

Annual Report 2011

Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres



Who are we?



What we provide

We provide welfare rights advice and representation on all aspects of Welfare Benefits for anyone who needs it.

Each year we deal with around 9,000 enquiries, represent around 300 people at tribunals and recover well over £2.3 million in one off payments and increased weekly benefits for the people of Derbyshire. The money we gain for people is spent in the local economy helping to preserve jobs

Contents

Who are we?	2
The Chairman writes Graham Baxter	3
Your Voice Your Rights!	4-7
Fundraising	8
Statistics	9
Chesterfield	10
N.E. Derbyshire	11
Amber Valley	11
Bolsover	12
Case Studies	13-14
Our Representation	15
Management Committee/ Where to get advice?	16

Established in April 1983, the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres are a part of a much larger network of TUC Unemployed Workers' Centres. We aim to build unity between employed and unemployed workers, and campaign for full employment with quality training and jobs and a benefits system that allows people to live in health and in dignity.



Some of our fantastic volunteers

and aiding regeneration.

The continuing and deepening recession has impacted on the DUWCs in a number of ways. The unnecessary and vindictive austerity measures aimed at workers and those already experiencing poverty is placing extra demands on our services. At the same time the same austerity cuts are squeezing the funding streams on which the Centres have become ever more reliant. Worse still the impact of the cuts far from helping us out of the crisis will most definitely bring more problems to our doors with lower benefits and people entering insecure jobs that fail to lift people out of poverty. The DUWCs have had to change opening times in order to adjust to the lack of Derbyshire County Council funding.

The massive increase in the number of tribunals where we are providing representation has

meant that we have had to further limit face-to-face drop in hours in order to give time for our workers to prepare for the appeals.

What we stand for...

- Provision of a voice for unemployed, underemployed and unwaged workers.
- Provision of information concerning the issues facing people on benefits and credits.
- Campaigning on issues affecting unemployed people and related issues for the whole community.
- Provision of top quality, free advice and representation on all aspects of welfare benefits.
- Support for Trade Unions and other bodies in their efforts to save or create jobs.
- Research and dissemination of information on issues affecting employment and benefits issues.

The Chairman writes...

Barry Johnson, our vice chair, is 80 years old in November. Barry is one of the original founders of the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres working with Bill Mitchell, Bas Barker, Bill Flanagan and others to bring about the organisation of the unemployed in Chesterfield and subsequently throughout North Derbyshire.

However, Barry was against the setting up of the Centres as a National initiative arguing for an organisation of the unemployed by the unemployed. Barry feared that the Centres would be stifled in their campaigning by the constraints that would be placed upon the Centres.

The TUC pressed ahead with the setting up of the Centres, so rather than licking his wounds Barry set about the task of helping make them a success. He could also help ensure that the organisation stuck to its objectives of providing a vehicle for unemployed workers to fight for

full employment and benefits allowing dignity if work could not be provided.

Barry has been a consistent support to the DUWCs through the 28 years of their existence involving himself in campaigning activities, locally, regionally and nationally. His advice at Management Committee meetings is always considered and valued. His commitment is unwavering and despite recent health problems continues to give all he can to the cause.

It is typical of Barry that he wanted his 80th birthday to be marked with



Barry Johnson



Graham Baxter, Leader of North East Derbyshire District Council

a fundraising event for the DUWCs – and that is what we are going to do following the AGM on Friday November 25th.

An evening of entertainment is planned with the objective of celebrating the achievements of the Centres despite the cruel 100% cut in funding from the Tory County Council. As well as enjoying the occasion Barry hopes to turn that support into practical and financial help for the Centres.

Thanks Barry, Happy 80th Birthday and long may your work for us continue.

Graham Baxter

The Co-ordinator writes...

The Tory controlled County Council dismissed over 20 years of work for the people of Derbyshire when they cruelly imposed a 100% cut on the funding of the Centres.

In a cynical fashion they emailed me on December 23rd 2010 to tell us the decision would be taken on January 3rd 2011, leaving us little time to organise to reverse the decision. The monies saved from our cut was to be given to South and Mid Derbyshire to purchase legal advice. The Tories argued that too much money was being spent in the North East of the County on Advice Services.

However, we all know that this was an act of political malice aimed at an organisation with its roots in the Trade Union Movement. Support from Labour and Liberal Democrat Councillors was not enough to change the decision and the



Colin Hampton (far right) campaigning against legal aid reform. (With kind permission from the Derbyshire Times)

organisation has suffered as a consequence with rising demand and falling resources.

I would like to thank all our supporters who have rallied to help us through these hard times. If we didn't know before we certainly know now who our friends are. We will not be distracted from our campaigning work to highlight the need for full employment and dignity for those who cannot work. **Colin Hampton**

Your Voice Your Rights!

Centres at forefront of campaign against onslaught on the sick and the disabled

The Government is acting like a disreputable insurance company with the Department of Works and Pensions turning down a huge amount of claims for benefits and then waiting to see who has the will and the support to appeal the decision. They know that hundreds of thousands will be bullied into submission, either too unwell or lacking the representation and expertise to fight back.

The DUWCs have represented 297 people between October 2010 and the end of September 2011 at Appeals Tribunals for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA). For ESA we have had an 80% success rate for DLA we have had a 60% success rate. Nationally under 40% of appeals succeed. The national figure includes those who are not represented that is why it

is much lower. If anyone doubted the value of organisations such as DUWCs then these statistics alone show our worth to the hardest hit in our community.

