

# HARC



Annual Review

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## our mission

- to relieve local poverty and to improve the quality of life for people on a low income

## our aims

- to ensure the correct benefits and/or Tax Credits are received by anyone on a low income whether in work or not
- to facilitate a return to employment through 'back to work' grants and in work benefits
- to give practical assistance to homeless people
- to assist people with disabilities, mental health problems and long term illness to live independently
- to provide older people with easy access to benefits information and a comprehensive support package
- to ensure that people with dependants have adequate support and sufficient income

## our objectives

### Information

to provide comprehensive information on all Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits

### advice

to provide impartial advice by;

- drop in service
- appointments
- home visits
- surgeries
- telephone
- email

### representation

to represent clients at;

- social security appeal tribunals
- disability appeal tribunals
- medical appeal tribunals
- upper tribunals

Demand for our service has grown significantly over the year and I congratulate the HARC team on maintaining a high quality of service.



HARC has been working hard to ensure that good quality advice services are maintained for our community in the future. Working with Brighton Housing Trust, Citizens Advice East Sussex and Newhaven Community Development Association, we were awarded £500,000 by the Big Lottery, Advice Plus Programme. This money is being used to identify the demand and needs analysis of advice provision throughout East Sussex, identifying gaps and challenging the impact on access to legal advice. The three year programme will strengthen and build partnership working between specialist advice agencies and other advice providers in terms of referral, co-ordination and monitoring. We will improve access to good quality and appropriate legal advice for people in need in East Sussex, enabling and supporting those in need to avoid, or overcome, disadvantage.

This project, along with tendering for a contract from the Legal Services Commission, was one of the largest and most important elements of HARC's work this year. The partnership provides an holistic approach, responding to the changing needs of our clients and the demand for advice services in Hastings and Rother. Now more than ever clients will receive all the information they need to resolve their enquiry, whatever the category of Social Welfare Law.

We are delighted that our Director, Jacky Everard, has been elected to the Hastings Community Network Executive and will join the Local Strategic Partnership. Jacky will have a powerful voice on behalf of those who use our services and, we hope, an influence on policy-making in the area.

Our Trustees are very proud to present this report outlining HARC's achievements in 2009-2010.

Mike Gratton

## Main Activities

Total client contacts 10,133 of which 385 were made through home visits and 51 at advice surgeries in Rother.

### Outcomes Achieved

Clients represented at Review/Tribunal	184
Review/Tribunal cases won	169
success rate	92%

### Increase in client benefits

£974,532 secured from new claims & renewals for Disability Living Allowance / Attendance Allowance.

£908,153 secured in previously unclaimed, enhanced or reinstated benefits.

**Overall HARC obtained £1,882,685 for local people.**

**94% of clients who used our service gained increased income.**

Having been involved with the Legal Services Contracted Work as a Caseworker since 1998, Clive Edwards took over Supervision of the Contract in November 2008.



Clive, Wendy & Robyn discuss the contract.

## How the Contract Works

The LSC Contracted work can only be undertaken for eligible clients, ie: those in receipt of certain qualifying benefits such as Income Support, Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance or Guarantee Pension Credit, or those who have below a certain level of income/assets.

We are required to open a certain amount of these financially eligible cases within a specified period – the average amount of time spent on these cases and the amount of successful outcomes have to fall within certain parameters, and the quality of all the contracted work has to be monitored closely. These parameters, and the quality of the work has been subject to auditing processes within the last year, which have all been successful. I have the responsibility of ensuring that all these things are achieved.

## Helping Local people

A couple of years ago a third of my new clients were being signposted by one other local agency, Seaview. However, we now have increasing numbers of referrals from other agencies, particularly involving clients with mental health issues. Working in conjunction with other organisations has accounted for a huge number of clients accessing HARC, leading to many of them successfully claiming extra benefit entitlements. This demonstrates a good local awareness of HARC's expertise and ensures the best possible outcome for local people.

For some, these extra entitlements represent a very significant increase in weekly income, which one person described to me as "making the difference between having some quality of life, rather than just an existence". An increase in income cannot be underestimated. It can certainly give some people a foothold in turning things around for themselves. In addition, a good percentage of the extra money may help reduce debt and/or be re-circulated within the community to good effect for businesses etc. In the current economic climate these can only be good things.

Over a third of my caseload is made up of people I have seen previously under the Contract and I think that demonstrates the confidence people have in the service we provide under it.

