

ADVICE & SUPPORT SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2017

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO A
COMMUNITY GATHERING CELEBRATING

25 YEARS OF SERVICE

BY

TERESA INTAVARANT

AT THE
ADVICE & SUPPORT SERVICE
HARINGEY IRISH CENTRE
PRETORIA ROAD

LONDON

N17 8DX

31ST MARCH 2017

3.30PM

R.S.V.P:

mary@irish-advice.com



The Advice & Support Service has been in existence since 1989 and has grown and developed over time to change from one part-time advisor to four full time staff, with a wealth of experience and expertise. The full time workers are (1) Advice & Support Service Manager (2) Disability/Welfare Advisor (3) Outreach/Welfare Advisor (4) Administrator & Receptionist. The Service provides free confidential front-line advice & support, advocacy, casework, outreach and specialist referrals.

The Service is accessible through drop-in, outreach, appointments, telephone, post, email and fax. Feedback from clients suggests that they value the ease of access to services available at the Advice & Support Service along with the standard, range and diversity of assistance provided. We have an **Advice Service Quality Mark** for generalist advice and have obtained **3 levels of Casework** – Housing, Welfare Benefits & Disability.

We have been supported over the year by four remarkable and experienced volunteers Christina, Pat, Moira & Lucy. We would like to publicly acknowledge our sincere gratitude to these workers who have given tirelessly of their free time for the benefit of the more vulnerable members of our community. Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir!

The Advice & Support Service plays a vital and significant role in tackling a high level of need within the Irish and local community by providing advice, support and advocacy in areas such as Welfare Benefits, Housing/Homelessness, Disability, Legal Issues, Identity, Tax & Debt Advice to name but a few. The Service addresses the problems of the ageing and vulnerable population through various additional activities and projects. It has also developed useful partnerships with local/national organisations for the benefit of all clients.

The Advice & Support Service challenged a number of unfair decisions, with a significant amount being pursued up to tribunal

level. Throughout 2016 we were successful in obtaining over **£3.7m in benefits** for clients. The Service also assisted **1,460 actual clients** (not footfall) with **5,518 office enquiries** and responded to **3,985 telephone queries**.

Assistance given included income maximisation checks, disputing benefit decisions, debt advice, securing housing, resolving health matters, obtaining identity documents, addressing legal issues, making grant applications, negotiating disability issues, providing emergency assistance, seeking employment rights, providing cultural information, encouraging educational activity, resolving housing repair matters to name but some of the issues. Statistical data relating to each category of enquiry is retained on a database designed specifically by the Advice & Support Service Manager to capture and analyse relevant information, trends and needs.

Tribunal representation has continued to be an important aspect of our work over the past year. Many people, particularly the sick, disabled and elderly, have great difficulty in obtaining necessary benefits. This is mainly due to inappropriate decision making when the claim is initially processed. This wrong decision making causes a drain on community resources when you consider the time that is required reversing these unfair decisions. People are denied benefits at this point (of which more than half become entitled to at a much later stage) and this causes extreme financial hardship in most cases. The process of reviewing and then appealing a case can take anything from 3 months right up to 2 years or more. Trying to cope without these benefits or on reduced benefits for so long can have serious effects on health and choices available. This usually impacts adversely on their overall quality of life. This impact is substantial when you consider how many people are affected overall and the amount of backdated benefit that is obtained. We no longer have time to attend to represent at these tribunals but ensure that clients are well supported on paper and briefed for the day if they are able to attend.

Housing continues to be an increasingly difficult resource to access in London, especially local authority housing. However we have forged and maintained links with registered social landlords and private sector landlords in an attempt to address this issue and secure

alternative options for clients. The Advice & Support Service has worked hard in the past to successfully protect established referral rights to projects such as ‘Aisling House’ a sheltered accommodation scheme where we negotiated 50% referral rights for older Irish people. In response to an increase in housing problems such as illegal evictions & possession proceedings, our working partnership with solicitors from the Hackney Community Law Centre who are still happy to take casework on even though they no longer have a specific contract for Haringey is quite successful. Our partnership with the Causeway Housing Association has also assisted many homeless clients to secure private rented accommodation. In addition to this, we intend to build up/expand our database of reputable private landlords who are willing to partner us in order to speed up the process of re-housing. The Advice & Support Service continues to work in partnership with the Safe Home Programme to prepare and support those who wish to return to live in Ireland. The Service would typically provide an opportunity for clients to consider the implications of the move and address any anxieties or concerns in this regard in close liaison with the staff at the Safe Home Programme.