The DUWCs campaign was featured in the TUCs film screened in Hyde Park for the 'March for the Alternative' in March 2011 attended by half a million people. Reports in the Guardian, Mirror, Sunday Mirror and Le Monde have featured

cases highlighted by the DUWCs. BBC Politics show and Channel Four have given coverage to some of our worst cases of injustice, one example being overturned without going to an Appeal on the strength of the publicity gained.

We have staged demonstrations in Chesterfield and Derby to highlight the plight of people facing the Work Capability Assessment, many receiving 0 points (15 are needed to claim ESA). Those refused ESA will have little chance of finding work in a recession with employers free to choose people who are fully fit and with appropriate employment becoming scarce. Claimants lose a minimum of £25 and are further forced into poverty.



ESA Claimants outside Chesterfield Jobcentre
(With kind permission from the Derbyshire Times)

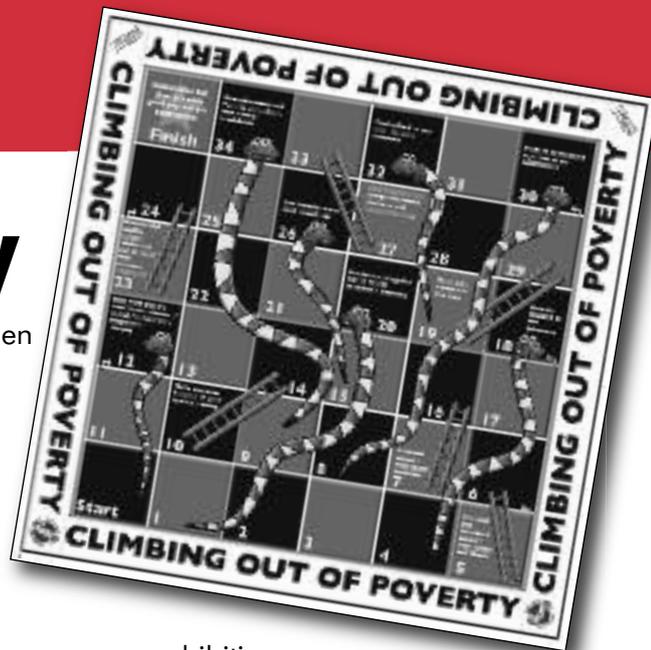
Climbing out of poverty

DUWCs have always networked with similar organisations and anti-poverty groups. One of the advantages is the sharing and developing of ideas.

DUWCs co-ordinator Colin Hampton whilst attending the European Anti-Poverty Networks AGM saw a mural used as a backdrop for the conference which had been created by a Migrants group in London. It was based on a game of snakes and ladders and designed to show the

difficulties encountered when trying to escape from poverty – the ladders clarifying what helps and the many snakes that prevent the objective of obtaining a full time job with good pay and job satisfaction.

With the help of the Bolsover Financial Inclusion Project the DUWCs are producing a 6m x 6m version of the game which will be played in Market Squares and at conferences in the coming year. The game, accompanied by an



exhibition will be used to dispel the myth that escaping poverty is easy. It will hopefully focus the minds of politicians and the public as to which policies help and hinder those caught in the poverty trap.

'Justine - Diary of a Jobseeker'

Volunteer Justine Bark has shot to international fame having launched her blog 'Justine - Diary of a Jobseeker' earlier in the year.

As a result of discussion arising from European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) meetings, Co-ordinator Colin Hampton asked Justine if she was prepared to put her thoughts and activities out in the blogosphere. The idea was to try to get an unemployed person in many countries across Europe to keep a diary of their experiences looking for work in the recession. Justine, who has been a volunteer at the Centre for two years, said she would give it a try and explored the mechanics of setting up a blog. With our contacts in EAPN and Church Action Against Poverty her on-line diary

quickly picked up a readership of thousands from all over the world. Justine has been brave enough to share her problems and anxieties of trying to make ends meet and search for work in difficult times. Justine has given insight into the difficulties of dealing with the agencies, public and private, when claiming benefits and looking for a job.

Her endeavours and willingness to have a go have had some rewards. Justine has been invited to address a big conference in Brussels entitled 'Getting out of the Crisis Together' organised by the EAPN, where she read out extracts from her blog to a packed auditorium of European delegation and EU policy makers.

If you want to read Justine's blog go to www.justine-diaryofajobseeker.blogspot.com/



Justine Bark



Justice at the Crisis Conference

Transition and Training

Thanks to the Transition Fund, I started on the 1st June with the aim of providing a complete targeted training programme on the Benefit system by the end of this Benefit year (March 2012).

The aim of the Transition Fund money is to help Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres adapt and cope with the loss of funding. My role is to help bridge that gap with Benefit training for new and existing volunteers and staff. My first goal was to recruit as many new volunteers as possible and then to develop their skills and knowledge so they could become advisers. Their services are needed to help with the sharp increase in demand for help with Employment and Support Allowance claims, help people

plan for the upcoming major changes in benefits in 2013 and support people in maximising their benefit entitlement.

9 new volunteers started the training programme in July, by the time of writing this article that number had increased to the current 13 volunteers involved.

The main programme is covering all elements of the benefits system and the skills needed to help people receive their legal entitlement. The main programme is being supplemented by specific courses to help both the new and

existing volunteers and staff to remain up to date and improve their knowledge base. One of these courses looked at the new 'Work Programme' which was launched earlier this year and how it affects individuals on Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance and Income Support.

By the end of November I will have lead courses on 13 different subjects and organised 2 other skill based courses to enable the volunteers to support people access the help they need. There is another 6 planned days of training as well as on the on-going and increasing one to one support to help the new volunteers reach the position of adviser.

Youth March for Jobs!

