



ANNUAL REPORT 2015 - 2016



Registered Charity No. 1113524
Company No. 5730678

2015 / 2016
HEADLINES FROM THIS YEAR'S ACTIVITIES

- BENEFIT ENQUIRY LINE**
- **583 BENEFIT ENQUIRIES ADVISING ON 1,001 SEPARATE BENEFIT ISSUES**
 - **£67,000 IN MONEY GAINS IDENTIFIED**
- INFORMATION ITEMS**
- **5,775 HARD COPY LEAFLETS DISTRIBUTED & 34,656 DOWNLOADED FROM OUR WEBSITE**
- TRAINING COURSES**
- **49 COURSES & PRESENTATIONS**
 - **601 ATTENDEES**
 - **AVERAGE 9/10 QUALITY RATING FOR OUR COURSES BY ATTENDEES**
- APPEALS CASEWORK**
- **359 REFERRALS**
 - **323 CASES CLOSED IN YEAR**
 - **83% SUCCESS RATE AT TRIBUNAL**
 - **£1,801,924 IN MONEY GAINS**
- TAKE UP CAMPAIGNS/ SPECIAL PROJECTS**
- **667 REFERRALS RECEIVED**
 - **EVERY £1 OF FUNDING RETURNS £8 IN BENEFITS FOR CLIENTS**
 - **£1.18 MILLION IN MONEY GAINS**



Chief Executive's Report

Whilst sitting down to prepare this year's annual report I took a little time to reflect on the fact that 2016 marked thirty years since WWRAS was first established. Back in 1986 a new Social Security Act was passed by Parliament which would completely change the structure of means-tested benefits in this country; fast forward thirty years and "Back to the Future" springs to mind - minus the DeLorean and Michael J Fox!

WWRAS was set up some eighteen months prior to the implementation of that Act and quickly set about the task of ensuring that as many Warwickshire residents as possible were helped to maximise their income prior to the change. There have been some monumental changes in the Social Security system over the past thirty years and latterly we have seen at first-hand the Government's unrelenting reforms to the welfare state which have had a disproportionate impact on children and families and people with disabilities or illnesses who are unable to work. In fact our on-going work with families and children via our Children Centre Project was initially set up seven years ago in response to various changes to the Social Security System which at that time affected the way in which family benefits were administrated.

Throughout this time, despite a lot of change (and some recurring themes) in the delivery of the Welfare State, the one thing that has remained constant for us as an organisation, is the ethos and mission statement that has driven our work. The common thread that exists in all of our work is to protect the most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents in Warwickshire and to increase the awareness of Social Security benefits amongst Warwickshire Councils, agencies and members of the public and to raise the level of benefits claimed in Warwickshire.

During the past thirty years in pursuit of its charitable aims WWRAS has helped to secure additional benefit entitlement for county residents in the region of **£68 million pounds**; the true figure will be even higher than this if one takes into account inflation and the fact that many people will remain on benefits for longer than a year which is the period over which we estimate our figures. Much of this money goes on to be spent in the local economy; in shops and on local goods and services, thus the economic impact of our work is more significant and far-reaching than the £68 million figure quoted above.



2015/16 Financial Gains

In 2015/16 through our Tribunal representation; Benefits Take-Up work and advice provided via our Benefits Enquiry Line (BEL) we secured financial gains for Warwickshire residents totalling **£3,025,426**. It should be noted that these are vast underestimates of the actual amounts gained. In addition to this amount our staff also identified a further £26,220 in potential benefits as a result of our advice to the clients of BEL users.

The amount of money raised for Warwickshire residents through our Appeals and Take-Up work continues to represent significant returns on investment for funders. In 2015/16 we achieved returns of nearly **£8** in increased benefits for every £1 of funding received, which is a truly remarkable testament to the added value that WWRAS provides for the funding it receives.

Proactive Advice Work

In an age where benefit claimants are increasingly viewed unfavourably by some in our society, often fuelled by inaccurate press reporting, it is also worthy of note, that despite the furore over the amount of benefits that people receive, (which has led to punitive measures such as the benefits cap), it has been estimated that some **£15 billion of benefits** goes unclaimed each year.

In reaching this estimate of the vast under claiming of benefits, the charity Turn2Us in its report last year highlighted that “nearly three-fifths (57%) of those not receiving this support said they had been deterred from checking or claiming potential benefits entitlements because they did not think they would be eligible. In addition, over a fifth (22%) of households with children said they were unsure of how or where to find out about this help, whilst a quarter (25%) of people with disabilities felt recent welfare benefit changes had made it too difficult to apply.” As a result, over four-fifths (81%) had not checked what welfare benefits they could be entitled to within the last year. This is highest for full-time (86%) and part-time workers (87%), suggesting they may not be aware of in-work benefits which exist to top-up low incomes.

When one looks at the feedback from our own clients, these statistics do resonate strongly, as often people will tell us that until they were contacted by WWRAS they did not know that they would be entitled to anything, whilst at the same time admitting that they were struggling financially. The approach that we take to our benefits Take Up work is very proactive, as we work with local partners, such as local Councils, and use local and national data to specifically target those groups whom we think are not claiming their full entitlement. We look ahead to try and determine what



changes to social security law will adversely impact certain groups and seek to try and protect income where possible by encouraging people to claim their legal entitlement. This could be in the form of encouraging people back into the work place by calculating what in-work benefits someone may be entitled to, or by advising a family who are struggling to care for a child with a disability what their correct legal entitlement is.

Indeed, our survey of Take Up clients in 2015/16 showed that **63%** of those surveyed had gained benefits as a result of our advice and assistance. In addition **45%** of clients said that following our advice and assistance they were now more confident dealing with household bills and **40%** said that they were now more able to pay their rent, mortgage or Council Tax and **42%** said that they felt more able to afford their gas, electricity and water bills. By enabling people to be better able to pay their household bills; to pay their rent and to pay for essentials such as food and clothing, this reduces the reliance on other front line services which may need to become involved if the family became homeless or unable to care for their children.

Of course, the role of WWRAS as a specialist advice agency in the Social Security field is more crucial now than it has ever been, but that can only remain possible if secure funding is available. We are proud of our funding relationships, particularly with local Councils and Warwickshire County Council (WCC) which has enabled us to continue delivering advice to the county's most deprived areas and residents for the past thirty years. However, as the years have passed stable long-term funding continues to be something that remains a constant struggle to maintain and unfortunately the future remains uncertain despite the demand for our services being higher than they have ever been.

Finances

This year saw our core funding remain at the same level as the previous year which allowed WWRAS to retain its core team and our contract continued to be managed by the WCC People Group. However, from April 2016 our contract has been managed by the Localities and Partnerships Team which is part of the Communities Group at WCC. The Communities Group already has considerable experience of managing advice services contracts of other key providers in the county such as the CAB and we look forward to being able to continue to provide our unique range of specialist welfare rights services and working with our new contract managers to ensure that the advice we provide reaches the clients who need it the most. Our contract was extended on the same terms until 31st March 2017 and we were informed in the summer of 2016 that our contract would be put out to tender (with new contracts awarded from April 2017) but this process has stalled, with no news on what our core funding arrangements will be beyond March 2017.



Funding Levels 2015/16

Although our long-term core funding remains an issue, our overall unrestricted income increased fairly significantly in 2015/16 by just over 14% to £450,922. This was mainly due to additional project/Take-Up funding which accounted for over 35% of our total funding this year, but this is often short-term funding which is not renewed.

We ended the financial year with a modest surplus which was allocated according to our Company Reserves Policy, with the majority of these funds being placed in our contingency fund to cover our on-going liabilities to the Local Government Pension Scheme and redundancy provision. A full set of our end of year accounts is available on demand.

WCC Local Government Pension Scheme Deficit

This year WWRAS continued to pay employer pension contributions of 25.6% of gross salary to the LGPS in order to address a deficit in our future service contributions. As stated in last year's report we are also liable to make an annual lump sum payment of £29,000 to the Pension Fund; we have been informed that we are liable to make these payments for the next 7.8 years in order to address a deficit in our past service contributions. WWRAS was not the only agency affected by this, as significant numbers of other voluntary sector organisations in the county were also similarly affected.

