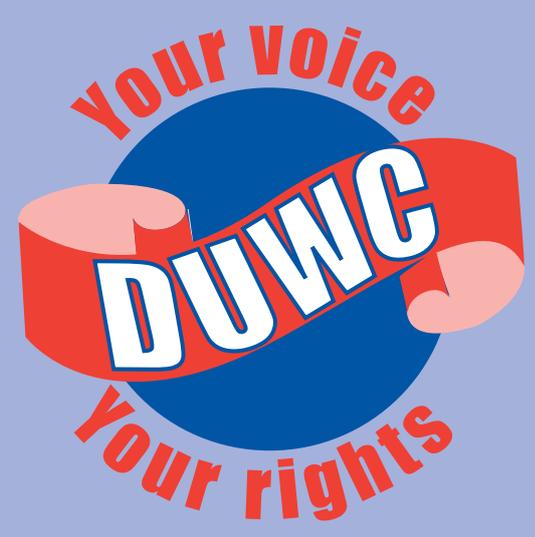


Annual Report 2008

Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres



The Chairman writes...

If you ever wondered why we need the Unemployed Workers' Centres in Derbyshire then read below.....

Over the past ten years some of us might have felt prosperous, secure, healthy and independent. Some will have driven down Saltergate, Patchwork Row or High Street and wondered 'what's that Unemployed Workers' Centre there for? - What do they do? Why don't they all get a job?' A few remain prosperous, secure, healthy and independent well into old age. For most of us, as the years go by, life throws up challenges and shocks that cannot be anticipated. The turmoil of the global financial markets impacts on jobs, and the secure can quickly have a precarious existence.

Ill health can affect anyone at any-time leaving those who scoffed at those 'languishing' on incapacity benefits queuing to have help with the new Employment Support Allowance. High bills and housing costs can soon turn prosperity into desperation. All of a sudden the person who thought

they needed no-one finds that they are looking for help. Redundancy and benefits, representation, disability benefits, tax credits, pension credits - 'Whose there to help? - Who will take up my problems? - Who will help me fight back?' Oh yes - now they understand why we need the Unemployed Workers' Centres and now they know what we do'

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Evidence

Throughout this Annual Report you will see evidence of the need for our services whether it's campaigning against jobcentre closures, fighting to raise benefit levels or helping people to get what they are entitled to.

It has been a difficult year for DUWCs with the move into smaller premises in Chesterfield and the end of established successful projects with the subsequent loss of staff. Despite the problems the work carried out has been immense from the representation at tribunals to the campaigns that have been waged. Many valued friends have moved on but have



Councillor Paul Buckley

been replaced by a new infusion of keen, highly motivated volunteers giving the Centres a fresh impetus. A special mention concerns Bob Pemberton, our senior adviser, who has taken a job with the Trade Union ASPECT. Bob has been with us for ten years and we will miss his experience and wise counsel. He will still be representing us at a National level, thanks to his new employer who are allowing him to continue his work representing the TUC at meetings with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Challenges

The coming period is going to throw up many challenges but our team at DUWC is ready to meet them and continue to help the people of Derbyshire.

So if anyone wants to question why the County Council and District Councils of Chesterfield, N.E. Derbyshire and Bolsover continue to back the DUWC you will be able to tell them. Unless you win the jackpotredundancy - benefits - advice - ill health - tribunal.

It could be you!

Cllr Paul Buckley

'In Gord we Trust'

Gordon Smith, the first co-ordinator of the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres, died in November 2007 shortly after the launch of our previous annual report. A year on, we are still feeling the loss of our comrade who did so much to make the DUWCs the widely respected organisation it is today.

In an age where the public are often sceptical about the motives of many who are involved in public service, Gordon Smith stands out like a beacon.

At work, when at Markhams engineering, Gordon rose to the position of convenor because of his abilities and willingness to help his fellow men. His ambitions



Gordon Smith

were never about personal advancement. After years of organising at Markhams a surprise discovery enlightened him as to the respect he was held in by the workforce. On visiting the toilets someone had scrawled on the back of the door 'In Gord we trust'. It was a feeling shared by the many who later visited him for advice at the Unemployed Workers' Centres. Gordon trained many of the advice workers that followed at the Centres and they have in turn passed on his ethos to those here today. The DUWC whilst being a professional body treats those who seek advice as equals with common cause – not clients or customers as is the vogue in many organisations.

Non-judgemental

People talk about being non-judgemental when dealing with the public. Gordon practised this more than anyone I have met before or since I worked with him. Everyone who came to see him he said 'is someone's mother or father, son or daughter, they could have been mine and I will treat them with due respect'. As you can imagine we have had some characters through our doors and to remain non-judgemental, without being naïve, in such circumstances takes some doing.



Colin Hampton

Campaigns

So Gordon lives on in the way in which our advice work is carried out. Not just in the delivery but by being inextricably linked to campaigns to make life better for ordinary folk. Advice work without a campaigning edge is like 'sticking plasters on a gaping wound'. Gordon saw the limitations of what could be done within the system – it was the system itself that needed changing.

The respect in which Gordon was held was shown by the many who came to his funeral and the £800 raised for the One Fund For All, much of which came from those he had helped in the past.

Let us resolve to continue the work that he started and develop some more Gordon Smiths from amongst our number to fight the battles ahead.



Your Voice Your Rights!



*Emma Hagger CAB,
Gill Whittaker PCS,
Colin Hampton DUWC
and Cllr Joyce Sanders
hand over the petition
to Derbyshire District
Manager, Keith Burn*

Centres Fight JobCentre Closure

Despite predictions from economic forecasters of a steep rise in unemployment, the Government appears to be pushing ahead with its plan to close hundreds of jobcentres throughout the country.

In July we were informed by the Derbyshire District Manager that it was his intention to close the jobcentre plus office in Belper. Community organisations and interested parties were given until 15th August to comment on this proposal.

Green Paper

Claimants needing to visit a jobcentre (most have no choice) would have to pay a minimum of £3.60 in fares to visit an alternative jobcentre in Alfreton, Heanor or Derby. With proposals in the Government's Green Paper on welfare reform to force unemployed

workers to sign on weekly this means a substantial financial outlay for people on as little as £47.95 per week. (under 25 year old).

