

Citizens Advice East Dorset

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

**citizens  
advice**

Charity Registration No. 1003456

Company Limited by Guarantee No. 2618707

## Contact us...

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### ELECTED MEMBERS

**Alan Breakwell**, Chair

**Barbara Manuel**, Vice-Chair

**David Morgan**, Dorset Council

**Chris Morle**, Elected

**Ashley Rowlands**, Elected

**John Rynne**, Company Secretary

**Derick Smith**, Lions Club of Wimborne & Ferndown (*passed away February 2020*)

#### OBSERVERS

**Carole Chedgy**, Wimborne Minster Town Council

**Terry Cordery**, Ferndown Town Council

**Diann March**, Chairman of Friends

**Mike Parkes**, Dorset Council

**Sandra Grove**, Verwood Town Council

**Barry Goringe**, Dorset Council

#### STAFF ADVISERS TO THE BOARD

**Dorne Hardyman**, Manager

**Pat Temple**, Advice Manager

#### VOLUNTEER ADVISER TO THE BOARD

**Barry Watts**, Staff Representative

#### INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

**Ward Goodman**

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East Dorset

**All face to face operations ceased in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.**

**We have continued to operate remotely via telephone and e-mail.**

For **new enquiries** please phone the **DORSET ADVICELINE 0344 245 1291** between 9.30am and 4.00pm Monday - Friday call in at one of the following places for an initial assessment.

#### Wimborne Citizens Advice

Hanham Road, Wimborne, BH21 1AS

MONDAY	10.00am - 3.00pm
TUESDAY	10.00am - 3.00pm
WEDNESDAY	Appointments only
THURSDAY	10.00am - 3.00pm
FRIDAY	10.00am - 1.00pm

#### Ferndown Citizens Advice

Ferndown Library, Penny's Walk,  
Ferndown BH22 9TH

TUESDAY	10.00am - 2.00pm
THURSDAY	10.00am - 2.00pm

#### East Dorset Citizens Advice Outreach

#### COLEHILL

The Reef Youth Club and Community Centre  
Colehill Lane Colehill Wimborne BH21 7AB  
Every 2nd Monday of the month 10am - 12  
noon with effect from 10th September 2018

#### HEATHERLANDS

Heatherlands – The Centre  
Every Thursday 9.30am - 2.00pm

#### VERWOOD

Verwood Library, 1 Manor Road, Verwood,  
BH31 6DS  
1st, 3rd and 5th Thursday of each month  
10.00am - 12.30pm

Email us at:

**wimborne@eastdorset.cabnet.org.uk**

Information and advice is also available at;  
**www.citizensadvice.org.uk** and  
**www.eastdorsetca.com**

## Chairman's Report

Alan Breakwell

**It gives me great pleasure to introduce and commend the Annual Report. It follows the pattern of previous years giving an insight into the activities of the Bureau and the finances that support that work.** I have been Chairman since November 2015 and again this year has been very interesting and challenging. Unfortunately in February one of our long serving Trustees Derick Smith who represented the Lions Club of Ferndown and Wimborne on the board passed away. He was a strong supporter of the Bureau and will be sadly missed.

Providing wider opportunities for our clients to access the service has been at the forefront of service delivery. The relocation of the Ferndown office to the Library continues to be a tremendous success as does the refurbished Heatherlands Centre in Ferndown where the service is provided one day a week. The Outreach service at the Reef in Colehill has been operating since September 2018. Whilst take up is low it provides a valuable service and the monthly service at the West Moors Army Centre operated as a trial for a year ending in January 2020.

Every year the service is audited externally by National Citizens Advice and this took place in March 2020 to review all aspects of the service and to see what progress had been made since the last audit. Whilst the auditor made some minor recommendations, the outcome was that the service scored highly in all areas. What a wonderful achievement and congratulations to everyone.

