

# Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau



A Review of the Year  
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002

## No of enquiries per year now over 20,000

Another record breaking year for Winchester bureau - the number of enquiries has topped 20,000 for the first time. Bearing in mind the complexity of many enquiries, this is a substantial achievement.

The bureau has been awarded the Community Legal Service Quality Mark for General Help in any subject and casework in both Welfare Benefits and Debt, acknowledging that it meets the required standards. The bureau staff, both managers and volunteers, should be proud of these achievements.

The management committee would like to thank those organisations, which have funded the bureau. This funding has enabled us to establish a home visiting service meeting a

clear community need. Sadly, future funding may not be as generous, but the management committee fully supports the staff in endeavouring to maintain existing standards and services.

A final celebratory note, Beth Taylor, a past Chairman and currently Vice Chairman of the management committee won the Volunteer of the Year Award from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureau. She collected it in person at the AGM in York in September 2001. Our thanks and congratulations to her.

*John Lunt, Chairman  
Management Committee*



*Beth Taylor, ex Chair of Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau receiving  
Volunteer of the Year Award 2001*

## Projects/services accommodated within Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

### **Mental Health Benefits Adviser - Jean Horn (20 hours per week)**

This was an extremely busy year during which Jean met with 177 different clients. Clients are seen by appointment at the Bureau, at their home, at Melbury Lodge Psychiatric Hospital, at the Connaught House Day Hospital or at a venue of their choice. About 77% of these clients wanted help either with claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or with problems arising over payment of benefit. The adviser completed 111 DLA forms. So far we have only been informed of the outcome of 41 but the amount awarded in respect of these is £61,000.

Clients with mental health problems also bring various other problems to Jean. During the past year there has been a notable increase in clients whose debts have contributed to deteriorating mental health and a subsequent hospital admission. In these cases debt counselling can help clients.

### **Winchester Housing Association Money Advice Worker - Jean Horn (10 hours pw) + Administration Officer - Chris Janson (3 hours pw)**

During the past year there have been 25 new referrals and Jean also continues to see 25 clients who were referred in past years. Most cases are complex, involving several issues. Typically Jean would need to follow up gaps in Housing Benefit claims and/or ascertain whether alleged overpayments of Housing Benefit can be challenged. Many clients will need to be represented in Court at both possession and eviction hearings. All are given a welfare benefit check to make sure they are getting all the benefits to which they are entitled. Usually, there is also debt counselling involved. In recognition of the amount of work involved with each client, the Housing Association agreed to fund a 3-hour per week Administration Officer.

### **Home Visiting Service - Jane Robinson (20 hours per week)**

The team has assisted with 2,400 enquiries by visiting clients in their homes, in hospital or at residential care homes. 40% of the 124 new referrals have come from clients themselves, and the service has enabled a higher proportion of isolated and vulnerable housebound people, unable to visit the Bureau through lack of suitable transport, ill health, caring responsibilities or disability to gain access to information and advice. 30% of our clients are under 65. Major changes to welfare benefits since April 2001 have resulted in a greater percentage of older people on low income becoming eligible for Income Support (Minimum Income Guarantee), Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. We have assisted with 85 claims for disability benefits. Successful claims usually mean eligibility for additional premiums, increasing weekly income by £80 - £100. Three volunteer advisers have successfully represented clients at Tribunals. Many cases do not have to reach this stage and are successful after requests for review. By listening, ensuring that clients maximise their income and providing information and advice about care and support available in the community the Home Visiting Service greatly enhances quality of life.

## Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

*The Bureau provides an open door policy to provide advice and/or information on any subject to personal callers or on the telephone. Subject areas include: Social Security benefits, sickness/disability benefits, housing, debt counselling/management, employment, legal matters, consumer problems, family and personal issues, health, immigration and nationality, community care, tax, leisure and access to other services.*

During 2000/01 Winchester Bureau received nearly 20,000 enquiries. Year on year the bureau increases its number of client contacts and its number of enquiries.

Our main enquiry areas continue to be consumer and debt and welfare benefits totalling approximately 50% of our work.

Volunteer Advisers continue to represent clients at Employment and Social Security Appeal Tribunals, Housing Benefit Review Boards and at the County Court. Although each case involves much time in preparation and attendance at a hearing it has over the past year shown that clients who are assisted have a much greater success rate than those appearing on their own.

A successful Social Security Appeal Tribunal meant an award of £2,700 in back benefit.

