

**cyngor ar
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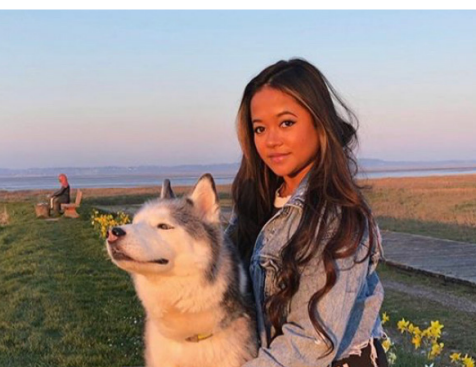
**citizens
advice**

**Sir y Fflint
Flintshire**

Annual Report 2019/20

Charity Registration Number: 1090010
Company Number : 03985923

What makes us unique is our people



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Despite the challenges that faced the charity this year, the people of Citizens Advice Flintshire worked together to ensure they were able to continue to provide generalist and specialist advice to the people of Flintshire via bureaux and funded projects. The ever increasing complexity and often urgency of client issues provided for a very challenging time for volunteers and staff. The story of how they are continuing to see people who are now living in destitution will be told during this report.

The main focus is on the unique individuals who continue to provide these services day in, day out. This dedicated and amazing team of people who provide the best possible quality service that should make everyone associated, proud to be a part of Citizens Advice Flintshire. The organisation has faced more challenges than ever in an uncertain world, yet they have continued to offer a reliable service to the people of Flintshire.

Behind the well-known brand and the professionalism of the service, this report will demonstrate the real people with unique personalities whilst showing how they contributed to another year of delivering a free advice service. This is a charity which continues to seek support from the very community that it's made to help, yet do we really know the people that are behind the scenes?...



Emily Yue - Employment & Discrimination Caseworker



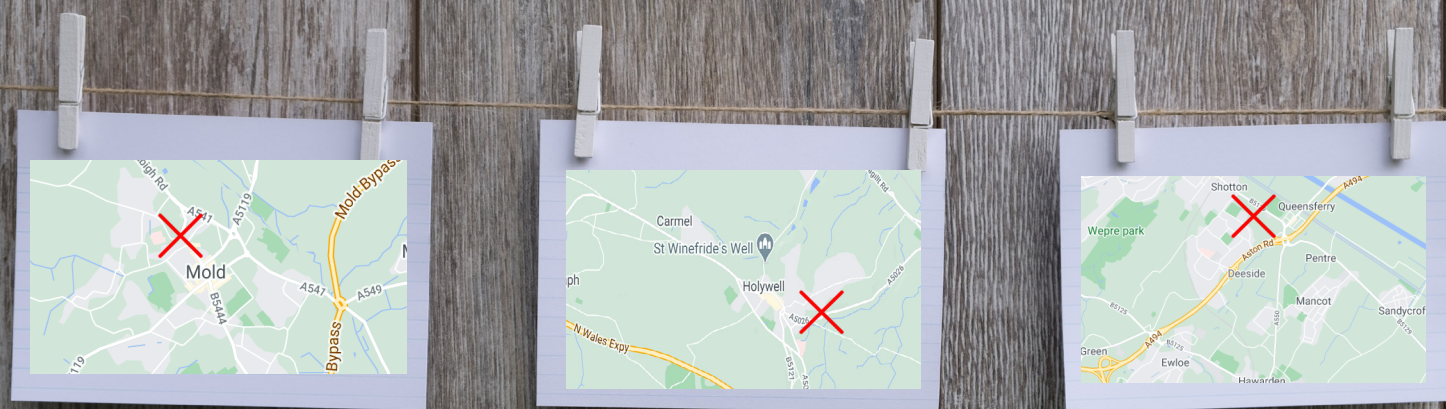
Where it all began



81 years ago, on the 3rd of September 1939, the UK and France declared war on Germany, and this was to have a huge impact on millions of lives. A year before, with a World War looming, the National Council of Social Services (the forerunner of today's National Council of Voluntary Organisations) established a group to look at meeting civilians' needs during war time. This led to Citizens Advice Bureaux being established throughout the country, particularly in the large cities and industrial areas where social disorganisation was to be acute. Citizens Advice opened 200 locations the day after war was declared. Over the next few years, more and more locations grew from 200 to over 1,000 across England and Wales. Dedicated advisers helped members of the public with problems as diverse as loss of ration books, homelessness and evacuation. They even helped locate missing relatives and prisoners of war.