75 years ago 200 unemployed men from Jarrow, on the banks of the Tyne, marched from the north east to London. They demanded jobs and an end to their poverty conditions. In October 2011, a group of young people set out on the same journey with a series of demands for jobs, support in education and an end to youth service cuts and closures. With 1 million young people out of work, the issue of youth unemployment is



Youth March for Jobs

at the top of the agenda of the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres. So it was with great enthusiasm that we welcomed the Youth March for Jobs into Derbyshire on Thursday October 13th. The young people were joined by DUWCs supporters and Natascha Engel MP on the Yorkshire border and marched in

to Eckington Market Street for a short meeting addressed by Cllr Anne Western. The March then went on to New & Old Whittington before receiving a great welcome both by students outside Chesterfield College and in New Square. The marchers were addressed by Toby Perkins MP and then delivered their own message

So far 22 people have been able to access some or all of the training offered.

I hope in the near future the new volunteers will be in the position that they can start acting as representatives at their first appeal. Their commitment to the programme and to help people gain their benefit entitlement is very strong.

I would like to thank Marie H, Marie R, Rebecca, Philip, Helen, Beryl, Jane, Shirley, Susan, Don, Michelle, Jade, Angela, Karen, and Adam for making this training programme so exciting for everyone. I would also like to thank everyone else for being so warm and welcoming to me, as well as helping in getting everything in place so quickly.

Barbara Knight
Transition Support Worker

to the crowd of supporters that had gathered.

Friday saw the young people leave Chesterfield Job Centre, sent off by the local PCS union branch and after receiving refreshments at Arkwright Community Centre went up into Bolsover Market Place to be welcomed by Dennis Skinner MP. The BBC's One Show then filmed interviews with marchers on the way to Shirebrook where they were greeted by a large crowd in the Market Place. After being fed at the Miners' Welfare they left Derbyshire on their long journey to London.

Youth unemployment levels are a national scandal. The cost of having young people on the dole will be felt by generations to come. The DUWC will continue to press for greater urgency in eradicating youth unemployment and for better support for those unable to work.



Sarah Walters & Colin Hampton

The withdrawal of our annual grant by Derbyshire County Council in April could have been disastrous for the continuing existence of DUWCs. But it is testament to the esteem that the people of Derbyshire have for our work that we have survived. There has been an impact on the service that we are able to offer – the Chesterfield and Shirebrook offices have had to close on Friday mornings. A combination of a drop in funds and an increase in tribunal work left us with no choice. But given we have lost £33,000 this could be much worse.

The situation isn't any worse because the community has rallied round with a splendid show of support. The column listing our official supporters on page 8 shows only half the picture. We have been showered with donations from those who have used our service and cannot consider the possibility of losing DUWCs. From the anonymous £10 and £20 notes left in our collection boxes to the regular contributions from established friends we have been touched by the support shown by so many people. We would like to say a big thank you to all concerned – and to those who fought so hard to stop the County Council cut.

Do you want to help?

Here are three easy ways to support DUWCs:

- Sign up to a regular contribution through bankers standing order or check off. All you need to do is fill in the form and return it to us, we'll do the rest.
- If you purchase goods over the internet, please visit our "Buy At" page (www.buy.at/DUWC). If you register and go through this page before shopping at major retailers such eBay or Amazon we get commission on your purchases. This is at no extra cost to the purchaser – all you need to do is make a few extra clicks.
- Save your used printer ink cartridges and collect those belonging to friends and family. Pass them onto us for recycling and we receive a small payment.

Fundraising

Our Supporters

Grants:

- Bolsover District Council
- Chesterfield Borough Council
- North East Derbyshire District Council
- Coalfields Regeneration Trust
- Working Neighbourhoods Fund (BDC & CBC)
- Transition Fund
- Derbyshire Community Foundation
- Salcare Heanor
- Pinxton
- Pleasley
- Scarcliffe
- Shirebrook
- Somercotes
- Unstone
- Warsop

Parish and Town Councils:

- Alfreton
- Ault Hucknall
- Brimington
- Clay Cross
- Clowne
- Dronfield
- Eckington
- Grassmoor Hasland & Winsick
- North Wingfield

Trade Unions:

- PCS Derbyshire
- PCS Nottingham DWP
- N E Derbyshire Unison
- Unite Derby Central
- Unite East Midlands
- Erewash Trades Council
- North East Derbyshire Labour Party
- NE Derbyshire Labour Group
- Chesterfield Labour Group
- Derbyshire County Council Labour Group
- Bolsover Labour Group

Corporate:

- Mansfield Building Society
- Midlands Co-operative
- Santander
- TESCO
- Wilkinsons

Various anonymous charitable trusts

- County Councillors through the Community Leadership Programme:
- Dave Allen (Birdholme)
- Sharon Blank (Spire)
- Walter Burrows (Brimington)
- David Chapman (Sutton)
- Alan Charles (Killamarsh)
- Kevin Gillott (North Wingfield & Tupton)
- Ken Stevenson (Bolsover NW, Elmton & Whitwell)
- Marian Stockdale (Shirebrook & Pleasley)
- David Stone (Staveley N & Whittington)
- Anne Western (Barlborough & Clowne)
- John Williams (Staveley South)