Following a period of negotiation by a group comprising of Warwickshire Citizens Advice service and ourselves it was agreed by the County Council that it would fund the lump sum payment of £29,000, in the form of a restricted grant, for 2014-15 and then it was also announced by the Council that this payment would be repeated in 2015-16 pending the outcome of further discussions about repayment terms. On-going discussions with the County Council and Pension Fund Managers have now led to WWRAS formally requesting an extension of the repayment period of the deficit in order to provide a more affordable repayment schedule in the future. At the time of writing this issue still remains unresolved and moving into a new tri-annual valuation Pension in 2017 the pension deficit remains a significant concern to WWRAS and its Trustee Board.

The Continuing Impact of Welfare Reform and the Future....

We are in the midst of historic welfare reform, with many significant changes still to be implemented thoroughly and new ones added, making it an extremely challenging time for Warwickshire residents. One consequence is the expected growth in the need for appeal representation – The Tribunal Service expects appeal tribunals to triple in the next two



years and we have had early evidence of this with a 30% increase in referrals to our service this year!

Over the past few years, firstly the Coalition Government and then its Conservative successor have introduced a string of Budgets, Autumn Statements and Spending Reviews, all of which have led to changes in the Social Security/Tax Credit system. The controversial nature of benefit changes has also meant that some of the announced changes were then withdrawn. Several Government initiatives started in previous years are picking up their pace in 2016/17, such as the movement of existing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants to the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and the final tranche of the migration of Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance and some Income Support claims to Employment & Support Allowance (ESA).

In particular the effects of Universal Credit are being felt in the county with all areas now “live”. As well as some people being better off financially, there will be some significant losers with Universal Credit (e.g. those who would otherwise get one/some/all of the various disability premiums, particularly couples) and WWRAS will look to work proactively to preserve maximum benefit entitlement prior to a client moving onto Universal Credit in order to take advantage of transitional protection.

The financial environment remains no less complicated and challenging, with funding still hard to come by for small to medium charities and with an increased demand for our services due to the impacts of welfare reform. We are hoping that by amending our articles of association in order to expand our area of operation to neighbouring regions it will mean that we can bid for funding which is currently unavailable to us due to the previous restriction in our governing document to work within the county boundaries. We continue to work closely with the County Council and local Councils and with other partners such as schools and children’s centres in order to maximise funding opportunities whilst providing a range of specialist services to these groups.

We would like to thank all of our funders for their continuing support, financial and otherwise in enabling us to continue to provide these essential services; in particular we would like to thank Warwickshire County Council, our largest funder which has supported and funded us for the past 30 years.

We also continue to try and strengthen the Trustee Board in the key roles of Chair and Treasurer, in order to provide the organisation with the level of strategic experience and expertise that is necessary to prepare us for these future challenges.



I would also like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to our former Chair, Greg Gavin, who resigned from his position on the Trustee Board this year, due to relocation to the North East with his job. Greg was a much valued member of the Board and we are extremely grateful for his dedicated contribution to our work and development as an organisation during his time with us and we wish him all the best for the future. At the same time, we also recruited a new member to our Board this year, Alan Markey, who has vast experience in the welfare rights field. Alan currently sits as the Chair of the National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers and is Director of a group of advice agencies in Coventry. He also previously headed up the National Citizens Advice Welfare Benefits Specialist Support Team. We extend a warm welcome to Alan and look forward to working with him.

Finally a huge thank you goes to the current Board members and staff whose experience, commitment and professionalism enables WWRAS to reach out and deliver a range of specialist services that respond to the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society during a period when they are needed more than ever.

Mark Stanyer
Chief Executive
January 2017

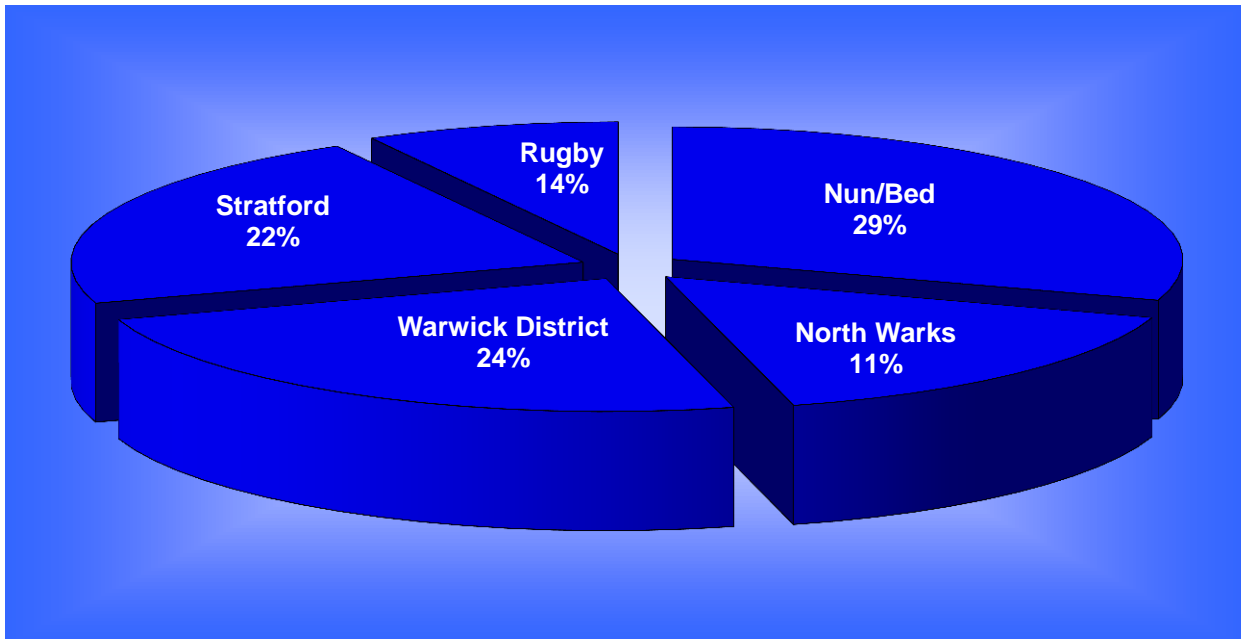


APPEALS WORK 2015/16

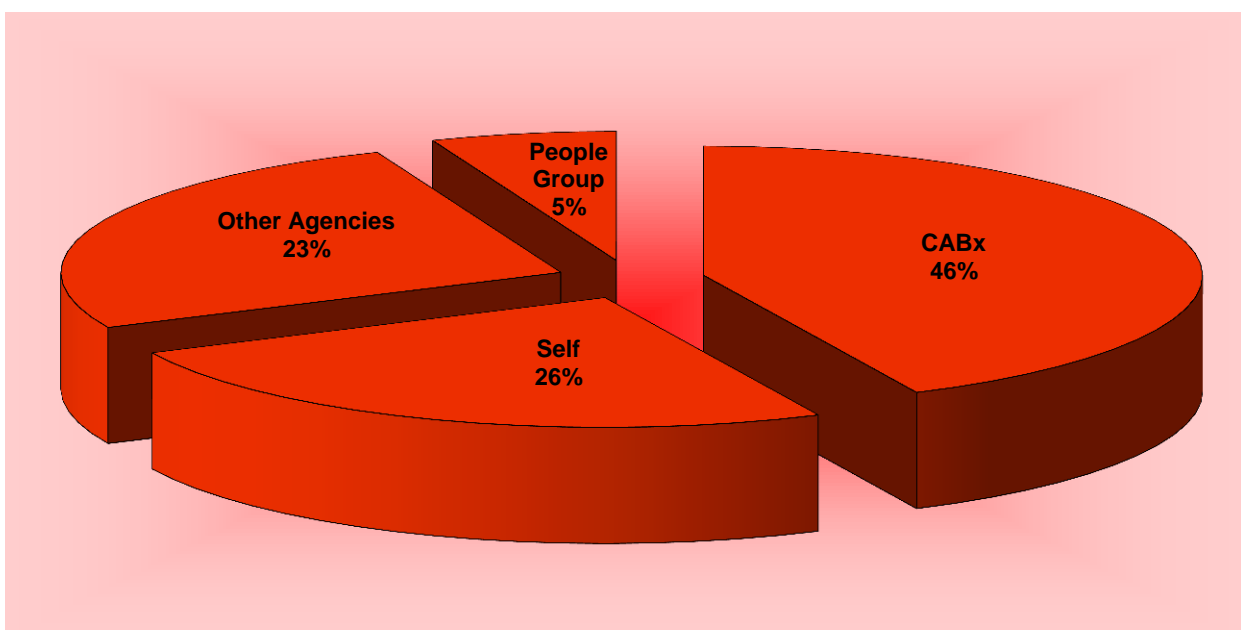
359 referrals received this year
Over £1.8 million in benefits raised for clients
83% success rate at appeal hearings



The spread of referrals coming from each area was:



The spread of referrals coming from agencies was:



Appeals Representation

Our Tribunal representation service has always been a hugely in-demand service and this year it has been as vital as ever with increased requests for representation from Warwickshire residents, mainly due to the continuing changes to social security benefits as a consequence of the Governments Welfare Reform programme. We help to provide a legal recourse to often extremely vulnerable people so that they can challenge incorrect decisions on their benefit entitlement and this is required because of the poor standards of decision-making by the DWP, but also due to the increasingly complex and labyrinthine volumes of legislation which underpin the welfare state.

