



Qualitative Strand of Welfare Reform Mitigation Study

Dr Briega Nugent

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INTRODUCTION

The study was carried out from November 2016 until the middle of February 2017. The main aims of the research were to understand:

- The drivers of effective partnerships between bureaux and other organisations in reaching out to individuals impacted by the changes to social security benefits, the benefits of these partnerships to the organisations involved and the added value for clients supported.
- How the changes to social security benefits and the impact on individuals are changing the demands on bureaux services, with particular reference to those

Ten bureaux managers from across Scotland, nine individuals from eight partners organisations and eight clients all participated and took part in qualitative interviews. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed and subsequently manually coded searching for similarity and divergences in responses and with the original aims and objectives of the research in mind. The following analyses are based on their responses.

Structure of Report

The report is structured so that the findings are presented from the three main groups separately, followed by the conclusion.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated and to Citizens Advice Scotland who commissioned this report.

PART I: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH BUREAUX MANAGERS

Overview

This section of the report presents the views that were elicited from Bureau Managers from across Scotland on the development, barriers and enablers of partnerships and the impact to the service of the changes to Social Security and roll out of Universal Credit (UC). A key theme that emerges from across these interviews is the importance of investing time, providing outreach and linking up with like-minded and motivated organisations that put the client first. These managers and those they work with are passionate about what they do and care about the communities that they support. The service is now inundated and appears to be needed more now than ever, not only because of the specialised knowledge it has to offer, but also because they are what one manager referred to as ‘the last branch in town.’ By this, the manager is referring to the loss of statutory support and services across Scotland so that Citizens Advice are now dealing more and more with people in crisis who have no one else to turn to.

Methodology

The analysis is based on qualitative interviews carried out from November until the end of December 2016 with ten managers of different Bureaux across Scotland. In order to provide a strategic overview, four urban, four rural and two ‘mixed’ bureaux were selected. The main objectives were to understand more about the partnerships that have been formed with other organisations, the added value, barriers and enablers, as well as if there were any differences as a result of geographical location. The changes in Social Security and impact of Universal Credit were also discussed and the future challenges the bureau now faces explored.

Structure of Analysis

Taking these in turn the analysis is structured to firstly present the drivers to making partnerships, added value to the service, how partnerships were made and what made them effective as well as the barriers encountered. Some managers discussed innovative ways of overcoming these barriers and essentially the importance of investing time to build and affirm connections came out strongly as a key theme across this research. The huge impact on the bureaux as a result of the changes in Social Security and Universal Credit is subsequently discussed and concerns for future development reported on.

THE DRIVERS FOR MAKING PARTNERSHIPS

The main driver for making partnerships with other services was the benefit to the client and the communities. Meeting others who shared this same passion was when the best work was able to happen.

The client's benefit

The main driver for all managers is that working in partnership means the client can get the best service possible and make the appropriate connections to get the help they need to make their lives better. Managers were passionate about supporting people and making a difference.

70% of my staff has been here for more than ten years and they could have walked off to something better but it is a good place to work. We care and we really help. We are very passionate about the work that we do. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

We have quite a wide range of expertise but we also have a lot of agencies that we are connected to that we can refer onto. It is about establishing with clients what do we need to do first? That is the added value... We are in a position in that we have the networks, so we can help the client. 'If we can't find the answer for you we will find someone who will.' (Manager 7, Urban Area)

Trust is essential to an effective partnership, to know that we are going to make a difference, in the brand, making the commitment that referring someone is going to lead somewhere. (Manager 1, Rural Area)

I think when a client comes to us we offer them a full service. We help them deal with the immediate issues and also thinking ahead to help them to move on and what other support there is available. We can help with the whole picture if they want us to. We are key to know what is out there and link people in. We can give them the information or make the connection. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

Managers were clear that they couldn't be the only support that people get, especially when they have multiple complex needs. The most vulnerable clients struggle to make appointments and access support and this type of service is not what the Bureau offers.

Having a support worker who supports the client, so we are supporting each other as organisations. We have some clients who don't open their mail. (Manager 7, Urban Area)

Essentially, getting people 'in the door' requires other services to help. Some managers had actually been instrumental in supporting other services to secure funding to do exactly this.

We don't have the resources to go to medicals. Now we only have volunteers working on that. There is such a demand for it, but I don't like to say 'I can't help you.' I am now looking at trying to get funding to co-ordinate this and a partnership. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

Benefit to the Community

All felt that the bureau was important and often central to their communities. They care about the people they support and want the best outcomes for their communities.

This way of working has not come about by chance but a lot of work. We have recognised over the years that this leads to the best outcomes. There are occasions that we challenge other organisations. We have learned that partnership working is for the benefit of clients. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

It is active listening and knowing something about what your partners do and using that to help other partners. It isn't about the bureau; it is about the greater good. (Manager 2 from Mixed Area)

It was identified that there was limited digital access and so we entered into a joint venture to be able to offer a support digital access, so within our office this partner provides support to people for filling in forms and so forth. (Manager 9, Rural Area)

All could give examples of people they had really been able to support through the help of other services, for example, dealing with housing.

Personalities Count

All but one manager felt that the personalities of the people they had met were vital as a driving factor in the development of partnerships.

I think it is because you want to support people and link in with people who are the same. It is about personalities. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

A lot of people wouldn't admit it, but a lot of work comes down to personalities. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

One manager said that their Chair of the Board of Directors put them in contact with the Chief Executive when they came into post and this fast-tracked the creation of partnerships. This example highlights that those who are well connected and want to help can have a significant impact.

Only one manager felt that personalities were less important than the frequency of contact in creating relationships.

There are always people that you build more effective relationships with but that isn't always to do with their personality but the regularity with which you are in contact with them. So you have those commonalities in the work that you are doing. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

Meeting of Minds and Common Purpose

All agreed that meeting others who wanted to help clients and put them first was the foundation for the best partnerships.

We don't tend to enter into partnerships with people who don't share the same values and common purpose...We are working with other agencies and all trying to enhance the client's life. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

We have quite a wide range of expertise but we also have a lot of agencies that we are connected to that we can refer onto. It is about establishing with clients what do we need to do first? That is the added value...We are all trying to meet the needs of our clients and when we meet an organisation and feel that they can benefit those we work with, we work with them...It is the recognition that we keep the client at the centre of what we are trying to achieve and what are the elements that we need to get there with other partners. It is working in that spirit of not losing sight of who we are here for. It is having that trust, respect and courtesy of the partners you are working with. (Manager 7, Urban Area)

Reaching out, Reaching Further and Being Innovative to create Partnerships

Bureaux continue to develop their service, and managers demonstrated that they consciously attempted to make connections. The outreach work that they now offer through the Welfare Mitigation Fund was felt to be particularly welcomed and they hoped that this would not only continue but also increase so the services could be expanded.

Consciously creating connections

Shame and stigma can be the main barriers to people getting the support that they need.¹ In line with the Christie Commission and the need for service provision to work alongside communities, managers are continually trying to find new ways to engage with 'hard to reach' groups and individuals. It emerged that managers were consciously motivated to make connections and had various ways of doing this, finding out about new services and potential partnerships by attending meetings, forums, conferences and reading local newspapers. One manager also contributed to the weekly newspaper and wrote a blog about the work of the local bureau to advertise the scale and diversity of support being offered.

