

The Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres and Chesterfield Borough Council

Our History

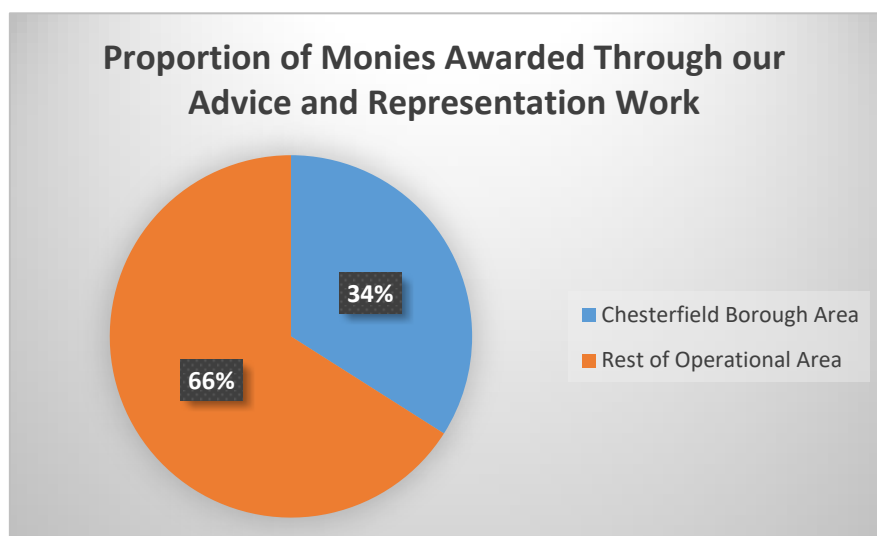
Chesterfield Borough Council was integral to the setting up of Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres (Chesterfield Centre for the Unemployed), giving a small grant and the use of a Portakabin and the Goldwell Rooms back in the early 1980s. The Centre was set up as a response to the huge growth in unemployment from the late 1970s as traditional industries shed labour and youth unemployment soared.

The Chesterfield Centre quickly gained an excellent reputation for advice work, representation and support given to the families of striking miners, with the appointment of Gordon Smith, an experienced convener from Markham Engineering. As more and more people came to access the Centre's advice services, North East Derbyshire District Council and Derbyshire County Council gave financial support, recognising that people were travelling into Chesterfield to receive help and support. With the pit closure programme, Amber Valley Borough Council and Bolsover District Council committed grant aid. The centre management, staff and volunteers, successfully lobbied for the existence of complimentary services, the Derbyshire Law Centre and Citizens Advice Bureau as many people were seeking advice outside of the centres remit.

How we Operate

From the initial seed planted by the Chesterfield Borough Council the Centre for the Unemployed had become Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centres, attracting funding from other Local Authorities, helping the most vulnerable people in the borough and wider area. We now have three main offices and operate out of 17 other outreach venues and foodbanks. In Chesterfield we work out of the Hasland Hub, Brimington Community Centre, Staveley Library and Gussies Kitchen.

The Help for Chesterfield



In Chesterfield over the last 12 months, we have assisted over 1300 people who bring on average two problems for us to help them with. This represents over 30% of the total number we see. As a result of tribunals attended, lump sum arrears £326,213 and ongoing weekly benefits £7,464.38 (over a year this equals £388,148) were awarded. Also general enquiries and take up work resulted in payments of £1,190,667. This means in the last 12 months **£1,905,028** has been won through our advice and representation services, which represents 34% of the total amount recovered for our entire operational area. This money will be predominantly be spent in the borough area so directly contributes to the economy.

In the Chesterfield area, the DWP's managed Migrations process (moving those on the older 'Legacy benefits' to Universal Credit) continues to gather pace. Since August 2023, Tax Credit claimants have been receiving Migration notices asking them to claim Universal Credit. DUWC's are already assisting claimants with the managed migration process that will move huge numbers of chesterfield residents, including the sick and disabled over to Universal Credit; the whole process is not due to end until well into 2028. Many benefit claimants will have had no previous contact with the Jobcentre, either because they have worked or have a long-term health conditions or disabilities. Many will be unaware of how different claiming Universal Credit is to receiving help through their existing benefits and credits; it is important that they are aware of their rights under the new benefit.

Claimants are likely to need different types of support as they migrate to Universal Credit. A benefit that is digital by default, throws up all kinds of problems for the vulnerable, who will encounter significant difficulties completing or managing their claim on line without support that DUWC's provides on a regular basis. For example, those with severe mental illness, learning difficulties, low-level literacy and numeracy skills, those who have no access to the internet at home, are less likely to engage with the migration process, some will fail to claim Universal Credit by their deadline date and lose transitional protection - a guarantee that they are no worse off under Universal Credit. A reduction in household income will be a catastrophe for many and put pressure on already stretched public services.

DUWC's have years of experience supporting Chesterfield residents with the many benefit changes, that have taken place in the last 40 years.

Real life – Chesterfield Case Studies

Helping ex-miners:

A woman from Old Whittington came to our Chesterfield Office. Our adviser was assisting her regarding her benefits. In the process of the case she mentioned that her husband was an ex miner and that he had problems with his knees. We advised her that he could submit a claim for Industrial injuries disablement benefit (IIDB). Subsequently we helped him to complete the form and he was awarded IIDB osteoarthritis of the knees payable at £41.52 per week. We also advised him to claim attendance allowance. Again our adviser assisted him with the claim form and he was awarded the highest rate of £101.75 per week. There

was also a back payment of £814. This meant total income maximization of £143.27 per week.

A Friends Recommendation:

A woman who lives in Boythorpe, Chesterfield, came to see us as her PIP (Personal Independence Allowance) was reviewed and consequently refused. We went through the appeal process. PIP is a points based benefit. Each question can gain points, which are added up giving a total score. The claimant had previously scored a total of 22 points thus, she was entitled to PIP. At the review she scored zero points indicating a substantial improvement. Sadly, her condition is both serious and degenerative. She cannot improve. She was shocked, dismayed and very upset as this decision made her feel 'worthless'. A friend suggested that she see us. We assisted with the whole process which concluded with a tribunal. This was successful. The claimant's previous award was restored, she received £2970 in arrears and £139 weekly.

After the Floods

After the devastating floods along Chatsworth Road in November, members of our team attended an evening meeting at Lighthouse Church to offer advice and assistance. We were able to help a number of people. Here is just one example:

A 75 year old woman who lives in central Chesterfield came to see us with a 'Social Prescriber' after hearing the co-ordinator address the meeting for flood victims at the Lighthouse Church. The client has been flooded and had to leave her home. The flooding was very severe with up to four feet of water in her house. Sadly, just 48 hours later she had a serious operation in hospital. This was unrelated to the flood. She was feeling very low and confused having lost almost everything in her home. Additionally, her health condition means that will have lifelong health impact. She needed help and support with many daily issues. We have now been able to advise and support this client with claiming Attendance Allowance, Council Tax issues, Flood Grant and an application to Derbyshire Discretionary Fund (DDF). We are now helping her to consider the Blue Badge Scheme and approach utility company's where needed.

Our Volunteers

We offer an 'open house' operation in encouraging volunteers. The majority of our staff started as volunteers, often coming to us first for advice themselves. As a result, we have trained over 30 people in the last fifteen years (over 40% from Chesterfield) who have moved on to employment in advice or related occupations.

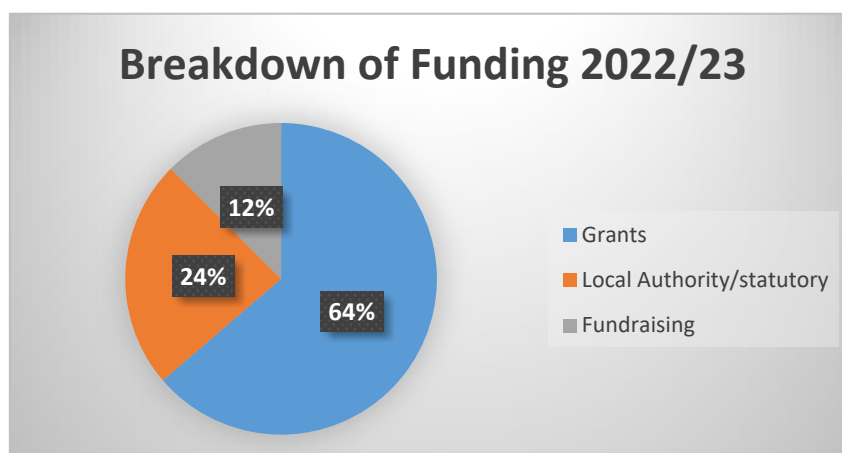
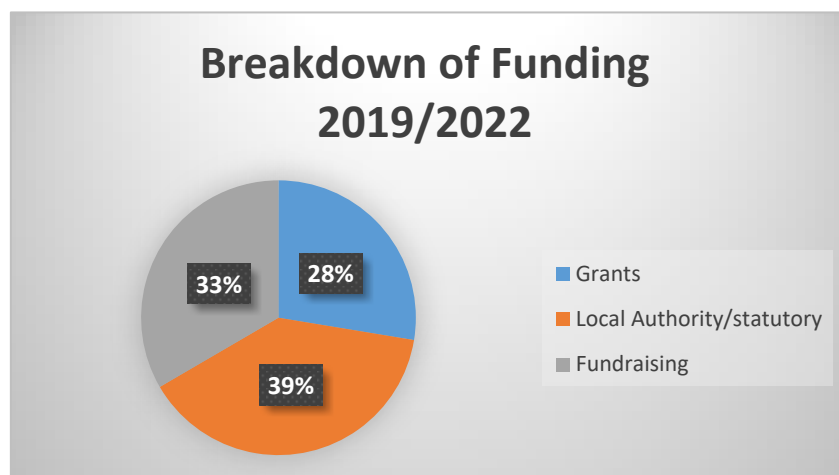
The Back Story of One of our Volunteers:

Ben: Coming from a background of customer service after the sudden death of his father Ben decided to refocus his work on social welfare. This led to him volunteering for the Centre where he was trained in welfare rights by our team. Ben now works full time for the

Centre assisting with attendance allowance, disability benefit applications, universal and pension credit, industrial injuries disablement benefit, carer's allowance, benefits checks and appeal representation.

Financing Our Operation

As local government finances became more restricted, the Centres management committee recognised the need to attract outside investment into the organisation, through charitable trusts, more extensive fundraising and through the newly established National Lottery. Crucial to our efforts was the support of the Chesterfield Borough Council. Without support from the Local Authority, the organisation would have lacked the democratic accountability to the people it served as well as the important matching funding that could draw in support from elsewhere. Vital to aid our gaining funding from charitable sources (totalling £1,385,865 since 2015) we needed the necessary stability that the Local Authority backing gave to our bids. All charitable funders, look to see that the organisation is both well governed with the necessary core funding to continue to exist for the duration of the funding period.



Above: The Changing face of our funding sources. Continuation of core LA/Stat funding is essential to ensure we have match funding and to maintain our core staff.

Chesterfield Borough Council's consistent and considerable contribution has ensured the flow of charitable grants that are of immense value to the residents of Chesterfield. Unlike other organisations we are not in a position to apply for government contracts as that would damage our independence and benefits advice representation is not legal aid fundable.

Our major external funders:

Coalfields Regeneration Trust (x2)
National Lottery – Community Fund; know your neighbourhoods; Awards for All
ESF/Lottery Partnership Project
Henry Smith Charity (x3).
Garfield Weston Trust (x2)
Tudor Trust
Alex Ferry Foundation (x3)
CISWO
Trussell Trust
Post Code Lottery

In summary, what we offer:

1. We aim to prevent or relieve poverty amongst the unemployed, underemployed, unwaged and those in receipt of or entitled to benefits and credits, as well as other disadvantaged people. This is carried out by accessible support in the claiming of benefits and credits as well as representation in court where people want to challenge decisions made by the DWP. We support people through the whole process of claiming benefits and credits.
2. We proactively make our services known to the hardest to reach and most vulnerable within our communities, through target campaigning, local advocates and supporters and via our outreach service which is delivered at 3 separate locations in Chesterfield – Hasland, Brimington and Staveley.
3. We lobby and campaign on the issues that are raised by the people using our services. Social Security Appeals Tribunals and face to face Medical Assessments are still held in Chesterfield only because of the campaigning work of the Centres. Our campaigning work is recognised and highly respected locally, regionally and nationally.
4. We work with specific groups of people claiming benefits, in precarious work, the elderly and those facing food/fuel poverty supported by charitable funding projects.

This year is our 40th anniversary and we are needed now more than ever. Any cuts to our core funding puts the organisation at great risk. The money we put back into the town will match, pound for pound many Local Authority activities, including tourism. This has been

confirmed by academic research. Any savings made today would come at a cost in future years.

We are told it is only responsible for a Council to set a balanced budget. However, we also note your commitment to '*protect essential services and support the borough's most vulnerable residents*'. In continuing your financial contribution to DUWC, we believe you are honouring that commitment. Our work is key to this pledge.

On behalf of the Trustees, staff, volunteers and users of our service I ask you to reconsider any recommendation to cut funding to DUWC.