## Benefits to HARC Staff

The LSC Contract gives the advisers an organised framework under which to work. I personally feel that this helps us to keep track of those clients who are particularly vulnerable. Having an individual case load for each adviser means that our clients don't slip through the net. Under the Contracted work HARC can assist in calculating potential benefit entitlements, assisting with benefit applications, disputing/appealing decisions, advice and assistance concerning Appeal Tribunals and even disputing Tribunal decisions. I think the contract framework is excellent and I congratulate the LSC team at HARC on achieving results far above the national average.

## What HARC clients say

HARC carries out regular surveys to monitor and evaluate its service, not only for LSC clients but for all HARC clients. A sample response to a typical survey is shown below:

Do you think the adviser understood your problem? 100% said yes

Was the outcome of your case successful? 91% said yes

Successful or not were you satisfied with the service you received? 100% said yes

Would you recommend HARC to others? 100% said yes

As part of the survey we ask clients to comment on the service they received. A sample of those comments are shown below:

*"Nothing in my opinion could make your service more excellent than it already is. I am so very grateful, I don't know what I would have done without your help"*

*"It is plain to see how busy you are and how vital HARC is. The adviser was excellent. I wish other organisations would take time and see what can be done, by looking at HARC"*

*"I have already advised a friend to seek your advice. I would definitely use your service again whenever I need help"*

*"If all advisers are as efficient and pleasant as the one who filled in my forms you should not have any complaints"*

## The Future

The Legal Services Contract has so far provided HARC with 12 years of Funding. In a consortium partnership with Citizens Advice 1066 and Brighton Housing Trust, Hastings Advice, we have secured a further 3 year contract from October 2010, giving HARC and its clients stability in uncertain economic times.

*Contract Supervisor Clive Edwards*

making a difference

I have worked for HARC for a year now after 13 years working for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on the Incapacity Benefit/ Employment and Support Allowance section.



Rebecca Sargent helps a client on open advice

I am still dealing with people unable to work due to incapacity but now also work with jobseekers, pensioners, carers and other client groups.

There are many differences, though, in the two jobs.

Clients have a much more positive attitude towards HARC. They expect us to be able to deal with their benefit problems in a professional, yet friendly manner. They appreciate the openness of the organisation, clearly trust us and have confidence in us too.

This contrasts vastly with their attitude and feelings towards the DWP, where many clients are frequently frustrated with the level of service provided. Clients often feel let down by the system and have little confidence in it. Since the inception of the DWP telephone team, clients are no longer able to speak to the people who are dealing with their paperwork. This means that a client ringing the DWP would rarely speak to the same person twice and have to explain their situation over and over again. People see the DWP as a faceless organisation which is quite impersonal.

At HARC, we are nearly always able to resolve client benefit problems and give correct advice, even when the client has previously been given incorrect information or advice. I advise clients about Job Grants, Return to Work Credits and Tax Credits. I am able to organise my own workload and take responsibility for my case work. Clients appreciate the help that we can give them and we have a very high success rate.

Since joining HARC there has been a large increase in clients needing our help. The most common types of queries are regarding Housing and Council Tax Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support and Tax Credits. I have learned much about other benefits and processes.

I enjoy working at HARC immensely and have job satisfaction. I have had good feedback from the clients, especially where I have won their appeals and/or got benefit awarded/ reinstated. There is a great working atmosphere at HARC and I feel supported by the whole team.

*Rebecca Sargent*  
*Benefits Adviser*

I first visited John, a single divorced man, in August 2009 following a referral from CAB. He is in his 50's and lives in private rented accommodation in rural Rother where he is very isolated. He suffered post traumatic stress when his daughter was attacked a couple of years ago and has been unable to recover mentally.



Teresa Andrews prepares another client for her appeal

John has been desperately trying to help himself with support from the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) but has suffered frequent recent relapses which have resulted in suicide attempts and self neglect. He also suffers from a prolapsed disc which affects his ability to walk. He had attempted to obtain Disability Living Allowance (DLA) with the help of the CMHT but was refused.

After discussing the appeal process with John it was evident he would need a great deal of support. I therefore agreed to represent him at the tribunal. HARC's policy is to give the client a comprehensive understanding of the appeal process and give them the confidence that we will get the decision overturned, which in 92% of cases we achieve.

Throughout the journey to the venue, John was visibly agitated and it was necessary to encourage, distract, calm and generally support him, to enable him to go through with the hearing. This support continued throughout the hearing with the client becoming tearful on several occasions.

At the hearing I submitted a written submission to the panel along with further medical evidence. HARC won the appeal and the client was awarded the middle rate care and low rate mobility components of DLA, backdated to February 2009.

He received £1,800 in arrears and an extra £3,419 per annum in extra benefits for his disabilities. As a result of the DLA award, John also received an additional £52.85 per week severe disability premium, which was added to his existing entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance, since he was not fit for work.