The benefits being appealed (e.g. care & mobility benefits) are overwhelmingly related to clients that the WCC People Group has a statutory responsibility to protect. Representation includes advocacy in a court setting before a panel led by a Judge and adds a high level of stress to already vulnerable customers, who tell us that without the help we provide would either not bother pursuing an appeal in the first place or they would not feel able to attend the Tribunal. WWRAS, through its package of services, is therefore able to provide an important voice and legal resource to those who need it the most.

Financial Gains - Appeals Work

During this year, through our Appeal Tribunal work we have successfully secured benefit entitlement for clients totalling **£1,801,924**. It is also important to note that this is a considerable under-estimate of the economic benefits that our work produces to local communities in Warwickshire.

This figure is a significant increase compared to last year's gains figure and can mainly be explained by an increase in appeal referrals and Tribunals attended but also due to an increase in our overall success rate at Tribunal. Although we have recorded an increase in financial gains this year, we have highlighted in previous reports that incrementally over the past few years, financial gains secured for clients at Tribunal will continue to be diminished due to the effects of welfare reform legislation and changes in DWP and Tribunal procedural rules which limits the amount of backdating one can expect to receive if an appeal is successful. This will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future and financial gains are also expected to be significantly lower once Universal Credit is fully implemented due to the loss of various premiums from claimants' benefit income.

Number of referrals received and from where

We received **359** referrals to our Appeals Team in 2015/16, which is a **30%** increase on the previous year. We, therefore exceeded our funder's target which was 350 referrals for the year.

As well as representing clients before the courts WWRAS also took the decision some time ago to receive referrals at the earlier mandatory reconsideration stage, which is the first stage of the appeals process and was introduced for the first time by the Government in October 2013 as part of an overhaul of the appeals system. This earlier stage involves the appellant having to ask the DWP for an internal review of a benefit decision before being able to appeal against this decision to an independent Tribunal, if still unhappy with the outcome. We feel that this early intervention is crucial in order that we can utilise our expertise to try and ensure cases have better prospects of success at an earlier stage, or alternatively to ensure that cases are moved more swiftly through the system. This approach also ensures that a consistent, evidential case is built for appellants from the outset, which assists greatly if the case does indeed proceed to a Tribunal.

The increased volume of referrals to our Appeals team has continued in 2015/16 and at the time of writing has increased even further throughout 2016 and confirms what we have been reporting for some time, that the increase in appeal referrals will continue to rise due to the significant impacts on clients of welfare reform and Tribunal and DWP procedural changes. As the only specialist welfare benefits advice agency in the county, we have always had to be flexible and responsive to change in demand which accompanies Government reform - this time is no exception.

The number of appeal referrals from the county Citizens Advice service continues to increase and as a specialist support service we continue to assist front line agencies such as this at a time when their clients are facing significant pressures from the welfare state which in turn presents its own set of pressures on the agencies resources. By utilising our specialist resource this frees up those agencies to focus on their own areas of expertise and is an example of strong and effective partnership work.

Self-referrals to WWRAS have also remained high and have been a rising trend over the past two years. This can in part be attributed to our increased publicity, promotion and targeting of members of the general public with regard to PIP appeals, which has been accompanied by our PIP telephone consultancy line exclusively for use by the public and which complements our Benefit Enquiry Line which is dedicated for use by front line professionals. The increase in direct referrals may also be because there are now far fewer frontline agencies available in the county for the public to access advice from.



Tribunal representation

323 appeal cases were closed in this year. Of these, 28 cases were successfully revised before hearing and 2 appeals were part revised in the clients' favour. 231 cases went to a full hearing which is an increase of over 62% compared to the number of hearings we attended in the previous year. Of these cases, 193 were won and 38 lost. A further 17 appeals were withdrawn on our advice and there were 41 appeals that were withdrawn because the client chose not to pursue their appeal.

This screening of cases and advice on the relative merits of a client's case is an extremely important part of the representation process and Tribunal Judges in particular warmly welcome our involvement in this respect as it frees up the court's time and resources and also means that the cases we do take to tribunal are judged in this light. Judges' know that if WWRAS represents a client before them that we have already assessed the relative merits of the case. This does not mean that WWRAS will only represent those cases that are "sure fire" winners; this is far from the case, but we do have to assess that a case has reasonable prospects of success in order to ensure an effective use of our resources.

We were also successful in two appeals against First Tier Tribunal decisions to the Upper Tribunal, which is equivalent to the High Court, and where we have to demonstrate an arguable point of law for an appeal to succeed.

Our Tribunal representation achieved a success rate of **83%** at hearings where we represented the client. This compares very favourably to a national average success rate of 47% without representation and 63% when accompanied by a representative. This excellent success rate highlights the considerable skills, knowledge and experience of our appeal representatives. The success rate would actually be a lot higher than this if one factors in the number of cases which were successfully revised before hearing, thus negating the need to go before a Tribunal.



 **CASE****STUDY 1 – Caroline Harrison (Appeals Worker)**

1. Our client was the mother of a little girl aged 2 – who was also her daughter’s appointee.
2. Our client’s daughter had been awarded the middle rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for day time care needs. However, in the parent’s view the worst time was during the night - highlighted by the fact that our client was suffering from mental health problems as a result of stress and lack of sleep.
3. Our client was her daughter’s main carer as her father was trying to continue to work. Our client appealed against the decision and was referred to us.
4. There was an element of risk with this appeal as the existing award for the day time care needs could be reviewed and benefit could be reduced rather than increased at appeal.
5. There was additional difficulty with this case as there had not yet been a diagnosis of the child’s condition. However, we were able to obtain evidence to support case law that directs that the symptoms were relevant if they were “capable” of diagnosis.
6. The Tribunal contacted us before hand to let us know that based on the evidence we had submitted the parents did not have to attend the hearing. The highest rate of the care component was awarded by the Tribunal based on the submission that we wrote and put forward and the evidence that we obtained to support this.
7. Our client’s daughter then turned 3 which meant that although she could not qualify for the lower rate of the mobility component she could apply for the higher rate. As our client’s daughter did not have any physical disability the only route to this was the complex Severe Mental Impairment (SMI) route.
8. Part of the law which relates to this route states that you must be entitled to the higher rate of the care component of DLA – which had been secured at the earlier appeal.
9. We advised our client accordingly and a form was completed requesting an award of DLA based on these rules. Unfortunately following the application an award was not made. We then supported our client and her family through the dispute process and an appeal was subsequently made against the refusal.



10. Further evidence was collected which was specific to the SMI rules. The case went to appeal and our client was awarded the higher rate of the mobility component on the SMI rules on her daughter's behalf.
11. This award then gave the family the freedom to consider obtaining a car through the Motability scheme and a blue badge to help with the difficulties of getting a child with severe sensory limitations out of the house.