The charity has come a long way since 1939. Citizens Advice now provides support nationally in 2,550 locations across England and Wales. The local Citizens Advice in Flintshire continues to adapt to the needs of the local community. At the start of the year the charity was mainly supporting people in the areas of debt, benefits and employment advice. With the Covid pandemic hitting the UK hard towards the end of the year in March 2020 the shift in focus is set to develop again as the charity predicts they will be needed to support people with mental health issues, an increase in debt and a major increase in those who are seeking employment advice.

Where are they based?



The charity has offices spread between 3 locations in Flintshire. They are in Mold, Holywell and Deeside. During advertised opening hours clients can access the service by drop-in, appointment, telephone or email. Clients can also access us at any time by completing a 'Contact us' form on our website and someone will get back to them within three working days either by telephone or email. CAF offers an initial gateway service (triage) for all clients. If they require advice after the gateway they will be offered either generalist or specialist advice, depending on the complexity of their enquiry.

Charity Aims

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.

Independence

The service provided by Citizens Advice Bureaux is completely independent. Bureaux are therefore able to offer impartial advice to all clients and to take up any issue with the appropriate authority on behalf of individuals or groups.

Impartiality

The service provided by Citizens Advice Bureaux is impartial. It is open to everybody, irrespective of ability, age, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and social or economic status. Advice and help will be given on any subject without any preconceived attitude on the part of the bureau.

Confidentiality

Citizens Advice offer confidentiality to enquirers. Nothing learned by a bureau from enquirers, including the fact of their visits, will be passed on to anyone outside the service without their express permission.

Free

Services are provided free to clients at the point of delivery. Each Citizens Advice office, is responsible for operating within the principles of the service and protecting the Citizens Advice brand. At the same time it is also recognised that we all need room for innovation without deterring people from seeking advice for fear of the cost.

Mission Statement

Our vision is that Citizens Advice Flintshire, through advice and campaigning, will help to create a fairer Flintshire where people are empowered, treated equally and have their rights respected.

What challenged them this year?

In 2019 the national charity, Citizens Advice Cymru were awarded funding by the Welsh Government to provide advice services across Wales from 1 January 2020 for 12 months. The Single Advice Fund was set up to offer a positive contribution to help meet the ongoing increase in demand for access to advice services and help to ensure more people throughout Wales have access to the information and advice that they need. This meant that Citizens Advice would sub-grant funds from the Single Advice Fund across the network of Local Citizens Advice operating in Wales. In a competitive time Flintshire would need to demonstrate their ability to meet the needs in order to secure funding.

Another challenge for the charity would be that in March 2020, like many other services, they had to adapt the way they delivered their service. The Coronavirus Pandemic had reached the UK and overnight changes were implemented including the closing down of all offices and the entire team would be forced to work remotely.

Not only did the organisation have to look at how it would deliver advice digitally. They would also have to consider how they go about their daily routines such as staff and volunteer management, communication and with the cost of new equipment, new software and new means of working it would have an effect on the charity's finances.

The impact this year



People often come to us with more than one problem. That's why this year we dealt with

31,909
separate advice issues



*We answered
498
Adviceline calls from
members of the public



We responded to
431
individual email
enquiries



We calculated that our
advice and support was
valued at
£5,446,221



This year we supported
people with over
7,132
separate debt issues



We recruited and trained
24
new volunteers to provide
our local community with a
free advice service



This year we helped a
total of
6,169
people with free advice

*We answered the following in April - Dec 2019. After Dec 2019, we no longer answered calls due to a change in service to Advicelink/SAF

Chair's report

In March 2019, our previous chair, Arnold Woolley, retired after many years of leading as a chair. I remember my first trustee board meeting and being in awe of how Arnold conducted the meetings and his external insights on matters we were discussing. Arnold will be greatly missed from the board of trustees.

Having been on the trustee board for six years now, including one year as vice chair, I was delighted to take on the role of chair, and I look forward to working with the trustees, staff and volunteers on the future direction of Citizens Advice Flintshire, ensuring that those in most need of advice are able to access it.

