



Our Impact

April 2021 – March 2022

A Note from our Director

It has been a tough year for everyone, as we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic and crash landed into a cost-of-living crisis. With energy bills, evictions and homelessness on the rise across the country, there's no doubt we're in for another challenging year.

Yet, despite an increasingly severe housing crisis, we're proud to say that we managed to **prevent homelessness for more people than ever before** over 2021/22.

Our community needs us more than ever to offer advice, support and advocacy to navigate the ever-changing housing and financial landscape, and here at CHAS we aim to offer more support than ever before. Working in partnership with other Bristol-based advice and community organisations we will be increasing the amount of advice and outreach support we provide to our community and will be preventing even more people from falling into crisis.

All credit must go to the hardworking and dedicated CHAS Bristol team. I want to thank you all and everyone else who makes the work of CHAS Bristol possible: our community leaders, our partnership organisations and of course our supporters and donors who have shown so much faith in our work. We couldn't do this without you.

I joined CHAS Bristol in April and feel so privileged to be working with such a dedicated team and believe that together we can build an empowered community of citizens in Bristol, who have access to safe, secure and suitable homes.



Alice Tibbert
Director

About CHAS Bristol

At CHAS Bristol, we believe quality housing is a human right. **We're here to give anyone in and around Bristol the knowledge and support they need to live in safe, secure homes.**

Established in 1965, CHAS Bristol provides free specialist advice, support and advocacy for people in financial and housing crisis in Bristol and the surrounding areas, particularly where there are high levels of deprivation.



Harriet, our Advice Service Lead, supporting a client.

WHAT WE DO



BRIEF ADVICE | We provide vital telephone support: clients can chat with one of our expert Advisors who may be able to resolve their issues there and then.



CASEWORK | We offer multi-agency support over several months – sometimes even years – whilst we work to find long-term solutions.



OUTREACH WORK | We form strong partnerships with local organisations to reach more socially excluded people in housing need.



INFLUENCING POLICY | We ensure the voices of local people are heard at city-wide debates and policy making forums.

Why We Exist

Last year, we helped over 1,600 people from 745 households with their housing struggles – **that's 75% more households supported than the previous year.**

Bristol is in housing crisis. Rents are amongst the highest of any UK city and are still rising. Last autumn, the ban on evictions and the government furlough scheme ended – both of these were a lifeline to so many of our clients. Now, with the cost-of-living crisis, many clients and their families are faced with the very real threat of homelessness.

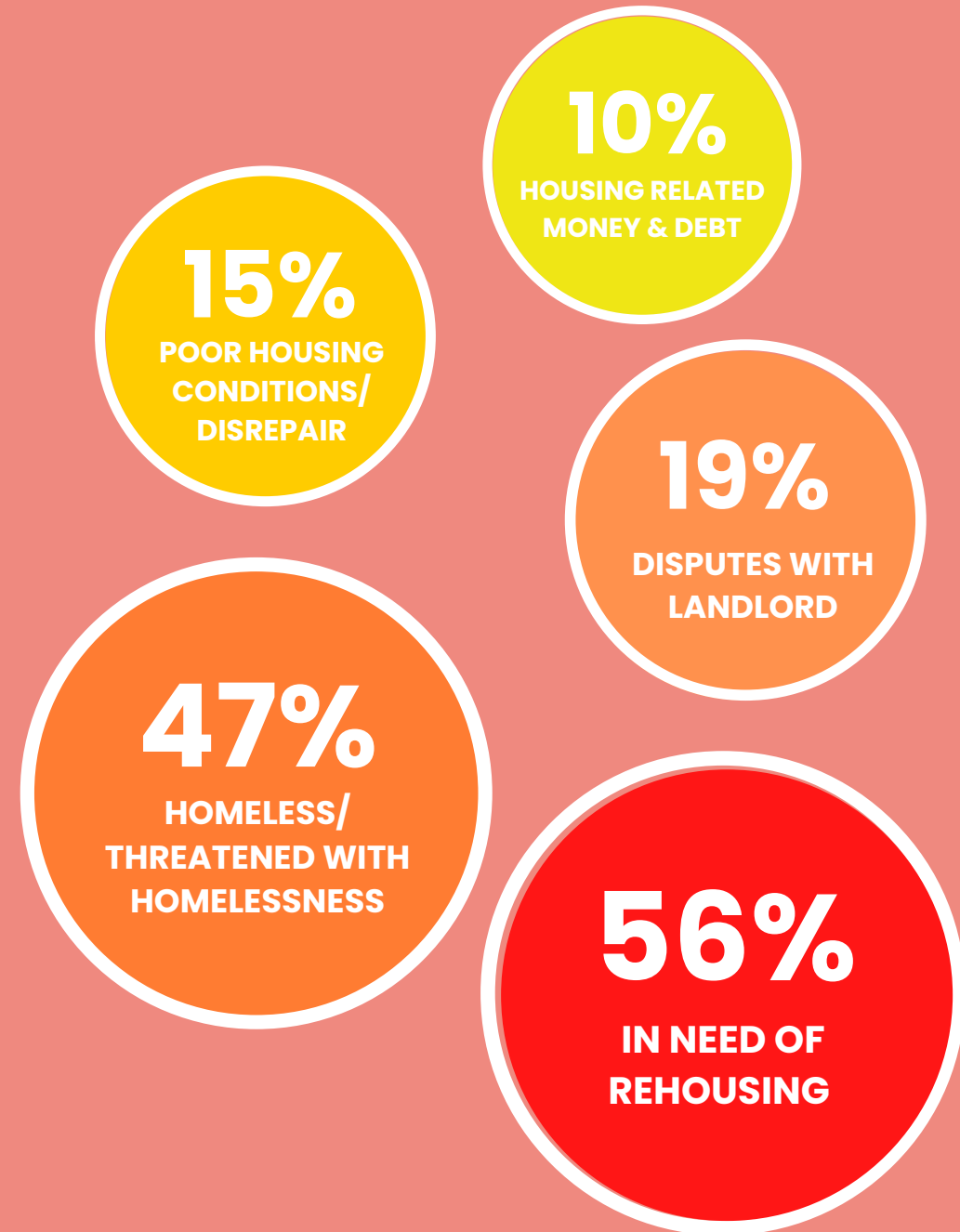
With reduced hours and lost jobs during the pandemic, a lot of people faced eviction after falling into rent arrears to their landlord. Last year, **almost half our clients came to us homeless or threatened with homelessness**, compared to a third just before the pandemic hit.