CASE

STUDY 2 – Tim Feuser (Appeals/Take Up Worker)

1. Mr A claimed Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) on the basis that he was suffering from depression and anxiety.
2. ESA is a benefit which can be paid to people who are unable to work as a result of illness or disability. Initially a GP 'fit note' is sufficient to evidence that the claimant meets the conditions of the benefit. They are then required to undergo the 'Work Capability Assessment'.
3. In order to remain entitled to the benefit the claimant needs to score at least 15 points against a set of pre-defined activity and descriptors. Alternatively, it has to be accepted that there would be a risk to the claimant's, or anyone else's, health if they were found fit for work.
4. In due course Mr A underwent a face-to-face assessment with a DWP approved healthcare professional (HCP). The HCP recommended that he did not score any points and a Decision Maker confirmed that he was no longer entitled to ESA.
5. Mr A's mental health problems were affecting his ability to concentrate or to deal with correspondence and were preventing him from going out or making and receiving phone calls.
6. Mr A was fortunate in that he remained on good terms with his ex-partner, Miss B. She supported him to challenge the decision refusing benefit and liaised with WWRAS in relation to his appeal. She had also assisted him to complete the ESA50 claimant questionnaire at the beginning of his claim.
7. In preparation for the appeal I arranged with Miss B that I would telephone Mr A at a time when she could be with him. I wanted to explain the qualifying tests for the benefit and ask Mr A questions to establish how his illness impacted on his ability to meet these conditions.



8. After a couple of minutes it became apparent that Mr A was finding our telephone conversation very difficult. He became noticeably distressed and upset talking about his health and asked to end the conversation. He passed the phone to Miss B and we agreed that I would carry out a home-visit, as it was felt that Mr A may find this easier to cope with.
9. I met with Mr A and Miss B at her home. Mr A again appeared to find talking about his mental health problems distressing. He looked tense, seemed agitated and had difficulty focussing on the conversation and my questions. I was left with the impression that he was clearly very unwell.
10. I prepared a submission outlining the background to Mr A's difficulties and, giving brief examples, listed the tests that I proposed Mr A met.
11. I attended the Tribunal hearing with Mr A and Miss B. It soon became apparent that the Tribunal were struggling to accept that Mr A was in fact suffering with the problems that had been put forward. I found this difficult to understand, as it appeared apparent to me that he was having problems following the Tribunal's questioning and was becoming more and more confused. Miss B attempted to assist him at one stage and was reproached for this by the Tribunal.
12. The Tribunal kept referring Mr A back to what had been written on the ESA50 form at the start of his claim when his condition appeared to be less severe. Mr A and Miss B were trying to explain that his condition had deteriorated since the form had been completed. The Tribunal appeared unwilling to accept this and were operating under the impression that the form had been filled in 3 months before the face-to-face assessment and decision under appeal. The form was dated and had in fact been completed some 15 months prior.
13. I attempted to interject on a couple of occasions in order to rectify this misapprehension but was told to wait. I eventually managed to correct the Tribunal and Mr A did succeed with his appeal.
14. Neither Mr A nor Miss B were aware of the mistaken adverse inferences that were being drawn by the Tribunal and they had both at that stage become too flustered to realise that a mistake about a date had been made. Although Mr A was being assisted by Miss B, who had proved herself entirely capable, I believe that independent representation was a significant factor in ensuring a successful outcome for this client.



1. Mr A is a Polish national. He had been physically attacked, aged 13 years old, whilst living in Poland and subsequently experienced a breakdown in his mental health. When he came to the UK in 2008 he attempted to work in warehouses and factories but he had difficulty holding down these jobs due to panic attacks and anxiety.
2. Mr A's father came to the UK in 2006. He has been in full employment since then. Mr A initially came to the UK in 2008, aged 18 years old, and he had a job working in a warehouse. His mother came to the UK in the 2009 with his younger brother and sisters. The whole immediate family now resided, worked or were in education in the UK.
3. In 2009 and 2010 Mr A had two mental health breakdowns a few months apart. He had been attempting to complete a college course. After the second breakdown he was admitted to hospital in a mental health facility. He remained there for three months and was on tablets and injections to control what was now diagnosed as schizophrenia. In 2010 he entered a rehabilitation unit where he remained for one year. He then returned to his parent's home.
4. In 2012 Mr A went back to live with his father and mother. Apart from the fifteen months spent in hospital and rehabilitation this is where he had lived since 2008 up to the present date.
5. Mr A was referred to WWRAS in 2013 by the Community Mental Health Team as he had no income at all. He had applied for Employment and Support Allowance in 2011 and this had been refused by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The grounds for the refusal were that Mr A had no right to reside in the UK because he was not a dependent of someone with a right to reside, nor a worker, job seeker or in higher education.
6. In the meantime whilst dealing with his ESA refusal, WWRAS also advised Mr A to claim Disability Living Allowance (a disability benefit paid to those who need care/supervision) and this was awarded to him in 2013. He received a backdated amount of nearly £3,000 and a weekly payment of £112. His mother was then able to claim Carers Allowance for looking after him and received a weekly amount of £62 and a backdated amount of £745.
7. In 2014 Mr A started a computer course at the local college. Once again he had to leave that course after a few weeks as he could not cope with the work he needed to complete.

8. In refusing Mr A's ESA claim, the DWP argued that Mr A's father had a right to reside along with his immediate dependents (the other children and his wife) but that Mr A had no such right as he came to the UK 11 days after his 18th birthday and was therefore classed as an adult and not a dependent.
9. As part of our casework WWRAS researched the complex immigration, EU legislation and case law and was able to present to the Social Security Tribunal an argument that Mr A derived a right to reside in the UK because his parents had still provided Mr A with a roof over his head; clothing, footwear, food, college materials and emotional support. Without such support Mr A would have been without the necessities of life.
10. The tribunal agreed that Mr A was a dependent of his father and benefit was awarded from 2011. Mr A therefore received arrears of ESA in excess of £22,000 for the four year period that he had been without the benefit.

CLIENT FEEDBACK - APPEALS WORK

- **98%** of appeal clients who responded to our "User Feedback Questionnaire" this year, told us that the advice we gave was either very easy or easy to understand;
- **96%** were very satisfied or satisfied with the overall level of service that they received;
- **100%** of respondents also said that they would recommend us to someone else if they needed legal help or advice about benefits matters;
- **95%** of respondents said that we kept them very well or well updated about the progress of their case;
- **91%** of clients said that we listened very well to what they had to say;
- **95%** of those who responded said that they were happy with the way that our representatives presented their case at tribunal.

Some of the comments made by users:

"My representative was lovely & so understanding, I feel like the work she did on my behalf really did win the tribunal for me & was brilliant at handling the proceedings on my behalf when I couldn't. She was so professional & so helpful..."



"I would tell everyone who is in the same boat I was in not to give up hope. If you have the evidence to back it up then don't be afraid to proceed and fight for your rights."

"My representative was extremely knowledgeable, experienced and capable. I hugely enjoyed being supported by her. Her advice was invaluable and she supported me to a successful outcome. I am so very, very grateful."

"You kept me informed all the way, so I was very happy with the service I received and I would recommend you to other people. Thank you very much."

"I can't fault service! You took my case v late in the process & got all the info together. I was v scared to go to appeal but knowing beforehand who would be there & what would happen was a great help & WR Worker explained things with patience. Great Service!"



BENEFITS TAKE-UP WORK & SPECIAL PROJECTS 2015/16



667 referrals received

Just over £ 1.18 million in benefits raised for clients

Every £1 of Take-Up funding raises just over £8 in additional benefits

Take-Up & Special Project Gains 2015/16

We have continued to bring in additional funds from other sources to promote take up of benefits amongst clients who do not traditionally access advice services. This work continues to return excellent outcomes for our clients when it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure funding for this type of work due to diminishing budgets.

In 2015/16 we raised **£148,638** in extra funding for Take-Up work and we secured just in excess of **£1.18 million** in increased benefits for Warwickshire residents through various Take-Up campaigns.

The amount of money raised for Warwickshire residents through our Take-Up work continues to represent significant returns on investment for funders. In 2015/16 we achieved returns of just over **£8** in increased benefits for every £1 of funding received. These are excellent returns and are down to the incredible hard work, expertise and diligence of our staff.

It is important to note that our ability to do Take-Up work is only made possible because our core funding affords us the flexibility and capacity for funding applications to be submitted and for projects to be managed effectively. This is an important aspect of our relationship with WCC, which then enables us to produce this important, value-added work, in local communities across the county.

Take-Up and Special Project Work carried out in 2015/16

Targeted Take Up work with County Children's Centres

The project's aim is to deliver benefits Take-Up work to low income families, working with Children's Centres. This project has been running for the past seven years, and was funded initially through Nuneaton and Bedworth Area Committee and more recently through the Warwickshire County Council Local Welfare Scheme. This year the project extended its reach across the entire county working with around twenty Children's centres in all parts of the county in areas of high deprivation. The funding for this project expires in March 2017 and we are currently looking for continuation funding beyond this date, otherwise the project will be unable to continue.