I'm reflecting on what a 12 month period this has been for Citizens Advice Flintshire. It saw Citizens Advice celebrating 80 years of service which is an incredible achievement. For 80 years our dedicated people have been ensuring that people in our community have access to the advice they need. 2019 saw us planning our new five-year strategy and we came together, staff and volunteers, to discuss what we should be focusing on during the period that would help us to make the most difference.

Little did we know that in March 2020, all our lives would change dramatically due to COVID-19. Citizens Advice Flintshire found itself having to adapt and very quickly. I am immensely proud of how people have risen to this challenge. We must not forget that COVID-19 not only changed the way in which Citizen Advice Flintshire provides advice, but it has also had a personal impact on everybody who worked and volunteered there. From the worry of loved ones catching the virus to teaching children at home.

It has been an incredibly worrying time that has required people to adapt in multiple ways. As this report focuses on our people, it is important to recognise the people that contribute to Citizens Advice Flintshire. It is the people who make up Citizens Advice Flintshire that will get us through this challenging 12-month period ahead.

So, a huge thank you to our people (staff and volunteers) who got us through the last 12 months and continued to provide quality advice to those in need, making a huge difference to the lives of people in Flintshire! Without you, the charity would simply fail to exist.

Here is to the next 12 months and navigating the new normal and how we further diversify the way in which we provide our advice to ensure we are there for anyone who needs us.

Laura Clays
Chair

Chief Executive's report

"This year has provided many challenges but also many opportunities.

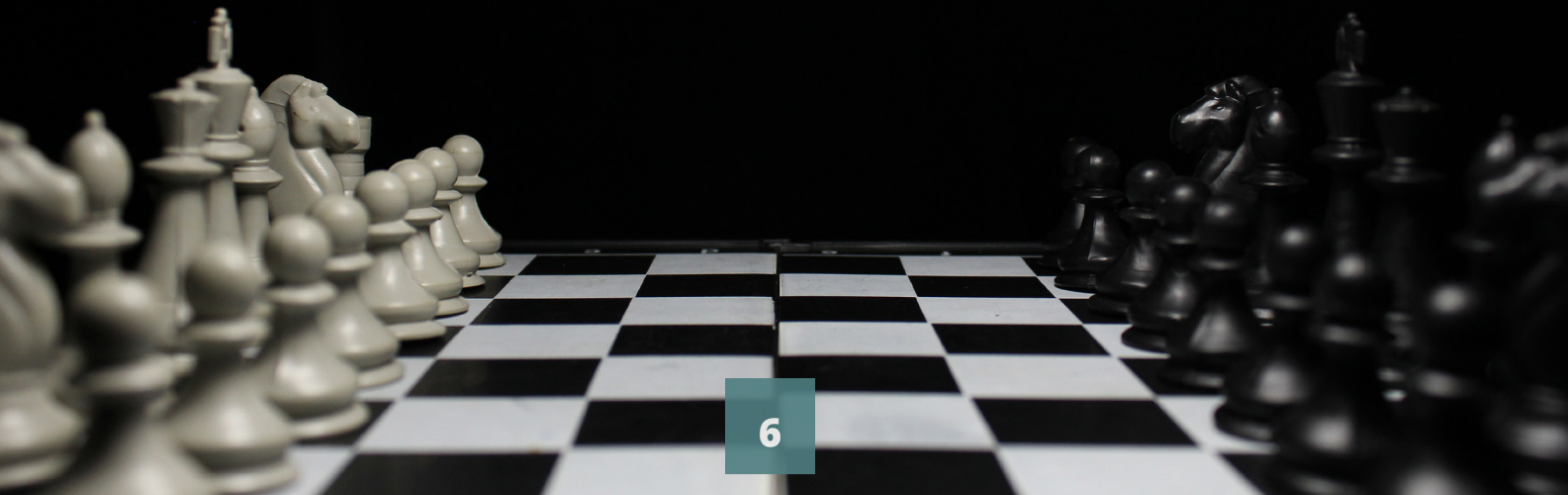
"Reflecting on the year I realised that my job is similar to a game of chess. I am constantly making moves and responding to other factors, often outside of our control, which requires that I make another move. In doing this we need to have a strategic view but also a good knowledge of the people and skills we have available.

"Our people have a resilience that I think is quite unique to the sector, working in an environment of constant change, short term contracts, never quite enough money or people and always too much work, yet they remain committed to the responding and changing needs of the local community.