Challenging

The Derbyshire UWC's quickly set about challenging the closure decision. Together with the Public and Commercial Service Union, the Mid-Derbyshire CAB, DCC Welfare Rights and the County Councillor for Belper Joyce Sanders, we gathered information concerning the impact of any closure on individuals, families and the wider community. A petition was signed by 2000 residents, an on-line petition to the Prime Minister was established, and local politicians were lobbied for support. A public meeting was held in Belper to which the District Manager was invited. It was evident that the DWP were

not going to carry out a proper consultation with the users of the service so it was left to us to organise this possibility.

Strength of feeling

The meeting was attended by 40 people including many claimants and concerned local residents. Despite the strength of feeling expressed it appeared that the District Manager, with a shrinking budget, had already made up his mind - that the costs saved by closure will be passed on to those who use the service, the unemployed, the disabled, the sick and single parents. At the time of writing no formal final decision has been taken so we continue to lobby politicians on the issue. Our fear is that Matlock, Bolsover and Clay Cross will be next on the hit list so we must press on with the campaign.

Social Fund Inadequacy

DUWCs try never to give up on a campaign. The complete inadequacy of the Social Fund (a system of grants and loans for essential items and emergencies) thrown up by the floods of Summer 2007, prompted moves by the Centres to seek reforms in the short term.

Many uninsured people were denied help from the Social Fund after the floods even though they were on low incomes and in desperate trouble. Our attempts to obtain much needed reforms fell on deaf ears. However, at the 2007 Annual Conference of UWCs, Peter Hain offered to give us a meeting. Before this could take place he resigned. Allowing time for the new Minister to get on top of his brief we organised another meeting in 2008 at which the Social Fund issue was raised.

We were granted a meeting with the junior minister responsible but unfortunately a week before our visit to London, he too was moved in the ministerial reshuffle. We will not give up. At our meeting with James Parnell M.P Minister of the DWP we said that, a year on from the floods, nothing has been done. If the floods were to strike again people would still be in the same predicament. A week later the floods hit Morpeth in Northumberland and a further round of misery ensued.

When people come to the DUWC we do not just tell them that unfortunately you are not entitled to any help. If there is an injustice we will campaign until we have exhausted all possibilities of affecting a change. Watch this space.



Welfare Reform Green Paper signals more of the same

The Governments Welfare Reform Green Paper published this summer is entitled **No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility**. Try telling that to claimants in Belper who because they live in an area with less disadvantage than other Derbyshire areas are to have their employment services taken away. **No one written off – try explaining that to the claimant who has his benefits taken away because they did not conform to the ‘help’ on offer.**

Whilst we would applaud the Green Paper’s championing of personalised back-to-work support there is much to be worried about. The furrow ploughed by previous governments in the 1980’s and 1990’s of stricter and stricter benefit regimes is being widened and enthusiastically enhanced by the Government. A stronger sanctions regime and ‘work for your benefit’ are key proposals contained in the paper.

The DUWC will oppose all attempts to further impoverish the poor under the guise of labour market activation. Forced labour for the unemployed is tantamount to the criminalisation of unemployment. Unemployment is beginning to rise rapidly in the U.K and this has nothing to do with the lack of motivation of the unemployed. Ministers would do well to recognise this.

Disturbingly the Green Paper looks to farm out much of the personalised support to the private sector. Private companies have hardly got a great record in this area with a history of corruption and bankruptcy. UWCs fear ‘cherry picking’ with privateers cashing in on those easiest to place whilst ‘parking’ many who are less likely to produce a profit.

DUWC will continue to work towards reforming the Welfare State in such a way as to alleviate poverty demanding quality training and jobs.

GET FAIR!

Following on from the TUC Unemployed Workers Centres Conference in 2005, the many national and anti-poverty organisations and Networks have come together to launch the GET FAIR Campaign. The aim is to put poverty and the need to lessen the wealth gap in the UK to the top of the political agenda in the run up to the next General Election. A series of events and campaigns are planned throughout 2009.

DUWC Migrant Workers Project

Following a steady increase in the number of migrant workers coming for help, particularly at our Shirebrook office, we decided to hold an open day.

Volunteer

The Unemployed Workers Centres had recruited a Polish volunteer, training in Welfare Rights. Kamila, helped with the translation of publicity material which was eventually delivered in Polish and Russian as well as English. We met with the CAB and the Bolsover District Council as well as the Law Centre to maximise the usefulness of the day. The Law Centre were available for employment and citizenship issues and the Council wanted to conduct a housing needs survey with a number of migrant workers.

The DUWC made contact with employees at Sportsworld, the biggest employer of migrant labour in the area as well as other employers. We also contacted Unite who have a good number of members amongst the migrant labour force.

WORKERS OPEN DAY

EVEN IF YOU ARE IN WORK YOU MAY BE ENTITLED TO TAX CREDITS OR BENEFITS

Are you unsure about what tax credits or benefit you may be entitled to?

Are you having problems with your tax credits or benefits?

DO YOU NEED ADVICE ON :

- HOUSING
- IMMIGRATION/ CITIZENSHIP
- EMPLOYMENT
- FAMILY
- HEALTH

Come along to our open day
THIS EVENT IS FOR YOU!

Throughout the day specialist advisers will be on hand to provide free confidential advice on a range of issues important to those in work.

Venue details:

Wed 20th Feb 9am - 7pm
Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres
44 Patchwork Row,
Shirebrook NG20 8AL
Tel: 01623 748161

OTWARTY DLA OSÓB PRACUJĄCYCH W WIELKIEJ BRYTANII

JEŚLI PRACUJESZ MOŻESZ BYĆ UPRAWNIONY DO ULG PODATKOWYCH (TAX CREDITS) LUB INNEJ POMOCY FINANSOWEJ (BENEFITS)

CZY PEWNIEN DO JAKICH ULG PODATKOWYCH (TAX CREDITS) LUB ZASIŁKÓW (BENEFITS) JESTEŚ UPRAWNIONY? CZY MOŻESZ KORZYSTAĆ Z ULG Z TAX CREDITS LUB INNYMI BENEFITAMI?