Many of our clients were in social/council housing and needed to be rehoused as they were at risk of harm because of, for example, domestic abuse, overcrowding, unsafe housing or racial harassment.

“ You helped me through the darkest time of my life. ”

– CHAS Client

Across the year, clients came to us with a range of housing related issues...



Mick's Story

Mick had moved into his elderly mother's housing association property, after giving up his job to be her full-time carer. Eventually, his mother needed to move into a care home.

Previously, the landlord assured Mick that if this were to happen, the tenancy would be passed onto him so he would still have somewhere to live. However, the landlord then told Mick's mother to end her tenancy, which she did, not understanding the impact this would have on her son. The landlord then gave Mick just four weeks to leave the property.

Feeling devastated, Mick turned to CHAS, where we got straight to work. We contacted the landlord, eventually persuading them to let Mick stay in the property for another three months. This would buy him time to make a homelessness application (to request their support with rehousing), apply for benefits and register for social housing.

However, we were presented with a hurdle: now that Mick had somewhere to live for the next three months, he was no longer considered by the council to be threatened with homelessness, meaning he wasn't entitled to their support.

It was clear that there was a serious risk that Mick could end up street homeless, so we went back to Mick's landlord to try and persuade them to offer Mick another housing association property. We argued that the way the landlord had dealt with Mick's occupation after his mother had moved out was immoral. We also highlighted that if they could rehouse Mick, they could free-up a 2-bed property - something that is in high demand in Bristol.

It was a success - the housing association offered Mick another of their properties. He was over the moon, and very grateful, saying we were the only ones to help him in his hour of need. Now settled into his new home, he can finally relax after a very distressing few months.

Our Work in Numbers

900

CASES

745

HOUSEHOLDS

1,628

PEOPLE

671

CHILDREN

*The number of cases is higher than the number of households because sometimes a household had to deal with another issue after their first case was closed.

Our Impact

Out of all
our 900 cases...

96%

felt they had a better understanding of their options, duties and rights.

53%

felt empowered to take action for themselves if similar situations happened in the future.

20%

said their mental health had improved. This went up to 48% for our long-term casework clients.

£30,000+

of additional income was secured for our clients.



Of the casework clients who came to us at crisis point (either homeless or threatened with homelessness)...

46%

had homelessness prevented, were rehoused or were able to maintain their tenancies.

25%

had housing conditions improved or rehousing prospects improved.

26%

were either referred to an alternative specialist, or felt empowered to take action for themselves.*

*The remaining 3% of cases represent clients in need of further support from us or those who disengaged with our service.