On the staffing side another very good year under the Bureau Manager Dorne Hardyman and both the Manager's report and the report of the Advice Manager reflect on the challenges faced by the staff over the last year and the way they have adapted to the changing circumstances. Everything changed in March and has continued into the current financial year with the Covid-19 crisis. This has meant an enormous amount of work to deliver remote advice. There has been no face to face but increased support on telephones, email and web chat. The part time Communications/Development Officer, a post

funded by the Valentine's Trust, has had key part to play during the current crisis in getting the message out to the community that the Bureau is there to support them.

The staffing structure was reviewed with the Manager reducing her hours. The savings from this change being used to employ a part time supervisor thereby strengthening the support side of the office. Recently the Manager gave notice that she would be leaving at the end of September bringing to a close six years of dedicated service to the Bureau. Over that time the Bureau has moved forward and Dorne should be proud of what she has achieved. Thank you on behalf of the Trustees.

Working closely with the other Local Offices through CAID a significant amount of time continues to be spent in ensuring that Citizen's advice in Dorset is ready for the challenges that the service faces. The most important message is that Dorset Citizen's Advice speaks with one voice and this will be essential in the future in its dealings with Dorset Council. The good news is that the level of grant received in this year will be unchanged for 2020/2021.

A high proportion of the Bureau's income comes from Dorset Council, Parish and Town Councils as well as other organisations and a big thank you to them for their continuing support. The Friends of EDCAB continued to work tirelessly in raising funds for the continuation of this essential front line service and have since they started raised over £117,000.

The Trustees are very pleased that the high level of support for the community has been maintained with the challenges the service has faced over the last year and it is a very big thank you to all the staff and volunteers involved. I would personally like to thank my fellow Trustees and Observers for their support and we look forward together to addressing the challenges that the future will bring.

The Trustees would like to take this opportunity of thanking all the staff, and volunteers who have worked so hard during this year to help ensure that the CAB remains a sustainable body.

# Advice Manager's Report

Pat Temple

**This year we have been working much more with our partners, locally in Dorset and nationwide. This is partly because of the local government re-organisation and partly because of the way the public now want to contact us.**

We have continued to take phone enquiries from across Dorset via Dorset adviceline referring clients to their local office only when their enquiry is too complicated to be handled by the initial phone call.

We have also been part of a national advice line to help clients with their initial claims for Universal Credit. This is a project, called **Help to Claim**, financed by the Government which recognises that many people applying for this benefit find it difficult as UC can only be claimed online and many people do not have access to the internet or the skills to make an online claim without support. We have supported clients from all parts of the country via the HTC phone line and we have helped local clients face to face from our office in Wimborne and from various outreaches.

Working closely with other Dorset offices enables us to get the best outcomes for our clients and we have been able to refer them to projects run by other Local Citizens Advice offices in Dorset to help them reduce their energy bills; apply to the Priority Services Register for their utilities; maximise their incomes through the welfare benefits; get help with problem gambling and to assist EU nationals in applying for settled status in the UK.

With the help of our Research and Campaigns champion, Rosemary Lunt, we have also re-established links with local Job Centre and Council departments whose decisions can have a major impact on our client's affairs.

Sadly several longstanding and valued staff and volunteers have chosen to retire this year and are missed by colleagues and clients alike. Nevertheless, we have been able to recruit some very able replacements who, like everyone who works for the service, show an endless enthusiasm to learn new skills and keep abreast of all changes in laws and processes that can help them to give the best advice possible.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has meant that we have been unable to see clients face to face since March 2020. However, we have continued to support our clients by telephone and e:mail since that time and hope to re-open the office and outreaches when it is deemed safe to do so.

citizens  
advice

**The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.**

**The service aims:**

- **To provide the advice people need for the problems they face;**
- **To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.**

Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. FRN 61759

# Bureau Manager's Report

Dorne Hardyman

**Once again we have had a very busy time with the needs of our clients. Our clients have many issues ranging from perhaps limited support finding information to years of support with complex needs in many areas. We are finding an increase in clients who bring one issue to us but after the advisors have investigated further the client needs, support is needed other areas to ensure they are in a position to move forward with their lives.**

At this time we are working in the Covid-19 crisis. This has meant an enormous amount of work for the management team to enable the team to deliver remote access. Whilst we were unable to do face to face work, we increased our support on the telephone, email and web chat. This has enabled us to be there for as many people as possible.