PODROZNY PORADY

WIELKIEJ BRYTANII, WIELKIEJ RODZINY W WIELKIEJ BRYTANII

Data i miejsce spotkania:

ŚRODA, 20-ego lutego 9.00 - 19.00
Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres
44 Patchwork Row,
Shirebrook NG20 8AL
Tel: 01623 748161

Local workplaces

Kamila put posters up in all Polish and east European delicatessens as well as at churches and clubs as well as in local workplaces. We also leafleted nearly the whole of Shirebrook.

On the day itself we booked a market stall on Shirebrook market between the job centre and the post office. Kamila and her partner Macjek were on hand for translation as well as two representatives from the Trade Union Unite who were both Polish speakers. Jurgida from the Midlands TUC came later in the day to give support.

The Open Day was an overwhelming success with 51 people attending for advice, some having travelled from Chesterfield and beyond. The fact that we had Polish speakers was a big draw as many people who came had little

or no English. Enquiries covered a wide spectrum but working and child tax credits were by far the most numerous.

Flow of enquiries

Since the open day we have had a continuous flow of enquiries from migrant workers. Kamila has left us temporarily as she is to become a mother. Before leaving she recruited another Polish volunteer Roman who has taken over where she left off. After building up the confidence and expectations of the local migrant workforce it would place us in difficulties if we were unable to continue the level and quality of advice.

We are exploring other funding avenues but have so far been unable to find further monies to help our migrant workers advice project.



Caption

European Minimum Income Campaign

The Co-ordinator of the DUWCs has been chairing the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) Minimum Income campaign. Posters and leaflets have been commissioned and produced (see caption) and distributed throughout Europe. EAPN is at once trying to raise the issue of the need for minimum income standards and provide quality materials for Networks to use. The Campaign which was inspired by our Peanuts for Benefits campaign will be stepped up in the New Year.



**For information
on becoming
an OFFA
supporter
contact Sarah
on 01246 231441**

Our Supporters

Local Councils at every level continue to provide the solid base on which we build our service.

Thanks to:

**Derbyshire County Council
Chesterfield Borough Council
North East Derbyshire District Council
Bolsover District Council
Alfreton Town Council
Brimington Parish Council
Clay Cross Parish Council
Clowne Parish Council
Eckington Parish Council
Grassmoor, Hasland and Winsick Parish Council
Old Bolsover Town Council
Shirebrook Town Council
Somercotes Parish Council
Staveley Town Council**

Thanks also to our project funders:

**Various local charitable trusts
Awards4All
BT Community Connections
Coalfields Regeneration Trust
European Regional Development Fund
Salcare Heanor
Staveley Neighbourhood Management
Sutton Cum Duckmanton Relief in Need Charity
TUC**

And finally to the businesses that have given their support this year:

**Alliance & Leicester
Midlands Co-op
Sainsbury's
Tesco
Wilkinsons**

Centres Launch IT Revolution!

2008 was the year that Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres joined the 21st Century! It all started in January with a grant of just under £10,000 from the Lottery's Awards4All fund. This paid for a brand new IT suite consisting of up-to-the-minute PCs, software and printers, and the installation of a wireless network. We also have a digital projector! Combined with a BT Community Connections award of a new PC and Broadband connection for our Alfreton office, DUWCS are now well connected to the outside world.

The Awards4All grant also paid for some IT training sessions for our volunteers, which took place in the summer. As well as enabling volunteers to develop their skills on a personal level, they are now also able to pass their knowledge on and use it to help others visiting the Centres for help. One task set by their trainer was to come up with new publicity ideas using the publisher programme, which has given us a fresh perspective.

Access to technology has also enabled us to launch an e-newsletter. Our quarterly publication Solidarity is now available as a PDF document to all those who would prefer an electronic version. We also now have an online presence

as we have set up a group page on Facebook, which features updates, photos and room for discussion – please join us!

None of this would have been possible without the support of our funders – Thank you!

New Volunteers Give Shirebrook Office a Shot in the Arm

Towards the end of 2007, DUWCS were awarded a grant of £4,300 by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust's Bridging the Gap programme in order to recruit and train new volunteers to help at our office in Shirebrook. The grant could not have come at a better time – Bolsover District worker Andrew Parkes was under increasing strain to meet the big demand for advice in the area.

As a result of the 6-month project, we now have 3 enthusiastic, committed welfare rights volunteers in the shape of Gill King, Cindy Andrews and Mike Houghton. All 3 are now ably supporting the daily advice sessions at Shirebrook as well as helping out at Creswell, Clowne and Bolsover when Andrew is carrying out tribunal representation. This reduces waiting times and increases the level of dedication we are able to give to individual cases - a fantastic example of how a relatively small grant can help to turn things around.

We must also thank Lynn Fieldsend and Caroline Tipple who continue to do a great job at Shirebrook – as well as Sharon Coles who recently joined us and along with Keith O'Neill is providing an excellent reception service at this centre.

Our Future – Your Legacy?

In 2008, our campaign work has been boosted through a legacy from long term supporter Jack Allwright.

By remembering us in his will, Jack has allowed us to freely pursue our work towards ending child poverty, opposing closures of services and demonstrating the need for changes to the benefits system. Each step taken this year is a tribute to Jack.