We generally phone people to make connections. We go to events and meetings where other organisations are there and have common

¹ Nugent, B. and Escobar, O. (2017) *Fun, Food and Folk: The Centrestage Approach to Dignified Food Provision*. Edinburgh and Glasgow: What Works Scotland.

clients. We make connections through other organisations and clients. It is basically through casework and we refer into each other. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

I have been here for many years...and have excellent connections with politicians and connecting with other agencies...I have started a column in the paper and this has worked well in raising awareness of what we do. So it is by local knowledge and by deliberately promoting our service. (Manager 9, Rural Area)

Through stakeholder meetings and workers forums, members and external agencies share information on how they can assist the communities. We are proactive in getting out there and the help and support that we can give to those we support. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

Larger Forums and creating connections through connections

The larger forums, such as the Welfare Mitigation Forum and Energy Forum, or even larger networking events such as The Gathering emerged as especially useful opportunities to network. These were not only a way to make connections through connections, but to reaffirm partnerships and keep abreast of current developments and identify ways of working together.

I am a member of the welfare rights forum that meets every six weeks or so. It has people from all sorts of agencies, housing, National Health Service (NHS), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) representatives, so lots of connections...we get notified about new organisations and changes in personnel. (Manager 8, Urban Area)

The Energy Forum brings together suppliers and other services so we can make them aware of the challenges and come to solutions about how to help. For example, the Warm Fuel Discount used to have a short time frame to apply and that has now changed. It is a grass roots represented level group to then be able to change the higher up policies.

I go to The Gathering every year and come away with about half a million business cards. It is a good networking opportunity and I am a member of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). (Manager 2 from Mixed Area)

In two areas they had a strategic referral system for all agencies and this meant that services had been mapped with new organisations communicated to all. This undoubtedly seems like a good way forward.

We are able to make connections through referrals and through the main system where there is an updated directory of organisations. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

We have a Third sector database where new organisations are identified. It is a new resource. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

Impact of Social Media

Social media is increasingly used as a way of finding out about other services and establishing connections.

New organisations – there is a local blog and anything going on gets posted on there. Plus there is a local newspaper that is very local and if it isn't happening there then it isn't happening. There is a local Facebook page...that is quite useful. (Manager 1, Rural Area)

In a lot of the little villages you will get a lot of social media Facebook. We have a Facebook page and I post on that...and link then to others. (Manager 2 from Mixed Area)

Different Types of Partnerships

One manager articulated a very important point, that these types of communication also relay a different style of partnership. They observed:

You are having different levels of partnerships – formal with the contract, the people you work with in a regular informal way and I think those are the ones that work best, because it is not constrained by paper. The third level is the social media, where you have an acceptance into a group, whether that is social media or talking to a particular group. (Manager 2 from Mixed Area)

Being innovative to reach those 'hard to reach'

Managers felt that more innovative partnerships were being created than before, whereby they were linking up with services that wouldn't in the past have seemed obvious or relevant. For example, one manager was working with a bank to access people who had debt issues that they had met at another meeting and described it as a 'chance encounter'. Another manager had attended coffee mornings at the Chest Heart and Stroke Foundation. Managers therefore are thinking more outside the box and have recognised that really these issues are generally interlinked. The breadth of support that is also now being offered by bureaux, by for example working alongside Occupational Therapists to help address financial situations so that people can leave hospital more quickly, or supporting individuals with cancer in partnership with Macmillan, inevitably meant that more and more people were now getting support through the service.

The importance and need for Outreach

The outreach services funded by the Welfare Reform Mitigation Fund are viewed as necessary because they support those who previously had unmet needs.

We are in a position where we do home visits and so the adaptability to not just be office based means you can reach out to those who may not

know you or they can't make it into the office, for example, due to health reasons. I think working with partners such as food banks or at the Job Centre we are getting people now who are attending that may not have before. How we work with partners' means that agencies are confident to refer people on and these connections are important so that we are reaching out as much as possible. (Manager 7, Urban Area)

We have also been looking at the barriers to accessing essential services. We do pop up clinics at the Community Centres. We go out to these rural areas and for those who find it difficult to travel can still get advice and support. That is a really good model of partnerships. We also try to dovetail this with job clubs; they can get advice then from us too. Also have NHS, Clued Up, they work with us and we are all working together. In an area this diverse you need to have that outreach. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

There are some pockets that are hard to reach and it is hard as there is a transport problem. More and more you have to think outside the box to get our services out there. For example, through the Welfare Reform Mitigation Fund we were able to outreach at some of the medical centres. (Manager 6, Rural Area)

This is also an example of how granting funding and creating subsequent expectations through formal channels can lead to more informal partnerships. As the following quote shows, the best partnerships are when the differentiation between formal and informal interaction is not easy to make.

Through this we were able to set up the outreach clinic and develop direct links with the housing officers. This all improves outcomes for clients as we are working collaboratively with the Local Authority. So it was the formal contract with the funding that got this going but now it has developed into more of an informal relationship also. It is formal and informal. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

Outreach as a means of securing more funding

The outreach services have meant more partnership working and in some cases also attracted more funding.

Through the Welfare Reform Mitigation funding and Scottish Legal Aid Funding, also part of a consortium we have tendered for the advice services and were awarded it from the Council for three years. We also now have to report on the agencies that we work with. Our service has grown because of the funding that we have got for different services, for example, debt advice and so forth. When you start a new project you build new contacts. I would say going back 4 or 5 years, before the welfare reform money we didn't have that referral route with the Local Authority. That has now changed. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

Being 'out there' and raising awareness

The outreach services were also felt to have made people more aware what bureau do and clients were said to be very grateful for the time given and effort made to be 'out there' to offer advice and support to address issues.

We have a lot of villages outside the town and we do a lot of outreach. It reminds people that we are there and reminds us that they are there. It is important to go out and/or taking surgeries with clients or doing talks on what we do. (Manager 7, Urban Area)

All of the managers wanted to be able to offer more outreach services and were already inundated in the areas and services where outreach was offered.

Outreach is very important. Some people cannot get to see us. We are interested in outreach to local hospitals and health teams but funding is an issue. (Manager 9)

Our outreach is always full and so we have four separate one-hour appointments. You have to do your research and again you are limited to how many you can see. You can only see four a day in the four areas that we now operate. We also now open on a Saturday. I am sure if we were open seven days a week we would still have more people.

One manager commented that through this outreach work bureaux are helping more people and also becoming part of the fabric within these communities.

We are so well known in the area. To actually imagine the area without us is hard. The MSPs, food banks, all refer to us. We are quite key to all of it. (Manager 7, Urban Area)

The importance of understanding the roles and challenges faced by partner agencies

Managers felt that it is important to understand the realities of what other organisations are able to do and the pressures they face, because then what is realistic and feasible can be known. This means that clients are not being told false information about what they can expect.

There is no point in us saying that these are your rights, if at the end of the day the Council don't have the housing stock to deliver. It is useful for us to know the challenges and limitations. It is about managing expectations. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

Managers spoke about the value of setting up shadowing opportunities between their service and another service, particularly the Job Centre or

DWP, to understand what information they have and therefore what they actually know.