In 2015/16 we advised **338** new clients. This is an increase of 26% when compared with the previous year.

We advised clients on **443** separate benefit issues and benefit claims. **66%** of referrals came from Nuneaton and Bedworth Children’s Centres; **16 %** from Rugby Children’s Centres; **12%** of referrals from Stratford Centres; **4.5%** from North Warwickshire and **1.5%** of referrals came from Warwick District Children’s Centres.

The total amount of additional benefit entitlement that we secured for users of County Children’s Centres was **£639,765** between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016. This is an extremely impressive sum, which represents a return on investment of just over **£10** for every £1 of funding which we received from the Local Welfare Fund for this project. In addition we provided talks to Children’s Centre Teams, especially focussing on the welfare reform changes affecting their clients and WWRAS also contributed to OFSTED inspections and CAF assessments as key partners to the Children’s Centres.

Children’s Centre Area	Number of Referrals	Number of benefit issues	Financial Gains £
Nuneaton and Bedworth	222	331	455,513
Stratford District	40	45	71,552
Rugby Borough	55	42	60,181
North Warwickshire	16	17	41,862
Warwick District	5	8	10,657
Total	338	443	£639,765

Free School Meals Take-Up Work

Data analysis shows that that there is a significant gap between those who are eligible to claim Free School Meals (FSM) and those who actually do. Contrary to perception this gap is worse in deprived areas and less evident in affluent areas. Failure to claim FSM not only results in lost income for the school but it also affects the family’s financial situation and potentially their health. Evidence also suggests that families who are not claiming their FSM entitlement are also likely to be missing out on other benefits.

The planning and preparation for this project began in early March 2014, following a successful application for funding to the Warwickshire Local Welfare Fund. An action plan was initially drawn up in consultation with Warwickshire County Council and schools in the chosen areas were then contacted and invited to participate. Each school was asked to pay a £2,000 contribution, towards the project and this has not proved a significant obstacle in securing school participation, although for a minority of schools with a smaller pupil roll it was an issue justifying the initial outlay. A lot of additional work has therefore had to be undertaken in order to secure agreement from schools to be a part of the project and thanks must go to the WCC Local Community teams who have worked extremely hard with schools to secure their participation in the project.

Schools were targeted on the basis of data analysis which showed where the gap was greatest between those who can claim FSM and those who do, but as not all schools wished to or were able to participate replacement schools sometimes had to be selected where Head Teachers had identified that there was a low take up of FSM in their school.

Due to delays with schools signing up to the project, the Warwickshire Local Welfare Fund, who financed the work, agreed to us carrying funds forward to 2015/16 to enable us to continue our work in Nuneaton and Bedworth and Rugby, having worked with Warwick District and Stratford schools in the previous year. Therefore, although we have still been working on open cases in other parts of the county, the main focus of our work this year has been schools in Nuneaton and Bedworth, North Warwickshire and beginning the final phase of our project in Rugby which we started at the beginning of 2016.

This year we received **301** referrals from schools, advised parents on **216** separate benefit issues and secured just over **£320,000** in financial gains.

We also helped parents to claim an additional **58** FSM, which meant that schools secured just in excess of **£75,500** in additional Pupil Premiums in 2015/16. We have continued to chase up outcomes and finalise work on client's cases into 2016/17 and so these figures are likely to increase.

As schools are guaranteed to receive pupil premium funding for a six year period, irrespective of a change in the parents' financial circumstances, the true pupil premium figure is estimated to be **£453,000** at today's rates.

Health in Warmth Partnership

We were notified of the funding award of £15,000 for this project in February 2015, although due to various complications the actual money was not received until March which further delayed our start.

The aim of the project, as before, is to work with each of the five District and Borough Councils to target those residents deemed to be in fuel poverty in the highest priority areas. Each Local Authority uses its own data and information (often EPC data) to choose a list of local residents (between 250-275 residents per Local Authority area) who are in fuel poverty or at risk of fuel poverty and they then send out a letter explaining the advice and support that WWRAS provides together with a FREEPOST envelope to enable residents to self-refer to us.

Once this referral is received we then carry out a benefits assessment, often over the phone and undertake a home-visit to complete any necessary benefit application forms in order to maximise household income, thus enabling households to be better able to afford their utility costs and other household bills. By working in partnership with a range of agencies, both statutory and voluntary we are also able to make referrals or signpost to other organisations if necessary, to assist with fuel debt and fuel poverty related issues and to access grants and schemes to address home insulation or other energy saving advice and support.

We are still continuing to work on open cases and I am pleased to report that WWRAS has once again been funded by the Warwickshire Health in Warmth Partnership to continue this work in 2016.

The table below details the referrals received, financial gains secured for clients and the number of separate benefit issues we have advised on.

District	N&BBC	WD	NW	R	S	Totals
Cases Opened	44	49	5	34	65	199
Benefit Issues	11	16	1	4	7	39
Financial Gains	£19,297	£57,946	£2,077	£6,602	£12,182	£98,104

Priority Families

WWRAS was funded by the Warwickshire Priority Families Programme to provide benefits advice to clients who were referred by the county Priority Family Teams and also to provide consultancy and support to Project staff in all Districts and Boroughs.

Progress was slow initially, but referrals started to increase the project concluded this year. A brief summary of project gains and referrals in 2015/16 can be seen in the table below.

Priority Family Area	Referrals	Benefit Gains
Warwick District	3	43,592
Nun & Bed	17	63,398
Stratford	4	6,824
Rugby	3	10,976
North Warks	1	0
Total	28	£124,790

Summary of Project Funded Take-Up gains- 2015/16

Project	Benefit Gains	Funding (1/4/15 - 31/3/16)
County Children's Centres	£639,765	£62,638
Health in Warmth	£98,104	£15,000
County Free School Meals	£320,061	£62,750
Priority Families	£124,790	£8,250
Total	£1,182,720	£148,638





CASE STUDY 4 - Bal Sandhu (Take-Up Worker)

Benefit Cap Case Study

1. We received a referral from North Warwickshire Borough Council in respect of a new client who required benefits advice and we contacted the client within two days of receiving the referral. The client, Miss B, had been affected by the new Benefit Cap which came into force in the Borough on 7th November 2016. As a result her Housing Benefit was being reduced by £71.57 a week.
2. Miss B is a single parent with three children aged 5, 7 and 15 years old. She was in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance, Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit. The client's 7 year old daughter had also been diagnosed with autism. We explored many options for the client, but we did discuss in some depth the possibility of her returning to the work place which she had been thinking about but which she was also concerned about as she did not know what the financial impact this would have on her benefits and how she would pay the rent/Council Tax etc.
3. We carried out various benefit calculations and better off calculations based on her working different hours with various rates of pay. We calculated her entitlement to Working Tax Credit based on these scenarios and advised her how much Council Tax she would pay and what the financial impact would be if she returned to work and lost entitlement to Free School Meals. We also advised the client that if she returned to work she would no longer be subject to the Benefit Cap.
4. Based on our advice, Miss B was able to find work through a friend working 16 hours a week. This meant that she was entitled to Working Tax Credit and as such she was no longer affected by the Benefit Cap.
5. Even though the client lost entitlement to Free School Meals, and had to start paying £45 Council Tax a month and rent of £28 a week, her overall income increased by an extra £119 a week and she no longer had the reduction to her Housing Benefit of £71.57 as the Benefit Cap no longer applied. As part of our advice we also completed a new Disability Living Allowance claim for her 7 year old daughter and we are currently awaiting a decision from the DWP.



