

Community Help & Advice Initiative (CHAI)

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Scottish Charity No. SC. 027594

ABOUT US

We are a registered Scottish charity providing free and independent advice to people affected by housing, debt and benefit issues in Edinburgh and Midlothian.

We also specialise in homelessness prevention housing advice (Edinburgh Housing Advice Partnership), housing support, and employability support.

Our objectives are:

- To relieve poverty
- To provide welfare assistance
- To provide practical help
- To provide information, advice and support on issues such as housing, debt, benefits and employability.



Family Support & Advice Service



INFORMATION SHEET

What is the Family Support and Advice Service?

The Family Support and Advice Service is a project launched by CHAI in September 2017 to provide free and impartial advice on income maximisation, debt and housing issues for families with children attending schools in Edinburgh.



PROJECT AIMS

Every year around £81 million worth of welfare is unclaimed in Edinburgh. Around 22% of children live in poverty with evidence showing that children from low-income households are more likely to have poorer attainment levels.

The project aims to maximise income, address any money problems and ultimately reduce the educational attainment gap between higher and lower income households. The service also makes appropriate referrals for employability and housing support where needed.

Crucially, the project aims to make access to advice as easy as possible by bringing

the advice sessions into the school, which is already a trusted environment for parents – and who may be dropping off or picking up their children anyway.

WHICH SCHOOLS SO FAR?

We have been piloting this work using a grant from the Council's '1 in 5' Programme, within 5 schools across Edinburgh:

- Tynecastle High School
- Dalry Primary School
- Stenhouse Primary School
- Rowanfield Special School
- Pilrig Park Special School

We are currently entering discussions with new School Clusters to extend the service, for example Oxbgangs Primary School, WHEC and Murrayburn Primary School. We are looking for more schools to self-finance the project.

DELIVERY MODEL

The service is delivered with one full-time Advice Worker allocated to each School Cluster (a high school with their feeder primary schools). The worker provides outreach Advice Sessions in each of the Cluster Schools, and provides development support to promoting the service to parents, carers and other stakeholders. We also produce bi-monthly newsletters to help promote the service within the schools:

www.chaiedinburgh.org.uk/new-family-support-advice-service/

ACCREDITATION

CHAI is approved to provide 'Advice and Counselling' services under the Council's 'Open Framework for Pupil Equity Fund', and also accredited by the Scottish National Standards.

GET INVOLVED

For more information on how **your school** could get involved, contact us on 0131 442 1009, or email us at: chai@chaiedinburgh.org.uk

Feedback, Statistics & Case Studies

The service has received great feedback so far and has **maximised household income by £136,000** since it started in September 2017. Dalry Primary Head Teacher Elaine Honeyman said the project is: *“a much-needed service in our school. It is invaluable knowing we can direct parents to this service and someone will be there to listen, advise and support them. It is a discrete and supportive service where parents are given advice in a warm and familiar environment. Due to it running inside the school building, and during the school day, it is convenient and accessible for many parents to use.”*

Below are our project statistics, from September 2017 to February 2018:

Number of families supported	45
Number of appointments attended	64
<i>Tynecastle High School</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Dalry Primary School</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Stenhouse Primary School</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Pilrig Park Special School</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Rowanfield Special School</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Other locations</i>	<i>13</i>
Financial gain achieved for clients	£136,712.73



CASE STUDY 1:

Fatma is a Turkish 33-year-old woman who is a lone parent to 2 young sons aged 9 and 14. She moved to the UK in 2014 and became homeless after a history of domestic abuse from her partner. Following this, she entered an unfurnished private let for £650 per month, but struggled to afford her rent and relied heavily on her friends for financial help. She had no furniture so they were currently sleeping on the floor in their home.

We assisted Fatma to make a Housing Benefit application which was refused as the Council did not deem her work to be genuine and effective. We challenged the Council's decision by gathering evidence of her employment and earnings. This was successful, and £3,660.87 of housing benefit was paid. Fatma now receive £385.58 per month towards her rent charge, boosting her annual income by £8,287.83.

Fatma also reported a large Council Tax debt which was worrying her due to the threat of earnings arrestment. We established a budget and provided Fatma with debt advice on her options, before negotiating a minimum repayment plan of £10 per month with her creditor.

Finally, we helped Fatma apply for Free School Meals for her children and arranged a Housing Support Worker to work closely with the family due to their vulnerability. We also applied for a Community Care Grant to furnish the property with beds, mattresses, sofas and other essentials.

CASE STUDY 2:

Claire is 40-year-old mother of 4 children aged 4, 8, 12 and 14 who lives in a 3-bedroom private let costing £675 per month. She suffers from poor health and is currently unfit for work, therefore claiming Employment and Support Allowance. She is affected by the Benefit Cap and only receives £25 towards her housing costs.

We assisted Claire by running a Benefit Check to ensure she was in receipt of all benefits she was entitled to and confirmed she was affected by the Benefit Cap. We helped Claire apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) through the Council to help cover her rent shortfall for a short period of time. The application was successful, and Claire's rent shortfall was paid for 3 months. This stabilised Claire's housing situation for a few months and ensured she did not accrue rent arrears.

We further advised Claire that claiming certain benefits such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) makes you exempt from the Benefit Cap and that it would greatly maximise her income. Due to Claire's poor physical and mental health conditions that challenge her daily, we applied for PIP. The application was successful. Claire now receives £119.80 per week from PIP and is therefore exempt from the Benefit Cap which means Housing Benefit covers her rent charge in full.

Overall, CHAI assisted this parent to maintain her current tenancy and maximise her annual income by £17,553.

