

The Impact of Outreach Advice: A Case Study

Partnership Between Citizens Advice Barnet and BOOST

Thanks to funding from the Barnet Community Innovation Fund, Citizens Advice Barnet and BOOST set up a new partnership whereby a Citizens Advice Barnet adviser was embedded within the team at BOOST, providing advice to their clients on a range of problems and access to more specialist support.

During the first year of this partnership, the Citizens Advice Barnet adviser provided advice to 398 people with 472 problems at 83 face-to-face sessions, 58 of which were at Burnt Oak Library and 25 of which were at Grahame Park, and through 163 referrals.

We referred 85 people into Citizens Advice Barnet's other services, 40 into general advice and 45 into specialist advice, and 28 into external services, including Age UK Barnet and Debt Free London. We signposted 88 people to other support.

Working closely together enabled us to learn from each other and improve our own practices. For example, BOOST recruited a manager for their welfare benefits advisers to enable them to provide more consistent advice.

We are also much more familiar with the services we both provide, which has enabled us to significantly increase the number of referrals we make to each other and make better use of our joint resources. For example, Citizens Advice Barnet now refer many more people to BOOST for support with Discretionary Housing Payment applications.

During the partnership, the Citizens Advice Barnet adviser attended weekly catch up meetings with the BOOST team and their other partners, which improved Citizens Advice Barnet's knowledge of and involvement with other local service provision, especially with the council.

The project also opened doors to other partnerships. For example, Citizens Advice Barnet have now been pledged funding from Notting Hill Genesis to continue providing advice at Grahame Park.

The partnership improved both organisations' reach and engagement with the community. For example, clients came to BOOST specifically to see the Citizens Advice Barnet adviser, and accessed support from BOOST, as well; and Citizens Advice Barnet was in more geographical locations than they would have been, otherwise, which improved accessibility, especially for more vulnerable clients or those with health conditions.

Through this partnership, we achieved the following hard outcomes:

- £46,081 benefits claimed
- £4,581 debt written off
- £5,920 debt managed through repayment plans

- 38 people accessed OISC level 3 immigration advice

The following client story is just one example of what we've achieved through this partnership:

A approached BOOST as she'd been trying to apply for housing benefits and council tax support for a year but was being refused as her son wouldn't provide proof of his income. She was also in a lot of debt.

After A's son moved out, BOOST helped her make a new claim and asked for her claim to be assessed as a priority. It was assessed two days later and was accepted with three months backdate. The client said she felt like a weight was lifted off her shoulders.

Whilst BOOST were supporting her, she was referred to CAB for debt advice and was booked an appointment with their debt caseworker. He liaised with her priority creditors to put her debts on hold while advising her of available options. He recently suggested a debt relief order, which is now being actively investigated. This will allow all of the client's debts to be written off, giving her a fresh start.

Overall, this innovative partnership model of embedding a CAB adviser within the BOOST team has worked well. BOOST commented that it's worked much better than their other partnerships, which are less formal and do not involve anywhere near the level of integration we have achieved. It has enabled CAB to work more closely with BOOST's wider network, e.g. Grahame Park and Notting Hill Genesis, and that is only the beginning. Going forward, the role will continue to be part of BOOST's network and provide advice at more of BOOST's outreach locations: thanks to its success, BOOST and Notting Hill Genesis have agreed to fund the continuation of this project. We would be keen to replicate this model with other partners.