Sarah Walters & Keith O'Neill fundraising

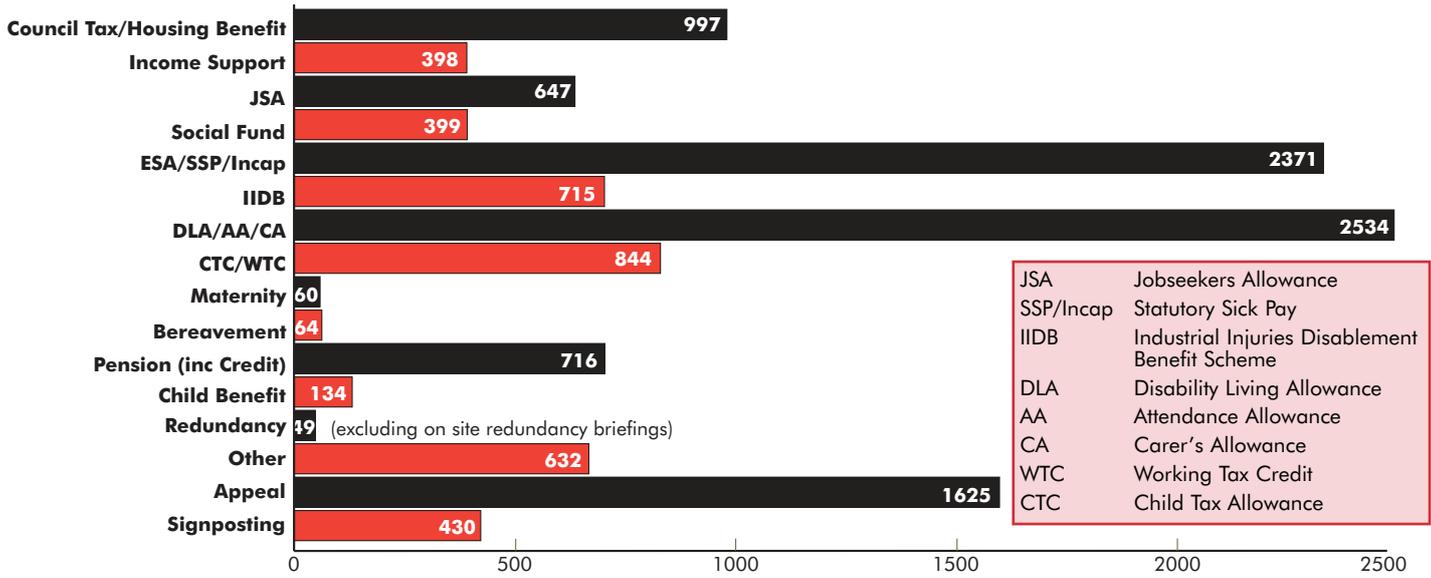


Sarah Walters receives a cheque from Mansfield Building Society

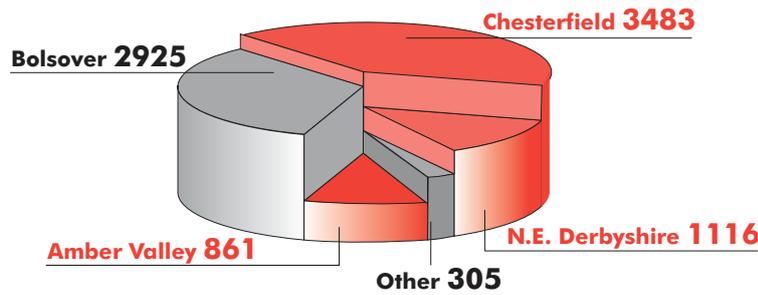


Statistics

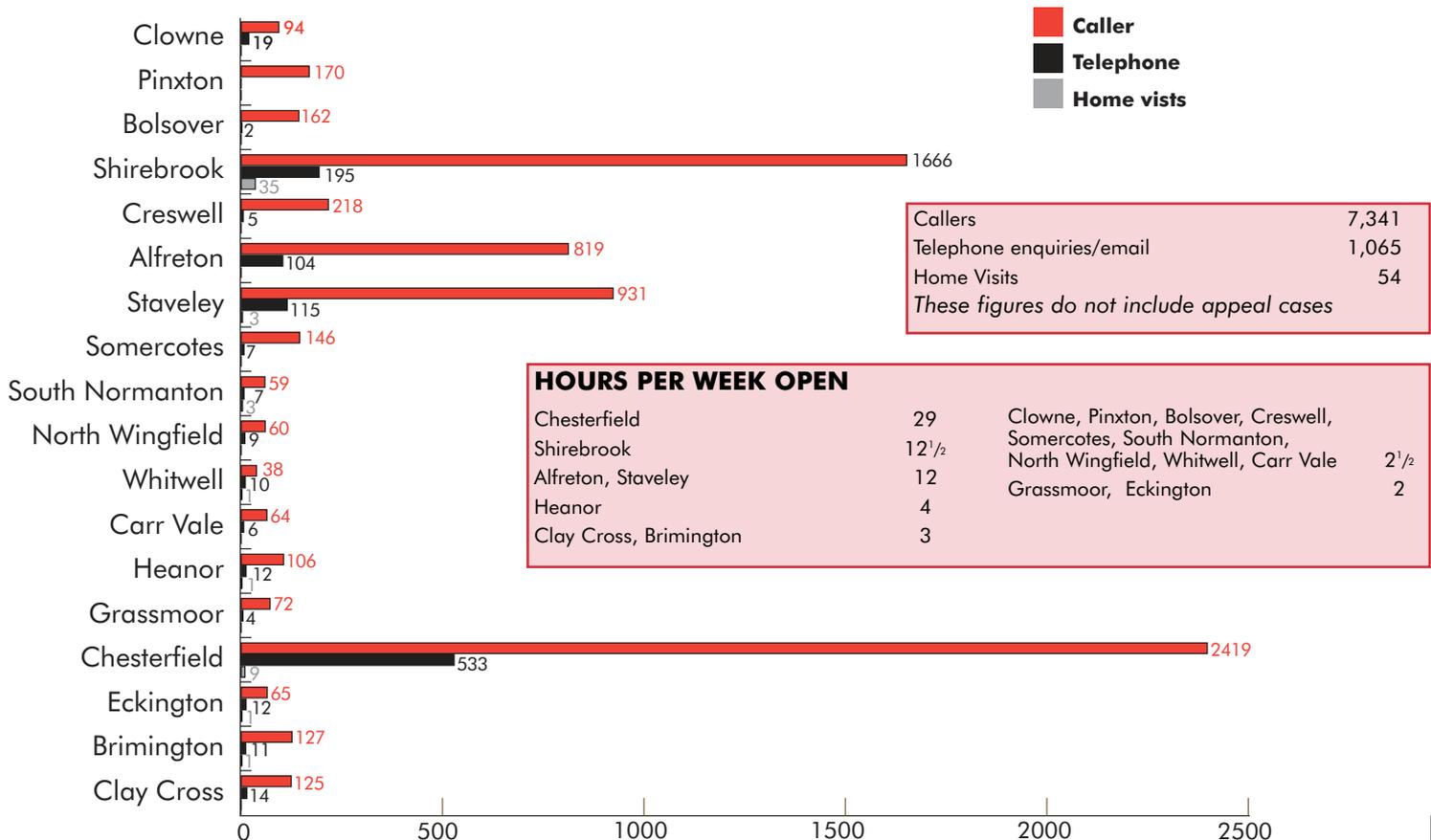
ENQUIRY TOTALS 2010/2011



ORIGIN OF ENQUIRIES



VENUE CALLER TOTALS 2010/2011



Around the area

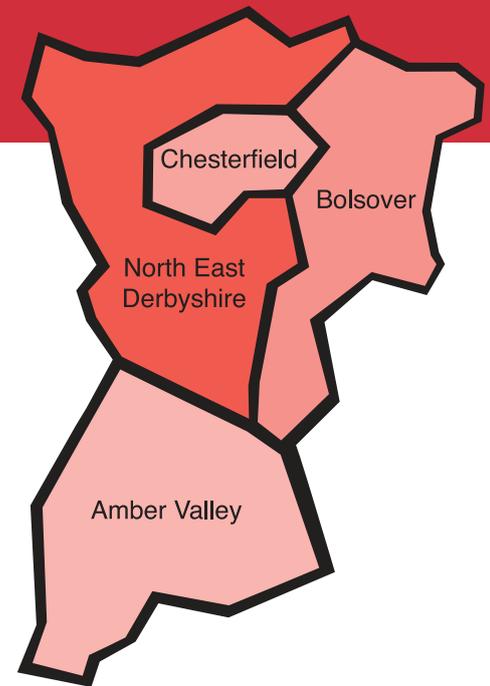
Chesterfield



Our Saltergate headquarters continues to provide us with challenges with regards to the cramped conditions. Those waiting for advice are sharing a limited area. Everyone has been very accepting of our predicament. New volunteers have coped well with the difficult

'To All the Wonderful Staff at DUWC your help was very much appreciated in helping me fill out all the relevant forms.'
Ms M Brimington

working conditions. A solution has appeared on the horizon with the Chesterfield Borough Council looking to find us suitable accommodation alongside the Chesterfield Law Centre and Chesterfield Citizens Advice Bureau. We already work very closely with these two organisations and so we look forward to a better future for our many Chesterfield callers. The



complete withdrawal of funding by Derbyshire County Council led to the decision to close the Chesterfield Office on Fridays. However despite this closure of a morning session venue callers are

Mr S (aged 30s) lives with his elderly parents and has mild learning difficulties. He claims Jobseekers Allowance (income based) but he has never been employment except for a couple of short seasonal work contracts. In July 2009 he received a letter telling him that he had been overpaid JSA by around £7000 but with no explanation. He brought the decision letter to DUWC's Staveley outreach and we made enquiries to find out the reasons for the supposed overpayment. The DWP had undertaken a "compliance" check on his savings and decided that he was no longer entitled to JSA because they had decided that his capital was above the limit and had not been fully declared. We helped Mr S to appeal the decision and provided further information about his various accounts to support his appeal. The DWP then reconsidered their