The support given by HARC helped keep John's mental health stable during this very stressful time. The extra money awarded has helped to improve his quality of life immensely. He can now afford to take a taxi to visit and spend quality time with his grandson. He feels less isolated and he also has more money to buy healthy food and pay for his heating. Overall John's physical and mental health and wellbeing have improved, thanks to the support he received from HARC and our expertise at Tribunal Representation.

*Teresa Andrews*  
*Benefits Adviser*

tribunal success

In December 2009 HARC was awarded £53,000 through a Government Funded Programme called The Hardship Fund, which is aimed at strengthening communities and helping voluntary and community groups facing hardship.



Karen Brooker Adviser

The fund is administered by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) who recognise the important role charities, like HARC, play in both society and the local community.

During the recession HARC is experiencing an increased demand for advice. Clients are feeling even more anxious and many are in desperate need. People who have worked hard all their lives suddenly face the prospect of claiming state benefits, either because they were made redundant or had their working hours reduced. Those who are not in work, through illness, disability or long term unemployment have become more dependent than ever on HARC's service and more people than ever need our help.

The Government realises that agencies, like HARC, are struggling to provide their services in the recession due to loss of other grants or dwindling charity shop sales. The grant means HARC can now offer an improved and expanded telephone service to residents of Hastings and Rother. HARC was the only local agency to be awarded a grant!

HARC has many years of experience assisting local people to overcome disadvantage and we know that our service improves lives. However, we recognised that the limited telephone service we provided was inadequate. The grant solved a long standing problem for people who find it difficult to visit the centre (perhaps due to illness or disability) and prefer to be advised by phone. The additional phone advice has also reduced waiting time for clients who do come to the centre or, who need an appointment. The money has helped HARC advise many more people, not only by phone but also face to face.

HARC welcomed the opportunity to continue to provide real help to the local community, through this substantial amount of government funding.

Sandra Lewis  
Administration Manager

## *HARC Phone Advice ahead of target!*

*HARC's target for the number of telephone advice sessions conducted this year was set at 1,500. In the first 5 months HARC staff had already dealt with 972 cases.*

*If this trend continues then the target will be beaten by over 50%!*

*On average we resolve between 15 and 20% of enquiries over the phone each month, which means that clients get an immediate solution to their problem.*

improved telephone advice

Despite the recession, HARC shops continue to survive although, like many businesses we experienced a difficult year in 2009/ 2010. The shop in St Leonards on Sea did surprisingly well, bringing in more funds than ever for HARC.



Shop Manager Marian Wright makes a sale.

Conversely the shop in Queens Road, Hastings, struggled to meet targets. The amount of funds raised showed a marked decline on previous years. In many ways we feel fortunate that we are still in business, as many nearby retail units closed their doors, after almost a lifetime of trading.

The support of local people is still strong and we now work very closely with Daltons Furnishings and Battle Interiors who regularly pass furniture our way. As an organisation, HARC is keen to promote recycling and we are encouraging this with some success. This not only benefits HARC and its customers but also reduces landfill and fly tipping. We feel many local people make a conscious effort to choose HARC when donating their unwanted goods.

Of course we work hard to make this happen, appealing through local media and parish magazines. We offer a free fast collection service to many local residents, some of whom are elderly or have disabilities. Many would have difficulty disposing of furniture without our help.

We continue to have a team of long serving volunteers of all ages. More and more young people are joining HARC shops, initially through New Deal, Tomorrows People and more recently Creating Futures. We genuinely help people back into work and can provide a variety of challenges, particularly now we have modern technology in our shops.

Put simply, people like working for HARC and show a drive and passion second to none. HARC's Annual Report provides an opportunity to thank both volunteers and customers for their continued support. We also extend our thanks to Managers Jackie Workman and Marian Wright and Deputy Steve Elledge for their achievements in these difficult economic times.

Sandra Lewis  
Administration Manager

## *Recognition from Sussex Coast College*

*"Thank you very much for supporting our Work Experience programme this year- we couldn't have done it without you!"*

*Your hard work and commitment are really appreciated and we look forward to working with you again in the future."*

Katie Jackson  
Work Experience Co-ordinator  
Sussex Coast College Hastings

Anna Hodsoll  
Work Placement Officer  
Area Based Grant

# summarised accounts

For the year ended 31st March 2010

## Money In


Local Authority Grants	120,534
Legal Services Commission	44,494
Magdalen & Lasher / Isabel Blackman Foundation	24,514
Charity Shops Income	79,243
Other Funders	17,318
Investment Income	9
Community Development Foundation	53,007
Henry Smiths Charity	26,400
Lloyds TSB Foundation	15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£380,519</b>

## Money Out

Advice Centre Service	293,560
Administration	4,003
Charity Shops Running Costs	55,833
<b>Total</b>	<b>£353,396</b>

These summarised accounts are extracted from the full unqualified audited accounts approved by the Management Committee on the 17th August 2010 and subsequently submitted to the Charity Commission.