Two members of the team need particular thanks at this time. **Pat Temple**, advice manager and **Ian Bagley**, volunteer advisor and IT support. Ian and Pat have ensured the team have the correct equipment, training and support to continue the service we provide. Without them we would not have been able to provide the service we are giving.

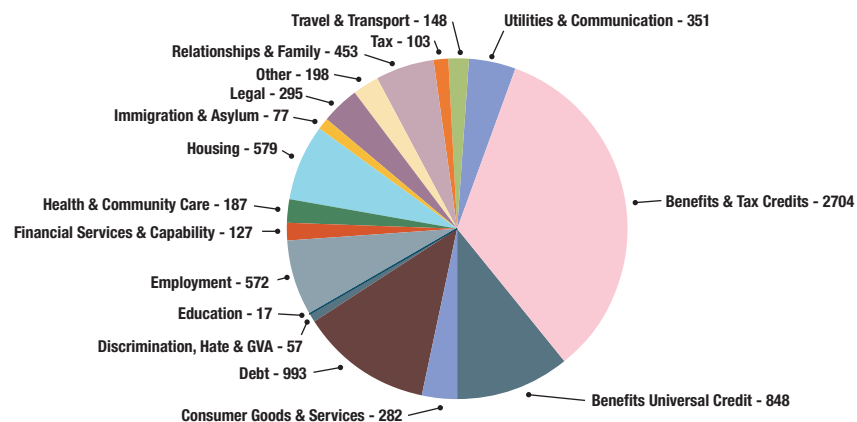
All year we have been training with our advisors to ensure they are up to date on current legislation. This has been an ongoing task as so many areas including benefit, debt advice and general support are changing continually.

We are working with the other Local offices in the new Dorset Council area, to ensure we give consistent advice within Dorset. Our funding from Dorset Council has been secured for 2020/21 and we are in negotiations regarding our future Council funding. We are very grateful for this.

Once again we have been supported by our local, town and parish councils. Without this ongoing support we would not be able to support our clients. On average it costs us approximately £100 per year for each client we see. The Friends of East Dorset have once again supported us with their fund raising and we thank them for that.

The superb team of volunteers and staff have once again worked extremely hard to ensure every client has the best possible service we can provide. I would like to say a personal thank you to everyone who supports us and to all the team working at East Dorset Citizens Advice because the work that is provided for the clients is invaluable.

Client Issues by Type 2019/20



# Financial Report

After two years of approving budgets which made significant use of Reserves to meet the Business Plan targets and to continue to maintain the high level of service the aim for 2019/20 budget was to achieve a break even position. Throughout the year the Trustees monitored the budget and were updated at each meeting of any changes that impacted on the approved budget and the outcome at the end of the year was very pleasing. The budget as approved showed a deficit of £10,210 and at the end of the year there was a budget surplus was £9,095 a turnaround in the year of just over £19,000.

This was achieved by increased income relating to the Valentine Trust, fundraising and additional grant via Purbeck Bureau relating to Wessex Water offset by reduction in sponsorship. In addition there were savings on expenditure mainly arising from provision made for outreach, administration and the office closure due to COVID19.

The General Reserve at the 1st April 2019 was £98,971 of which £5,498 relates to income received in advance and after taking into account the surplus for the year of £9,095 General Reserve at the 31st March 2020 was £108,066 of which £9,358 relates to income received in advance.