"A particular group of people we identified as having additional challenges in obtaining advice were people with mental well-being issues. This led to us seeing an opportunity and we were successful with a National Lottery Community Fund grant to develop 'The Extra Mile Project'. This new project will improve access to our service, via a variety of new and improved methods, which will assist with earlier intervention and will stop situations deteriorating and escalating, resulting in getting good quality timely advice where and when they need it.

"CAF is well established in regional working across North Wales through our discrimination service. We were able to use this experience and strong track record to take the opportunity that arose to help European Union Citizens apply for Settled Status. Working with Citizens Advice Cymru, Cardiff and the Vale and Newport CABs we secured a Welsh Government contract to provide help to enable people to apply and secure their entitlement to live and work in Wales. Opportunities arise in all areas of our work including campaigning. Last year, BBC's Panorama followed the lives of claimants in Flintshire, North Wales, which was one of the first areas to introduce Universal Credit. We were featured in this programme and this year we were asked to work with BBC Wales again on the impact that Universal Credit has had on the people of Flintshire and on our service twelve months on. This opportunity enabled us to share our clients' voices and experiences which is a key part of our work. Finally, in March 2020, Arnold Woolley took his opportunity to retire after being a trustee for 18 years. I would like to say a big thank you to Arnold and acknowledge his commitment, hard work and good counsel over many years. He was very much a calming influence, always dotting the i's and the crossing the t's, a role that is essential on a Trustee Board. His presence and contribution will be missed."

Salli Edwards, CEO.



Finances with Finance Officer Ian Gray

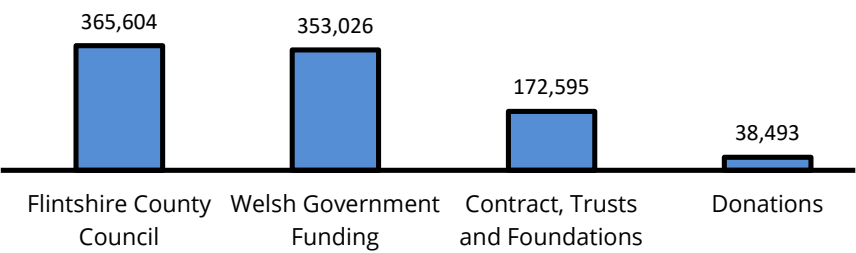
Ian is always trying to lower his score cards and the charity's expenditure, as a keen golfer he knows how important it is to be precise when it comes to putting down the figures. We asked Ian to give us an insight into the year's finances He said... "Our total income for the year was £929,718 while our total expenditure was £902,109. The surplus income is then used to reduce the deficit, currently £80,000 a year, of running our core service. This is our opportunity to express our sincere thanks to all our funders who have helped us to help the community this year.



"A huge thank you to Flintshire County Council who continue to support our service by funding a significant element of our core service. The Welsh Government for their support for local advice provision and locally we are supported by smaller organisations including Town and Community Councils. Our internal funding team who work tirelessly to ensure the CAB Charity is promoted to the county and raise much needed funding.

"Good quality and sustained income streams are the foundation to enable our valuable service to be delivered year after year. We have specialist staff and volunteers who receive excellent on-going training together with the latest reference materials. We have the day-to-day running costs of operating from three sites in Flintshire together with all the expense of funding our computers and specialist telephone network. I want to express our sincere thanks to all our funders who have helped us to help the community this year."

This year's income





Employment & Discrimination with Isslia Roberts

Citizens Advice Flintshire has a North Wales team providing support and advice to clients on employment & discrimination issues. Leading that team is Employment & Discrimination Lead Isslia Roberts. Her passion is challenging discrimination and she believes that no one should be treated unfairly because of who they are. A self-confessed plant collector who has a soft nurturing side on the weekends but is tough and ready for battle when it comes to her day job in challenging discrimination and taking on those who break the law in employment rights.

We get the lowdown from Isslia on what the charity has seen in the last year. Isslia reported that "Disability Discrimination continues to be the most commonly affected area that we see with pregnancy and maternity discrimination still common too. As the year progressed we saw an increase in redundancies and other work related issues due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. Looking ahead into the future we envisage this will become an even bigger problem for our community.