Complex Better off Calculations Case Study

1. This is a relatively new project that WWRAS has been commissioned to undertake, whereby our benefits adviser will provide specialist benefits advice to families undertaking the EmployAbility internship scheme with National Grid which takes place at a number of specialist schools in Warwickshire and surrounding areas.
2. We received a referral from Oakwood Secondary School in respect of a new client, whose son was taking part in the EmployAbility scheme and who required benefits advice. We contacted the client within 2 days of receiving the referral and discussed the family's benefit circumstances and decided that a home-visit was required in order to deal with the enquiry.
3. Miss A is a single parent with three children living with her aged 16, 17 and 19 years old, all of whom are in non-advanced education. Miss A also has a 22 year old non-dependant living with her and her 28 year old daughter lives next door to her (Mrs C). Miss A is in receipt of Carers Allowance and Income Support. She receives the child elements in her Income Support under the old rules as she has not yet transitioned to Child Tax Credit. She is also in receipt of Child Benefit for the dependants. The client also receives help with housing costs in respect of her mortgage and is also in receipt of Council Tax Support.
4. The referral which had been made by the school had requested benefit checks and better off calculations for Miss A's 17 year old son (Mr B) who was currently on a year's internship with National Grid as part of the EmployAbility Scheme, with the prospect of full-time employment on the successful completion of the internship. Mr B has a learning disability and is in receipt of Personal Independence Payment, (enhanced daily living and enhanced mobility rates). Miss A receives the child disability and severe disability elements for Mr B within her Income Support.
5. We firstly carried out a benefit check and better off calculations to assess Mr B's entitlement and also did a calculation based on his anticipated income once he had started full-time work at the end of the internship. It was also evident that Miss A and Mrs C were not in receipt of their full benefit entitlement. Miss A's daughter, Mrs C, helped her mother look after her younger siblings all of whom have learning disabilities.



6. The daughter was not in receipt of any benefits herself and was not aware she was able to claim anything because her husband worked full-time. We advised her that she was able to claim Carers Allowance of £62.10 a week for the care she provided to her younger brother as her husband's earnings weren't taken into account for the purposes of entitlement. Both the 22 year old and 19 year old were also not receiving their full entitlement and following our advice they were able to claim an increased amount of £34.60 each a week to be included in their Employment and Support Allowance.
7. Miss A went on to say that her Income Support had not been paid for two weeks and she was not aware why it had stopped; the client was living off the children's disability benefits. In addition to this her Council Tax Support claim had been suspended by the Council as they were awaiting evidence of her capital. Miss A had supplied this information some two months prior but had not received any further correspondence from the Authority. Miss A was frustrated by the fact that she was not getting any answers every time she rang the relevant departments.
8. We obtained written authority to act upon the clients behalf in connection with her benefits. We forwarded the written authority to the relevant benefit departments and then we contacted them some days later. The Council Tax section advised us that they had erroneously failed to action the evidence which had been submitted by the client and following our intervention they put the Council Tax Support claim back in payment and backdated the payments which cleared the arrears.
9. The Income Support section at the DWP also backdated the claim and put it back in payment stating that they had found the evidence they required following our contact.
10. The reason for the original referral was to carry out a benefit check for Mr B but there were many benefit issues that required addressing in the family before we could advise on further benefit entitlement. Mr B is already in receipt of Enhanced Daily Living and Enhanced Mobility rates of the Personal Independence Payment. Several calculations were required to ascertain the options available to the client and to ensure that he was not any worse off financially and to also help him remain in employment at the end of the internship. We explored many scenarios to correctly advise the client and the family was extremely pleased we were able to equip them to think about the future.



11. We advised Mr B and Miss A to continue to claim their current benefits. Several options presented themselves following the better off calculations. Our advice demonstrated that Mr B, depending on the amount of hours worked and income earned, could claim Working Tax Credit and possibly Employment Support Allowance and continue employment under Permitted Work Rules, depending on the offer of employment at the end of the internship. We agreed to reassess the entitlement once the offer of employment and terms and conditions had been made by the employer.
12. The clients were relieved to have this support and they welcomed having someone to turn to for advice and assistance with a variety of benefit forms. This in turn helped to alleviate the stress and worry that this situation was causing them. In addition, the school was also pleased that the advice had been given as they sometimes find that offers of employment are not taken up at the end of an internship due to the intern and family not knowing how an offer of employment will affect the family's financial situation as a whole.



CASE STUDY 6 - Bal Sandhu (Take-Up Worker)

Children's Centre Case Study

1. We received a referral from a Children's Centre in the south of the county. The client (Ms A) was a single parent with three children, living in Council-rented accommodation.
2. Ms A was working until her relationship broke down and her partner moved out. She was struggling to balance work and looking after her children who were aged one, four and eleven years old. Eventually Ms A had no choice but to leave her job to look after the children. She had not claimed benefits before and so did not know how to go about doing this, nor did she know what she was entitled to claim. At the time she was struggling to pay her rent and other priority bills and did not know how she was going to cope.
3. Following the referral we visited the client at home, checked her benefit entitlement and advised that she was entitled to claim Income Support because she had a child under 4 and no savings, together with Child Tax Credit, Child Benefit and Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support.



During the interview Ms A mentioned that her four year old was being assessed by health professionals for his challenging behaviour which had not been picked up previously. Based on this information and medical evidence we made an application for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for the child. It became clear during the interview that he required care and attention throughout the day and also during part of the night.

4. Following the application Ms A was awarded DLA for her child of £82.30 per week. As a result of this award we advised our client that she was also entitled to an increase in her Child Tax Credit claim to include the disability element and severe disability element of £85 per week. Ms A also became entitled to Carers Allowance of £62.10 per week for looking after the child.
5. Following our advice Ms A told us that she was now able to provide the care her children desperately required without worrying about the extra costs associated to her child's disability. She said that this had given her some peace of mind and had enabled her to stabilise her financial situation following the break-up of her relationship.

CLIENT FEEDBACK – TAKE-UP WORK

Feedback from Take-Up Clients

- Of the clients who responded to our “Take-Up User Feedback Questionnaire” **63%** said that they had gained benefits as a result of our advice and assistance.
- **98%** of respondents said that we had provided advice that was very easy or easy to understand and 94% of clients said that we had kept them very well or well updated with progress on their case.
- **98%** of clients said that we listened very well or listened well to what they had to say.
- **100%** said that they were very satisfied or satisfied with our overall level of service.
- **91%** of respondents said that they would recommend our service to someone else if they needed legal help or advice on similar issues.



We also ask our Take-Up clients a series of questions about the impact or effect that our advice has had on their everyday lives. The following responses were received:

45% of clients said that following our advice and assistance they were now more confident dealing with household bills.

40% said that they were now more able to pay their rent, mortgage or Council Tax and **42%** said that they felt more able to afford their gas, electricity and water bills.

41% of clients said that they were now more able to afford food and clothing following our advice and assistance and **33%** were more able to afford to pay for school uniforms or school trips for their children.

85% of respondents said that they now felt very confident or confident about accessing advice or other services they may be entitled to in the future and **22%** of clients said that our advice had helped them make informed decisions about returning to work or accessing training opportunities.

Comments from Take-Up Clients about our service

“Originally being offered a Benefits Check meant learning about benefits I didn't even know existed which I was given every help to apply for, and subsequently, have been granted. Grateful thanks to adviser for his kind assistance”

“Following your advice and help to claim benefits, I was able to afford a small car on a monthly payments basis after losing my Motability vehicle and a cleaner twice a month for two hours.”

“Attendance Allowance for my husband means we can pay for a carer once a week to allow me with some respite”

*“Because everyone involved went through all aspects in a simple way, I found it very easy to understand and not worry about money.
Thank you to everyone”*

“THIS WAS A VERY USEFUL SERVICE THAT SUPPORTED ME TO ACHIEVE GETTING WHAT I AM ENTITLED TO. I WILL USE THE SERVICE AGAIN TO ACCESS SUPPORT IN CLAIMING PIP SOON. THANK YOU”



TRAINING & INFORMATION 2015/16

49 courses & presentations

601 participants

Training -average rating of 9/10 by attendees

34,656 leaflets downloaded from our website

5,775 hard copies of our leaflets distributed



We aim to present twenty courses in a year. This year we scheduled **23** courses with three of those being cancelled due to low numbers. Of the **20 courses** that we ran, **4** were new or had been significantly updated. New or significantly updated courses included: the Benefit Changes Seminar; PIP Assessment Form/Process; ESA Form filling and the Disabled into Work Seminar.

Course bookings can be done directly from our website and we use this and e-mail to reduce the administration and cost involved in processing bookings.

This year we ran **29** in-house training sessions, talks and presentations, which is higher than our usual target of 25.

Number of trainees

262 people booked onto our main training programme courses this year, and **198** people attended. 38% of attendees were from WCC Adult/Children's Services staff. The remaining 62% of attendees were from other agencies in the county.

