Citizens Advice case study

As the rising cost of living takes its toll, more people in Totnes are struggling day-to-day. Last year, 640 residents reached out to Citizens Advice South Hams in Totnes for help – that’s around 7% of our town. And by far the largest area of assistance needed was managing debt and help getting financial or other support to cope with the rising cost of living, with over 600 people helped with queries in this area. The good news is that as a result of the guidance from Citizens Advice South Hams, these residents are now better off by over £725,000 either through debts being written off or because Citizens Advice helped them to increase their income.

Citizens Advice South Hams is a charity which relies on donations and a dedicated team of volunteers to deliver this essential support. Their work in Totnes was supported last year by Totnes Town Council through a Community Grant of £5,969 specifically to help fund their Totnes outreach programme. This means Citizens Advice can continue to provide vital, accessible, face-to-face support in the town. Town Council grants are funded through a portion of the Council Tax paid by Totnes residents.

Janie Moor, of Citizens Advice South Hams, explained: "Our grant from Totnes Town Council has helped us see 640 people in the town about a wide range of issues, including debt, benefits claims, housing and emergency support. This resulted an income gain of £554k for people in the town and £173k worth of debts written-off.

"All these results are thanks to our fantastic volunteers, who always go above and beyond to help people in their community. If you'd like to find out more about becoming a volunteer with Citizens Advice South Hams, please visit our website <https://southhamscab.org.uk/get-involved/>

"No previous experience is needed, full training is provided, and we welcome applications from all sections of society."

Cllr Emily Price, Mayor of Totnes added: “Life in Totnes would be a lot tougher for many residents without the support of the team at Citizens Advice South Hams. As Mayor, I extend my thanks to everyone who gives up their time to help others. I hope that more local people will now step forward to volunteer for Citizens Advice as this support is sadly needed more now than ever.

“I’m also proud that Totnes Town Council was able to financially support the work of Citizens Advice South Hams with a Community Grant, which has helped to keep this lifeline face-to-face service available in Totnes for local people in need. £700,000 in financial help for local people is huge – and represents great value for money in terms of our £5,969 grant. It’s proof that when we support charities that are helping people in our community, we can have a much bigger impact that really makes a difference.”

**The scale of the problem**

The Office for National Statistics says 52.5% of Totnes residents are classified as ‘deprived.’ And according to figures from Action for Children, over 30% of children in the South Hams live in poverty. So, it’s little wonder that more and more local people need extra help to manage day-to-day.

**How does Citizens Advice help people in Totnes?**

Citizens Advice South Hams provides free, confidential, impartial and independent advice. Volunteer advisors are available to help you every Wednesday from 9.30am-12.30pm at St John’s Church Bridgetown. Alternatively, go to [www.southhamscab.org.uk](http://www.southhamscab.org.uk)

**Can you help Citizens Advice and others in their time of need?**

Robert, who volunteers in Totnes, said: “Helping others in their time of need is very rewarding.

“We often see people coming in at the end of their tether but go out of the door with a huge sense of relief.

“It’s also great working as part of a team – you’re never left on your own to cope with issues and you can always rely on professional support from your supervisor and fellow volunteers.

“Since joining Citizens Advice, I’ve learnt new skills, met new friends and feel like I’ve made a real difference to someone’s life, no matter how small the issue.”

As well volunteers to provide frontline advice, Citizens Advice is looking for volunteers who can help in other areas, including work on research and lobbying, help with administration and support jobs, such as IT and fundraising, or sitting on the boards as trustees.

*Photo: Pam Thompson and Owen Box offering support and advice at the weekly Community Café at St John’s Church, Bridgetown*