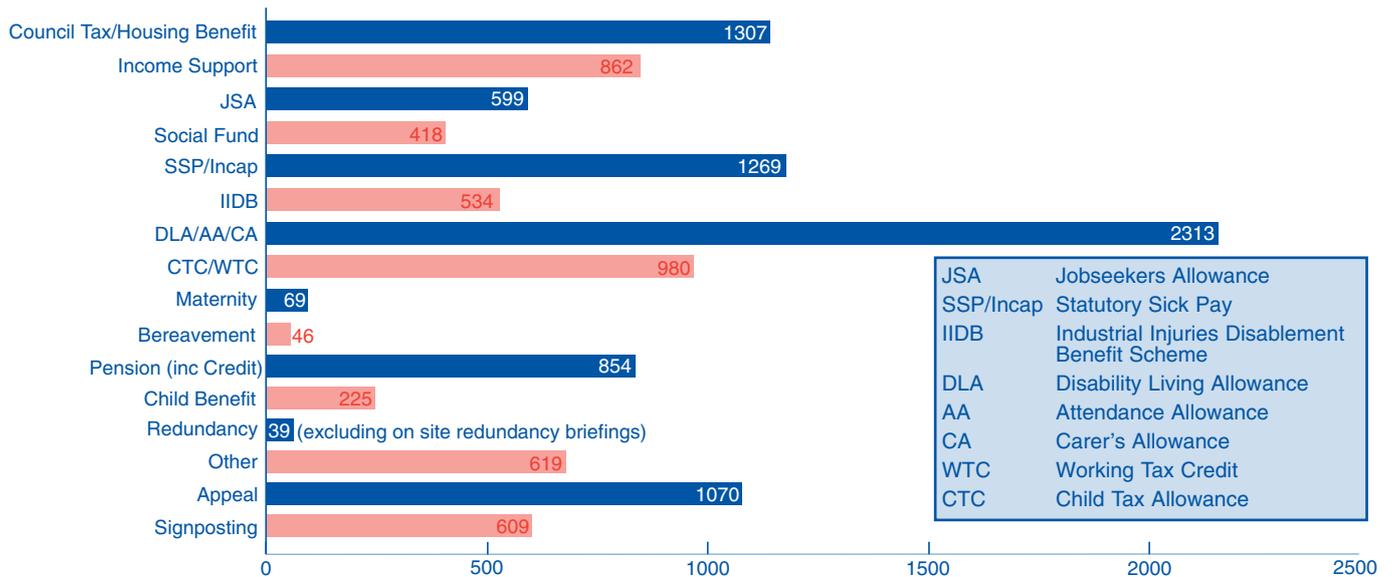
Please consider leaving DUWCS a gift in your will – it would help make a real, lasting difference to your community.



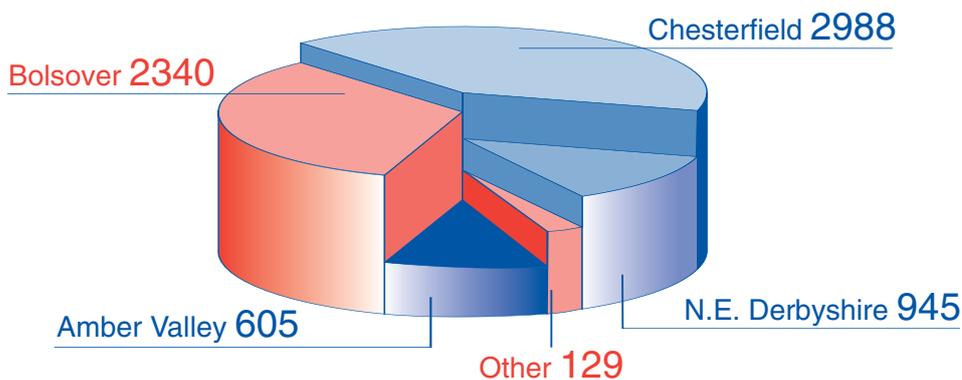
To discuss any aspect of the Centres'

Fundraising, please contact Sarah Walters on 01246 231441 sarah.walters@duwc.org.uk

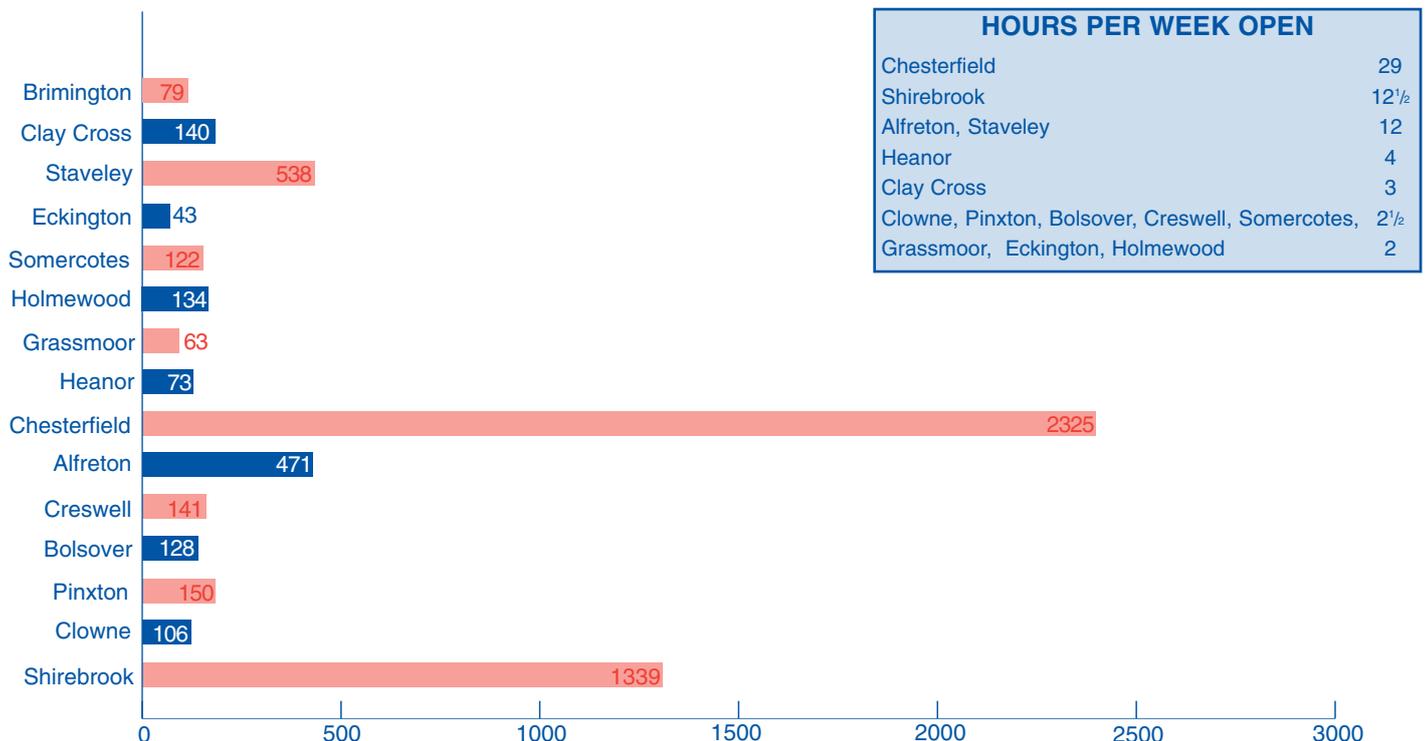
ENQUIRY TOTALS 2006/2007



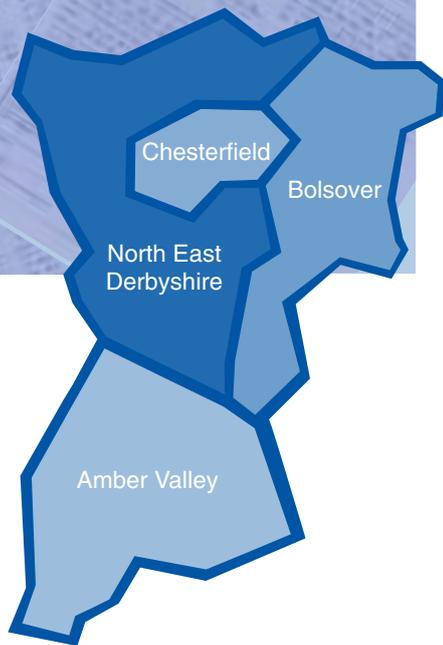
ORIGIN OF ENQUIRIES



VENUE CALLER TOTALS 2006/2007



Around the area



Chesterfield



Chesterfield

In the Summer Bob Pemberton, our senior welfare rights advisor secured a new job working for the Trade Union ASPECT and left the organisation after ten years service. Bob has continued to build the fine reputation of the Centres advice work and has represented at hundreds of tribunals during this time. With Bob's resignation he has missed our move into smaller premises at 70 Saltergate (Trade Union Safety Team and Derbyshire Asbestos Support Group have moved to our

Shirebrook office). Our new home is compact to say the least and a challenging environment to deal with the many daily enquiries which come through our door.

The Centre is receiving considerable support from Brimington Parish Council in order that we can provide a service from the Community Centre on a Monday morning.

*Just to say a big Thank You!
For the help you gave to get my
disability decision overturned.
Thank you.*

Graham, Hollingwood

A former miner visited our Brimington office who is now a self employed shop keeper. He had recently had a stroke causing paralysis down his left side, and wanted to know if he was entitled to claim any benefits. Our adviser told him that he could claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and went on to ask him for further details about his mining career. His 20 years+ underground work meant that he could also put in a claim for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit due to bronchitis, pneumoconiosis and vibration white finger. If the claim for vibration white finger is successful he can then claim reduced earnings allowance. Our adviser has assisted with applications for all of the above and we are now awaiting decisions.

We have also received a boost from the Derbyshire County Council Community Priorities Programme, with Cllr. Walter Burrows presenting us with a cheque for £5000. The Brimington outreach is well attended and we have given support to 79 people since we began the service during 2008.

A young lady came to Brimington for advice regarding imminent changes to the system. She is seriously disabled due to curvature of the spine and also has a disabled son. She had received a letter telling her that she will not be able to claim Income Support due to the incapacity provision route within this benefit being removed from October 8th. Our adviser explained that she will need to claim Incapacity Benefit instead and helped her with the application.

Staveley Outreach

Our outreach advice sessions in Staveley have continued to be very well attended throughout this last 12 months and these sessions are especially important to local people who find it difficult or expensive to travel into Chesterfield to seek advice. The close proximity of free parking and the purpose-built advice rooms within the Learning Matters building on the High Street mean that people can easily call in for advice and help. Also, being situated near to the Staveley Housing Office and Jobcentre, we are often able to sort out people's queries and problems at an early opportunity, thereby avoid longer term difficulties with benefits claims. We

A Staveley resident came to see us for advice about housing benefit arrears. By exploring his circumstances, we were able to work out the cause of the arrears and to get the decision reviewed and full Housing Benefit reinstated. It became apparent that an appeal for Incapacity Benefit has recently lapsed and we were able to reinstate the appeal on medical grounds and went on to successfully represent the resident at an appeal hearing. On checking his benefit income, it was clear that the man's health condition was sufficient to make a claim for Disability Living Allowance and this was successfully awarded, giving both a weekly payment and an increased premium on Income Support.

receive a significant volume of people sent to us on the recommendation of the Jobcentre, particularly for help and advice on completing the lengthy Disability Living Allowance claim form.

Thank you for helping me sort out my housing benefit. The last few weeks I feel as if I have been harassed but I can get on with my life now.

Patricia, Tapton

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, the future of our project is uncertain. However, local residents can rest assured that we will be doing our very best to maintain the accessibility of our advice services for Staveley residents in the area through to March 2009 when the current funding ends.

Disability and Incapacity Benefits continue to dominate the enquiries at Staveley, alongside assistance with State Pension and Pension Credit claims, Housing and Council Tax Benefits and Industrial Injuries Disablements such as Vibration White Finger and Carpal Tunnel. The use of centralised call centres to make claims causes particular difficulties for people who do not have ready access to a land-line phone or for those elderly or disabled people who become anxious when dealing with benefits over the phone.

Bob Pemberton has helped train many of our present WR staff.



We continue to act as representatives for Staveley residents at Appeal Tribunals, most notably for those who are awarded insufficient points at the Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) as part of a claim for Incapacity Benefit. We have helped claimants to obtain medical support and evidence from their hospital doctors and GPs, usually with positive responses from local surgeries although the consistency of medical evidence remains an issue. We are anticipating a high volume of enquiries and potential appeals from the Staveley area as a result of the introduction of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to replace new IB claims at the end of October 2008.