The Board reviews the current and future sources of income for their commitment and consistency in relation to the expenditure anticipated to best meet client needs. A significant amount of the current income is either from specific term grants or is vulnerable to pressure on local and national government budgets. As most funding streams are based on annual review the Board believes it should aim to establish general reserves of two years funding for these vulnerable areas or two thirds of its annual income as it can take at least one year to replace lost funding. These reserves will then assist the Board in maintaining services based on need, not short term funding restrictions. On the current income level a General Reserve of around £120,000 would be appropriate and at the 31st March 2020 the General Reserve was 80% of this figure.

Each year is a financial challenge and the future is unclear beyond 2020/21 as Citizens Advice in Dorset await the outcome of Dorset Council's review of support for Voluntary Organisations and the impact COVID19 will have on available funds. Other local councils and organisations are supportive by maintaining or increasing their levels of support so that the charity is able to respond to the changing needs of the local community through an increased reliance on volunteers, co-operative work with other bureau in Dorset and new technology.

## INCOME

GRANTS	2018/19 (£)	2019/20 (£)
Dorset Council	0	84,600
East Dorset District Council incl. Ward and Other Grants	76,600	0
East Dorset District Council Ward Grants	950	0
East Dorset District Council Other Grants	11,638	0
Dorset County Council	9,400	0
Dorset County Council Children's Services	2,450	0
<b>Town Councils</b>		
Ferndown	7,000	7,000
Verwood	3,000	0
Wimborne Minster	8,000	8,000
<b>Parish Councils</b>		
Alderholt		100
Colehill	2,000	4,500
Corfe Mullen	1,500	1,650
Cranborne	400	400
Holt	200	250
Knowlton	200	200
Sixpenny Handley with Pentridge	250	250
St Leonards & St Ives	750	1,000
Sturminster Marshall	100	250
Vale of Allen	100	100
West Moors	300	450
West Parley	0	250
DCA Outreach Cranborne Area	1,135	0
Primary Health Care Trusts	6,000	6,000
Macmillan	20,250	21,600
Wessex Water	1,800	3,525
Personal Budgeting	5,500	0
CAiD for Healthwatch	5,750	0
Tesco's Community Grant Scheme	2,000	0
Valentines Trust		10,000
CiTA Universal Support	2,820	23,520
Wimborne & Ferndown Lions Club	1,500	1,500
Rotary Club of Verwood	300	200
Friends of East Dorset CAB	9,195	18,597
Donations	1,002	2,188
Sponsorship - Douch	500	500
CiTA DRO Payments	157	92
CiTA Broadband Grant	519	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>183,266</b>	<b>196,972</b>
Bank Interest	373	847
Room Hire	1,560	1,485
Miscellaneous	3,165	453
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>188,364</b>	<b>199,757</b>
<b>Total Income</b>		
Salaries, Pensions & National Insurance	141,336	141,638
Staff Costs	6,451	7,319
Office Costs	25,091	12,589
Premises Costs	21,844	17,863
Fundraising Costs	2,472	9,010
Governance Costs	1,743	2,246
<b>Total</b>	<b>198,937</b>	<b>190,665</b>
Surplus/Deficit of income over expenditure	<b>-10,573</b>	<b>9,092</b>
<b>BALANCE SHEET</b>		
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Debtors & Prepayments	7,445	6,615
Interest Bearing Accounts	70,000	120,307
Cash at Bank and in Hand	91,085	47,120
Creditors amounts falling due within one year	-22,282	-18,702
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>146,248</b>	<b>155,340</b>
<b>Represented By</b>		
General Reserve	98,974	103,681
<b>Unrestricted Designated Funds</b>		
Premises Reserve	8,387	8,387
IT Replacement Reserve	4,705	4,705
Legal Liabilities Reserve	28,182	28,182
Development Reserve	6,000	6,000
Restricted Funds - Valentine Trust	0	4,385
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>146,248</b>	<b>155,340</b>

## Money Advice Report

Karen Hancock

As a qualified debt specialist, my main role is to take on debt cases and assist clients over a period of time, sometimes many months, to deal with their debts. We undertake a full debt exploration which covers other areas such as benefits, housing and employment in order to give an holistic approach to the client's issues. Our face to face service is very important as many of our clients find it difficult to access on line and telephone debt advice, the more vulnerable find it easier to talk to someone face to face.