Our Clients

We support people from many different backgrounds, including disabled people and their carers, refugees, single parents and people leaving care, prison or rehab with little support.

A lot of our clients face extra barriers when it comes to accessing good quality housing and support, such as language barriers, poor mental health and discrimination.



51%

were parents with dependent children



29%

had a physical health condition



90%

were dependent on benefits, either entirely or to top up their income



60%

were from a minority ethnic group



42%

had a mental health condition



34%

didn't speak English as a first language

Mya's Story

Mya had a fixed contract with her landlord, meaning that the rent couldn't be put up until the contract ended. However, her landlord had increased the rent anyway and was pushing her to sign a new contract which gave her fewer rights.

Her landlord even claimed that she owed him extra rent from previous months. Feeling out of her depth, Mya ended up paying the landlord what he had demanded. She decided to give us a call to help with her confusion.

We explained to her what her rights were in this situation, advising her that she didn't have to sign the new contract and could continue with the existing one instead. We educated her on what steps she'd need to take to get the rent back that she'd overpaid. Through our work, we empowered Mya to take control of the situation and gave her the confidence to take action.



“Brief advice can help people to make informed decisions around complex issues”

– Joseph, CHAS
Housing Advisor

THE IMPORTANCE OF BRIEF ADVICE...

Although most of our advisors' time is spent on long-term casework, the majority of people who call us just need some brief advice on a housing matter. This might be just one or a few phone calls via our Advice Line to help someone to understand their rights, responsibilities and options. Thanks to our team of specialist advisors, brief advice can be extremely effective for our clients.

This is a very important part of our service – through brief advice we can empower a client to take further action themselves, and if something similar happens again they will be more confident in dealing with it. It also means we can often help people resolve their housing issue before it reaches crisis point.

Our Partnerships

We know that housing issues are often linked to other things clients are struggling with, like insecure employment, poor mental health or money and debt problems.

That's why we've built strong partnerships with other local organisations, enabling clients to access a much broader range of support. Through our partnership projects, we also aim to reach more socially excluded people.

We help them to deal with housing concerns early on so they can avoid reaching crisis point and can easily access the support they need.



In partnership with Talking Money, a local debt advice charity, we run our HomeFull project for families. Last year, we worked together with family support workers in children's centres in Central Bristol to help parents (often lone parents) tackle debt, bills, benefits and housing issues.



We partner with the Wellspring Settlement and the West of England Works to provide Boost - a drop-in service for the community in Lawrence Hill, Bristol. Here, local people can access support with bills, benefits, budgeting, employment and housing.

We began our Early Doors project in 2021 in partnership with the local homelessness charity, Caring in Bristol. Together we aim to prevent homelessness through education and early intervention e.g., by expanding the reach of our Housing Advice Service in East and South Bristol. We are honoured to work with members of the community to design new projects in order to best match their needs.



Aashyana

Aashyana, meaning 'beautiful home', is our partnership with Citizens Advice Bristol and St Pauls Advice Centre.

Through this partnership, last year we offered targeted support to Bristol's South Asian communities with housing, welfare benefits and money and debt advice.

Acknowledging the impact insecure housing can have on mental and physical health, we partnered with Southmead Development Trust for a local social prescribing programme. People can be referred directly to this service via their GP, allowing patients to access support with housing issues and other worries, like budgeting and loneliness.



What's Next?

At point of publication, we are halfway through the new financial year. With Harriet (Advice Service Lead) and Esme (Housing Advisor) returning from leave, we have been able to retain five members of our expert advice team. This has allowed us to take on more cases than ever before: in fact, we are fast approaching our 600th case worked on this year. This stands us in good stead to tackle the increased demand we're seeing across Bristol.

We have also welcomed two new members to the team:



Amran Arab
Project Coordinator (Outreach)

Amran is working alongside the Caring in Bristol team on the Early Doors Project and supporting the local community through outreach work.



Hollie Cochrane
Office Administrator

Hollie joined us in the summer supporting our brilliant Operations team to help CHAS to run as smoothly and effectively as possible.

We are looking forward to growing our partnership and outreach work and utilising our expertise to support those who may be struggling with food, financial and fuel poverty this winter.

And finally, after a period of incredible growth of the organisation over the last five years, we have been working hard to assess how we see ourselves and how we would like to move forward. With that in mind, we will be looking to relaunch under a new name and visual identity in the new year. We are incredibly excited about this next step in the organisation's journey and can't wait to share more details with you soon.



We would like to say a huge thank you to all of our kind supporters.

It is because of you that our work last year was possible.



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