A Staveley resident with mild learning difficulties came to see us for help in completing a review of his DLA claim. It became apparent that his existing award did not reflect his deteriorating health caused by a circulatory condition and that his decreased mobility was now also a significant issue. He did not visit his GP very often because he could not easily walk the distance from the bus stop to the surgery and he does not possess a land-line or mobile phone.

We encouraged him to make an appointment to see his GP and wrote a letter to the GP to ask for medical support in relation to mobility difficulties. At the review, the award for DLA was increased to reflect these increased mobility needs.

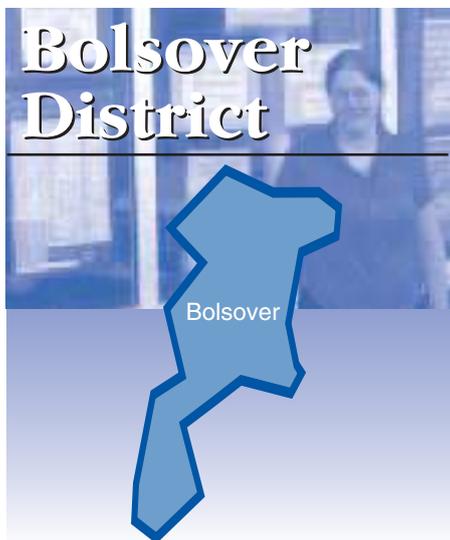
How Much?

In June of this year we provided a home visit for an elderly couple in the Shirebrook area. They were both disabled and in receipt of State Pension and Attendance Allowance. They had been advised to claim Pension Credit but needed help in doing so. We rang the Pension Service claims helpline to make a claim over the phone on their behalf.

We requested a new claim but after some initial information was supplied to the advisor, we were told that the couple had made a claim back in August 2007? The claim appeared to be live but not in payment. I was passed on to the relevant processing section who stated that the claim was being checked over before payments could be issued. We asked the question why it had taken so long to process. The indication was unclear, so we asked if there was any further information the Department need; the answer was no. They did promise to ring the couple and give them some indication when payments would be made. At this point we did know that the amount would be quite large.

Weeks went by and the couple returned to see us. They had not been contacted by the Pension Service or received any correspondence about their claim. We rang the Pension Service again and asked what was going on with the couples claim. We were told that their claim was being checked and double checked; we did point out that we were given this scenario last time we made contact. We were passed through to the processing section who then informed us that in order for the claim to be fully processed the Department needed more information. We complained strongly on behalf of the couple, and indicated that we would be taking the matter further.

We contacted the couples local Member of Parliament explaining their case. A week later they returned to let us know that their claim had been finalised and payments made. Their claim had been backdated to August 2006 under Pension Credit backdating rules. They received in excess of £15,000, which is well over two years of arrears.



Shirebrook report

Throughout 2008 our Bolsover Team have continued to work extremely hard to maintain the quality of service expected by the people of the District of Bolsover. This was despite the many challenges, opportunities and changes which have presented themselves at our Shirebrook office, over the last 12 months.

A very big thank you for your hard work in winning my appeal.

Paul, Shirebrook

At the beginning of the year we could boast that our new volunteers were able to provide face to face benefits advice both at our Shirebrook and at our numerous outreach venues.

Further training and support has enabled volunteers to take on the role of representatives at appeal tribunals.

In February we held a Workers Open Day at Shirebrook. Working alongside other local advice agencies such as the Law Centre and the Citizens Advice Bureau, we invited the many local and migrant workers living within the Bolsover District and surrounding areas, to our office, where we pro-

vided free and confidential advice on a whole range of issues affecting working people.

The whole day was a huge suc-

I wish to say a 'Thank you' for all those who helped me win my appeal.

Mrs.P. Shirebrook

cess, due to the hard work of both staff and volunteers who had to cope with large numbers of people seeking advice. We were helped by our Polish volunteers who were on hand to provide their valuable interpretation skills during the many interviews.

March heralded the end of the benefits take up project which had generated great interest in our service all over the Bolsover area. Sadly we had to say goodbye to valued staff members we had worked alongside for the last few years. The month of March also brought about a more significant change within the whole organisation. The move from 54 to 70 Saltergate meant a re-location to the Shirebrook office for both the Derbyshire Asbestos Support Team and The Trade Union Safety Team.

In the second half of the year we were able to help those people seeking employment advice, by inviting and providing an interview room for the Chesterfield Law Centre, who come along to Shirebrook once a month.

The latter part of this year will pre-

Thank you all for your help with attendance allowance forms for Mr.J. which he was granted with no problems at all.

Mrs.J. Shirebrook

sent further challenges for our team of advisors, with the introduction of the Employment

Support Allowance on the 27th of October. This will replace the existing Incapacity Benefit for new claimants, and has the potential to increase the work load of advisors in the near future. Our team are currently getting to grips with this fundamental change in the social security system, and are ready for the problems it will certainly bring.

In January a Bolsover man visited our outreach venue on Castle Street, seeking advice on income support and child tax credits. In March 2006 whilst claiming as a disabled lone parent his benefits were stopped following allegations that he had worked whilst in receipt of incapacity benefit. Alongside his incapacity benefit he was also in receipt of income support which included the child allowances within the claim. Sometime later he made a new claim for income support but was never advised to claim child tax credits because new claims (after April 2004) did not include the child allowances as part of the claim.

In August 2006 he did claim Child tax credits from the Inland Revenue and requested backdating to March 2006. However under tax credits backdating rules the award could only be backdated three months, leaving the man with a short fall of at least two months of benefit for his two children. He appealed this decision but lost at a tribunal. He was advised to contact our organisation with a view to seeking a special payment under maladministration due to official error. We helped him make a successful application for a special payment; he received over £800.00 in compensation because the Department of Work and Pension decided that he had not been informed of the need to make a claim for child tax credits resulting in a late application.