"To give you an example of how this project has helped people this year, a couple who spoke limited English and both worked for the same employer came to me for advice after they were dismissed by text message. One of them had suffered an epileptic seizure and was too unwell to work. Unfortunately, with no access to childcare and with one parent unable to care for their child, the partner was forced to take unpaid leave to look after the child. Because of this they were both dismissed by text message after they didn't attend work. A few days later when the client felt better they went to the workplace to provide a doctor's note and to explain the situation but the employer was extremely rude and told them that they wouldn't get paid for holidays. The clients told me that they did not see them act this way towards British workers after having time off. With a strong case, I helped the clients to make separate claims for automatic unfair dismissal and direct disability and race discrimination. Following a preliminary hearing where I represented them both, they were able to settle for £20,000 (£10,000 each) and have both received the settlement sum in full. The clients thanked Isslia for all her help and support and have both since found other jobs.

"This year the project supported over 170 people to challenge discrimination and/or improve their situation at work. Isslia noted numerous successes including helping to negotiate a £12,000 settlement agreement for a client with Crohn's disease whose employer repeatedly refused to make reasonable adjustments."

Parent Partnership with Vicky Hancock

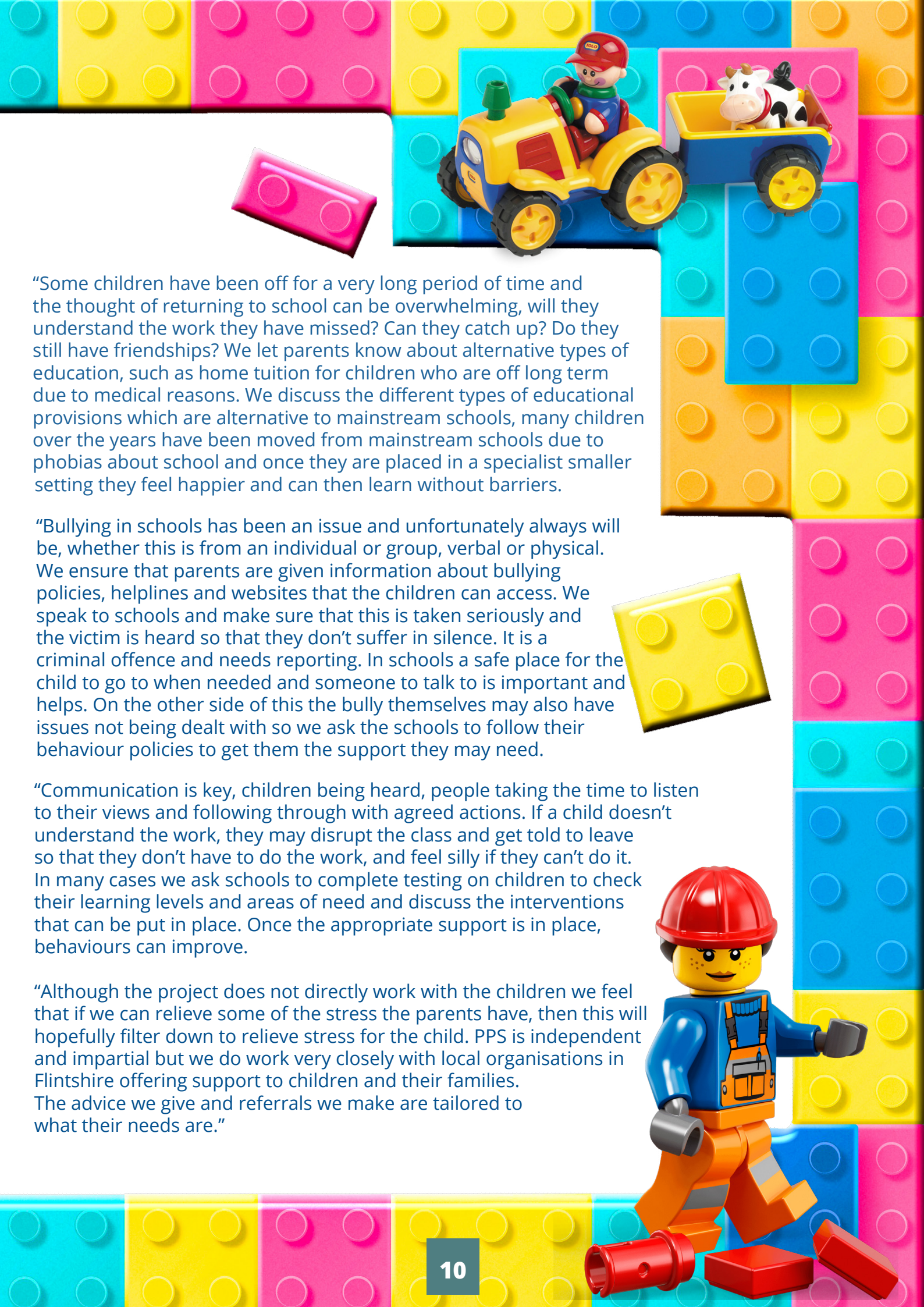
Citizens Advice Flintshire continues to do amazing work with the Parent Partnership Project. This is led by Vicky Hancock who specialises in working with parents/carers who have children with additional educational needs. Vicky is passionate about supporting children and with a young family of her own, she understands the importance of education.

