

DAS Report on Crisis Case Management and Case Studies

Since the start of the pandemic the number of crisis cases we have been dealing with has risen sharply. In 2019 we handled 27 cases in this category compared to 124 in 2020, a near five-fold increase. A few of these can be resolved quickly by calling DWP and/or other agencies but most cannot and are quite complex.

We signpost certain clients to the Salvation Army in Woodbridge, who require no formal referral, the client just turns up and no questions are asked. This is a weekly foodbank held on Thursdays. However, some of our clients cannot access this because of a lack of transport or they have mental health issues and are in much greater need than the Salvation Army can provide for.

For these we turn firstly to the Families In Need (FIND) foodbank in Ipswich which in appropriate circumstances will make deliveries to the client's home. We have established a good working relationship with them and they trust our judgement to know that a case we refer to them warrants their involvement.

The client's basic food needs being addressed our attention turns to other short term issues where small subsistence cash payments or the settling of debts, adding credit to electricity cards and/or mobile phones etc are needed to rescue the individual from what is often a spiralling descent into despair and giving up.

The funds to make these payments are provided to us by four organisations with whom we have established informal partnerships. Effectively, we provide an outsourced gateway service for them whereby we carry out the individual assessment of need and make or arrange payments. We have a longstanding arrangement with The Mrs L D Rope Third Charitable Settlement charity in Kesgrave and in the summer we were approved by the Suffolk Hardship Fund (via Suffolk Community Foundation) and the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme 2020 (via Suffolk County Council). We have since added support from the East of England Co-op Community Cares fund who have provided a small fund and store food vouchers. In total we dispensed £12,000 through these routes in 2020.

We are incredibly grateful on behalf of our clients to have access to these funds but generally speaking we have to turn to other sources to fund the core cost of running the service.

The final piece in the jigsaw, and arguably the most important, is that once the short term emergency has been dealt with, we carry out a full benefit check. The result of this often puts the client into a more stable ongoing position with a combination of less outgoing expenses and more income – income they are entitled to but which the "system" has conspired to deprive them of for one reason or another. In many cases it is a lack of mental resource and resilience that has led them down the path they are on and the support and compassionate, non-judgemental care given by our staff and volunteers puts them back on their feet and significantly more able to look after themselves in the future.

The following case studies are taken from the period of the pandemic and are typical. The names have obviously been changed to protect anonymity.

December 2020

Edwin's story Edwin was a single man in Leiston, no food in his cupboards, 83p

left on his electricity meter and no benefits for another 8 days. One of his benefits had been stopped altogether 5 months prior and from then he had been living off his PIP – £58 a week. He had had to pay a gas bill some weeks previously, which had emptied his bank account. He has housing benefit and so his accommodation was not under threat but he had nothing else. Additionally, because he'd lost his income related benefit he was now paying weekly for his two prescription items, unaware that he could claim free prescriptions via another route. He has a dog whose food he was prioritising over his own. We organised an Ipswich FIND food parcel immediately. They delivered the following day – enough food for 2 weeks, including toiletries, household essentials and dog food. They also topped up his electricity meter by £20. We repeated this referral 3 times until we were able to get his benefits back into payment. Additionally we were able to access a grant for him, giving him £50 cash per week for 6 weeks – he could afford to buy extra food, clothing, travel and the electricity he needed.



Diane's story Diane was a single mother with 3 children under 12. She was being

migrated onto Universal Credit, which meant she was without her income related benefits for 5 weeks. Her housing benefit was only paid for 2 of these 5 weeks, putting her immediately into 3 weeks arrears. Her Child Tax Credits were previously paid only weekly, so even though we were able to calculate the best day for her to migrate, minimising the wait for new payments to only 5 weeks, we couldn't bring it down any more. We arranged for a weekly food parcel from Ipswich FIND – we had to do a new referral for this every week, that is their system – including nappies for the youngest child and sanitary products for the mother and oldest child – they also needed pet food for their cat. We made a very strong case for this family and FIND really did try to give them everything they needed. We were able to also award this client a cash grant of £50 per week during this time – and she used the small amount of maintenance she gets from the children's father to pay the bills that came in. We supported her in making her initial application for UC and also, separately, for PIP. We will complete her UC paper form when it arrives in a few weeks too. She has now received her first UC payment and manages to survive the 5 weeks without income thanks to the service we could provide for her and her children. Finally we have sorted her housing arrears for her too so that she is not carrying them forward.



Joe & Annie's story This was a couple, in their 30s – the husband had

lost his job during lockdown and although previously in good health, was now struggling with his mental health. The wife has bi polar, reasonably well controlled, but in the light of lockdown and her husband's job loss had suffered a serious relapse. They were at their wits end about what to do for income. We were able to complete a thorough Benefit Check and advise them of exactly what to do, in which order and how quickly. In the meantime, we organised 3 Ipswich FIND food parcels, over as many weeks, and arranged for a cash grant of £100 for 3 weeks.



Punna's story Punna was a client referred by his care co-ordinator. She rang us as they

had not been able to visit due to lockdown, and he had reported that he hadn't eaten for 4 days. We had never seen this client before and he seemed to have no support from any agencies until this referral. He has very complex mental health issues: agoraphobic with enormous social anxiety. He has also been heavily alcohol dependent in the past and his care co-ordinator was keen for us not to give him a cash grant in case the temptation proved too much. We organised two Ipswich FIND food parcels, collected his electricity key and took it to be topped up so that he didn't have the cash himself. His mobile phone was out of credit and again we arranged a remote top-up to avoid giving him cash. When I completed a Benefit Check it was apparent that this client should have claimed his state pension 5 months previously. Working closely with the care co-ordinator, we arranged for the forms to be sent and we completed them. His pension was in payment within 3 weeks. We also assisted with an application for Attendance Allowance – he is now in receipt of this too – and got him onto a reduced tariff with his water company. Finally we were able to sort a Council Tax reduction, which saved him over £60 per month.