In addition to the special payments case we also helped the man win his appeal against the decision to stop his incapacity benefit due to the allegation that he worked whilst claiming benefit.

North East Derbyshire



We would like to thank, again, the people of NE Derbyshire for their continued support and appreciation of the work we do in their communities. Despite the problems they face, with the ever changing benefits system, they continue to make us welcome at our Clay Cross, Eckington, Grassmoor and Holmewood outreaches, which continue to be well attended (even more so in the current economic climate).

Another year has passed but the problems remain the same, only worse. Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Tax Credits (TCs) continue to be the the most complex problems, with Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) sanctions not far behind.

This year has seen appeals against the Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) for IB almost double.

Given the mining and heavy industry that was present in NE Derbyshires past, it is hardly surprising that many of its male residents have health issues that prevent them from working. However, the Government's insistence that they reduce IB recipients by one million has resulted in

I was, earlier this year, approached at the Holmewood outreach by a man who had failed his Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) for Incapacity Benefit (Incap).

Investigations revealed that he had had an eye removed at 11 months old and used an artificial one, he also had an unstable knee and suspected osteo-arthritis. These problems meant that he had problems walking, using stairs, rising from sitting, standing, bending and kneeling, as well as being blind in his right eye. He was awarded 12 points, the requirement being 15 to pass the PCA.

We lodged an appeal and when the Secretary of States Submission arrived prior to hearing I was amazed to read that the man in question had 6/6 (perfect) vision in both eyes and could bend and kneel to the floor despite being observed struggling to do so. The result of this case was that the Appeal Tribunal awarded him 15 points for bending and kneeling without myself or the man in question getting anywhere near the Tribunal Suite, because in their opinion (and that of the law) the man obviously could not bend and kneel because he struggled to do so.

We then lodged an official complaint against the Doctor who had compiled the medical report and the company who are responsible for carrying out the medicals on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) investigated a complaint against one of its own employees. This company is a private company contracted by the DWP and so I raised this issue with the Jobcentre Plus East Midlands Regional Manager at the recent regional conference. Her response was that they were self-regulating because no-one within DWP had medical knowledge. However, there are monthly meetings between Jobcentre Plus (JC+) and the company concerned and they are obliged to notify JC+ of all complaints made. This does not appear to be happening. Copies of all complaints are now to be forwarded to the Derbyshire District JC+ Manager who will ensure that they are brought to the attention of the Regional Manager.

The response we got back to our complaint was unbelievable, they claimed that as the Dr. who had carried out the medical had made a typographical error when commenting on the vision aspect of the PCA, their Senior Medical Adviser stated that there had been no loss of faculty in the right eye because the man had learned to adapt and that as he was observed, with difficulty, bending and kneeling to the floor he could quite clearly do it.

The matter has now been referred to the mans MP, who has asked for copies of all other complaints made against this Dr and the company he works for. Also, as a result of my raising the issue at the JC+ Regional Conference, the Regional Manager of Citizens Advice Bureau is now going to monitor the matter within her vast area. I will keep you informed of any outcomes of this case.

more and more IB claimants having to go to appeal for their benefit. Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centres (DUWCs) has played its part in helping many IB claimants with their appeals and have been successful in over 70% of cases that have gone to Tribunal.

Unfortunately, the future looks bleak with the introduction of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and its much stricter qualifying criteria for physical problems, on the 27 October

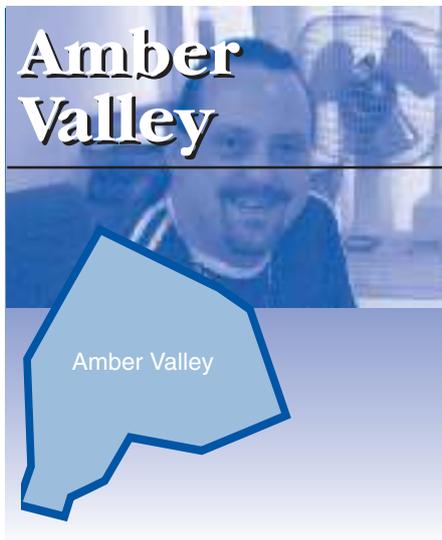
this year. Initially, it will only affect new claimants who cannot work due to illness. However, from next year existing IB claimants will start to be introduced to the new Work Capability Assessment (WCA) which is replacing the PCA. We anticipate that this will cause a serious increase in the number of appeals that we deal with as there are numerous parts to ESA that can be appealed as opposed to only one with IB. We will be working closely with the MPs with regards to the introduction of ESA

and any problems this will cause for NE Derbyshire residents.

We anticipate that JSA sanctions will continue to rise as Jobcentre Plus offices try to enforce Government policy. However, DUWCs will be in NE Derbyshire to give its Jobseekers a fair hearing and ensure that they are not exploited by the system that should be there to help them.

Unfortunately Tax Credits will continue to be a problem for the foreseeable future until they are dealt with by an agency that is used to dealing with people and who doesn't treat everyone with suspicion when they try to make a claim.

If you have any problems with benefits or tax credits, or just need some advice please call in at our NE Derbyshire venues.



Thanks again to the Alfretton Town Council and Somercotes Parish Council we have been able to continue our sessions in Alfretton and Somercotes.

The Alfretton office is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays. If we could secure the funding we would like to provide a daily service at our High St Office which is well used. The search continues. Our Somercotes outreach pulls people in from all over the Parish and is a much needed lifeline for many who would otherwise not be able to access help.

Great news has been received from Heanor Salcare who have secured funding in order to be able to provide our service out of their premises. Ours is the only open door facility in the area and our work is much valued by the Salcare organisation.

Thank you so much for all your help in the appeal. You were very kind, patient and supportive and clearly explained things to me.

Thank you, I could not have done it without you.

Helen, Chesterfield

An ex-miner from Heanor came in to make sure he was receiving his full entitlement to benefit. He had a wife and young child, owned his own home and paid Council Tax.

The adviser checked what income the man had coming in to assess whether he qualified for means tested benefits. He didn't and he was already in receipt of Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit.