403 people attended our local sessions this year with 55% of those attending being from Adult Services, Children's Services or joint teams.

Increase in Attendance Figures

The attendance figures for our locally based courses were **35%** higher than the previous year and attendance figures on our main training programme increased slightly, which has started to buck the trend of previous years when attendances had started to diminish. This increase may be due to the wider promotion and advertisement of courses and in part due to our offer of spare places on courses free of charge to volunteers.

Feedback from users

Evaluations are always conducted for our courses and there are as ever a consistently high level of positive comments from trainees. Post training surveys routinely go out to all trainees to ensure the course is relevant to their work and to evaluate our effectiveness.

From the fixed Training Programme evaluations **99%** of attendees said that they found the course they attended helpful in increasing their knowledge, relevant to their work and pitched at the right level for them. When considering the quality of presentation, attendees scored it on average as worthy of a mark of **9 out of 10** and an average rating of **9 out of 10** for the usefulness of the training materials and visual aids.

When given the opportunity to add comments, 94% of the comments were positive. The standard of administration and the venue also scored highly, with 98% for the joining arrangements, and 93% for the venue.

We also survey trainees three months after they have attended one of our courses in order to assess how useful the course has proved in their everyday work and what impact the additional knowledge has had on clients for example.

All attendees who were surveyed said that they had found the course generally relevant to their job; **96%** stated that they found the training relevant when advising clients and **93%** of those surveyed said that they had found the training relevant when advising colleagues about benefit issues. In addition, **41%** of those surveyed said that they had become aware of clients receiving more benefit income as a result of the information and strategies learned about on the training course.

SOME QUOTES FROM RECENT TRAINING COURSE EVALUATIONS:

- ☺ *“WWRAS is invaluable for providing information about benefits. Courses on changing benefits have helped tremendously when it comes to our customers being changed from Income Support to ESA”*
- ☺ *“I always find the training very useful and interesting. They are always presented well and made to be easy to understand, which is very good as I find benefits a bit complicated to understand. Thank you”*
- ☺ *“We always find WWRAS training to be of a high standard and helpful. Long may our partnership working continue!”*



- ☺ *“I gained knowledge about Universal Credit as I previously knew nothing about it. The course helped me identify how this new benefit relates to my previous experience of the relevant benefits and whom this now applies to”*
- ☺ *“Course was very helpful in that my main aspect of work is behaviour work with families but financial problems is becoming more of an issue, so information gained has been very beneficial”*
- ☺ *“The pace and content of the training was right on point. I got a lot out of the training. I am due to complete my first PIP form for a client in 2 days... having attended this training makes me feel confident about completing the form”*
- ☺ *“Found the course really useful and afterwards was able to roughly calculate whether a customer would be better off in work - which I then confirmed with WWRAS”*
- ☺ *“I regard your courses as a form of continual coaching. Although I have been working at CAB for 7 years now I find continual coaching is essential...”*

INFORMATION



Benefits Bulletin and Benefit Rates Leaflets and Posters

The benefit rates items are still popular and this is one of the items that is most downloaded from our website.

Four issues of the Benefits ✓ Bulletin were produced this year and distributed to raise awareness of topical benefit issues including the huge volume of change introduced under the Government’s welfare reform agenda.

Number of publications updated

Following on from the archiving of many leaflets due to historical reductions in core funding we have steadily re-introduced guidance materials, designed to be used by the public and advisers alike. Thus we have updated a number of longstanding leaflets and created new items, bringing the total now available to view/download from our website to over **40** separate leaflets.

Website

WWRAS launched its new website (www.wwras.org.uk) in January 2014, in order to provide a more modern, fresh and user friendly experience for users. This year saw a considerable rise in the number of leaflets downloaded from our website, with over **34,500** leaflets or publications downloaded compared with 10,825 for the same period last year. This is unsurprising, given the number of changes which have been implemented in the social security system over the past couple of years and we anticipate demand to rise even further next year in line with the trends experienced in our other services.

We have reproduced a few key statistics below which demonstrates the popularity of the new site.

Top 5 most downloaded Publications in 2015/16

Position	Code	Name of Publication	Number of downloads
1	Pb8	ESA- ILL? Claiming Benefits?	6928
2	Pb86	What to do if you fail a medical assessment	3419
3	Pb6	A guide to tariff income	2915
4	Pb55	NHS Fully-funded continuing healthcare & your benefits	2370
5	Pb32	Living together as partners (co-habitation)	1457

- **34,656** leaflets were downloaded from our website in the last year
- **260** users were registered for the restricted “adviser” section of the site as at 31/3/2016, with **23** new users registering in the last year.
- Our “facts of the day” feature was the most viewed article on our website.

Number of publications distributed

We also distributed **5,775** hard copies of our one-off leaflets/publications in this year. Our Benefits Bulletin newsletter and our “Benefit Rates leaflet and checklist were the most popular information items. This is significantly less than we distributed last year, but as can be seen from our web stats, more people are accessing our materials online now rather than in hard copy form.



BENEFIT ENQUIRY LINE (B.E.L.) 2015/16

583 enquiries received

Advice given on 1,001 unique benefit issues

£67,000 in money gains identified



This is our specialist consultancy telephone service for WCC staff and front-line professionals in other statutory and voluntary agencies across the county.

This service is unique, giving social care staff and their colleagues direct access to specialist advice, which would not otherwise be available elsewhere. The range of agencies that use the BEL reflects the intention of our SLA with the People Group to make it accessible to organisations representing the public, i.e. not just Social Services. This model gives customers a plurality of choice whilst diverting them away from approaching social care directly for assistance. Also, as the relationship between social security matters and social care policy and practice is not straightforward, specialist teams need specialist advice, e.g. Leaving Care.

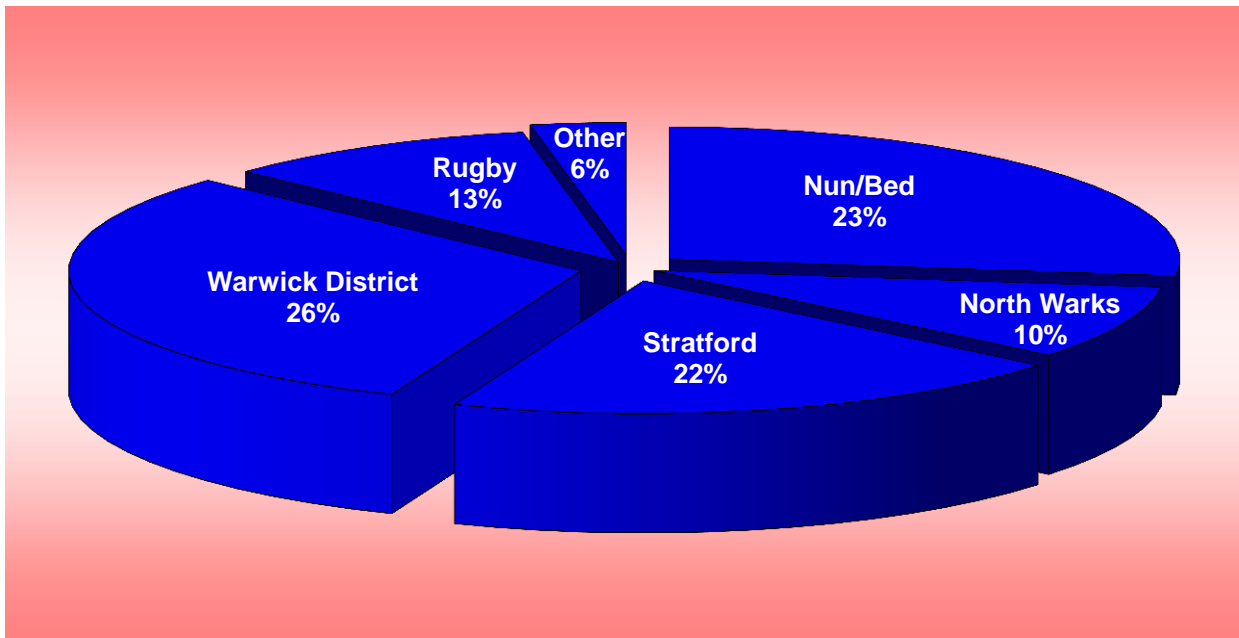
The help line is staffed between 10am and 1pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday's as well as recording additional queries which come in through the main switchboard, re-directing callers to the BEL or other agencies as appropriate. Calls have been fairly evenly spread across these days, with a higher volume of calls received on a Wednesday.