The trend established over the last few years of more complicated interlinked problems has continued, therefore the time we spend with clients has increased. I have also noticed that because there appears to be less resources available, particularly for clients who have poor mental health, we are having to take a more active role in acting on their behalf with creditors and government departments regarding benefits etc.

It is encouraging to get lovely comments from our clients for example;

*"Thank you so much for your help once again, I was so desperate I do not know what I would have done if you had not helped me".*

A huge **"Thank You"** to our amazing volunteers who give up so much of their time it is a pleasure to work with you.

# Outreach Report

Sophie Brown

**Heatherlands.** This venue continues to be very popular and I have my regulars who are happy to visit me there because it is such a friendly and accommodating place with somewhere to sit and wait and have a free drink provided by the manager Lorraine. My senses are treated to the wonderful smell of cooking as the Age UK lunch is prepared, and the lovely tunes of the baby and toddler music session.

Benefits continue to be the most popular topic with universal credit being added to the list. I have helped several clients with PIP and ESA appeals. Mrs A needed my help to challenge DLA decisions relating to her 2 disabled children. In this case DWP refused both of her applications and when she asked for mandatory reconsiderations DWP responded so quickly they barely seemed to have spent any time considering the matters only to not change their decisions. I therefore helped her appeal to the tribunal service where she was ultimately successful in both claims.

**GP Surgeries.** These continue to be busy and I usually have all 4 appointments booked. This is a very useful service as many of the patients are able to travel to their surgery but no further. The Doctors are happy to liaise directly with me and send me supporting letters and medical reports. This cooperation facilitates any necessary action and means clients have better outcomes.

There is a variety of issues although the most common is benefits however I have had a number of employment issues as well. The employers in these cases appear to have had little sympathy with their employee who is left with the distinct impression that they are not wanted due to their disability/health status. One employer said they could not make reasonable adjustments for a lady who had lost a limb and another was hassled by their employer to return to work when she was off sick with work-related stress having been given an extra job for which she was not qualified. In these instances the employer could be at risk of a discrimination claim by the employee. I was able to give initial advice and then referred the clients to our specialist employment adviser.

## Doctor's Case Study to illustrate the work that is taking place via the GP Surgery.

Mrs L lives with her severely disabled son who is 21. Mrs L is his carer and has been for over 15 years. She therefore has been in receipt of Income support (IS) with a carer's premium (CP) and also a disability premium because of her own health issues. Her son gets ESA Support group and PIP enhanced rates. Mrs L would ordinarily be in receipt of carer's allowance (CA) but in 2005 was not able to claim that because of overlapping benefit rules (when in receipt of severe disablement allowance) so got CP instead.

In early 2019 Mrs L received a letter from DWP stating she was not entitled to CP because she was not caring for someone with a disability benefit for 35 hours per week and had not been entitled since 2008 and so she had been overpaid benefit to the tune of £17,000. Mrs L also received a letter stating her IS was coming to an end and inviting her to complete a work capability assessment form with a view to being transferred to ESA.

Mrs L's son has a progressive genetic disorder so Mrs L is prepared for him dying at any time. He keeps having stays in hospital from which she thinks he will not return. Her life therefore is on a knife edge and quite stressful. She also struggles to understand the DWP's letters.

When Mrs L came to see me in February 2019 she wanted to know what her options were as regards her own benefits bearing in mind that her son could die at any moment she did

not want benefits that relied on his presence. So she decided to go down the ESA route and not claim CA at this stage. CA being complicated by the fact that her son is in receipt of SDP which he may lose if she claims CA. As regards the CP; as Mrs L does in fact care for her son on a full time basis, more than 35 hours per week, and always has done, there should be no reason why she was not entitled to it.