decision, agreed that Mr S's qualifying capital did not actually exceed the capital limit and reduced his overpayment to around £2500. While making their reconsideration (which took around 10 months to finalise) Mr S received no JSA payments despite continuing to sign on at the Jobcentre every 2 weeks. He lived off his savings and we wrote several letters on his behalf to the DWP to try to get his JSA payments reinstated and also involved the MPs office in making representations and complaints on his behalf. His JSA was finally reinstated in October 2010 but with no backdating to 2008. We therefore appealed the lack of backdated benefit and again we helped Mr S to provide all the necessary evidence about his

savings. He struggled to understand exactly what information the DWP required to assess his claim and it took several months to collect all of the information. In May 2011, the DWP have finally agreed that Mr S is now owed over £4000 in backdated JSA that was never paid to him over an 18 month period. We have seen Mr S around 40 times at our Staveley outreach over a 2 year period and believe that without our help he would have given up on claiming his entitlement to JSA. He is now getting JSA paid at around £60 per week.

Mr T (aged 60s) suffers from breathing difficulties (COPD), arthritis, diabetes and chronic depression since the death of his wife. On the advice of a housing support worker, he made a claim for Disability Living Allowance but was turned down. He struggled to find an advice agency that would deal with him face to face because he does not cope well with phone calls. He called into our Staveley outreach when passing one day and was very pleased to find out that we could help him with his appeal for DLA. We wrote to his GP to obtain medical evidence in support of his claim and which we submitted on his behalf. A DUWC representative went with him to his Tribunal hearing where he was awarded High Rate Mobility and Low Rate Care, backdated over 18 months. He now gets a weekly equivalent DLA payment of £70.95 and is due to receive a lump sum of backdated benefits of over £5000. He intends to buy a good quality mobility scooter.