One of our main strengths is that we have planned and built in systems as part of the development of the Service which increases our ability to **respond quickly in emergency situations** as well as being flexible and practical in our approach. We are able to attend to the increasing numbers of emergencies/crisis situations that present either outside or inside of drop-in hours at the office or elsewhere when necessary. This resolves matters quickly and effectively avoiding further unnecessary complications and anxiety for the clients.

Access to updated information and the maintenance of a solid resource base continues to be essential in providing a high quality service. **Affiliation with professional organisations** such as the Irish in Britain, Advice UK, National Housing Advisory Service, Disability UK, Lasa Welfare Rights Services, Child Poverty Action Group, National Homelessness Advice Service, National Association of Welfare Rights Advisors and the Public Law Project along with the Advice Quality Standard Certification further ensures the Service maintains its standards in service delivery and that it works within

nationally approved guidelines. Our continued subscription to the organisations such as Advise Uk & Child Poverty Action Group and the access to regular updated information also ensures precision in representing client's interests. Our **Advice Quality Standard 'Quality Mark'** accreditation to include 3 casework levels- Welfare Benefits, Disability & Housing and maintaining it has been a positive move by the Service. To sustain this accreditation all systems, structures, policies & procedures have been and will be subject to a stringent external audit on a regular basis. Our last audit was November 2016 and we were successful in securing the Quality Mark accreditation for another two years for the Advice & Support Service. This further endorses the high quality of service provision/delivery at the Advice & Support Service.

We run seventeen additional practical and supportive projects in conjunction with the core work which have been invaluable in addressing the urgent/immediate needs of our clients.

These projects are as follows:

- (1)The **Social Inclusion Film Club** – free films shown twice monthly and fresh baked soda bread and scones and a free raffle provided.
- (2)The **Free Computer classes** for those aged 50+ who have no experience whatsoever of computers.
- (3)The **FareShare Free Food Distribution** -30 food bags distributed weekly.
- (4)The **Bus Saver Ticket Scheme** - free bus tickets distributed to clients to help them to get to various places such as the Doctors, Jobcentre etc.
- (5)The **Supermarket Voucher Scheme** – free supermarket vouchers given to clients in times of crisis.
- (6)The **Carmelite Mass Card Project**- affordable mass cards via the Carmelites order in Dublin.
- (7)**Sainsbury's Daily Bread Run**- bread distributed on a daily basis.
- (8)The **In Kind Direct Scheme**- goods are purchased at a nominal cost and distributed free to clients in need.
- (9)The **Crisis Intervention Fund** – clients are assisted very swiftly at times of crisis through funding obtained from the London Catalyst Samaritan Grant.

(10) The **Morrisons Food Wastage Scheme** – food donated once a week by this supermarket to distribute to clients in need.

(11) **Radar Key** – we distribute Radar keys to people with disabilities so they have quick access to toilet facilities when they are out and about.

(12) **The Hub** – we provide access to computers and phones for people who are able to follow up on their specific issues but need this facility.

(13) **OLSGEIRE** – A group of businessmen run events to help with additional funds for the Advice & Support projects and have done so since 2014.

(14) **Haringey Women's Refuge Appeal** – We collect and look for donations of toys and gifts and wrap them up for women and their children in a refuge in Haringey at Christmas.

(15) **Christmas Food Appeal** – We collect food from individuals and supermarkets to make up food bags for those less fortunate members of the community at Christmas.

(16) **Foodbank Referrals for Haringey & Enfield boroughs** – These remain quite high and we issued 303 Foodbank vouchers in 2016.

(17) The **Community Book Swap** - is a simple but effective project where people can come along to the waiting area and read/swap books while they wait their turn.