We did a job exchange as well where one of the team from the job centre came here and we went there. They saw the problems that we face and that was quite enlightening. It allowed us to see who did what and the limitations that they face too. Sometimes they can't see a whole client's case, it seems illogical but that is the reality. It does make you realise where we have to channel our energies. Welfare reform is over 50% what we do. (Manager 1, Rural Area)

It takes time to do that though and the Local Authority is stretched to the limit. People have retired and not been replaced. We spent the whole day with the housing team for a day to find out what the challenges are from their end. You can speak to them on the phone but it is good to get that face-to-face contact. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

We had people from the Job Centre come and shadow and we did the same and it was good because then you could understand each other's situation. Sometimes you have a perception of how things work but seeing can help you to know and we found that they do want to help people. The Job Centre also realised the different issues and breadth that we can help with. Now they can refer to us and vice versa. Clients see the Job Centre as more of an authority figure rather than getting help. They are literally around the corner from us and it was the manager and I that set that up. We have had four staff go across. We can then cascade the information down to the Volunteers. (Manager 7, Urban Area)

Making links and the value of having a 'named person'

Managers felt that it was important to have a 'named person' within organisations to speed up the process of support for the client, with all saying that the best relationships were when you could 'pick up the phone' to get situations resolved quickly. Another benefit of this was that for those most vulnerable, the experience of being 'handed over' to another person was then made easier.

I used to be the main person getting out to meet people. It does take a lot of time but it benefits you in the end. I set up meetings so we had a link, a named person in the Job Centre. It is important to make those personal relationships. Sometimes it doesn't work. Even when it does you have to keep up with people. I always make sure that I have half an hour with the person from the Job Centre for a coffee away from the office so that we are able to find out about new things that are happening. (Manager 8, Urban Area)

The client base I work with tend to be very vulnerable with mental health problems. It would be a disadvantage if they had to move around to another person. Sometimes I will pick up the phone to that

person and ask for them to help me to deal with it. I had one case where I was able to help the person within twenty minutes to get the person on the right benefit. (Manager 1, Rural Area)

The importance of the bureau as a 'Hub' for other services and the community

Three managers had extra office space and offered this to become a 'hub' for services and groups to come together in the community. They were also used as training suites for services and to bring in local groups, both for consultation exercises and to give direct support. The real driver behind this was to help the community and strengthen partnerships.

We are central...and have a conference room and I am keen that we become a community resource. We have the seniors that meet there and I don't change them, as they are my ready-made consultation group. It has computers as well and the local employability group use that as well. If those people need assistance then they are in the right place. (Manager 2, Mixed Area)

WHAT IS NEEDED AND WHAT HELPS TO MAKE AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP?

This section presents views on what was needed and what helped to make partnerships. The key ingredients that emerged as being most important were time, funding and having the right support or people who were equally motivated to make things happen.

Time

One of the most important factors felt was time, time to meet, share ideas, build trust, work together and establish and affirm the connection.

I think the best person, right job. That is how it works here and I try not to abuse that people trust me more and I am the main link. It does make it hard when you are the manager but it does save time. You have to invest time to save time. (Manager 8, Urban Area)

Funding

All of the managers spoke openly about the necessity of funding and the Welfare Reform Mitigation Fund was cited as an excellent example of how funding opened up the opportunity to build relationships and work with other services.

Communication

Good communication is key and the best work was said to happen when roles were made clear and how to maximise potential understood and part of an ongoing dialogue.

Good communication and knowledge of each organisation and how to connect the client to the support that they need. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

Strong communication channels, sharing information to enhance the operation and for them to share best practice is what makes an effective partnership. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

It comes down to communication and it is about that continuous dialogue with the agency. Everyone is working to try to support the client. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

On a practical point, one manager pointed out that for those most vulnerable, sometimes it was the services that had the only real contact with the person. They gave an example of one client dying recently and they were able to share this information with the other services. This again gives some insight into the challenges and vulnerabilities 'out there'.

In the latter section on what are the barriers to effective partnerships this discussion becomes even more paramount.

What helps to build effective partnerships?

Personalities

In the same way as personalities were regarded as drivers of partnerships being built, they were also important for these to be maintained, to build trust and an understanding of how to work together.

I think that partnerships are people rather than organisations. (Manager 2, Mixed Area)

All felt that the ideal way of working was when you felt you had got to know the other individuals who were part of the partnership and could lift the phone when you needed help, but were also careful not to abuse this trust.

Co-location or proximity to other services

Quite simply, the closer services were to one another in terms of location the easier it was to communicate and to cross refer, even in four cases 'delivering' clients as part of the cross referral process.

Extra Office Space

When the Bureau had extra space, as already discussed, this could become a hub for the community bringing services together.

BARRIERS TO CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Lack of time

As with what made an effective partnership, when time was not available, this was a major barrier.

Time, getting people to take the time to listen, to trust, and to make the referral. People are so busy and they don't always take that time. Sometimes they deal with things themselves and then we have to pick up the pieces. So we had social work filing in attendance allowance forms for people who had been on DLA and then this knocked it out, but we have now managed to make them aware of the problems. It is easier if we have been involved. (Manager 1, Rural Area)

One manager related there had been one partnership in particular that wasn't able to happen for a while because the time to do what they wanted to do was not there. Fulfilling core business meant sometimes that stepping back to have vision was difficult. Equally, all managers felt that having foresight and direction was essential.

Funding

A lack of funding was a major barrier to partnerships being established or projects being taken forward.

We want to do lots of things. We have in place a service level agreement with the NHS to put in an adviser in the hospital but it is hard to get the money. I will get it eventually. (Names a number of funders)...You can't back down because the people who suffer are the clients. My father used to say that the greatest crime is to be poor. I think if we don't do it then these people won't get what they are entitled to. (Manager 9)

Austerity measures, people stretched. LAs are making cuts and not able to hire specific staff. We see demand for those resources and people are struggling. The most vulnerable are affected. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

Managers also discussed that they didn't know until the last minute every financial year what funding they would have allocated and this again stalled projects from being taken forward.

People

In the same way as personalities and people were key to partnerships, equally those who did not share the same vision or were possessive and put their service ahead of their clients halted progress.

You have got to have the right person on the other end. A jobs worth, who isn't dedicated, who won't do things won't help. Some people will buy into it more. Some of the welfare rights team will contact me, others won't. Red tape is a big issue and just time. There are always three or four things you could be doing. (Manager 8, Urban Area)

We had difficulties with the Credit Union and we couldn't get anywhere, now with the change of staff we now have that connection and even have a mobile clinic in that area. It can be just one individual who puts a stop to a successful partnership. As a result of one individual, all the other partners have to work hard to find ways around it. This person just didn't care about the work and that can stop things. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

This latter example shows how the manager had to think creatively and get a link with other individuals who work for the service. This shows that success can sometimes mean simply bypassing the obstruction or in this case, no longer attempting to engage the person who is resistant but seeking out someone else.

Overcoming Barriers

To overcome barriers managers had to be innovative and tenacious. To make time, they had to sometimes bide their time and keep relationships going. Managers were also seeking new funding sources all the time and working in partnership with other services to try to strengthen their applications. Managers also were increasingly taking account of the challenges the other service is dealing with and finding ways of helping them to engage. For example, in one area the GPs were not engaging well with the service and instead of doing presentations and attending meetings, as they had done, the bureau instead wrote up case studies demonstrating the difference that can be made to the mental and emotional well being of 'patients' by helping them deal with finances. It was felt that it was these case studies that made the GPs take notice and therefore overcoming barriers was about understanding the audience that you were attempting to engage with.