'Thank you so much with my appeal for my ESA claim tribunal would not have won it without you.'

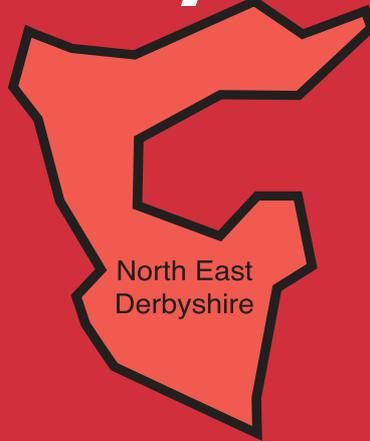
Ms C.D. Boythorpe

only slightly down with just under 2500 coming to the building apart from telephone enquiries and Chesterfield home visits. John Bradley has now given way to Tim Wilkinson who is the regular adviser at our Brimington sessions. The Community Centre venue continues to be well used and has thrown up some interesting case studies.

Our Staveley Advice sessions have benefited from Chesterfield Borough Council Working Neighbourhoods Funding as well as Coalfield Regeneration Trust support. We continue to work alongside Chesterfield Law Centre and Chesterfield CAB. Kathy Farr has helped mentor many volunteers at our Staveley Learning Matters Office. This year we have said goodbye to Heather Riggott, Jade Surah and Denise Hawksworth, who have all found paid work. Nicola McManus continues to provide support alongside the intake of new volunteers. Angela Webster, Ian Rutledge and Nico Ferrera provide help on reception.

All at the Centres are worried what will happen after the end of March 2012 when the CRT and WNF funding comes to an end. Over 1000 enquiries have been dealt with by our service at Staveley and so there can be no doubt over the value of our presence. However without this funding we will be unable to continue this level of service. Many people will not access the Centre's advice if the service is withdrawn.

North East Derbyshire



'Many thanks for your advice and support leading to a successful appeal at Chesterfield Tribunal.'

Mr.S N Wingfield

'I really would like to thank you so much for all your support with my appeal, I would have given up long ago without your help as I found it so daunting.'

Ms D Eckington

North East Derbyshire District constituents access our services at venues all over North Derbyshire. Our outreach offices cover Grassmoor, N Wingfield, Eckington and Clay Cross, but Chesterfield, Staveley and even Alfreton give support to those travelling to access advice and representation. Jo Moran, Tim Wilkinson, Katrina Hudson, John Bradley and Angela Manfredi have all played a significant part in the development of services in North East Derbyshire. Superb support from Parish Councils has helped enhance the services provided with many claimants having support from the Centres at Appeals Tribunals.

'I am writing to thank you for all the help you gave me with my appeal for incapacity benefit with all your help I managed to win my appeal for which I am very grateful.'

Mrs .H. Cutthorpe.

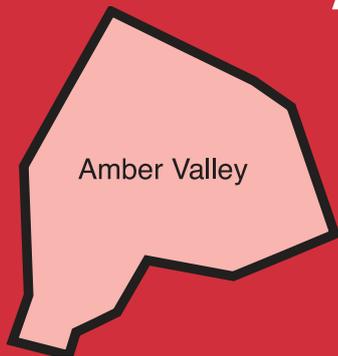
Mr and Mrs J from Eckington approached DUWC for help to seek a review of Mrs J's DLA award. Following a serious operation on her spine, her mobility was very limited and her care needs had increased considerably and she was expected to take a significant time to recover. DUWC helped her to complete a DLA review form and she was subsequently awarded the High Rate Care and High Rate Mobility Components of DLA for an 18 month period (giving rise to a weekly DLA payment of £121.25 to Mrs J).

The local Jobcentre told them that this DLA award would enable the household to be paid a higher rate of Income Support but the Jobcentre were unable to provide any help to sort this out. Mr and Mrs J therefore approached DUWC again and we advised them of their options. We helped Mr J to make an underlying claim as Mrs J's carer and we helped them to notify Income Support of the relevant changes. When Income Support sent a series of conflicting letters, we advised them of the correct option.

Subsequently Mr and Mrs J's weekly Income Support payments increased by £143.35 and a lump sum of arrears of Income Support of around £800 was paid.

Around the area

Amber Valley



The support from Alfreton Town Council, Somercotes Parish Council, Salcare and the

'I can't thank you enough for all your help and support but most of all for believing in me. It's been a dreadful 18 months but now I can look forward to living again instead of just existing.'

Mrs M. Somercotes

A couple came into the Alfreton office and asked for help with completing some Working Tax Credit forms. During the interview it emerged that the husband was suffering from Spondalosis of the Spine and Rheumatoid Arthritis and that the couple had financial difficulties. Our adviser sent for a Disability Living Allowance form and helped the husband to complete this. As a result he was awarded this benefit at the lower rate of care – however as his mobility was very poor our adviser appealed this decision after obtaining further evidence from the man's doctor.

The decision was revised by the DWP and he was awarded the middle rate of care and the high rate of mobility. He is now £100.70 per week better off and has received a back payment of £2,618.

'Just writing to you in support of what you're campaigning for. I've had help from your office in Alfreton for appealing my ESA claim. Keep up the good work you do!'

Mr.J. Alfreton

Coalfields Regeneration Trust has ensured that we have been able to maintain and develop our service in Amber Valley. The Law Centre and Mid Derbyshire CAB have worked with us in our Alfreton Office providing a service giving debt and employment law advice as well as benefits advice and representation. John Bradley has been helped by Jethro Waldren, who has now left to go to university, as well as support from Katrina Hudson and Glynn Power working with Bolsover Claimants.