Customer Feedback Review 2016

Happy with the
Information 100%

Able to ask
questions 100%



Would use this
Service again 100%

Would recommend
this Service 100%

Key achievements for the year

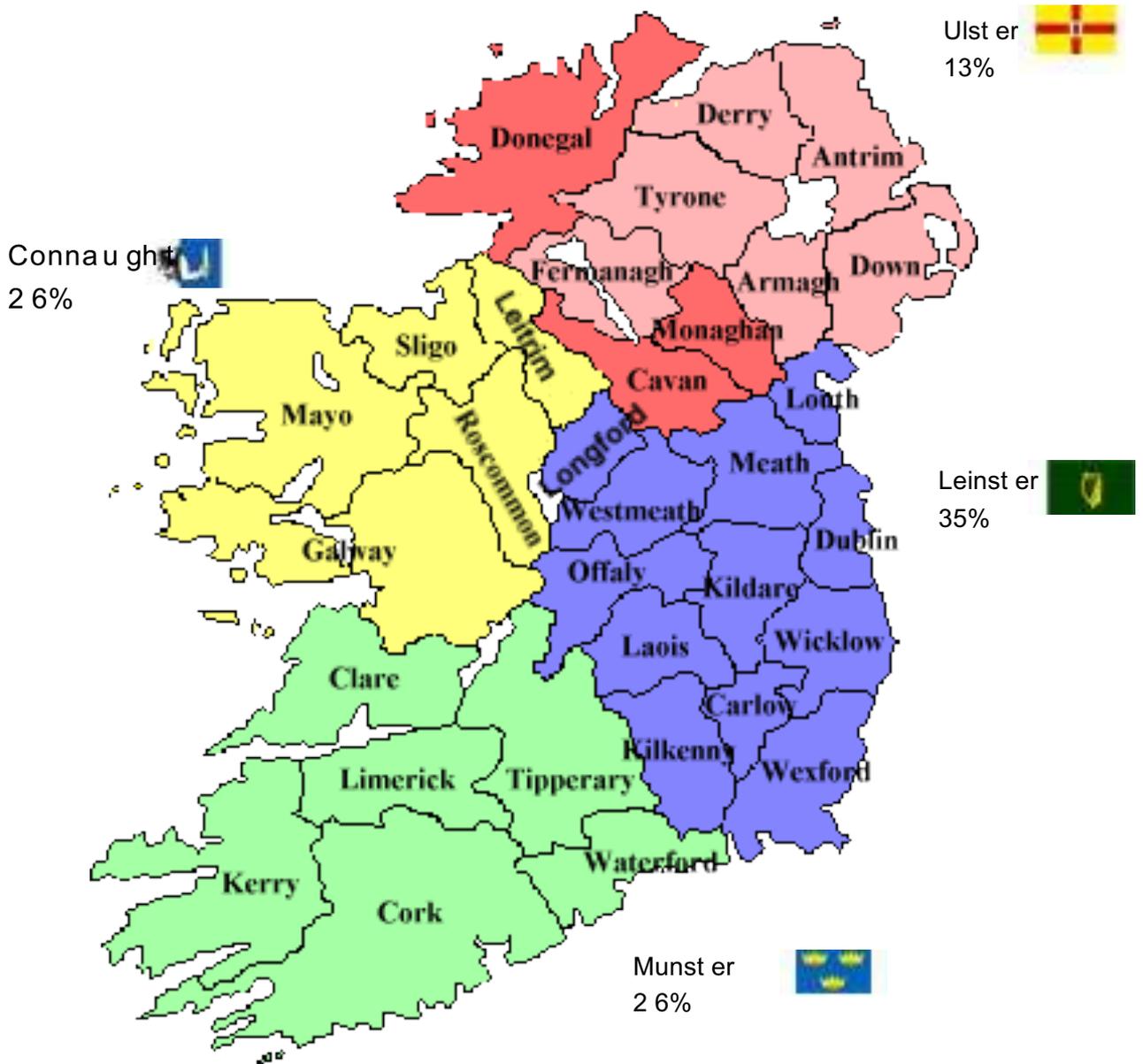
- **Over £3.7m** in financial gains for clients.
- 📄 **1,460 clients** advised, assisted and supported.
- 📄 **5,518 office enquiries** addressed.
- 📄 **3,985 telephone enquiries** resolved.
- Third year of our **partnership with Sainsbury's** who provide free bread and more recently additional perishable goods for low or no income clients on a daily basis and support our Christmas Food Appeal.
- 📄 Increased use of the **The Hub**, a project where people can access computers independently and free of charge within the Advice & Support Service interview rooms.
- 📄 Continued **partnership working with the Carmelite nuns** in Dublin.
- 📄 Fourth year of supplying **Radar Key Project** for disabled people.
- 📄 Sixth year of the **free food voucher scheme**.
- 📄 Fifth year in partnership with **Hackney Community Law Centre**.
- 📄 Seventh year of providing **free Bus Saver Tickets**.
- 📄 Ninth year of running the **free Social Inclusion Film Club**.

