didn't make friends very easily. His Mum described him as a 'difficult' child.

Playworkers here at GAPA, discovered that he didn't like things that were unfamiliar to him. Staff encouraged him to help us prepare meals for the other children. To start with T found this a huge challenge however, after a few months T became more willing to try new foods when he became more familiar with the ingredients and how they were prepared.

He has since attended several of our cooking workshops in the school holidays, and without fail, T is guaranteed to try new food before deciding whether he likes it or not.

Playworkers have also worked closely with his Mum by offering support with T's food journey. With reassurance, Mum now lets T help her plan and prepare meals at home. This has turned meal times into less of a battle and also help bond a relationship with Mother and Son.

When staff spoke to T about exercise, we found out that he found sport to be 'boring'. The Playworkers found T some different sporting activities to try and engage T partake in. T enjoys playing dodgeball in our free sport sessions with Wright Way Sports as T didn't realise that dodgeball was an actual sport! In the last year, T loves to rollerblade outside, he has become quite accomplished on a scooter, trying out trick shots on the mini ramps. T adores making Parkour assault courses out of tyres in the den building area.

These changes have led to an increase in T's confidence and purpose in life both at GAPA and at home. Whereas before T was very defensive and struggled to find common ground with the other people around T's age. He is now calmer and more relaxed and has a much wider circle of friends that enjoy similar sporting activities like T.

Voluntary Centre Services

Case Study 1 - Social Prescribing & Volunteering

Ms D was referred in to social prescribing by her job coach from DWP as she was struggling following the loss of her job due to a recent diagnosis that affected her mobility. She was struggling with the amount of Universal Credit that she was receiving and was getting herself in to substantial debt. Ms D's mental health had suffered as a result of her financial issues and as she lives alone, she was feeling very socially isolated.

After having a couple of telephone conversations with Ms D and following some encouragement, she decided to do some painting and decorating on a self-employed basis using social media to gain custom. This enabled her to get out of the house more often, have some social interaction whilst she was working and also alleviated some of her debt issues.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown prevented Ms D from entering other people's homes and therefore she was unable to continue with her self-employment. Following a telephone appointment with Ms D, I (Link Worker) signposted her to organisations that she could volunteer with during the lockdown period as she had expressed an interest in getting out of the house and giving back to the community.

Ms D gained a volunteering position with the NHS responders and was working to deliver food parcels to vulnerable people during the initial lockdown phase. She enjoyed doing this kind of work so much that she decided to apply for a caring role at one of the local care homes in the area after she saw they needed additional help.

Ms D secured a permanent position at the care home and is enjoying the work greatly. She says that she feels she has found her niche and even though the work is exhausting, every moment of exhaustion is worth it for the benefits that she feels from working with the elderly residents. She is making friends in the form of the other members of staff as well as gaining social interaction with residents. As she now has a permanent position, money is even less of a concern and she continues to do some self-employed decorating on her rest days. Ms D told me that her life has changed so much through the COVID pandemic that her mental health feels much improved and she even has found the confidence to go on the first date she has had in five years. She is audibly happier on the telephone and has a very bright outlook for the future.

Case Study 2 - Support for Disability Network CIC

We have supported Disability Network CIC for a number of years including representation on the board of directors. As part of our social prescribing programme we identified the need for a Befriending Scheme in Gainsborough with a large number of socially isolated clients. We connected them with established organisation "Assist" who shared information about their scheme and supported its development. We then proceeded to support their search for volunteers and provided support with governance, policies and procedures. The organisation has now successfully established a new scheme and is working closely with social prescribing to identify suitable clients.