Number of enquiries per year

We received **583** enquiries to the B.E.L. in the past year, with calls from a wide variety of agencies. This represents a **14%** increase in the number of calls we received for the same period last year. The Benefit Enquiry Line also enables front line professionals to receive casework support and "pre-referral" support where our workers will assess whether a referral to our appeals or Take-Up services is required, or indeed whether a referral to a more appropriate service, such as the local council or CAB is required.

There are a varied range of calls from the different parts of the county. In the past year, Warwick District agencies made extensive use of the service as ever, with **26%** of all calls coming from this district alone and calls from Nuneaton and Bedworth agencies made up **23%** of all enquiries to the BEL this year. Stratford agencies accounted for **22%** of all calls, which is slightly increased compared to the previous year. Rugby agencies represented nearly **13%** of all enquiries, also slightly more than last year and calls from North Warwickshire agencies remained constant making the least enquiries at just over **10%**. The remainder of calls were either out of the area or from county organisations not restricted to any one geographical area.





Breakdown of Users

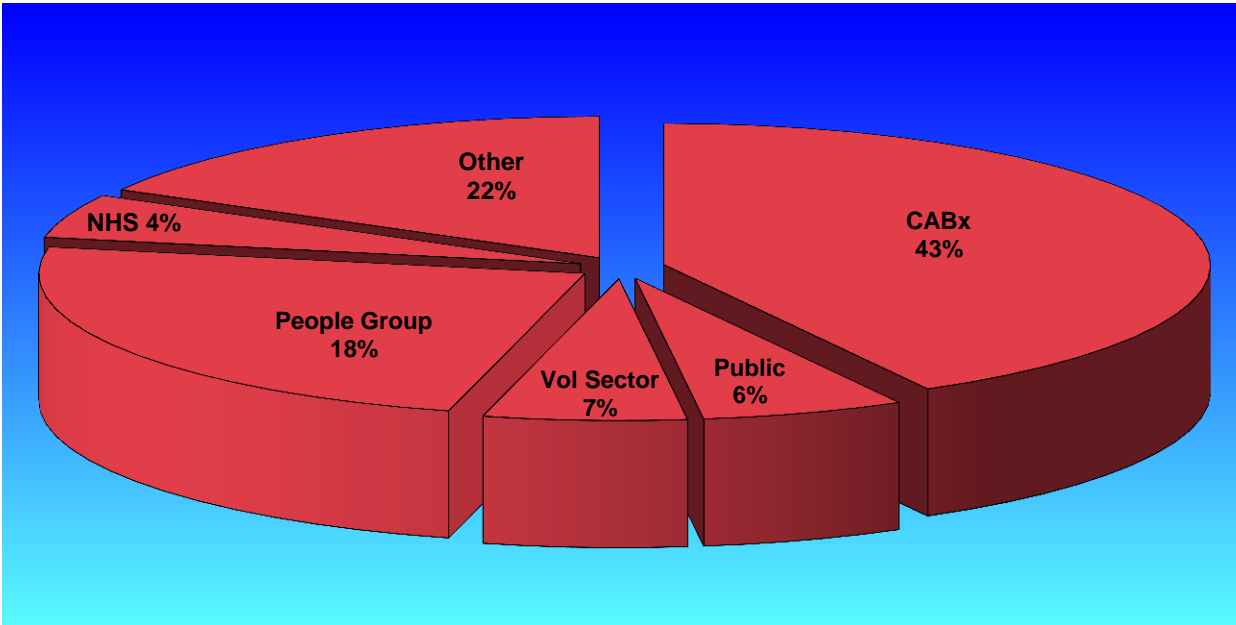
Within the People Group just over **5%** of calls came from Children's Services and **13%** from Adult Health colleagues. As in the previous year, this year we received more calls from Adults as opposed to the Children's Teams. **4%** of calls were from NHS or joint NHS Teams, which is a 1% decrease compared with last year's usage.

43% of calls came from CABx, with the total number of enquiries we received from CABx seeing a slight increase compared to last year. The trend of increased appeal referrals has continued from last year and this has been mirrored with an increase in BEL calls particularly from the CAB who continue to be the main referring agency for appeals representation.

7% of calls were from other (mainly voluntary sector agencies) most of which are funded by WCC and this is a 1% increase on the previous year. Last year we saw a significant reduction in calls to the BEL from these agencies which was possibly due to the reduction in the number of other agencies providing advice in this field in Warwickshire following funding cuts, mergers or changing roles and functions. **22%** of calls came from other agencies/organisations, not categorised above.

We are not funded to provide a service to the general public as it is intended to be a consultancy line for front line professionals and we will always try and signpost or refer such callers to an appropriate service, although there are occasions where we cannot do so and we will provide some basic advice. The number of calls from members of the public directly accessing our helpline (**6%**) has significantly decreased over the past few years and this call rate remained static in 2015/16. We started to provide a helpline for members of the public about eighteen months ago on two afternoons per week specifically to assist with enquiries about the relatively new Personal Independence Payments (PIP). This means that

we have been able to provide a crucial lifeline to people who have been adversely affected by the new entitlement rules for this benefit and feedback from those using the service has been positive.



Type of Enquiry

Although we received **583** enquiries to the BEL last year, during those calls we dealt with **1,001** different benefit issues, which gives some indication of the complexity and in depth nature of the work that is carried out. Often, single calls will produce a multitude of different benefit issues as the relationships between the different benefits can be complicated and time consuming to deal with.

The majority of calls to the BEL still relate to disability and ill-health benefits but enquiries about **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** and **Attendance Allowance (AA)** made up just over **4%** of all enquiries (down from 5% last year) with the replacement for DLA - **Personal Independence Payment (PIP)**, accounting for **23%** of all enquiries (up from 17% last year). Enquiries about **ESA/IB** remained fairly static and still remain our highest single enquiry area at **26%**.

30% of calls from frontline professionals were on behalf of clients with a mental health disability, whilst enquiries on behalf of people with a physical disability amounted to **33%** of all enquiries. **8%** of all enquiries to the B.E.L related to a child or young person, with **4%** of enquiries relating to pensioner benefits, broadly the same as last year's figures.

We record all cases on the B.E.L where we have helped to identify and advise on additional benefit claims and our work has helped to identify **£26,220** in potential unclaimed benefits this year. In addition our adviser's helped other front line professionals claim **£40,781** in *actual* additional entitlements for their clients.

STAFF as at January 2017

Chief Executive	Mark Stanyer
Operations Manager	Stephen Watkins
Appeals Workers	Rachel Wilcox Jill Wood Caroline Harrison *Tim Feuser
	*Appeals and Take-Up work
Take-Up Workers	Bal Sandhu
Freelance Welfare Rights Take-Up	Jacqui Gardner
Admin Assistants	Sam Morgan Denise Peach Melanie Patton

TRUSTEE BOARD as at January 2017

Acting Chair and Director	Janice Nichols
Treasurer	<i>(Position currently vacant)</i>
Company Secretary	Mark Stanyer
Directors	Greg Gavin (Chair-resigned July 2016) Ramby De Mello Peter Eaves Steve Lloyd Martyn Ashford Sally Roberts Danielle Chetwynd Alan Markey (joined July 2016)



CONTACT BOX

Mark Stanyer – Chief Executive

024 7637 2069 x26

e-mail: mark.stanyer@wrras.org.co.uk

For Operational Matters

Contact **Stephen Watkins** on 024 7637 2069 x21

e-mail: stephen.watkins@wrras.org.uk

For Training/Website

Contact **Sam Morgan** on 024 7637 2069 x29

e-mail: sam.morgan@wrras.org.uk

For Information Materials

Contact **Denise Peach** on 024 7637 2069 x32

e-mail: denise.peach@wrras.org.uk

Main office number: 024 7637 2069

Benefits Enquiry Line: 024 7635 4034

10am – 1pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday
[Advisers only – not for members of the public]

OR

(for all of the above)

Fax: 024 7637 5033

e-mail: info@wrras.org.uk

Address: 1 Stratford Street, Nuneaton, CV11 5BS





REGISTERED CHARITY NO: 519072

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