- ❏ Our second year of receiving food donations on a weekly basis from **Morrisons** as part of their community waste food project.
- ❏ Eleventh year of running **free computer tuition** for people aged 50+.
- ❏ Increased distribution of free **FareShare** food bags.
- ❏ Increased number of referrals to **Haringey & Enfield Foodbank**.
- ❏ Increased allocation of free essential household items through **In Kind Direct**.
- ❏ Second year of **Crisis Intervention Fund**.
- ❏ Second year of **London Catalyst Partnership**.
- Second year of **Haringey Women's Refuge Appeal**.
- ❏ Third year of **Olsgeire Partnership**.
- ❏ Third year of **Community Book Swap**.
- ❏ Third year of running a **Christmas Food Appeal**.



Sorting out the food donations

Clients Province of Origin 2016



Advice & Support Service Customer Gender & Age Groups

Female = 42%

Male = 58%



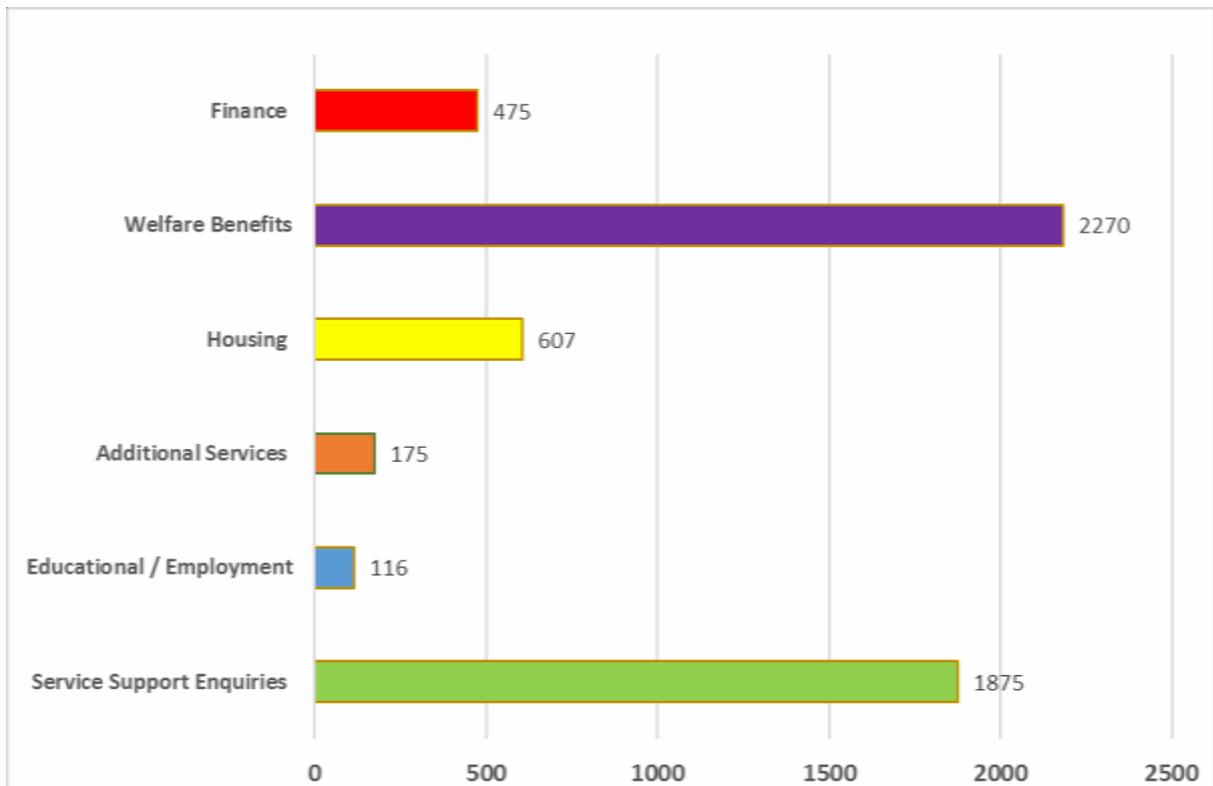
Under 18 = 4%

18-25 = 6%

26-55 = 54%

Over 55 = 36%

Advice & Support Service Enquiries 2016



*Monies Obtained for Clients
January - December 2016*

TYPE OF AWARD	MONEY AWARDED	TYPE OF AWARD	MONEY AWARDED
<i>ALLEGED DEBT REVOKED</i>	£29,978.16	<i>HOUSING BENEFIT</i>	£161,922.72
<i>ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE</i>	£202,845.10	<i>INCOME SUPPORT</i>	£56,700.80
<i>BLUE BADGE</i>	£52,500.00	<i>INLAND REVENUE</i>	£350.80
<i>CARERS ALLOWANCE</i>	£160,814.60	<i>IRISH PENSION</i>	£14,944.58
<i>CHILD BENEFIT</i>	£57,983.80	<i>JOBSEEKERS ALLOWANCE</i>	£37,316.80
<i>CHILD TAX CREDIT</i>	£228,464.41	<i>OYSTER 60+ PASS</i>	£11,952.00
<i>COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT</i>	£17,351.44	<i>PENSION</i>	£150,054.20
<i>CRISIS INTERVENTION FUND</i>	£166.00	<i>PENSION CREDIT</i>	£227,769.80
<i>DEBT</i>	£1,337.91	<i>PENSION-OCCUPATIONAL</i>	£50,712.00
<i>DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE</i>	£324,814.70	<i>PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENT</i>	£1,155,128.40