They may not contain sufficient information to allow a full understanding of the financial affairs of the charity. For further information, the full accounts and the auditors' report on those accounts should be consulted: copies of these can be obtained from 8 Cambridge Road, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 1DJ

Signed on behalf of the Management Committee,  R Lynch 17th August 2010.

Independent Auditors' statement to the Management Committee of Hastings Advice and Representation Centre - "We have examined the summarised financial statements of Hastings Advice and Representation Centre as set out above."

Respective responsibilities of the Management Committee and auditors. "The Management Committee is responsible for preparing the summarised financial statements in accordance with applicable United Kingdom law and the recommendations of the charities SORP."

"Our Responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summarised financial statements with the full financial statements and Management Committee Annual Report. We also read other information contained in the summarised annual report and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent mis-statements or material inconsistencies with the summarised financial statements."

Basis of opinion. "We conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 2008/3 issued by the Auditing Practices Board for use in the United Kingdom."

Opinion. "In our opinion the summarised financial statements are consistent with the full financial statements and the Management Committee's Annual Report of Hastings Advice and Representation Centre for the year ended 31st March 2010."

## Patron

Michael Mansfield QC

## Management Committee

Mike Gratton (Chair)

Morgan & Lamplugh Solicitors

Naomi Ridley (Vice Chair)

Hastings Furniture Service

Nick Baskett (Secretary)

Local Solicitor

Richard Lynch (Treasurer)

Client Representative

Danny Ryan

Social Services Adult Assessment Team

Dina Christodoulou

Citizens Advice 1066

Terry Fawthrop

Hastings Borough Councillor

Terry Soan

Hastings Borough Councillor

Geoff Brown

Committee Member

June Turner

Committee Member

## Advice Centre

Jacky Everard

Director

Sandra Lewis

Administration Manager

Clive Edwards

LSC Contract Supervisor

Karen Brooker

Adviser

Wendy Knowles

Adviser

Robyn Cleverley

Adviser

Andy Knight

Adviser

Rebecca Sargent

Adviser

Teresa Andrews

Adviser

Melanie Selley

Adviser

Sarah Allen

Reception & Admin

Astrid Gray

Reception & Admin

## Charity Shops Hastings & St Leonards on Sea

Jackie Workman Manager Marian Wright Manager Steve Elledge Relief Manager

Steve Palmer Driver

## Volunteers

Carol, Jill, June, Robert, Ian, Anne, Jenny, Clare, Jo, Susan, Tina, Kaye, Jill, David, Betty, Jodi, Sarah, Terri, Ian and Louise.

# acknowledgements

HARC continues to seek and attract funding from a variety of sources outside the local authorities. We are especially grateful to the following for their support.

East Sussex County Council, Hastings Borough Council, Rother District Council, Hastings Area Community Trust, London Legal Support Trust, Community Development Foundation, Modernisation Fund, Henry Smiths Charity, Isabel Blackman Foundation, Legal Services Commission, Lloyds TSB Foundation, Magdalen & Lasher Charity, Silver Lady Fund, Sussex Community Foundation, Supporters & Clients.

the team

## IT Support

In October 2009 we moved HARC's I.T support to Mark O'Connor, Kenward Pullen Ltd. Since then we have worked closely with Mark, to develop more efficient and effective client systems.

We feel confident the support we now have has resulted in an improved service for HARC clients.



Mark provides ongoing technical support for HARC staff, as well as system maintenance. Response time is fast and "down time" seems to have been eliminated.

We have been able to introduce home working and hot desking where appropriate. HARC Charity shops have, at last, been brought into the 21st century with lap tops and internet connectivity, something we have been working towards for a long time. As ever, all of this is achieved on a shoe string budget but really makes a difference to the way HARC operates and the facilities available to staff, clients and shop customers.

We feel this Annual Report gives us the opportunity to thank Mark and the Kenward Pullen team for their patience, support and innovative ideas which keep HARC up to date in the fast moving world of technology.

### **Hastings Advice and Representation Centre**

8 Cambridge Road  
Hastings TN34 1DJ

Tel: 01424 428375

Fax: 01424 423266

Email: [info@harcuk.com](mailto:info@harcuk.com)

Website: [www.harcuk.com](http://www.harcuk.com)

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