We asked her for some more information on the project, she said "There has been a gradual increase in referrals every year that the project has been running. We feel that this is a positive increase and shows that people are more aware of the service and other agencies are recommending us, which we feel very proud of. Even with the high demand on the service we still promote and provide a holistic service.

"We have families that come to us who don't know their rights at all, they have arguments and are stuck in broken down relationships with schools. All this means that the child is sometimes stuck in the middle. The project has helped many families over the years to know their rights and to help with building relationships, which in the end, means that the child is getting the support they need. Children need to see that school and parents are working together otherwise this can cause anxiety and worry, impacting on their learning."

"We have had parents who have children in mainstream school who are struggling to cope due to their learning needs. We explain fully the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) process to them and they feel more confident in pushing for what would meet their child's additional needs better. Parents and children are supported in giving their views which are key to them getting the best advice and support.





"Some children have been off for a very long period of time and the thought of returning to school can be overwhelming, will they understand the work they have missed? Can they catch up? Do they still have friendships? We let parents know about alternative types of education, such as home tuition for children who are off long term due to medical reasons. We discuss the different types of educational provisions which are alternative to mainstream schools, many children over the years have been moved from mainstream schools due to phobias about school and once they are placed in a specialist smaller setting they feel happier and can then learn without barriers.

"Bullying in schools has been an issue and unfortunately always will be, whether this is from an individual or group, verbal or physical. We ensure that parents are given information about bullying policies, helplines and websites that the children can access. We speak to schools and make sure that this is taken seriously and the victim is heard so that they don't suffer in silence. It is a criminal offence and needs reporting. In schools a safe place for the child to go to when needed and someone to talk to is important and helps. On the other side of this the bully themselves may also have issues not being dealt with so we ask the schools to follow their behaviour policies to get them the support they may need.

"Communication is key, children being heard, people taking the time to listen to their views and following through with agreed actions. If a child doesn't understand the work, they may disrupt the class and get told to leave so that they don't have to do the work, and feel silly if they can't do it. In many cases we ask schools to complete testing on children to check their learning levels and areas of need and discuss the interventions that can be put in place. Once the appropriate support is in place, behaviours can improve.

"Although the project does not directly work with the children we feel that if we can relieve some of the stress the parents have, then this will hopefully filter down to relieve stress for the child. PPS is independent and impartial but we do work very closely with local organisations in Flintshire offering support to children and their families. The advice we give and referrals we make are tailored to what their needs are."

Marketing, Communications & Fundraising with Mandy Plant

Every charity has a need for fundraising. With that comes the need to market what the charity does and communications goes hand in hand. MCF Manager, Mandy, has been at the forefront of fundraising for 8 years now and has seen several successes throughout those years.

Having to catch her quickly before she's on her bike, we asked MCF Manager Mandy Plant to see how this department has developed this year. Mandy told us that "The year has seen a heavy focus on digital giving. We have been successful in setting up direct debit payments with all our regular givers donating online through PayPal and GoCardless. We are currently developing our own database which will play a vital key role in fundraising, supporting and campaigning for the people of Flintshire and help to sustain our charity's future.

"We have been fortunate for a number of years to receive significant core funding and support from Flintshire County Council. We also deliver a number of Government contracts and projects funded by the Welsh Government via Citizens Advice Cymru. Unfortunately, the contracts and core funding do not cover the entire cost of the services we provide. The MCF team's role is to diversify our fundraising streams by obtaining additional monies for the organisation from a range of grants, trusts, events, corporate support and individual donations, so that we are able to carry on delivering the range and level of services we currently provide.