A gentleman who suffers from Parkinson's Disease came into the Alfreton office, as his Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) had been stopped. We put in an appeal for him and went on to represent him at tribunal, where his case was successful. Because it had taken so long to get to the tribunal stage he was entitled to backdated payments of £4,104. His medical condition also prompted us to put in a claim for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and he was awarded this at a rate of £49.30 per week. His wife could then claim Carer's Allowance at £55.55 per week. When he first came into our office, this man was in the depths of despair, but now he has a much more worry-free existence.

Bolsover District



Glyn Power and Cindy Williams

Two thousand and eleven just a typical year of advice provision within the Bolsover District. Not on your life!

From Pinxton to Creswell, by the end of the year most communities will have felt the full impact of benefit cuts and changes, which threaten to reduce living standards for many of the poorest in our area. The woman from Creswell who became pregnant with her second child in March, found to her dismay that the Health in Pregnancy Grant (worth

'If at First'

In January a woman from Clowne visited our outreach venue on Mill Street. She brought in documents relating to both current and previous claims for child tax credits; her husband died a year ago leaving her and her Son. The papers she presented indicated that she had incurred overpayments of child tax credits from tax years 2005/2006 and 2010/2011 the total being approximately £2,500. It appeared that she had failed to provide information to the Tax Credits Office by a particular deadline date in order to renew her tax credits award, this had happened in 2005 and 2010.

We rang the Tax Credits Office to try and clarify what had happened with this Woman's claim; we were informed of her failure to provide information. The adviser we spoke to was able to waive the overpayment from the 2010/2011 tax year but indicated that we would have to appeal against recovery of the overpayment from 2005/2006 tax year; giving our reasons.

Having spoken at length with the woman, she did state that back in 2005 her husband had left work due to illness, she had become his carer, and found looking after him very difficult; she did indicate that

she had learning difficulties and could barely read and write. Her husband had over the years dealt with all financial affairs, and since becoming ill had been unable to. He also began to hide or destroy correspondence, so this situation created many problems for the woman.

On the appeal from we argued that the overpayment should be wiped out because of the difficult circumstances the woman found herself in. The first response was a resounding rejection of our arguments, which we received in May 2011. We gathered further information from her which included much more detail about predicament over two years, what did come to light was isolation this woman felt over a long period. We sent off further information in June and waited until the end of July when a second response was received. This time we received a letter requesting further information in the form of questions about how the woman was dealing with correspondence received at the time; more information was sent back soon after.

In September 2011, we received a new decision which was favourable to the woman. It read that due to 'exceptional circumstances' the overpayment would not have to be repaid. This case is a reminder that if at first you don't get what you want keep trying, don't give up.

£190.00 of income to all women) had been abolished in January. Quickly followed in April, by the scrapping of the Baby Element in child tax credits (families with a child under one lose £10.50 per week) and as if to add insult to injury the Sure Start Maternity Grant she was able to claim for her first child, will not be available for her second (restricted to the first child only from April 2011) The impact of the latter is that babies in neighbourhoods with complex financial and social problems will now be denied £500.00, of much needed support. All such cuts significantly affect families and children, despite the Governments child poverty pledges. Furthermore, the 6 changes to

both working and child tax credits which came into force in April 2011, without much publicity; are cuts aimed specifically at working families which does not fit well with the Governments stated aim: making work pay.

Many people throughout the Bolsover District claiming sickness and disability benefits have visited our advice venues and shared with us their frustrations and fears, as they are branded scroungers or malingerers, by the press and government ministers. Those previously in receipt incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance and income support on the basis of being unfit for work are currently being subjected to a process of migration to Employment and

Support Allowance, and with recent changes to the Work Capability Assessment a much stricter medical assessment is now in place; guaranteeing that many more claimants will be found fit for work. The Bolsover man suffering from severe mental health and learning difficulties, and in receipt of highest care component within Disability Living Allowance, will face the WCA for the first time; having previously been exempt from the old Personal Capability Assessment within Incapacity Benefit, he is unable to cope with new process and has had to re-engage with local mental health services. Many Disability Living Allowance claimants within our area are feeling the heat as plans to

replace the benefit are being formulated, and are to be implemented in 2013, as part of new welfare reforms. DLA is to be re-named Personal Independence Payment it is certain that existing claimants will be subjected to stricter assessments to qualify, and as a result of this many will lose entitlement.

At our Shirebrook office and the numerous outreach venues throughout Bolsover we continue to experience high demand for our service. Our team of staff and volunteers are meeting this challenge, working hard to ensure that we deliver a first class service under difficult circumstances. In early summer we moved our Bolsover outreach venue from Castle Street to join Community

'DUWC took the worry off us and directed us in the right direction what a relief, If these people weren't here for Shirebrook people we would be in a right muddle.'

Mrs R. Shirebrook

Voluntary Partners (CVP) in their new offices at Kitchencroft. This is the old Voluntary Action Bolsover/Business Link building opposite the District Council Offices. This continues to be a Monday afternoon session from 1.00 pm to 3.30 pm. Since the move we have experienced a significant increase in the number of local people wishing to access

our advice provision; many having come straight from Bolsover Job Centre. This highlights the fact that our service is both valued and trusted within the community. As the public purse continues to shrink and services are withdrawn or re-organised, we face difficulty times ahead. Despite significant cuts in our core funding we continue to face an increase in enquiries as the economic situation for many in our area worsens. We would be unable to continue meeting the increase in demand without the help of our fantastic group of volunteers. Gill, Cindy, Allison, Shell, Karen, Keith and Paul give their time and effort week in and week out, to make sure we can continue to provide the best service possible to the residents of the Bolsover District.