The differences between urban and rural areas in creating partnerships

Rural managers pointed out that making effective partnerships took more time because of the distances between organisations, however, the principles underpinning building good partnerships, that is of good communication, understanding and working together for a common purpose, were the same.

Much as you try you don't always have time. Not all areas are doing the same thing. There are some pockets that are hard to reach and it is hard as there is a transport problem. More and more you have to think outside the box to get our services out there. (Manager 6, Rural Area)

Those located in rural areas felt that there was already an acceptance of the need to be interdependent and a culture of partnership working part of

everyday life. However, one manager also said that they felt that there was more shame and stigma in these rural areas for people to come forward to ask for help.

Those in the urban areas felt that partnership working was made easier because of the proximity to other services. The vital component in good working relationships was the drive to want the same thing – to help the client and genuinely caring.

Geography plays a part in this, all of the partners are in the same corner of town and I think that this is part of the council planning. I think that it has been designed in. (Manager 2, Mixed Area)

Location helps. We are situated opposite the council offices and near the agencies we work with. Sometimes though you have to go there and meet people face to face. We work with the mental health team. Your client base is so vulnerable and so they had wanted to make sure that we know what we are doing so it all comes back again to trust. (Manager 8, Urban Area)

The communication for those in urban areas would sometimes even happen as a by product of being so closely located, for example one manager pointed out that even as a result of taking smoking breaks with other services, it was inevitable that the communication was improved as a result.

ADDED VALUE TO OTHER SERVICES

This section presents the added value to services managers. Bureaux have accumulated specialised knowledge that is being increasingly relied upon and have become skilled at being able to help people deal with the immediate and underlying issues. The independent and national role that the service plays can also help to develop policy and practice.

Specialised Knowledge

All recognised that what they offered was increasingly specialised and that they could help each person address their immediate and underlying needs through the relationships that they build and the connections to other services.

There are more specialisms needed now and skills in specific areas...to us, it feels as though there are organisations that are doing this work and they do not have the expertise. We look at the whole situation and for example the housing association will only look at their part to ensure rent payment is made. They don't care about everything else. (Manager 6, Rural Area)

Holistic Approach

All of the managers discussed the tact of volunteers and staff to ask the right questions at the right time and navigate clients towards the right support, trying to uncover the underlying issues.

We are not counsellors and try to offer practical support. We do refer people on to other services. When you are dealing with people who have mental health issues you can't avoid stress, a lot of the interviews become stressful. ...It is complex. It takes you some time to unpick what the issues are and then the appropriate course of action...The volunteers, they are a certain type of person- it is a detailed training programme and you shadow, sometimes people's understanding is not fully realised until they shadow. We do lose people when they realise it is not for them. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

We speak to them as people. For example, we use tact and wouldn't try to deal with the underlying issues on the first visit and that is down to the volunteers and advisers we have. (Manager 6, Rural Area)

I think that it is important that we remain non-judgemental. We have for example, a lot of clients who are dealing with substance misuse and there is no judgement passed. They are still treated with respect and can come and get advice. The little part that we can play can help them regain control of their lives. (Manager 7, Urban Area)

Unlike many other services that are centred on dealing with one issue, bureaux could be more holistic by linking in with other services.

We provide a holistic service and advisers are trained to try to understand or explore all of the potential issues or problems. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

National Oversight and analysis

The bureaux service is national, and the breadth as well as depth of data collected can be and is used to uncover gaps in policy and practice. As demonstrated:

One of the things was the job centre were the largest referring agency and one of the question in the survey was 'what do you know about the Scottish Welfare Fund.' The DWP people didn't know about it. We went back to the Job Centre and asked them why they were referring people to food banks when they weren't telling them about these funds. We had 23% reduction thereafter of referrals to the food bank. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

Independent

A smaller number of managers pointed out that because of the national and independent role that bureaux played they could be sometimes hold government and other agencies to account.

We are quite unique in East Renfrewshire because we are the only independent advice giving service. (TER)

THE IMPACT ON THE BUREAU AS A RESULT OF THE CHANGES TO SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS

The impact on the bureau as a result of the changes to social security benefits has been huge. The volume and complexity of work they now deal with has increased. Managers were concerned for those most vulnerable and digitally excluded, and it emerged that the service was essentially picking up the pieces for a system that was ill thought out.

Rise in Number of Appeals

The number of appeals about decisions made, especially about moving people from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) onto Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) had risen, and subsequently the amount of work taken forward by bureaux. Managers attributed this to the high refusal rate and also some other services filling in the forms in the first instance incorrectly. It was also felt that forms had become more complex. In one service they are taking training forward for their volunteers on an ongoing basis to ensure that this does not happen. The appeal process itself was said to be very stressful for clients and felt to be a creator of problems.

The number of appeals raising to tribunals...the problem is that someone assessing physical health is assessing people with mental health issues. We have volunteers and paid staff and the benefits appeals have risen. The time taken also means that people are not getting paid. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

The migration from DLA to PIP and the number of decisions that need to be challenged poses big questions. We have lots more appeals. Also lots of people who fail the work capability allowance and this poses problems. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

We have people being transferred from disability to PIP and it is proving time consuming because it ends up with lots of challenges. A lot of decisions get overturned but clients go through a lot of stress in the meantime. (Manager 1, Rural area)

One manager felt that the decisions being made about migrant workers were questionable.

We are exploring drawing up fact sheets on the changes. I think that the decisions on migrant workers are not acceptable, we need to get information so we can try to avoid going to appeal, that can take three or four months when they are without money. Invariably, many of these decisions are incorrect, as they are not getting the right information. For example, if you have a family member in work then you have a right to reside, but people don't always know about derivative rights. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

Benefit Cap

A number of managers had already noted the impact of the benefit cap on clients who had had their level of income vastly reduced, and as a result were no longer managing financially and this was affecting their emotional and physical well being.

We had a mother come in with two children who is now £90 a week worse off because of the benefit cap, she doesn't know how she is going to manage. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

Holding the line...frustrating communication process

All of the managers felt that the move to a more centralised communication system with the DWP was frustrating resulting in problems not being dealt with in a timely or appropriate manner.

You struggle to get through to the different DWP lines. We are time limited per client during appointments and you can spend that time trying to get through. I am in Scotland but could speak to someone in Wales. Before, it would be someone who would know that you couldn't book appointments in that area, so you have lost your local connection via the DWP. The length of time to get through is incredible. (Manager 8, Urban Area)

Not fit for purpose and picking up the pieces

The change over to electronic system did not mean that people could do this on their phone, and for the most vulnerable, in order for forms to be filled in correctly they often had to come back a number of times to the office, wasting time and effort. The practicalities of implementing these changes did not seem like they had been well thought out. For example, clients did not always have a bank account and there was no support given to get this in place.

What transpired from the interviews, as will be discussed in more detail is that this is a confused 'system', with those working on the ground unsure of the changes in place, and also with changes happening all the time there was an ongoing cycle of confusion experienced. The central agencies also manifested their own bewilderment, with one manager describing how they

had clients who had got different letters on the same day telling them different things about what they had to do.