"It has without doubt, been an immensely challenging year and the pandemic has thrown every charity off course. All of our events this year, including our Annual Sleep out in March 2020, have had to be cancelled and with that we have lost significant sums in vital fundraising income.

"Fortunately, we have a small, hardworking MCF team and the talents of Dylan Evans and Paul Bertrand have helped steer us in the right direction again. We have very quickly had to adapt to digital and for the foreseeable future all fundraising and communications will be digital. November 2020 will see the launch of our new Supporters Scheme and we are hoping that many people in Flintshire will make small monthly donations that will help us to continue to provide our vital free services. The demand for our service is growing daily as more and more people sadly lose their income and livelihoods to this pandemic. Unemployment, redundancy, poverty, and coronavirus debt inevitably affects the mental well-being of many of our clients.

"Mercifully, this year we have been awarded a significant grant and special thanks goes to the National Lottery Community Fund for believing in us to support more people with mental wellbeing issues. December 2020 sees the launch of our new digital advice service 'The Extra Mile Project' and quite frankly, it could not have come at better time.

"We want to give a really big thank you to all the following funders who have given us extra support this year and our promise to you is that we will be there to support the many local people that thought they would never need us. We are here for everyone."

- The Laspen Trust
- Moneysupermarket.com
- The Oakdale Trust
- FLVC emergency fund
- Moondance Foundation
- Community Cohesion Fund
- Tesco Community Grants – Bags of Help
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Anne Duchess of Westminster's Charity

A big thank you to our supporters this year



Volunteering with Mike Carroll

Volunteers are crucial to the charity and you could almost guarantee that in the process of getting advice, every single client will have been supported by a volunteer. That's because volunteers deliver different roles in all departments throughout the organisation. Volunteering can be extremely rewarding and CAF's view is that not only is volunteering a fantastic way to share your skills and give back to your local community, it also supports volunteers to seek out employment, both externally and within CAF.



We caught up with music loving volunteer Mike Carroll to get his perspective on the year and to find out a little more about the man who covers the reception desk every Wednesday.

Mike said "Volunteers like myself have always been extremely important to our charity, it's a mutual benefit to both the organisation and the individuals who take part. We get a high number of people expressing an interest in volunteering with us, in fact this year we had 93 in total. Unfortunately not all of these expressions of interest result in a new volunteer as it takes a really dedicated individual to commit the necessary time to volunteer with us. We had 24 new volunteers this year and it's great to be able to work with them.

"A big success this year has been part of the Rural Development Project, we saw the first intake of CAF digital assessors who started training in July 2019. Of the 9 trainee digital assessors, 6 were new volunteers and 3 saw it as a progression route (a receptionist, an admin assistant and an IT volunteer). This team of volunteers supported by the RDP team, has now considerably increased capacity to reach people in rural communities who find it difficult to access the service face to face. This year also saw the development by the MCF team of a new volunteer role of Database & Supporters Scheme Assistant to help with the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database and to assist with the administration and day to day running of the new CAF Supporters Scheme.

"I was delighted to hear that a fellow volunteer, Becki Crozier, achieved both the national Citizens Advice Certificate of Competence for Generalist Adviser and the national Citizens Advice Certificate of Competence for Gateway Assessor in just a year. Becki completed the self-study element of the adviser training in record time which is very impressive."

Pushing Mike to tell us more about himself he added: "Well I'm not one to talk about myself but if you must know more I suppose I should tell you that I'm learning to play the violin. I started on the drums but I'm trying something new. The main reason why I volunteer is because it's another great way to stay social. I've loved meeting all the different types of people that come through our doors and would recommend it to anyone."

Administration with Sophie Fitzgerald

Behind the scenes and working hard is the Administration team who are often the unsung heroes. However Citizens Advice Flintshire understands their importance and how they are crucial to providing an advice service that helps thousands of local people. Clients can almost guarantee that an administrator has supported them at one point or another. From organising appointments to controlling the post, whatever the task you can be sure that someone like Sophie played a role in the service. We caught up with pup crazy Sophie and asked her how the year went for her team.

