

## Grant Report to Felixstowe Town Council

When we applied for this award we reported on an unprecedented increase in demand for our services throughout 2022 and this has continued. Both our client and enquiry numbers doubled from last year and this was reflected in the rise in the number of our clients who live in Felixstowe as shown in the table below.

### **Figures for 2022:**

Total Clients: 2182 (107% increase)

Total Enquiries: 15,588 (105% inc)

Clients **from Felixstowe**: 358 (98% inc)

Total Paid Staff: 231 hrs per week (62% inc)

Total Volunteers: 75 hrs per week (44% inc)

### **Figures for 2021:**

Total Clients: 1055

Total Enquiries: 7591

Clients **from Felixstowe**: 181

Total Paid Staff: 143 hrs per week

Total Volunteers: 52 hrs per week

We had had to increase our staffing resources and our office space to house them in order to meet this demand. We took on a new unit in the same building that increased our footprint by 50%. Through a special campaign, we had raised £20,000 to refurbish the new office and make it accessible and safe for wheelchair users (staff, volunteers, trustees and clients). Moving our frontline Duty Team into the new office then exposed some deficiencies left behind in our existing office as some new volunteers joined us. So, we were in real need of certain equipment that would enable us to provide the team with the tools needed to continue delivering the high standard of service we offer.

The grant we were grateful to receive covered the costs of three office chairs, three telephones (loudspeaker and headset facilities), three laptops and a shredder. In total £1,586.



Felixstowe residents now have a greater than ever opportunity to access our service and the increasingly wider skillset of our growing team. In addition to our well-established service, offering advice on welfare benefits, appealing incorrect decisions at tribunal, helping carers with applications and so much more; we now provide specialist Energy Advice and have a dedicated advisor who looks after older people's benefits, ensuring all of them are assessed for Pension Credit eligibility. In 2022 we advised 260 seniors in this category alone and as a result increased their Pension Credit benefit by over £80,000 per annum.

With the development of our successful telephone service, there has never been a better time for people in Felixstowe to access the full range of our services from the comfort of their own home, without the need to travel. But if they prefer a face-to-face service and are able to travel they can of course, still come into see us by appointment. The expansion of the service and the grants we receive to support it are all part of our efforts to ensure we see as many people in as timely a fashion as possible.

Supporting staff and volunteers with the equipment they need to function is key to ensuring we deliver the best possible client service and the feedback we receive confirms we hit the mark 99 times out of a 100. We are also proud of the quality of the advice we give and this shows through in the fact that we have won all 200 of the appeals to the Department of Work & Pensions over the last three years. A remarkable achievement no other disabled advice service can claim.

Any client whose financial situation is improved through our work is obviously better off and that alone alleviates their anxiety to some extent. But almost as important is the compassionate, empathic and non-judgmental approach taken by our staff and volunteers, some of whom have been in their client's position themselves in the past. People come to us at a low ebb and this has a significant uplifting effect for them just knowing there is someone out there who really cares.

**Rod Gibson**  
**Secretary/Trustee & Volunteer Fundraiser**  
**March 2023**