Have they changed partnerships as a result of the changes?

On the whole, managers felt that they had not altered their partnership but were now working more closely together than ever. They invested more time for those working in the DWP and Job Centre and felt that having a named person was helpful, even if they are all confused together. These connections also meant that changes were heard about more quickly and they could be responsive in a way that may not, if they didn't get the information through these more informal channels.

IMPACT OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT (UC)

The following analysis is based upon all of the bureaux but especially on those two where there has been a full roll out. The main downfall of this system is that recipients are moved onto an electronic system with their case file managed and notes uploaded in a move away from a paper trail or the traditional fashion of communicating. All are expected to manage their account online using their email and with a bank account where the money is transferred. Most people on UC at the moment are single, newly employed people, but there is a move for this system to be rolled out across Scotland. The significant gap identified by all, and which almost all of the problems emanated from was that this seemed to not be designed with those who were affected in mind.

The necessity of computer literacy

This new system takes for granted that all are computer literate, have access to Wi-Fi and bank accounts and can navigate their way around the forms. Applications, because of the need to set all of these things up, were said to take a few days to fill in. The most vulnerable had to come back to the office a number of times before their forms were completed and would forget passwords slowing up the process.

Time restrictions

The application process is time limited and the client has to call in after seven days when they have made the application to make their appointments, if they don't do this then the claim lapses.

Lack of accessibility

Despite the system having apparent freedom and being able to be accessible by phone, no one felt this was actually possible and there is a real issue about uploading information. The system does not accept a sick note or letter and this means that people have to go to the Job Centre for all of these needs, a problem especially for those living rurally. The other issue is that when you do get through by phone you are put onto a central system, so getting a reply

from someone who does not know the 'local' area and for example would not understand the transport challenges.

We have a major problem with uploading information; you have to go to the job centre. They can send to you on your journal but you can only put on a sick note or letter when you go to the Job Centre. Or, you can send it to a freepost service but it gets lost. They can communicate with you but you can't communicate back to them in the same way. The upload function for clients does not exist. No one had thought of that particular point. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

Who are you going to call?

There is no direct contact for problems with UC, only for new claims. Also, if you do get through on their helpline it costs between 1p and 45p per minute for mobiles and 9p from a landline.

No turning back

Once applicants go on to receive Universal Credit they cannot go back to what they had been on before, even if the change has meant that they are now receiving much less.

We were doing comparative checks, whether people are better or worse off on UC. We know that people on health related benefits, they have to claim UC or they will get no money. There are no transitional payments, so these people are considerably worse off. Once on UC you can't come off. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

Mind the Gap

At present there is a gap of between five to six weeks before payment is made when someone goes onto UC, which means they have no money during this time. They can ask for an advance but this then must be paid back, so effectively they are always in arrears.

You can get an advance but then have to pay that back. So you are always running to catch up. UC replaces some benefits and people have to apply online. There are no letters sent anymore, they need to access their journal online. We don't have access. The client has to share that with us. This is the new regime to empower clients to manage their own affairs and in the real world this is not happening. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

Test and Learn?

At the moment, a 'test and learn' system is in place which means that changes are being made all the time which has inevitably contributed to much confusion and also it means that problems are not being dealt with in a timely fashion.

Who decides?

One manager noticed that with a sick line, the UC work coach can still demand the individual to go to their work group - another gap in the system and highlighting another point which brings into question the ethics underpinning this system.

HOW can I help you?

It is now more onerous, if not in some cases impossible, for the client to get permission for the bureau to fill in the forms.

The client now has to phone in and give consent for us to do that. The biggest problem we have is that clients don't have credit and can't make the call, which is a 0345 number and they can't pass the security questions. So now we are stuck in a loop and can't get information for clients. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

The risk of homelessness

At the time of the interviews, all of the managers spoke about the impact that UC would have on those vulnerable who are unlikely to pay their landlord if they are given the money directly and risk becoming homeless. Since this point there has been a change in policy so this can be reviewed.

Impetus for exodus

Managers have already had some volunteers leave because of the changes because they felt overwhelmed navigating the confused system and also not satisfied with the 'outcomes'.

A lot of our volunteers are reluctant to do it because it is scary as it is new. It is having an impact on us as an organisation; the volunteers are shying away from UC. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

One manager summed up the feelings around the impact of Universal Credit in the following quote:

I am frustrated by this. We have lost the ability to control the situation. We used to do a lot over the phone with clients and with the client's consent speak to DWP. You know they would ask date of birth and so forth, we were able to secure information on their behalf without having to drag them in here in person, whereas now we won't be able to do that. I think that their expectations of what a client can do are a step too far and there has been no transition. We went from something that had its faults, and we challenged decisions to not being able to talk to them at all, because their client has it 'on their journal.' You are expecting people to have a phone, and be able to read their record on that, to have credit, Internet access. It is becoming a drain on our resources.

There is going to be a point when we will have to turn people away. We have ten people waiting every morning. When it comes to Glasgow there will be rioting in the streets. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Interviewees were acutely aware of the challenges faced and hoped that for the future they could get more support to carry out the important role that they do in communities. The main challenges were funding, the increasing complexity of cases and the feeling that with the changes to be implemented, it was inevitable that the situation was going to get worse. It was also felt that in the future the service had to be more prepared to deal with mental health issues and address the potential that volunteers were going to be more difficult to recruit.

Funding

The main issue that all spoke about was a lack of funding and they were genuinely concerned about the future in terms of what they could offer.

Our core funding comes from the Local Authority and it has never increased all the time I have been a manager. They expect us to do more and they set our targets. We don't know our position at the moment and the project funding will not continue. That was for early years work and that will hit on welfare rights. Funding is the big concern. We have a lack of space and lots of volunteers and advisers, but we don't have the room to put them together...We are looking for new premises and we have been innovative in how we are using our space and opening hours and so we don't have to turn people away. The next financial year is difficult and last year was the same. The one thing CAS was able to do was to bid for big projects, like energy reform, that has been our lifesaver. It has to keep doing that. (Manager 6, Rural Area)

Funding to deliver the service that is required of us. There is an increase in demand and we have had cuts. All of the bureaux have had a 50% reduction in our core funding, whilst we are committed and keen to get other funders but you need to have the core in order to branch out. There is a limitation to what you can draw down to being the bare minimum. (Manager 7, Urban Area)

Our main challenge is funding. We have not had an increase in eight years. We all earn considerably less than in other organisations because we care. We need more funding to meet the growing demands of the service. The change too that is coming in place is going to require a lot of work. We need a lot more government support and I would like to see the funding coming direct from the Government. We need recognition of the role that we fulfil. We can't continue to do it on the level of support that we have. (Manager 9, Rural Area)

Despite the concern over funding, all were trying to keep positive and explore avenues for funding, and in partnerships.

Budgets are being reduced...we have so many projects in place, through the path, PensionWise, etc. Our funding from the Council hasn't been reduced but that is because we are demonstrating what we bring to the community. The worth of our organisation. (Manager 4, Urban Area)

Change in Core Business

Managers spoke about the need to recognise that the 'core business' of the service has changed and there are more people coming to the bureau in crisis.