Investigations by the Adviser into any health problems revealed that the ex-miner had not made any claims for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit for Vibration White Finger, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and Chronic Bronchitis, this despite being paid out by the Coal Board under the Mineworkers Compensation Scheme. He was on other appropriate sickness related benefits

The adviser assisted with the filling in of the relevant forms and, depending on the % percentage of disability awarded for each condition, if the amalgamated scores add up to more than 14% the man will be better off by at least £27.36 per week.



Caption

User Feedback Campaign 2008

Throughout October we encourage all our users to complete a feedback form. The 2008 results are summarised below:

151 people completed forms this time.

The average waiting time was 12 minutes, with the majority of people waiting 5 minutes or less to see an adviser. This is a reflection of the excellent support that our new volunteers are giving us.

99% of respondents said that they would use our service again, and 98% said that they would recommend us to someone else.

Our publicity shows again that word of mouth continues to be our most important form of publicity, with 52% saying that they had heard about us through a friend or relative. 17% came in after passing by our offices, 14% are regular users, 7% saw one of our leaflets while the remaining 10% were referred to us either by the Job Centre or another voluntary organisation.

87% of respondents said that they were very happy with our service, while 12% were satisfied that we had done our best. The remaining 1% left this question blank.

Finally, a selection of comments from our happy users!

"Very helpful and easy to talk to. Very much a feeling that someone will listen and care."

"Very good and a service needed in Staveley."

"The people concerned are all genuine and conscientious regarding our needs."

"Don't know what we would do without you."

"First class service."

"Fantastic help and support."

Type of Appeal	Completed	Pending
Disability Living Allowance & Attendance Allowance	74	76
Incapacity Benefit	74	47
Income Support	10	14
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (see note 1)	24	14
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit	4	2
Job Seekers Allowance	10	32
Tax Credits	2	8
Other	2	4
TOTAL	200	197

Note 1: Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit covers payments on a weekly basis for accidents at work and diseases contracted as part of work. These include Bronchitis and Emphysema for miners, Vibration White Finger, Deafness, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Pneumoconiosis and many Asbestos related diseases.

As a result of these Tribunals the following amounts were awarded:

Lump Sum Arrears:	£198,119
Ongoing Weekly Benefits p.a.:	£501,863

Over a year general enquiries at the Centres and Outreach Offices (as well as by home visits) resulted in payments amounting to £975,375 for Derbyshire residents.

**During the last year this has meant a total of
£1,675,357
has been won**

Management Committee 2007/2008

The Management Committee would like to thank all those who have given freely of their time and talents throughout the year in pursuit of the aims and objectives of the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres.

Chair

Paul Buckley
(Derbyshire County Council)

Vice-Chair

Barry Johnson
(Chesterfield & District TUC)

Treasurer

Ian Rutledge
(Workers' Education
Association)

Chesterfield Borough Council

Cllr Mark Higginbottom

Bolsover District Council

Councillor Brian Hudless
(until September 2008)

Councillor Ann Syrett
(from September 2008)

North East Derbyshire District Council

Cllr Graham Baxter

Chesterfield & District Trades Union Council

Gill Whittaker & Roger Davenport

Derbyshire Association of Trades Councils

Mike Nelson

Members

Keith O'Neill, Elaine Tidd,
Dennis Clayton, Leslie Shooter,
Lynn Fieldsend, Angela Webster,
Frank Sims, Adrian Rimmington,
John Gilbert, Caroline Tipple

Co-optee

Dorothy Carter (ACCA)

Centre Staff

Colin Hampton - Co-ordinator

Bob Pemberton - Assistant
Co-ordinator/Welfare Rights

Andy Parkes - Welfare Rights
Natalie Woodward-Welfare Rights
Neil Buxton - Welfare Rights

Sarah Walters - One Fund For All

Catherine Liffen - Admin Worker
Lynn Haythorne - Admin Worker

Ellie Lynall - Moving Forward

WHERE TO GET ADVICE

Chesterfield & North East Derbyshire

54 Saltergate, Chesterfield, S40 1JR

Tel/Fax: (01246) 231441

Email: info@duwc.org.uk

Monday to Thursday 9.00am - 3.30pm

Friday 9.00am - 12.00 noon

Clay Cross - Adult Education Centre, Market Street

Monday 9.30am - 12.30pm

Eckington - Business Centre, Market Street

Monday 1.30pm - 3.30pm

Grassmoor - Community Centre, New Street

Friday 10.00am - 12.00 noon

Holmewood - St. Albans Centre, Heath Road

Thursday 1.00pm - 3.00pm

Staveley - Learning Matters, High Street

Monday & Friday 9.00am - 12.00 noon

Wednesday 9.00am - 12.00 noon, 1.00pm - 4.00pm

BOLSOVER DISTRICT

44 Patchwork Row, Shirebrook, NG20 8AL.

Tel: (01623) 748161 Fax: (01623) 743316

Monday - Friday 9.00am - 11.30am

Bolsover - Adult Education Centre, Castle Street - Monday 1.00pm - 3.30pm

Clowne - Community Centre, Recreation Close - Tuesday 1.00pm - 3.30pm

Creswell - Limestone House, Elmton Road - Thursday 9.00am - 11.30am

Pinxton - Village Hall, Kirkstead Road - Tuesday 1.00pm - 3.30pm

AMBER VALLEY

Suite 4, Alfreton House, High Street

Tel: (01773) 832237

Wednesday & Thursday 9.00am - 12.00 noon, 1.00pm - 4.00pm

Heanor - Salcare, Ray Street - Friday 8.30am - 12.30pm

Somercotes - Parish Hall, Nottingham Road - Monday 1.30pm - 4.00pm

Thanks

To all our funders, our Management Committee,
our OFFA Contributors and all our supporters.



Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres are funded by Bolsover District Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, N. E. Derbyshire District Council, Derbyshire County Council, Staveley Neighbourhood Management, Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Derbyshire Community Foundation, Alfreton Town Council, Somercotes Parish Council, Salcare Heanor, as well as contributions raised through the One Fund For All.