Over the intervening months I obtained expert advice and Mrs L and I had various unsatisfactory and contradictory communications with DWP. Despite all this DWP failed to explain to our satisfaction why Mrs L was not entitled to CP and why it had taken over 10 years to notify her of this decision. By November I had had enough and wrote to DWP asking them to reconsider their decision that she had been overpaid on the basis that she had always satisfied the conditions to be entitled to CP and that in any event it was DWP's official error that she had been overpaid so should not recover the debt.

Additionally DWP were making deductions from her ESA to pay back the £17,000 which they should not do once a challenge to their decision has been made. So I had to phone DWP and request that it cease which it has. The DWP have yet to respond to my letter despite my phoning and enquiring as to its progress a number of times. Mrs L has been successful in applying for ESA and her son is still with her.

# Training Report

Fiona Wilkinson

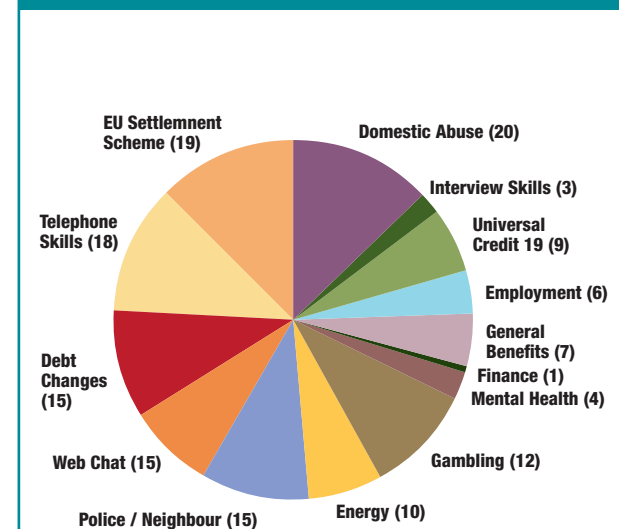
**From benefits and relationship issues to immigration and housing rights, much needs to be borne in mind when supporting and advising clients. Ongoing training of advisers and support staff, along with quality procedures and checking, ensures our clients receive full, up-to-date information on which to base their important decisions. I am in awe of the way our volunteers and staff continue to rise to the challenge of building up and extending their knowledge, skills and competence to this end. On top of this, I would like to thank the supervisory staff for taking on board the usefulness of feedback and assessments. This has really helped to develop and encourage our extremely hard-working volunteers.**

Citizens Advice nationally introduced a new training e-platform "DOCEBO" in spring 2020 with two objectives a) to update and replace their database of training materials and b) to support more effective recording of learning and assessments. This now helps us record adviser, supervisor, management and admin training more efficiently. It will also help our auditors, as it shows that our advisers meet all legal requirements and professional standards eg GDPR and FCA.

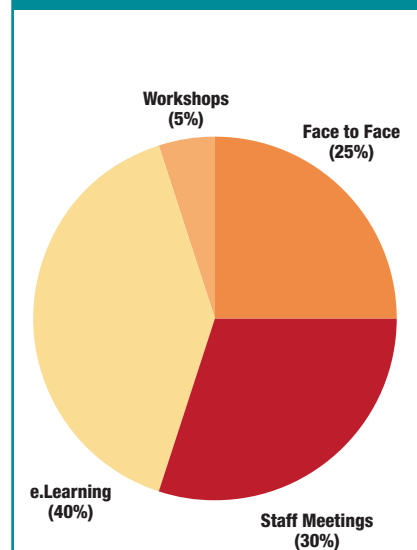
Locally, we arranged a day of training about Universal Credit for our advisers in the autumn. This was delivered by a competent, Dorchester-based trainer / caseworker for 19 of our staff (held in Allendale House). It proved very useful.

In February, an experienced national trainer came to support two local tutors as we introduced Domestic Abuse awareness training to many supervisors and experienced advisers from across all the Dorset CiA offices.