We are not counsellors and try to offer practical support. We do refer people on to other services. When you are dealing with people who have mental health issues you can't avoid stress, a lot of the interviews become stressful. ...It is complex. It takes you some time to unpick what the issues are and then the appropriate course of action...The volunteers, they are a certain type of person- it is a detailed training programme and you shadow, sometimes people's understanding is not fully realised until they shadow. We do lose people when they realise it is not for them. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

It was observed that because of the drawing back of services, that is the cuts to the local authorities and the lack of services for people with mental health, the bureau is the only support now for some people. One manager described it as being 'the last branch in town.'

Being inundated

All felt that with the ongoing changes to the benefits system and the increasing numbers of people using their service, the expertise were needed now more than ever and they were in sum, inundated. All felt that they had not enough staff or volunteers and if responding to the level of need presented should increase the number of outreach clinics offered.

Now we are inundated with referrals to help people with tribunals and I think it has a knock on effect on the number of referrals that we are getting in. More people are informed. (Manager 1, Rural Area)

The volume and complexity of the cases has increased and we need more personnel. The vast majority of our staff is volunteers and funding is an issue because you are trying to find enough advisers to advise on a service that is more and more complex. Food bank use has increased. Clients don't understand the benefits system and come to the bureau when they are in dire need. They wait because they think it

will improve or bury their head in the sand because they can't cope. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

The nature of the enquiries is becoming more complex. So the time that it takes to deal with it is increasing. That poses a number of challenges when you think of the client experience and service delivery. (Manager 9, Rural Area)

People are not coming with one issue, but three or four that are inter-linked. Now things take so much more time. You struggle to get through to the different DWP lines. We are time limited per client during appointments and you can spend that time trying to get through. I am in Scotland but could speak to someone in Wales. Before, it would be someone who would know that you couldn't book appointments in that area, so you have lost your local connection via the DWP. The length of time to get through is incredible. Also, you have clients who don't open their mail. Appeals are time limited and so it becomes more difficult to do this. People now have to attend more appointments at the Job Centre and people who have chaotic lives and the changes in the benefits to UC, it is fairly hard for people to follow. The rules change continually and that is why it is important to have good partners in place. (Manager 8, Urban Area)

Feeling overwhelmed and dissatisfied

With the changes in the benefits system managers were particularly worried about those who were not computer literate and would struggle with the move to an online system. They feared that as a result of the changes, the most vulnerable would slip through the gaps and become devoid of being on any system at all and they were powerless to stop this. Managers discussed cases that they felt were evidence of how badly things had gone wrong, where people who were disabled had lost their transport and were now more isolated than ever.

We don't know the impact on NHS. You work with these people and you are relieving the burden, the impact of money worries on people to get well, we don't know. We know the number going to foodbanks, no heating, we see there are issues. If these people didn't have these issues, what would their health be like? We are creating problems through these changes. The number of suicide rate has gone up. A high number of people on DLA/PIP are losing their independence... These issues are not within our control. The lack of funding creates its own problems...the time to share information is minimal. It is a massive piece of work and you are all the while doing the ongoing work as well...We have to key in our measures of performances but it doesn't capture the everyday stresses or strains of our workload...We feel like we are letting our clients down as we have no control and people are not getting their financial situation sorted in a timely manner. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

We have so many people who are suffering...The people who seem to be really suffering are young single people, the elderly and young couples...We offer a lot of emotional support and a woman came in recently and it was a really bad issue, and years ago it would have been a social worker, a police officer dealing with it. The bureau is now a social service and we are filling in the gaps of others. (Manager 9, Rural Area)

Recruitment of Volunteers

As a result of these changes and also the way in which society is changing, with early retirement less likely in the future, managers were aware that the future recruitment of volunteers needed to be looked at.

Traditionally for us volunteers come from people taking early retirement but that is a thing of the past. I am looking at exploring the option of taking on University/college students, even if it is just a short while to fill in gaps in employment or people looking to learn skills to help get either into or back into work (Manager 3, Urban Area)

Be more digitally 'switched on'

All felt that providing face-to-face contact needed to be at the forefront of service delivery, but two managers felt that the bureaux also needed to be 'more digitally switched on.' For example, to offer Skype advice, web chat and increase their presence on social media.

If I had a wish list it would be to have huge investment in IT. One of the things I am looking at is SKYPE Advice. I want to pilot it in the colleges. I think that a lot of students will be on UC. I am just waiting on the funding. I think we still need to provide face to face but also rolling out to the little communities. So for example, helping to address some of the transport issues and the only issue would be to up skill people...The way in which we deliver advice is face-to-face, longer term we need to be far more digitally switched on...we also have a huge amount of people who are digitally excluded, they don't have the skills or don't have access. We have a lot of people with mental health issues, poverty...the Internet connection is not the best. We have massive issues. I am really concerned. Also, in the background I have all of these wonderful people and we are looking for solutions. (Manager 2, Mixed Area)

I think you see the people you are working with as partners. We are increasing our social media presence and improving our website. We have also launched web chat so people can access the service through different channels. For example, people with autism may not necessarily prefer face-to-face contact. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

Be trained to deal with complex issues

One of the recurring points raised throughout the interviews was that the service deals with more people who have mental health issues and complex needs.

When I started...it was debt, now it is the benefits and more and more clients with mental health problems. I think it is the sign of the times...it takes up to a year to see the psychiatrist....they are stretched way beyond capacity. (Manager 8, Urban Area)

Big problem is getting people to access the support that is available particularly people with mental health problems. I think that we need to address these issues in wider society, some people with moderate to severe mental health problems are not always willing to accept referrals on to specialist support. From a confidentiality aspect, we can't force the client to take our advice. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

There is not enough staff to deal with the people who are coming through and people have complex issues. We have to liaise with many agencies to then offer support. (Manager 10, Rural Area)

The issues are more complex too. So horribly complex so now we have welfare rights officers and had to take on another one. Many of the issues of are so complex that it wouldn't be fair to hand it on to the general adviser. The impact on our volunteers- they do a fantastic job and they are often retired people. We have postgrads but only for a short time, so volunteers, it is hard to keep them. (Manager 9, Rural Area)

Managers were constantly sourcing opportunities for training in mental health issues and often this cost money.

Raise Awareness

One of the points raised that was that it was felt that people were not fully aware of the breadth and depth of work that was being provided at local bureaux and the need to raise awareness.

We are happy for people to come and see what we do too, the range of what we do, a lot of colleagues would be surprised about what we can do. (Manager 5, Mixed Area)

We had a stand at the Community Centre and we ended up helping groups of people with disability badges and so forth, people who didn't realise that we did this type of thing and it wasn't just for people who are living in poverty. (Manager 1, Rural Area)

That has been one of the key challenges that we have addressed to make people aware of the services that we provide and build on that momentum as the service grows. (Manager 3, Urban Area)

I think Citizens Advice is going ahead on their reputation and they need to make people aware of what we do. The number of times I hear that people didn't realise what we do. We are resting on our laurels. I would like to get us working with Citizens Advice Scotland to promote the work of the Bureau. (Manager 9, Rural Area)

Conclusion

This section has presented the manager's views, firstly on the drivers behind partnership working, which were mainly about benefitting the client and the communities. In turn, managers demonstrated that they consciously created opportunities for working with other agencies and used a range of ways to make contact. As well as attending meetings, forums and conferences, they also interacted through social media and in two areas there was a central system where third sector organisations all found out about each other and could connect in a more strategic way. Although in the rural areas, it was acknowledged that networking took more time and effort, the principles underpinning good partnership working, that is of the need to have a common purpose and good communication remained the same.