She said "In 2019/2020 the Admin department had one of its busiest years supporting all departments and projects. We expanded the team by recruiting more volunteers – the team consisted of 4 paid staff and 7 volunteers (the most the Admin department has ever seen).

"We're often the first point of contact for clients as they call the Admin line and it is important for staff and volunteers to have a good all round knowledge and understanding of the services we offer at Citizens Advice Flintshire so that the clients receive correct information and have the best possible journey. This year in the Admin department we wanted to focus on improving the journey of clients who needed help with completing benefit forms. We chose this because of the deadlines clients would have and the importance of getting them help as quickly as possible. We upskilled our Admin team by providing them with training so that they can gather the relevant information needed to either book the client an appointment or provide them with the correct information so that they can complete the form. This went really well and the staff were excellent in their training.

"We have many roles in the Admin department, from supporting staff, booking appointments for clients, typing letters and inputting data. In March 2020 the Admin department had to see some major changes in the way we work due to the pandemic with everyone working from home and although difficult it was the support from everyone which meant that the transition went smoothly. The future is now digital and we are utilising these tools moving forwards. We want to ensure we can still provide the best possible service for the clients moving in to the next year.

"I would also like to just add a huge well done and thank you to Sarah and Emily for adapting to the new way of working and to all staff/volunteers past and present who have helped support the department this year."

We quickly asked Sophie 'why Dogs?' to which she replied "Isn't it obvious? They're the best and coolest of all animals. They truly are your best friend."

In loving memory of Ann Parry



Settled Status with Chloe Peers the EUCR Lead

Citizens Advice Flintshire has always challenged inequality and faced issues head on. One of the current problems our EU / EEA / Swiss community face is the need to apply for settled or pre-settled status by 30th June 2021.

The EU Citizens Rights Service provides free, information, guidance advice and practical support to the EU Settlement Scheme and in-depth, specialist help on wider issues including social welfare and discrimination.

The service is funded by the Welsh Government to help EU, EEA or Swiss citizens and their families living in the UK to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme in order to legally continue living in the UK after 30th June 2021. This is necessary to ensure they will still have their right to work, access the NHS, study and claim benefits in the UK. We caught up with running enthusiast and Project Lead Chloe Peers for more information.

Chloe said "67,200 applications have been made so far to the EU Settlement Scheme in Wales as of September 2020. The exact number of people eligible to apply to the scheme is unknown, there are expected to be 1000s of people left to apply and time is running out. Our small team of advisers have been promoting the scheme to make sure that those who need to apply are aware of the scheme, how to apply, the deadlines, and the implications of not applying. We have been helping people in Wales with applications to the EU Settlement Scheme. We will help people gather the information needed for the application, and to prove they have been resident in the UK. Once we have helped gather all the necessary information we will help people complete the application form, we will check that our clients have received the right outcome, and that they are aware of their rights in the UK going forward.

"We have assisted over 300 people with their enquiries about the EU Settlement Scheme since the start of the project. Iolanda Viegas and Raquel Fernandes who are caseworkers on the EU Citizens Rights Project are both Portuguese Citizens. Iolanda and Raquel feel that this has helped their work with clients, as they have had to go through the same process themselves. We are here to help anyone that needs our assistance to secure their rights in North Wales. We are able to support people in any language using interpretation services.

"Alongside helping with EU Settlement Scheme applications, our Employment & Discrimination caseworker, Emily Yue, has been helping those who feel they have been treated unfairly at work, or are at risk of exploitation if they don't get the right advice on the scheme. Emily has helped around 100 people with employment and discrimination enquires since the start of the project."

Asking Chloe to tell us more about herself she added, "Outside of work I like to spend my time outdoors, running and enjoying the Welsh countryside. I recently completed my first virtual marathon after being inspired by some of my fellow running colleagues. Speaking of this, I want to say thank you to my team this year. They are always doing their very best to support the people who seek our help."



**Citizens Advice Flintshire
Terrig House
Chester Street
Mold
Flintshire
CH7 1EG**

Advicelink helpline: 0800 7022 020
Local helpline: 0300 3302 118

Online information: www.flintshirecab.org.uk

Twitter: @flintshirecab
Facebook: @CitizensAdviceFlintshire
Instagram: CitizensAdviceFlintshire

Charity Number: 1090010
Company Number: 03985923