## Learning topics - all methods:



## Training undertaken:



Through advising clients we have a unique insight into the main problems facing our local community. Sometimes we can see ways that policies or practices could be improved to prevent problems and we try to influence policy and decision makers to make these changes.

Over the last year we have contributed nationally to Citizens Advice work by sharing 110 pieces of evidence about unfair policies or practices, by promoting their Scams Awareness Campaign, and encouraging clients to take part in their survey on private tenants' rights. Nationally however, the overriding problem continues to be the very poor decision-making on assessment of disability for benefit claimants and the number of months delay in reaching a final ruling. This can cause despair for our most vulnerable clients yet, despite lobbying the MP and submitting evidence to Citizens Advice, the problems remain.

Other more locally recurring problems have been caused by difficult communication with agencies and lack of guidance about how to claim the right benefit. So, we initiated liaison with Council Tax and Benefit managers at Stour Valley and Poole Partnership and with Poole Jobcentre Plus. We involved other Local Offices in these meetings so that, together, we were able to point out how difficulties arise, question what could be done and also learn the constraints under which the agencies work. The three parties each responded constructively and time will tell whether this ongoing liaison leads to fewer client problems.

**I have seen a number of clients with extreme stress and poor mental health this year. It is impossible to know if it is the chicken/egg situation: was their poor mental health part of the reason for the loss of their job or vice-versa?**

***How does the economic environment even before lockdown affect the mental health of individuals?***

It could be a vicious circle of course. These clients are advised, supported and encouraged to take decisions about the best way forward with the full information needed. At least two clients were assisted to make a financial settlement through ACAS rather than have the added stress of preparing for a tribunal hearing.

For other clients, a few long-running battles stand out, as much for the stamina involved for the client in keeping faith that the slow wheels of bureaucracy will eventually turn and pay what they are owed.

Two clients worked many years for a local business which closed suddenly without offering any redundancy pay. After a long-drawn-out employment case the judge awarded redundancy payment to these clients, but the employer had no money to pay and went bankrupt. The next step was to apply to the Redundancy Payments Office, which is payable if the business has liquidated. At the same time these clients were coping with searching for a new job and/or having health problems. More than a year later, both clients were paid by the Redundancy Payments Office. They received nearly £17,000 between them. Another client is still in a similar situation over a year since we first started the case but a payment is expected soon.

The Jive Nights held in The Pavilion, Bournemouth, arranged by John Rynne, have continued to be a sell out as well as being our main source of fundraising through the year.

M&Co, situated in Crown Mead, kindly held a Fashion Show in aid of the Citizens Advice in May and again in October, with tickets being sold out for both events, and the only things we had to do to help was supply the chairs and models. The models enjoyed the opportunity of a free range of the store picking out which outfits to wear.

We again sold plants and books on the Saturday of the Folk Festival in front the bureau premises. Unfortunately the takings were down from the previous year due to the weather conditions, although we still raised nearly £200.

Our Patron Viscount Cranborne continues to support us in whatever way possible, for which we are very grateful. The Friends were very appreciative to receive a further donation of £1,000, which is donated from Gascoyne Holdings on behalf of Lord Cranborne and Lord Salisbury.

It is wonderful how many volunteers come forward each year to help serve teas at Wimborne St Giles. People seem to start arriving even earlier each year to be served which keeps us all on our toes as we never turn anyone away. Thank you to those who also make the cakes and scones.

This year we raised nearly £9,000 on behalf of the Bureau, the majority of which once again came from the Jive Nights. Some of these monies would be used towards supporting the team who are presently working from home due to Covid 19.

The committee of Friends is presently very small and we would welcome new members to join us, especially with fresh fund raising ideas.