Due to funding restraints, our Thursday evening and Saturday morning service, started in January 2001, had to cease at the end of March 2002. During the last 12 months there were 260 telephone enquiries and a total of 190 appointments helping 351 clients.

**Prison** Our weekly visits to Winchester Prison continues to be welcomed by prison residents both male and female. Four advisers helped with 212 enquiries (up 65%).

**County Court desk** The duty desk on fortnightly possession hearing days is now a well-established strand of bureau work. Nine advisors have attained the skilled level of housing and debt expertise needed to staff the desk. 22 court desk sessions were

staffed. 18 clients were advised but not represented; 62 were advised and represented at the hearing. 88% of those attending the hearing were helped at the duty desk and they all retained their home and avoided the very real threat of homelessness.

**Social Policy** is an important area of work. We sent 102 bureau evidence forms to our national office.

The bureau lost 11 volunteers (3 went onto paid work) and gained 8. Two advisers joined us from other bureaux. Our first wheelchair volunteer switched from being a trainee adviser to helping us with our Local Information Our longest serving male volunteer (17 years) retired from advising but remains as a volunteer, helping us with social policy work.

**Training** As part of the new training competence programme, Liz Sladen became the bureau's first trainee adviser to gain her *Certificate in Generalist Advice Work*. The Bureau recruited its first Millenium Volunteer. Three trainees successfully went on to become trainee advisers and a further 7 trainees started. The programme involves volunteers in extra commitment during their 9 months training period.

In March 2001 funding for our Rural Outreach Advice Direct (ROAD) project finished but the bureau was able to gain enough funds to continue with a Home-Visiting Service.

During the year one new member of staff joined the bureau (see back page).

## Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

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**Tel: 01962 848006 Fax: 01962 848005 email:**

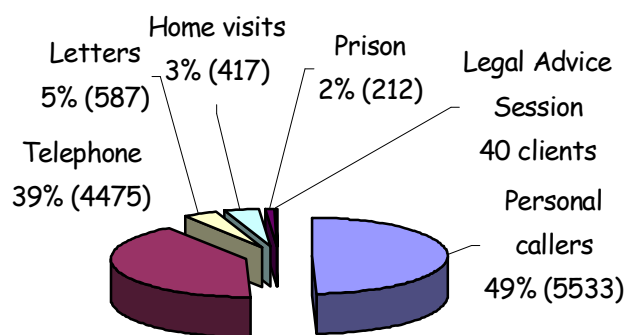
The Citizens Advice Bureau is an **independent** service providing, **free, confidential** and **impartial** advice.

**Aim:** To ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available; or through an inability to express their needs effectively and equally to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and service, both locally and nationally.

<b>OPENING HOURS</b>	
Monday	10 - 4
Tuesday	10 - 1
Wednesday	10 - 4
Thursday	10 - 4
Friday	10 - 1

<b>PROJECTS AND STAFF</b>	
1 April 2001 - 31 March 2002	
<b>Bureau Manager</b>	Jenny Meadows
<b>Deputy Manager</b>	Mary Barnard
<b>Training Officer</b>	Ann Gilbertson
<b>Admin Officers</b>	Ian Tattersall Chris Janson - (WHA) Liz Sladen (from Sept 01)
<b>Home Visiting Service</b>	Jane Robinson
<b>Mental Health Benefits Adviser</b>	Jean Horn
<b>WHA Money Advice Worker</b>	Jean Horn
42	<b>Volunteer Advisers</b>
3	<b>Volunteer Trainee Advisers</b>
9	<b>Volunteer Admin workers</b>

<b>OTHER SERVICES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home-visiting by request</li> <li>• Outreach at Winchester Prison (Mon pm)</li> <li>• Legal Advice Session (2-weekly) Thurs pm</li> <li>• County Court Desk - lay representation at possession hearings (bi-monthly)</li> </ul>
<b>PROJECTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Health Benefits Adviser</li> <li>• Winchester Housing Association Money Advice</li> </ul>



**Contacts by Category**

We would like to thank our funders Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council, Mid Hants Primary Care Trust and Winchester Housing Association

### PROJECTED FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- Consortium Community Fund bid made with Winchester Group for Disabled People
- Development work H M Prison, Winchester
- Continued working on Best Value with WCC Housing Dept
- Winchester Neighbourhood Mediation Steering Group
- Winchester Credit Union Group
- Information Technology development to work with CABNET