

the charity for  
your community



### **Sevenoaks and Swanley Citizens Advice Bureau**

In 2010 your Citizens Advice Bureau helped 4,700 local people deal with over 17,000 concerns. Although we receive invaluable support from Sevenoaks District Council, we have lost significant public funding in the past two years. We need to find new sources of funding to maintain our services. This will come mainly from charitable donations and community support

### **Our future**

After serving the local community for over 70 years, the largely volunteer based service of Sevenoaks and Swanley CAB is under serious threat. In 2009 the two Bureaux merged to reduce our costs, but this will not be enough to cope with the funding cuts we now face. Added to this, our caseload has continued to rise – last year the number of enquiries we handled increased by over 30% on the previous year. We are now working hard to find possible new sources of funding, but, in the current economic climate, this is a difficult task. We always value greatly the donations we receive and are appealing directly to our local community for further help.

### **Our service**

CAB support has a positive impact on people's lives. Research carried out by MORI found that 46% of people felt less anxious, less stressed, or had fewer health problems after receiving help from the CAB. This also helps to ease pressure on other services, for example, local GPs. In the well respected tradition of CABs our staff and volunteers remain determined to continue to offer a free, confidential service available to everybody.

Each hour of advice costs us £15 to provide. At any one time we can be conducting three or four interviews, while three or four other advisers are completing case notes, writing letters on clients' behalf, dealing with emails, answering telephone enquiries or researching solutions to more complex problems.

For many we are the first port of call when a problem emerges, for others we may be the last port of call when things have gone badly wrong. Often we deal with a problem from beginning to end, or we can signpost clients to more specialist agencies for additional support.

### **Managing debt**

Helping people manage debt problems takes up a considerable amount of our time. These often arise as a result of a dramatic change of circumstances, for example, losing a job, relationship breakdown or ill health. Last year we opened a weekly debt clinic to provide a dedicated service to clients struggling with debt. We are looking for financial support to continue with this valuable service after its current funding comes to an end later this year.

### **Welfare benefits**

The benefits system is complex and our specialist advisors and form fillers help ensure that claimants follow the correct procedures. We do not help people cheat the benefit system - instead we aim to ensure that clients can claim the benefits to which they are entitled, particularly those clients who are disabled or genuinely too ill to work

### **Employment**

Employment problems also make up a significant proportion of our caseload. Some employers do

not understand their obligations, others choose to ignore them. Again, our specialist advisers work hard to help resolve employment issues. This will mean that clients may keep their job or obtain rightful compensation if they lose it.

#### **Family, legal and other matters**

We help clients deal with a wide range of other problems. For example, relationship breakdown is frequently discussed in detail for the first time at the Bureau. We also help clients who have been made homeless, or who are threatened with it; advise them on how to exercise their consumer rights, deal with problems following a bereavement and many more issues.

#### **Our social policy work**

Another very important part of our service is our social policy work which seeks to influence the decisions of government and policymakers at local and national level. For example, providing evidence from clients on changes to the benefits system which may result in them being disadvantaged; highlighting excessive bank charges, creditor harassment and the poor enquiry and complaint handling systems of some utility companies.

***Can you help us sustain this valuable, free service to the local community? Any assistance you can provide will be greatly appreciated***

#### **Further information**

If you would like to make a donation, a leaflet can be obtained from the Parish Council. If you can offer help or ideas for our fundraising activities, please contact Colin Logier at [funding@sevenoaksdistrictcab.org.uk](mailto:funding@sevenoaksdistrictcab.org.uk) or on 01732 456100, weekdays 9.30-3.30.