Summary for Period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020	Total Raised 2019/20 (£)
<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>3,942.46</b>
<b>Net Income:</b>	
Donations	2,575.79
Fashion Show	703.50
Gift Aid on previous year's donations	597.24
Jive nite Bournemouth Pavilion	4,187.44
Plant Sale	181.46
Wimborne St Giles Teas	550.59
<b>Total Raised</b>	<b>8,796.02</b>
<b>Closing Balance</b>	<b>12,738.48</b>

Friends of East Dorset CAB
<b>COMMITTEE LIST 2019/20</b>
Chair <b>Diann March</b>
Vice Chair <b>John Rynne</b>
Treasurer <b>Chris Isaac</b>
Fundraiser <b>Jill Wilkins</b>
Committee Members <b>Derek Geldart</b>

**We help people living with cancer and their families, with referrals coming mainly through health professionals. We give advice by telephone or in person either at our office in Wimborne or by home visit for our more vulnerable clients. This is a busy part-time service with two advisers and an admin support assistant. Our referrals have more than doubled with over 200 new cases in 2019/20.**

We are benefit specialists, calculating entitlement in an increasingly complex system, completing lengthy application forms, progressing claims and if necessary preparing appeals. A high proportion of clients are unfamiliar with the system and negotiating through it is an added burden at an already difficult time, both physically and emotionally.

Cancer brings many extra costs, increased heating, water, electricity, and travel costs. Income often decreases to sick pay or clients losing employment completely. Family members end up becoming carers and debts start mounting up for everyday essentials including housing. Thankfully we are often able to help by obtaining benefits and grants for clients.

Over the last 11 years that the service has been running we have gained around £6 million for local people.

**Case Study** – Mr X was referred to us in June 2019 because of a terminal cancer diagnosis. He was self-employed, working from home and in receipt of contribution-based ESA and PIP due to a long-term disability. Mr X decided that he could not continue working and needed to know therefore if he was entitled to any benefits. He was already in receipt of working and child tax credits and child benefit for his son who was in full-time education.

I visited the couple at home and did a benefits calculation and he was re-assured that he was getting the right amount of tax credits. I also did a benefits calculation based on the future scenario i.e. when he stops work. Mr X was advised he would be able to claim New Style ESA and PIP and should be able to get into the support group for ESA and get the enhanced rates for PIP. I also told him he would be able to claim Council Tax support and disabled element of working tax credits. Whilst I was present Mr X phoned DWP and made a special rules claim for PIP which was successful. His ESA application under special rules was also successful. He subsequently got the disabled element added to his working tax credits.

Unfortunately, Mr X died at the end of October. I then helped Mrs X with her claims for child benefit and bereavement support payment. Mrs X did not want to claim UC or Council tax support even though she would have been eligible. I have also helped with asking for a review of her PIP claim and a renewal of her ESA claim.

## MANAGEMENT & PAID STAFF

Manager	<b>Dorne Hardyman</b>
Advice Manager	<b>Pat Temple</b>
Deputy Advice Manager	<b>Mandi Douglas</b>
Advice Session Supervisor	<b>Sue Bristow</b>
Money Adviser	<b>Karen Hancock</b>
Training Supervisor	<b>Fiona Wilkinson</b>
GP Adviser	<b>Sophie Brown</b>
Outreach Adviser & HTC	<b>Wendy Farmer</b>
Macmillan Welfare Benefits Caseworker	<b>Sophie Brown</b>
Macmillan Assistant	<b>Jane Paynter</b>
Office Administrator	<b>Sue Spear</b>
Comms & Development Officer	<b>Sian Smith</b>

## VOLUNTEERS

Hilary A, Ian B, Paul B, Angela B, Jo B, Margaret B, Mandy B, Linda C, Phil C, Gillian D Marie D, Jean D, Tony E, Geraldine F, Stephen G, Rachel G, Alastair G, Jane G, Maria H, Kay H, Michael J, Brian M, Carol M, John M, Glenis M, Lesley M, Marie M Geoff N, Lynne N, John P, Hugh P, Denise P, Sally R, Jeanette R, Lyn R, Alan S, Kirsty S, Cheryl S, Elaine S, Joan T, Derick W, Jill W, Barry W