In essence, the best partnerships were often formal and informal with trust established, so that people could pick up the phone when they needed to get help for their client quickly. To maintain the balance of these relationships, it was vital to not abuse this trust and therefore only ask for this help when it was appropriate.

In order to minimise, or at the very least keep a handle of the changes that are being implemented, the Job Centre and DWP emerged as organisations particularly sought out and communicated with. Managers also had their staff shadow at these services and therefore were keen to know, understand and learn about how they worked and what was realistic to expect for their client.

The impact on the bureau as a result of the changes to Social Security and the roll of UC will be and has been huge. There is a rise in cases and increased complexity, with those requiring help in crisis now more than ever. The managers were creating opportunities for more training, particularly in dealing with mental health issues and it was felt that the Bureau's core business had changed. With the rolling back of social support services, they were now sometimes the only source of support people had in these communities.

For the future, increased funding to meeting the rising need and to have a review of recruitment and support given to volunteers was needed. It was also strongly believed that the service had to reaffirm to the wider public the role that they now played and in turn raise awareness of the increased necessity of the service.

PART II: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Overview

This section of the report presents the analysis of interviews with nine individuals from eight different organisations that work in partnership with Citizens Advice. These contacts were made through the Bureau Managers interviewed acting as gatekeepers, and therefore is a form of appreciative inquiry whereby organisations already likely to be positive were approached and opted in to take part.

The main focus of the inquiry was unpacking what was felt to be the 'added value' of working in partnership with Citizens Advice Bureaux.

The findings are supportive of the interviews with managers, with the main drivers being the benefit to the client and communities to improve their lives. Communication between services and the clarity of roles were felt to be essential to creating effective partnerships. All agreed that the specialised knowledge that the bureaux offered was increasingly needed and there was mutual benefit to the connections being affirmed and established.

Methodology

The interviews took place between November 2016 and the middle of January 2017. All interviews were transcribed and manually coded with key themes drawn out and explored.

Structure of Analysis

The main drivers to create partnership from the organisation's view is firstly presented and there is some cross over with this and the 'added value' reported by services for working together. What was felt to make an effective partnership is discussed, and in turn the barriers to this identified. Finally, the future hopes of these partnerships are also presented.

MAIN DRIVERS OF CREATING PARTNERSHIPS WITH CITIZEN'S ADVICE

The resounding key message and reason for creating partnerships was that all felt that those who worked for the bureaux really cared and by working together they could offer the best support possible to their clients. The bureaux were viewed as having specialised knowledge that was increasingly needed, and by establishing relationships and building trust, services felt reassured about their most vulnerable clients receiving help or being 'handed over' to bureaux. The outreach and pop up clinics now offered had created momentum for services in these areas to work more closely together, and therefore was a driver to creating and cementing these connections.

They Care

Quite simply, the most prominent reason given for partnering with bureaux was that the agencies interviewed felt that the service really cared about giving and getting people the right advice and support.

I think bureaux staff actually care about what they are doing and this makes the material difference. It is not just being involved because they have to...members have spoken volumes about how well they have been treated by bureaux. The consideration of care they bring to this makes the difference, the members really feel as though they matter are being listened to and being heard. Sometimes people get a chance to talk and then they get no further support. (Service 1)

I am quite new to the money and advice team and what I have noticed is that people are very passionate about what they are doing. There is never a notion of people skiving. I know they are keen and they want to help. (Service 2)

There is an enthusiasm there too and they are willing to share information and try to get the best for their clients all the time. That is what we work towards as well so there are common values. (Service 3)

I have to say it is a very reliable and helpful partnership. I think it is because we all care, you don't get to these jobs unless you care. It is tough out there for people out there and the big issue for us is funding. (Service 6)

This care also manifested itself with bureaux appearing to not be possessive of clients and wanting to connect and facilitate connections to the best or most appropriate support.

With other employability services we find that some other services can be competitive. We find that you can't always refer people on because of double funding. This puts the barrier up for the person, for example, we had a guy who was long term skills and I saw that we could pass him on to employability, but DWP had send him on to Triage and so he couldn't get back on that support. (Service 5)

Their expert knowledge is needed

All of the services felt that the bureaux offered highly specialised knowledge that they and other services did not have.

They have a good solid knowledge of the benefits system and what is available to people. (Service 2)

They have the expertise and share that. We have a common purpose. It is the ability of the staff to engage and gel and they get on well in a professional way. (Service 3)

It is their expertise. Providing the kind of advice that they do, we could do it, but it would take a lot of work for us to get up to speed. We know when we refer our clients to bureaux they are getting the most up to date information. It saves us time. We have experts there and we want to work in partnership, we want them to get their funding and that is us being selfish so we can do what we do best, which is not to provide benefits advice. (Service 3)

Obviously they have a huge amount of experience and knowledge that we don't have. You know I am able to say 'I can't deal with this but I know someone who can.' So there is obviously that. (Service 4)

We came to the conclusion that people needed access to good financial advice and to have access to people who had that level of expertise. We also recognise that people who are using the food bank, although we were signposting to bureaux they were not turning up. It was good to have that direct support there. It was about opening up those conversations. It is less onerous going into the office and so forth. (Service 7)

Able to provide a more holistic service by working together

The partners recognised that they were not able to offer what bureaux offered; this was also said in turn by bureaux managers about these services, and by working together they could provide a more holistic service.

We really thought about how we could engage and interact with ideas coming from both sides, the bureau and us. We have worked hard together to make it something that is part of the fabric of services offered in Midlothian. (Service 1)

Share expertise, complimenting rather than duplicating... it was clear that we both get it. We have a common purpose. (Service 7)

Reassurance about the most vulnerable clients

For the most vulnerable clients services wanting the experience of getting support to be as simple, easy and as comfortable as possible. One of the reasons then to work together was to be sure that the person you were handing someone over to was the 'right person.' It wasn't just that bureaux had expert knowledge; they also were tactful and able to provide support in an empathetic and approachable way.

We found it frustrating that we would be working with someone for so long and then would have to hand them over to say the bureau for the next bit and so partnership was really important to us so that we could trust the person who was taking it over to treat the person with the same dignity and respect... We have and they have tried to make sure that there is mutual benefit...Possibly in the past and in the early days

the funding pool can make people very protective, and for example in the early days we may have questioned people's motivation for us to be involved but then when it is clear that they do care and you are being invited to lots of different things then there is trust there. Their intentions are good and there is strength in partnership working. (Service 8)

It is their expertise but also their understanding of the vulnerabilities of the people we work with and they have a good handle on the issues. (Service 6)

We have lots of relationships with other organisations but I think when we refer to the bureau, we are dealing with people who are in crisis situations and extremely vulnerable and so that is paramount to us to have that trust. It's a two-way thing. (Service 8)

A more seamless process for those who need help

Some of the services said that partnership working was so effective that cross referrals often seemed as though they were all part of the same process.

It enhances our relationship with the people we support because I think they see it as one process. They are confident in our service because of the additional services that the bureau can offer us. From employee development point of view, the manager there is so willing to share the things they find, for example they did a people management course and picked up the phone to me and told me about it and it was free. I have gone back and have staff now who are about to do this training. (Service 8)

Sharing information

All acknowledged that the changes in the benefits system and the fallout of the financial crisis and austerity measures meant that sharing information about what help was available was really important. Working together meant that information could flow more easily and quickly.