A man came to visit us at our Bolsover outreach in June this year. He had been in receipt of Employment and Support since 2009. He had come in to have a benefits check which he had been encouraged to do by his family. He brought with him various papers from the Department of Work and Pensions. We discovered that he was receiving ESA, which included the 'Work Related Activity Component'. We assumed that he had at some stage been medically assessed and been found to have Limited Capability for Work'. It was at the point when he produced an appeal decision notice from the summer of 2010 that we realized that the DWP had in fact been underpaying this man for many months and had subjected him to unnecessary contact with them through 'Work Focused Interviews'.

The letter stated that an ESA appeal had been allowed, but more importantly the man had been found to have Limited Capability for Work Related Activity by virtue of ESA regulations. Essentially it was decided that he should be placed in the support group (would not be expected to work due to their condition) as there would be a substantial

risk to his mental health if he was found fit for work.

We immediately rang the DWP at Derby, explaining the situation. They asked us for a contact number and informed us they would ring back but within three hours. We argued for a shorter time span for such a call back, as we were unlikely to be with the customer for the next three hours. We were put on hold and then told a Decision Maker would call us back as soon as possible. Twenty minutes later a Decision Maker was apologizing for the error and promising to put things right straight away.

The difference between the work related activity component and the support group component is £5.60, the amount the man received back as arrears was not large. The significance of us discovering the benefit error was the effect upon his mental health. He had the previous week been to a work focused interview which he had found very distressing, and had set back his recovery. This situation could have been avoided, but could have gone on for many months. This case highlights the need for the retentions of well funded advice provision within our communities.

The Value of Our Representation!

The number of appeals attended by our advisers continues to grow at an alarming rate. With 828 waiting to be heard, we expect that figure to grow to 1,000 early in the new year. Our success rate is just under 80% for Employment and Support Allowance appeals and just over 60% for Disability Living Allowance tribunals.

When the results are matched with the national figures - reported at around 40% for ESA, two issues are illuminated. Firstly the national figure shows

the total number of appeals including those who appealed but did not attend an oral hearing, having their case dealt with without representation or

the opportunity to provide evidence and cross examination on the day.

Secondly our success rate shows the worth of our support and representation for the people of Derbyshire. Without our help many people would be wrongly disqualified from entitlements and further impoverished as a result.

Type of Appeal Oct 1st 2010 - Sept 30th 2011	Completed	Pending
Incapacity Benefit & Employment Support Allowance	209	351
Disability Allowance & Attendance Allowance	86	264
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (see note 1)	16	71
Job seeker's Allowance	5	72
Income Support	5	22
Tax Credits	5	24
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit	0	5
Other	0	19
TOTAL	326	828

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:	£390,719
Ongoing Weekly Benefits p.a.:	£782,434

Over a year general enquiries at the Centres and Outreach Offices (as well as by home visits) resulted in payments amounting to £1,170,450 for Derbyshire residents.

During the last year this has meant a total of £2,343,603 has been won through our advice and representation and at appeals

Management Committee 2010/2011

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

Cllr Graham Baxter
(N.E. Derbyshire District Council)

Vice- Chair

Barry Johnson
(Chesterfield & District TUC)

Treasurer

Ian Rutledge (co-optee)

Chesterfield Borough Council

Councillor Amanda Serjeant

Alfreton Town Council

S Marshall-Clarke
R Johnston

Bolsover District Council

Councillor Ann Syrett

Chesterfield & District Trades Union Council

John Knight and Roger Davenport

Derbyshire Association of Trades Union Councils

Shay Boyle

Members

John Gilbert, Frank Sims,
Keith O'Neill, Angela Webster,
Elaine Tidd, Caroline Tipple,
Nicolo Ferrera, Justine Bark,
Hilary Cave, Josephine Moran

Co-optees

Dave Marriott (PCS)
Dorothy Carter (ACCA)
Sarah Roy (Law Centre)

Centre Staff

Colin Hampton - Co-ordinator
Andy Parkes - Welfare Rights
Lynn Bagshaw - Admin
Neil Buxton - Welfare Rights
Sarah Walters - OFFA Fundraiser
Tim Wilkinson - Welfare Rights
Katrina Hudson - Welfare Rights
John Bradley - Welfare Rights
Kathy Farr - Welfare Rights

WHERE TO GET ADVICE

Chesterfield & North East Derbyshire

70 Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1JR
Tel 01246 231441/Fax 01246 551529

Email: info@duwc.org.uk

Monday-Thursday 9am-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

North Wingfield – Community Resource Centre, Whiteleas Avenue,
Thursday 1.00pm-3.30pm

Grassmoor – Community Centre, New Street,
Thursday 10.00am – 12.00 noon

Staveley – Learning Matters, High Street.
Mon, Wed, Fri 9.00am – 1.00pm

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 – Mill Street, Tuesday 1.00pm-3.30pm

Creswell – Limestone House, Elmtun Road, Thursday 9.00am-11.30am

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

Carr Vale – Bainbridge Hall, Wednesday 1.00pm-3.30pm

Whitwell – Community Centre, Tuesday 9.00am- 12.00 noon

South Normanton – Cyber Café, Thursday 1.00pm – 3.30pm

Amber Valley

Suite 4, Alfreton House, High Street,

Tel: 01773 832237

Tuesday 9.00am- 12 noon,
Wednesday/Thursday 9.00am-12 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, North East Derbyshire District Council, Derbyshire County Council, 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.