<i>DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT</i>	£6,704.20	<i>SEVERE DISABILITY PREMIUM</i>	£36,350.80
<i>EMPLOYMENT & SUPPORT ALLOWANCE</i>	£534,096.51	<i>SOCIAL FUND</i>	£1,526.65
<i>FREEDOM PASS</i>	£210,000.00	<i>SUPERMARKET VOUCHER</i>	£65.00
<i>GRANT AWARD</i>	£4,097.20	<i>SUPPORT FUND</i>	£1,100.00
<i>HEALTH COSTS</i>	£100.00		

OVERALL TOTAL AMOUNT OF BENEFITS OBTAINED:

£3,737,148.58

Our thanks to

Sincere thanks once again to the Irish Government for their continued funding of this vital project along with their ongoing support and community awareness through the Emigrant Support Programme. Our thanks to the Centre Management Committee and the Centre Manager for their guidance, support and sustained commitment to the work we undertake. Thanks to the Ireland Fund of Great Britain, The London Catalyst and Noel Sainsbury & friends for funding our projects which help so many people in so many ways. Thanks also to Sainsbury's & Morrison's for their ongoing contributions to the Service.



The Advice & Support Team

**A special tribute to Fran
Baker from the Advice
& Support Service**



SLÁN

GO

FOILL

FRAN

BAKER

Fran has been the Administrator of the Haringey Irish Centre for the past 29 years. I have had the great honour and pleasure of working directly with Fran for 15 of those years and of being her friend for 25 years. Fran decided to retire from 2nd June 2017 making it truly the end of an era in the Haringey Irish Centre annals.

Everyone at the Advice & Support Service wants Fran to know that we really value and appreciate all her hard work and true friendship over the years.

We will really, really miss you so much Fran and good luck in your

future adventures. Go n-éirí an bóthar leat!

AN IRISH BLESSING

May the road rise up

to meet you May the

wind be ever at your

back

May the sun shine warm upon

your face And may the rain

fall softly on your fields And

until we meet again

May God hold you in the hollow of his hand