



Monitoring Form – Voluntary Organisation Support Grant

Uttlesford Citizens Advice

Q1 April – June 2017

Please demonstrate how you are achieving:-

Promote and grow the use of Takeley video service. We will work with Uttlesford Food Bank to jointly promote services out of the Station House in Takeley.

Takeley Parish Council informed us in May that they were going to leave Station House and were in the process of over-seeing the renovation of the new 'Old School House' premises. We agreed with the parish that we would remove the video conference facility and wait for a dedicated room for video conferencing / advice leaflets and posters to be available at the new site.

After taking out equipment in May, we decided to cascade the machine into our office equipment in Saffron Walden and purchase a new Dell touch screen PC specifically for Takeley. One of our volunteers is in the process of configuring the machine as a kiosk – this will enable clients to have public access to Frontline, Gov.uk, Uttlesford District Council website, Citizens Advice website and will serve as a video conference host.

We are currently trying to negotiate a small monthly fee to access 'gotomeeting.com'. This will allow users to access a personal url site with a single click on an icon to join the conference – this overcomes a number of user issues we identified using Skype.

We have recently heard from the new clerk, Julia Peachy, that due to funding issues the move to 'Old Station House' has been delayed and therefore they have extended their tenancy on Station House for one year. We are now in discussions to put the new PC into Station Road from September.

Please demonstrate how you are achieving:-

Train debt caseworkers to ask new debt clients a set of routine questions, which aim to identify gender violence and abuse (a scheme called ASK). In pilot studies 27% of clients had a life time experience of gender violence and abuse. The aim of the scheme is to ensure that clients get earlier access to appropriate support and advice and to ensure that we provide the most effective debt advice based on their responses.

In December 2016, 6 paid staff and 5 money advice volunteers undertook a day of ASK training. Training was funded by Comic Relief and was delivered by Dr Lucy Allwright from Action Against Violence and Abuse. The aim of training was to ensure that staff and advisers are giving clients the opportunity to disclosure gender violence and abuse, including financial abuse.

Training focused on;

- What GVA is;
- How to ask clients if they have experienced GVA;
- Assessing danger;
- Safeguarding implications;
- Impact on advice about - safety options, accommodation, finance, immigration, children and family, health and wellbeing, support needs & organisation details.

Staff and volunteers are asked to deliver a set question in their first meeting with a new debt client – **‘To make sure we give you the right support and information we ask clients this question.....Have you been hurt or frightened by your partner, a family member or someone you know – it could be happening now or some time ago?’**

We asked for feedback from our staff and volunteers on using the question in May – this resulted in 3 concerns being raised;

- A number of volunteers found it impossible to see clients individually – with clients choosing to bring along friends, family or partners to debt advice sessions.
- Clients receiving one to one debt support have already be triaged as being very vulnerable – often due to mental health issues. There were real concerns that directly discussing GVA at first meetings with a caseworker/money adviser could divert a client from focusing on dealing with their immediate debt problems. Experience of two clients becoming upset about historical abuse was given as examples where important debt work was delayed.
- Staff and volunteers stated that GVA issues were often raised in the course of discussions without using the set ASK question.

Discussing feedback with national Citizens Advice, we were informed that there is growing evidence that ASK is best used with clients at the initial point of contacting the service – rather than at a tailored advice appointment. We were also informed that the ASK question can be amended to exclude reference to the past.

Moving forward;

- We agreed with paid debt caseworkers and money advice volunteers that we should amend the question to ensure it focuses on the present **‘To make sure we give you the right support and information in helping you deal with your debt we ask clients this question.....are you being hurt or are you frightened by your partner, a family member or someone you know’**
- We emphasised that although we would like to ensure we ask the question of all new debt clients – it is a matter where the volunteer and staff has discretion.
- We agreed to review our experiences in 6 months’ time.

Please demonstrate how you are achieving:-

The charity is keen to work with the district council over the next 12 months to assess medium and long term need within the district for our services – basing this assessment on projected population growth, particularly in the south of the district, and the increasing demand for services in Stansted.

We have asked Dawn French and Fiona Gardiner to join us at our bi-annual strategy meeting on 18th September – we hope to discuss the Council’s longer term views on the need for advice and delivery and accessibility of advice services in the district.

Completed by:

Name: Kate Robson

Date: 11th July, 2017

Position in organisation: CEO

Signed: