

Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk)

Annual Report and Accounts

1 April 2016—31 March 2017

CIO Charity Number: 1152772

www.daseastsuffolk.org.uk



Highlights – 2016/2017

- This is the **32st year** that the Disability Advice Service has been offering advice and support to disabled people and carers in Suffolk Coastal.
- We have supported our clients to gain approximately **£2,307,512** in benefits.
- We have advised **1,178 Clients**
- We have dealt with **6,499 Enquiries.**
- We **won 78 of the 99 appeals cases** where a decision was reached (**79%**). And dealt with a massive 227 appeals throughout the year!
- We **gave £7,339** as small grants to individuals.
- We continued our partnership with the Multiple Sclerosis Society to deliver advice to their members across our area.
- We launched a new Work Experience Project in collaboration with local Job Centres.
- Our Customer Forum continued to meet and help us to improve our service, and elected a representative to our Management Committee.
- We developed our outreach services to Leiston and Felixstowe and planned similar services to Saxmundham
- We worked with SNAP (now Homegroup) to deliver housing help and advice.
- We continued to be part of Ipswich County Court Advice and Representation Service (ICCARS)

Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk)

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Management Committee

Trustees

Stella Morris (Chairperson)
Leigh Horton (Secretary)
Robin Stroud (Treasurer)
Stephen Doe (Vice Treasurer)
Jo Cowley
Yvonne Everson
Andy Simpson
Nigel Farthing
Jean Gooch
Ben Mills until January 2017
Janet Garfield

Associate member

Amanda Strowger

Suffolk Coastal District Council representatives

Cllr Mark Amos
Cllr Doreen Savage

Teresa Rose, Independent Examiner
Kevin Curtis, Patron

Paid Staff

Jenny Morcom, Manager
Caroline Goldsmith, Senior Welfare Rights Adviser
Colin Williamson, Administration & Fundraising Officer
Jess Hargrave, Welfare Rights Adviser
Nicky Jay, Training Officer

Volunteers

Anne Barnes	Roz McSweeney
Simon Shaw	Margaret Shaw
Diana Thomas	Liz Warden
Donna Frankis	Moira Bevilacqua
Louise Liddell	Sarah Sharman
Jess Hargrave	Sue MacGregor
Dee Woolnough	Amanda Jones
Mou Samuel	Marc Adams
Brendan McArdle	Joyce Robinson
Alan Parsons	

Chair's report: Stella Morris

Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk) (DAS) is an independent advice service for disabled people and family carers living in the Suffolk Coastal area. We are part of a wider network of disability advice services throughout Suffolk working to county-wide standards that are equivalent to nationally agreed community legal services (CLS) standards.

Our charitable objective is the relief of people with disabilities in East Suffolk, and our aim is for disabled people and their carers to have increased financial, social and psychological well-being through holistic advice. All financial, strategic and operational decisions by the Trustees are made with due regard to our charitable objective, aim, and the Charity Commission's Public Benefit Guidance.

To this end we provide advice on welfare rights, housing rights, accessible leisure activities, equipment, health and social care services, employment rights and permitted work, as well as referral to accredited providers of debt and legal advice. We are constantly developing our working relationships and partnerships with related organisations so that no-one in need of help and advice gets passed from pillar-to-post.

Our customer numbers remained high at 1,178 and our service is stretched. I am pleased to say that we achieved the challenging target of raising £50,285 to all but balance our budget

This year has been another record year for benefit gain, of £2,307,512. This means that every £1 spent on DAS generates £24.59 for the local community! We helped 1,178 customers, dealt with 6,499 enquiries, and challenged a record 227 benefit decisions, a staggering 89% increase on the year before, and we won 79% of completed challenges. We continued our small grants programme, raising £7,339 towards necessary items or help for individual customers that could not be funded in any other way.

In December 2016 we recruited a new Training Officer to work with local Job Centres to launch a new Work Experience Project funded by Santander. By 31 March 2016 four disabled people had taken advantage of the project and had proved a great resource for DAS. The Project continues to attract disabled people wishing to develop or regain skills for the workplace.

Our Customer Forum met in November 2016 and again in March 2017 helping us to plan our 2018 service evaluation to improve our work and organisation. The Forum and now sends a representative to our Management Committee meetings.

Our outreach projects and partnerships with SNAP (now Homegroup), MS society and other public and voluntary sector agencies ensure that our advice service is accessible to all those who need it, with help to access more specialist advice. As part of ICCARS we help prevent needless evictions for rent and mortgage arrears by representing people at the county court.

Lastly I would like to thank all our Trustees, staff, volunteers, Customer Forum members, funders and supporters in the local community who together make DAS such a trusted and expert service.

Stella Morris
(Chair)



Manager's report: Jenny Morcom

Three things strike me about this year: -

- The huge increase in the number of people needing our help to challenge welfare benefit decisions. Numbers rose from 120 in 2015-2016 to 227 in 2016-17, an increase of 89%!
- The increase in the number of people having benefits stopped or withdrawn because they have failed to attend an appointment with DWP.
- The general complexity of the casework we undertake.

These changes are symptoms of the continued pressure to reduce public expenditure and the toll this is taking on disabled people and family carers. Over the past year we conducted 2 separate studies, both showing the considerable psychological stress this places on our customers, and the overall negative impact this has on their health and wellbeing. Many people reported feelings of desperation and some told us of thoughts of suicide.

Our appeal success rate of 79% demonstrates the pressure within the Department for Work and Pensions, and the effect this has had on the quality of their decision-making.

Sadly the numbers of people approaching us with no money for food or rent continue to increase, and this is mainly due to benefit delays, sanctions or mix-ups that are entirely avoidable. We also see the end results in the form of homelessness, family break-up and children taken into care. The mounting debt and the need to work with people on a number of different fronts at once has made our close working relationships with colleagues in other organisations all the more valuable, and perhaps this is the one positive result of the extreme difficulties we help our customers to tackle on a daily basis.

At DAS we aim to work with all our customers holistically and sensitively. We treat each person as an individual, we listen and we do our best to help him or her work through the range of difficult issues they are facing. If anyone cannot get to our office then we go to them, either through our outreach services or by visiting them in their own home. And if they have a problem that we cannot solve, we do our best to refer them to an organisation that can.

Despite our challenges DAS remains a fulfilling place to work. We get wonderful feedback from our customers as well as from our partners, and this really does keep our spirits up! We also have a great team who work hard, and cheerfully tackle any problem they can get their teeth into.

Jen Morcom
Manager

Treasurer's report: Robin Stroud

I present the statement of financial activities and balance sheet I have prepared for the year ended 31 March 2017.

The year has seen continued high activity and I have to report that we finished the year with a £1,056 deficit. Despite this, we had an income of over £93K and this has been achieved by the hard work in attracting an increase in donations and grants' and fundraising. This leaves us with reasonably healthy final bank balance of £62,837

In line with our financial policies £52,816 is our reserves fund and £10,021 restricted funds.

Never the less, we should not rest on our laurels, as the predicted spend for 2017-18 is £102,826. This will change somewhat if our Big Lottery bid is successful.

During my time as treasurer I continue to be very impressed in the total efforts of the staff, committee and volunteers in the delivery of a quality service and the combined contribution to the financial aspect both visible and hidden.

As I have mentioned previously, the voluntary efforts in advisor work, administration, IT support, committee duties and fundraising have a tremendous hidden value. A conservative estimate of the total number of hours involved with this is some 60 hours a week. Therefore, over a year at say £26 an hour if they had to be paid for, these efforts have contributed a hidden income or saving on expenditure of over £80,000

All involved have to be congratulated and I would like to thank all those involved and extend special thanks to those that have assisted me directly with the accounts work over the year.



Robin Stroud
April 2017

Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk)
Reg. Charity 1152772

Balance sheet: as at 31 March 2017

2015-16	Activity	2016-17	2015-16	Assets	2016-17
£		£	£		£
317	Cash	234	234	Cash	157
12,081	Current account	7,787	7,787	Current a/c	11,653
53,592	CCLA	55,872	55,872	CCLA	51,083
				Held for Coastal Forum in current	*See note below
(100)	Unpresented cheques			Unpresented cheque 1134	(56)
65,890					
(1,997)	Deficit	(1,056)			
63,893		62,837	63,893		62,837
				Reserves/ Restricted funds	52,816
					10,021

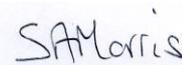
Note: As the £590 held in the current account for the Coastal Forum is not DAS funds, it has been removed from the general accounts and balance sheet. It is accounted for on the current account reconciliation statement.

Agreed to be a true and accurate statement of our accounts, which have been duly examined.

Robin Stroud
Treasurer



Stella Morris
Chair



Teresa Rose
Independent Examiner



Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk) Annual Accounts

General Account 2016-2017

2015-16	Expenditure	2016-17	2015-16	Income	2016-17
65,959	Salaries, HMRC & payroll charges	58,572	32,163	SCC Grant	31,681
	Recruitment	27	4,000	SCDC	0
12,979	Rent and Service charges	15,381	2,997	MS Society	4,995
3,644	Travel	3,218	6,498	Donations	4,243
15	Training	388	280	CCLA interest	211
3,127	Telephone/fax	2,494	51,178	Fund Raising	50,285
691	Postage	698			
1,016	Stationery	593			
1,912	Insurance	1,934			
250	Publicity	0			
152	Refreshments	153			
1,326	Publications, books & subscriptions	1,370			
	County Group	0			
242	Fees, AGM and gifts	168			
3,623	Computer & office equipment	1,969			
959	Premises (cleaning)	1,136			
598	Fund raising costs	1,268			
0	Legal /DBS/ Licences	0			
2,620	Utilities	2,546			
	Client grants	2,990		Client grants	2,434
99,113	Sub total	94,905			
(1,997)	Deficit	(1,056)			
97,116	Total	93,849	97,116		93,849

Grants and Donations 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

Local authority grants	£
Bawdsey Parish Council	100
Benhall and Sternfield Parish Council	150
Bramfield and Thorington Parish Council	200
Clopton Parish Council	100
Cookley and Walpole Parish Council	20
Friston Parish Council	70
Great Glemham Parish Council	50
Kirton and Falkenham Parish Council	100
Little Glemham Parish Council	40
Leiston Town Council	75
Marlesford Parish Council	20
Melton Parish Council	500
Otley Parish Council	100
Peasonhall Parish Council	125
Pettistree Parish Council	50
Rendlesham Parish Council	100
Rushmere St Andrew Parish Council	250
Saxtead Parish Council	20
Suffolk County Council	31,681
Westleton Parish Council	50
Wickham Market Parish Council	50
Woodbridge Town Council	1,000
Total	34,851

Other Major Grants and Donations

Organisation	£
Dunwich Town Trust	1,000
Ganzoni Charitable Trust	70
Eine Kleine Sax Quartet	310
Mediterranean Shipping Company	100
Multiple Sclerosis Society SLA	4,995.90
Mrs L.D. Rope Third Charitable Settlement	20,000
Santander Foundation	5,000
Saxmundham East Coast Walk (Saxmundham Rotary Club)	3,700
Scarfe Charitable Trust	1,000
Suffolk Community Foundation: Joy Abbott Fund	2,000
Suffolk Community Foundation: Leiston and Sizewell Fund	5,400
Suffolk Community Foundation: Port Fund	2,000
Suffolk Community Foundation Suffolk Giving	2,000
The Lynn Foundation	500
The Mills Charity	2,473
The Rest Harrow Trust	100
Total	50,648

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of the Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk)

Registered Charity number 1152772

I report on the accounts of the Trust for the year ended 31 March 2017.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act;
- to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act; and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

(1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

- to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the 2011 Act; and
- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 2011 Act
- have not been met; or

(2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Teresa Rose Independent Examiner Date 22 April 2017 Signed

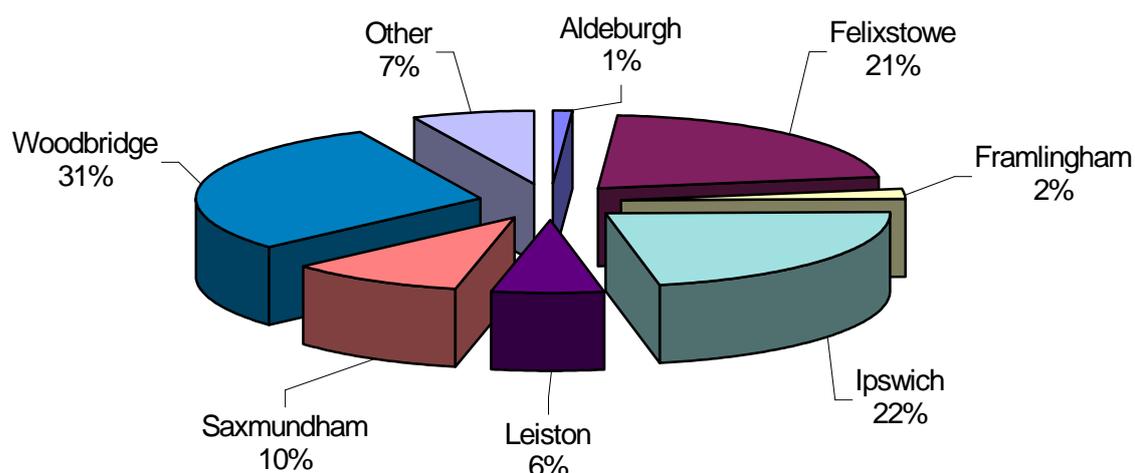


Financial Gain: 1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017

Benefit	Gain £
Appeals	408,022
Attendance Allowance	65,830
Carers Allowance	36,196
Council Tax	1,910
Disability Living Allowance	105,027
Employment Support Allowance	389,078
Housing Benefit	9,611
Pension Credit	7,958
Personal Independence Payment	1,278,192
Unspecified	5,689
Total	2,307,512

The total benefit awarded to clients as a result of our work this year was approximately **£2,307,512** highlighting the essential need for our service in the East Suffolk Coastal area.

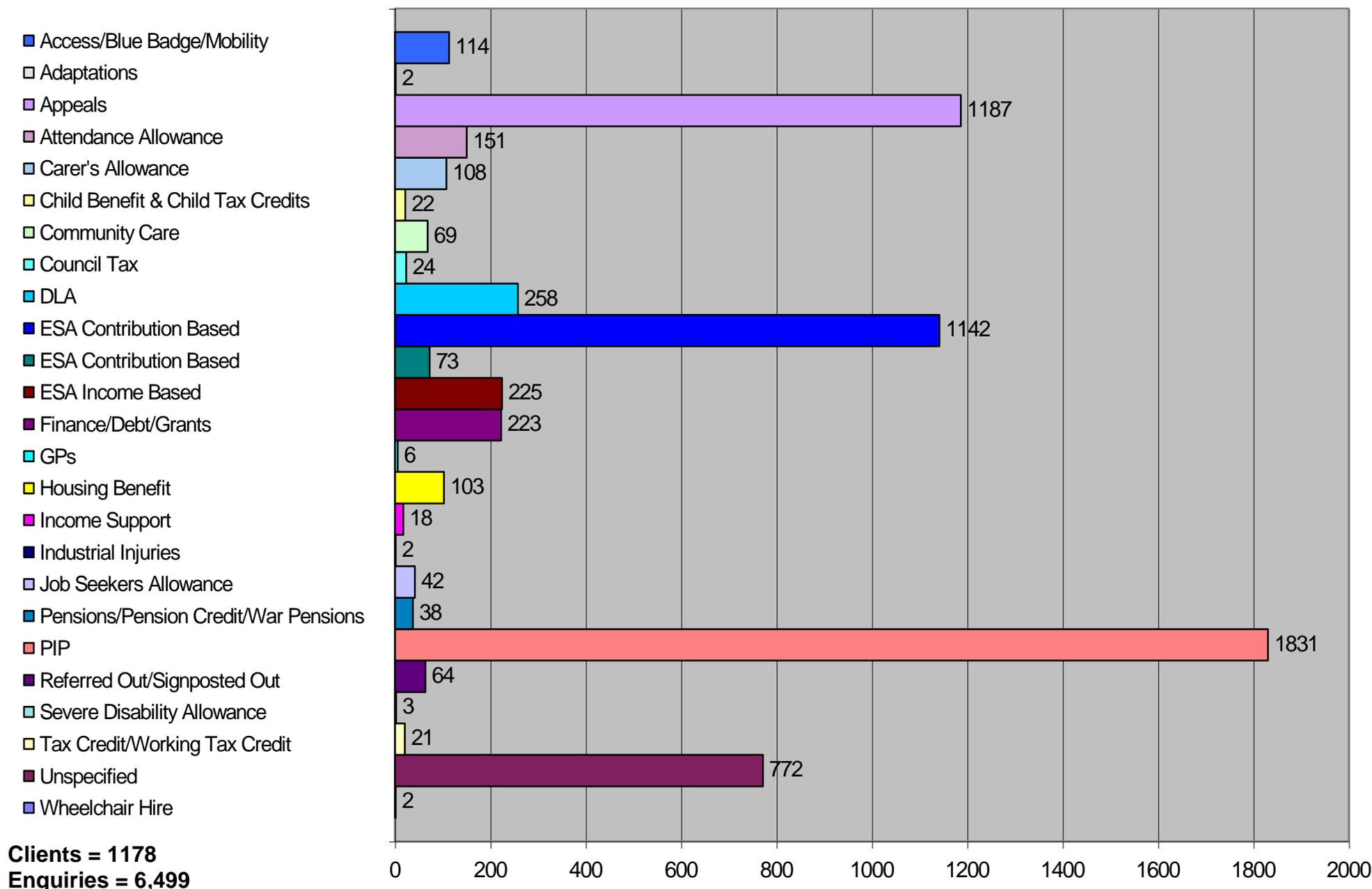
Enquiries Town and Surrounding Area



Financial Gain by Area: 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

Area	Gain £
Aldeburgh	21,866
Felixstowe	508,217
Framlingham	29,353
Greater Ipswich & Kesgrave	772,551
Leiston	83,481
Saxmundham	177,487
Woodbridge	609,539
Other	105,018
Total	2,307,512

Enquiries by Case Category 2016-2017



Clients = 1178
Enquiries = 6,499

Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk)

Helping people of all ages

DAS is an independent advice service and specialises in issues relating to disabled people and their carers. We are based in Martlesham Heath, but we offer free help and advice to people over much of the Suffolk Coastal district.

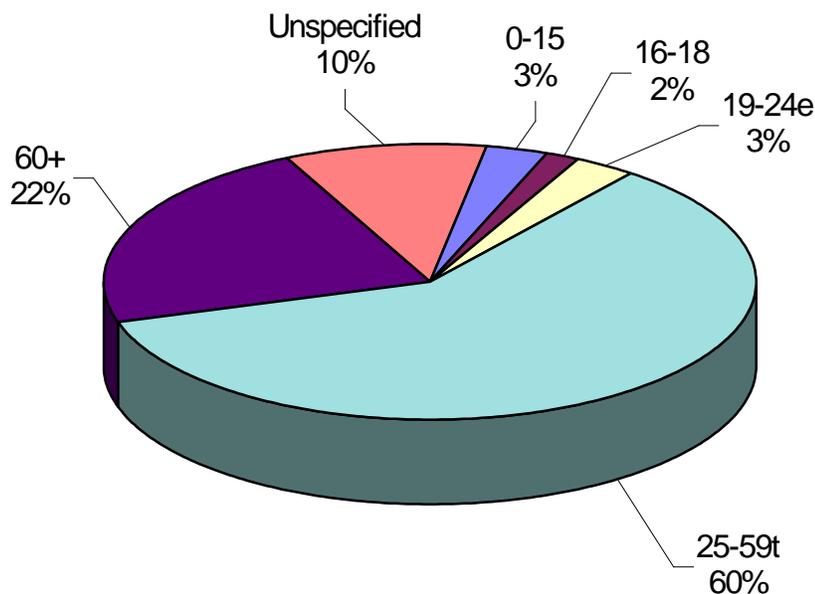
The **6,499** enquiries DAS has received this year have been varied and encompass the following categories.

- Welfare benefits and tax credits
- Advocacy and appeals
- Housing adaptations and special equipment
- Accessible transport, holidays and leisure activities
- Help with education and employment retention
- Home and respite care
- Access issues and disability discrimination
- Fundraising

Disability can affect anyone of any age and we do our best to advise and support people of all ages who require our help.

The pie chart below shows the diverse age ranges of people affected by disability that DAS has been able to help during the year.

Age Range Enquiries



Customer comments

We pride ourselves on the quality of service we give to our clients. However, we are always trying to improve the service so we politely request that clients fill out a customer satisfaction survey anonymously so we can target areas for further improvement.

Here are some of the comments made by our customers. We have left them in their own words:

- “Gives great support. Helps you feel you are not alone. Thank you”
- “An excellent service That I Feel is needed for people like myself needing help with form filling due to their conditions. I rate this service as 100%”
- “Excellent valuable service, really appreciated”
- “Appreciated the friendly+clear help+surroundings “stress free””
- “Made to feel very relaxed by Caroline.Thank you so much.”
- “Very friendly and helpful.Thank you.”
- “I was treated with respect and understanding would have no hesitation in using service again”
- “So helpful and friendly .I couldnt be more impressed.Thank you .!
I felt welcome and the advise given was topnotch.I FEEL SO MUCH MORE HOPEFUL NOW.”
- “Provide a good service all around .A Valable service for people”
- “An excellent Friendly yet informative assistance in form filling”
- “Very good with questions and answers and obtaining correct wordings for medical conditions etc, with a very professional attitude +understanding”
- “I wouldn,t have been able to without the help of the das thank you so much”
- “Very friendly and helpful.Thank you”
- “Empathetic + Kind”
- “Excellent valuable service,really appreciated”
- “Thank you for volunteering and giving your time to help us””

Volunteer and customer case studies

The experience a disabled volunteer with learning disabilities

Ms P has learning disabilities. In the past she had sought our advice about welfare rights, and she came to us again when her mother moved away from the area. Ms P was very worried about how she would cope and considered giving up her social rented flat in order to move nearer to her mother. She discussed her options with DAS and decided to try volunteering with us to see whether this would help her cope without her mother.

She now runs our reception one day per week and her confidence is growing with regard to answering the door, welcoming customers signing them in and seating them until their advisor is ready. Ms P says this experience has boosted her confidence, self-esteem and her feelings of inclusion. She enjoys being part of the DAS team. But she wishes DAS staff had more time to train her further. She recognises that she needs to learn slowly but would like to have more varied tasks around the office. Ms P says she is very shy socially and feels vulnerable going out on her own. She thinks that more social events for volunteers would provide her with a safe environment to go out more often and she wouldn't feel so isolated.

A conversation with 2 disabled volunteer advisors. Ms Q is a former nurse who gave up her job because of her MS, and Ms R is a retired teacher and an amputee.

Q. Why do you volunteer for DAS?

Ms R I got bored when I retired. I like making a difference. Being disabled myself; I wish I'd had the support DAS offers. When I discovered DAS I wanted to help.

Ms Q Yes – I felt passionate about helping people.

Ms R I thought I might come in and do a bit of filing! (She laughs because she is an appeals officer) I like structure. I like being part of a team

Ms Q I'm dedicated to people who can't speak for themselves. I like dealing with people. I like a common cause. Just being here is social.

Q. Would you like to do more socially?

Ms Q No I'm busy, but coming here I meet diverse people with a common aim. I like that.

Ms R I find the advisor meeting very useful. I guess different volunteers may want different things and some may want social activities.

Q What about training in things like safe working practice?

Ms Q Well I'm steeped in it from my career as a nurse. Safeguarding and boundaries are second nature to me.

Ms R It's the same for me as I come from a teaching background, but this would be really important for volunteers without this kind of experience.

Q So our customers are benefiting from a lifetime of valuable experience from both of you?

(Both laugh and nod)

Ms Q It's very easy to beat yourself up and feel you are not doing enough. It would be great to have a system of mentorship and support for new volunteers.

Ms R You need to know your capabilities, and what levels of support you need. All volunteers are different. I can't imagine how people who are not used to working with people cope. You've got to be quite strong. It's a big responsibility because you are dealing with people's money and they can't survive without it.

Ms Q I feel honoured that customers are willing to share the details of their disabilities with me. It's about building trust. I know the forms off the top of my head, so I can really concentrate on the customer.

Ms R New volunteers need to sit in with a range of advisors because we all work differently. You need to be really adaptable. Volunteers will have very different training needs, for instance some people only have very basic IT skills or may never have answered the phone professionally before. You need to be aware that disabled volunteers will come to us with low self-esteem. They may have lost their jobs because of their disability.

Ms Q I feel a sense of responsibility to perform – there's a lot of pressure. You can't underestimate how much volunteering takes out of you. You often deal with very emotional people.

Ms R People can't always follow our advice. They need help to do it. They can't always keep appointments or make the phone calls we suggest. They need us to do it with them and there just isn't time.

Ms Q You pick up on the stress our customers feel. Sometimes you become the sounding board for all their problems, anger and distress.

Customer case studies

- A. Mr X was a very vulnerable person with a long history of mental ill health and self-harm. He frequently fell into debt because of his extreme fear of opening and dealing with official correspondence. When he approached DAS both the District Council and Department for Work and Pensions were pursuing him for overpayments. They also accused him of fraud as he had failed to notify them of changes of circumstances. All benefits had ceased due to his lack of response to requests for information. He was threatened with eviction for non-payment of rent and was receiving letters from various creditors.

DAS helped him to open his letters and prioritise the issues he needed to resolve. We managed to get a local solicitor to represent him pro-bono at his interviews for fraud, and a member of staff also accompanied him as an appropriate adult. Mr X was not prosecuted for fraud and DAS helped him to negotiate manageable levels of repayment.

We put him in touch with Woodbridge Foodbank and helped him to re engage with his GP. His benefits were re-instated with our help, including his housing benefit and DAS liaised with his housing officer avoiding eviction.

We referred him to CAB for help with his other debts and arranged for short-term community support to help him to stabilise his life and cope better with letters, etc. He remains a regular customer as he frequently needs help to open official looking letters, but he no longer leaves these to build up to crisis point.

- B Around 5 years ago DAS helped Mr. Y to claim Disability Living Allowance and he was awarded the middle rate of the care component and the higher rate of the mobility component. He swapped the mobility component for a motobility car and his life improved as he could go out again on his own without having to rely on his wife.

In July 2016 he received a renewal form, and again DAS helped him to complete the form and his award was retained. But the claim stopped and DWP claimed that his sister had written to DWP requesting that his claim be migrated to Personal Independence Payment as she thought he would be better off. Mr Y didn't have a sister so it was clear that a mistake had been made. Nevertheless Mr Y was at risk of losing his motability car.

DAS made many phone calls on behalf of Mr Y and was passed from department to department until a supervisor eventually resolved the situation. It is very unlikely that an inexperienced customer would have been successful in coping with the bureaucratic resistance DAS encountered.

C Ms Z and her children fled severe domestic abuse and were given a special protected persons PO Box for all official post so that her abuser was not able to locate the family.

DAS helped Ms Z to claim disability benefits, but all DWP responses came to her very late as they went via her PO Box in her hometown. All disability benefits require a medical assessment and these too were arranged to take place in her town of origin at the other end of the country. DWP had never heard of this situation and Ms Z was unable to deal with the phone calls needed to sort it out.

Eventually we were able to speak to someone within the DWP who was able to arrange for the claim to be dealt with on a clerical basis, using our address as a correspondence address for appointments only. We were also able arrange for her medical assessments to take place at a suitable venue.

Grants/donations awarded



The Disability Advice Service (East Suffolk) gratefully acknowledges the financial support of:

- Bramfield and Sternfield Parish Council
- Dunwich Town Trust
- Eine Kliene Sax Quartet
- Joy Abbott Fund*
- Leiston and Sizewell Fund*
- Port Authority*
- Suffolk Giving*
- (*administered by the Suffolk Community Foundation)
- Melton Parish Council
- Rushmere Parish Council
- The Lynn Foundation
- The Mills Charity
- Multiple Sclerosis Society
- Mrs L.D. Rope Third Charitable Settlement
- Saxmundham East Coast Walk (Saxmundham Rotary Club)
- Santander Charitable Giving
- Scarfe Charitable Trust
- Suffolk County Council
- Woodbridge Town Council

And all the town parishes and clients that have supported our work throughout the year.

Donations big or small are a vital aid in providing our service in the East Suffolk area.