It has been difficult. We attend the financial inclusion meetings to try to keep up to date with the changes... It is because we work in welfare and so we have been on a steep learning curve together with all of the changes. (Service 8)

For a good partnership to work you both can't be hung up about 'this is my client', you have to be able to share information and outcomes. There has to be flexibility in your approach. You also have to respect what the other is doing, so we don't for example give advice. (Service 4)

The importance of Outreach

The outreach support is really valued by all of the agencies and has been instrumental in forging relationships and partnerships.

I recognise that they have such a tough job with the way welfare/benefits are going, they face a tsunami of difficulties and yet they still find time to engage with other agencies and services. They have a clinic here and make good use of facilities. They have just been great. I think the outreach part of the bureau service is really helpful. They are really reaching out to the wider community. I don't think anyone would have difficulties in knowing where to go to see them. Time appears a limited resource, as it can be a problem to see a worker because of the large number of people who want to see them. (Service 1)

Opens up and strengthens opportunities to achieve funding

All of the services spoke about partnership working providing a much-needed way of trying to achieve future funding.

It strengthens the application to work in partnership. Our relationship with the bureau is brilliant. (Service 8)

We are both feeling the need to work together and even on funding bids to plug the gaps. We are both overrun. (Service 2)

Really making a difference

What is really a key point here is that all of the services felt that through working together they really made a difference to the lives of others.

I know several men here who having attended the bureau feel like their lives have been saved because of the help that they have been given. It becomes all the more powerful and all the more real when you realise that the person you are talking to, who is sitting there, might not be there if it hadn't been for the support given to them by the bureau. (Service 1)

The following are examples of exactly when this had happened by working together.

We had one gentleman; he came in very smartly dressed and had asked to see both workers from the two services. He wanted to use the computer and we didn't recognise him. He had been homeless, no job and had got a job and was smartly dressed. We had helped him with the housing and jobs. It was just so lovely. (Service 4)

We had a man come into us who was homeless and felt desperate about his prospects. We identified relevant services and referred him to

the bureau to do an individual financial entitlement check to make sure that he was aware of all his financial entitlements. The outcomes with both services working together, he ended up in full time appointment and got housing. That success was through working in partnership with the bureau. (Service 5)

The services recognise that they could not have done or achieved this level of support for the person alone.

ADDED VALUE TO THE SERVICES

There is some crossover with this and the previous section, with services feeling that the added value was that they were able to support their clients and communities better by working together, and in turn were more reassured about the help that was given to those most vulnerable. In this section, services also discussed the accessibility of the bureau and partnerships leading to more opportunities and innovative ideas coming to fruition. Lastly, the independence and accountability role that the bureau played was also welcomed and valued.

This is a service for all

Although only pointed out by one service, a key driver in the creation of partnerships is that bureaux offer a service for all, so people who may not access other services come through their doors. As a result they have a wide reach and are likely to not carry the same stigma as some other services. Having connections then to this service meant that other agencies were able to have access to a wider group of people who may need help.

Men don't feel services are geared towards them. I think the bureau has been able to help them break down that barrier because everyone can go along and see a bureau worker. It is a community wide service and so they feel comfortable in the first instance to go in to a service where they will not feel judged. It can be easier to go there than to a mental health services or a GP. (Service 1)

Able to be more innovative, two, three, four heads are better than one

By working together, essentially more could be achieved. For example, one service discussed how it was through the support of the bureau, both in terms of funding and ideas, that they were now able to offer art therapy to their specific client group. Other agencies spoke about how sharing resources, such as training and office space meant that they were learning to do and were able to offer more. Through these relationships, ideas could also formulate. For example, in terms of working together to provide pop-up clinics in different communities, or reaching out into GP surgeries and meeting with local groups.

I think the timing of the involvement with the bureau was positive, they have good people there and it has allowed the project the opportunity to flourish and become something really worthwhile. They are creative and supportive of all that happens with the project. (Service 1)

We both share training for the mutual benefit. (Service 3)

I think that it is about the common aim but also recognising the boundaries in terms of other's expertise. We have a similar approach with staff, bringing the staff together and this has to work at the coalface. You need to have buy in with the staff, this is about genuine partnership. You need to give them time to have that space, nurturing those working relationships. You can have managers meeting and then what happens on the ground happens. (Service 7)

Another key aspect of working together meant that the bureau had effectively agreed to 'fast track' clients from partner agencies, with protected time allocated rather than having to make standard appointments. Through this, the mutual benefit of working together was made really clear.

So all of the roads were coming together. It makes sense for us to all work together...time and investment that we are bringing people to their doors and use their expertise where it is needed. So it is working reciprocally, so we have an agreement as well, so people do not have to wait as well to be seen, that can be stressful. They have protected space so the connectors can have those appointments. The payback then for us is that we make sure that we get there. (Service 7)

What emerged from these discussions was that working in silos and separating out issues was not a sensible way forward. Needs were interlinked and therefore working together was essential.

I think it is crucial that we look at wellbeing and finances all together. Health drives it and health is the consequence of it, it doesn't sit separately. It is intrinsic to everything. (Service 7)

We have seen a huge increase in people coming in when they are in real crisis. They are stressed and it is really hard. We had a couple, the husband was the carer for the wife, she was invited to go to her assessment meeting but didn't get the letter, they stopped her PIP and her husband who had given up his job to look after her, couldn't get his carers allowance, then he had to go on job seekers even though he couldn't get a job as he was a carer, so...He had been a chef and he had had no choice but to give up his job to look after his wife. Knowing that we can sit confidently with these people and say that we can do the mandatory consideration but knowing that if it comes to appeal then the bureau will be doing your appeal and it will be a smooth transition. Knowing that they will be treated with dignity and respect all the way through is paramount to us. (Service 8)

Playing to each other's strengths and knowing your limits

Services acknowledged that with the bureau workers taking on a particular area of support meant that the partner agency was then freed up to concentrate on what they were skilled at.

They take that pressure off the people that we are helping. We do what we can and it is good that they are there to help take that pressure off us too. But they are only there on a Friday and that is our busiest day. Maybe because of the weekend coming up? You know they panic that there won't be money over the weekend. It is a massive bonus that they are here. We would like there to be more support given by the bureau. (Service 5)

One of the main reasons we started the partnership is that we can only help people who are on their benefits to a certain stage. So at the appeals stage, going to the courts and tribunals, the bureau had to step in and give us a helping hand. (Service 8)

Independent and National Overview

One of the valued aspects of the partnership with the bureau is that they could act as the spokesperson for other services and leverage power and holds other agencies and organisations to account for their mutual benefit.

We are not allowed to campaign because of our memorandum. We sometimes feed into them from a local perspective, whereas the bureau can give them figures and so forth. (Service 6)

I think that it would be strange for the bureau to not be involved as they bring that independence. Sometimes the right thing to do is to make the challenge and the bureau is able to do that well. I think that is a real benefit to us, because Citizens Advice has that national overview of what is happening. That lends a lot of strength to them too. (Service 7)

WHAT IS NEEDED AND WHAT HELPS TO MAKE AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP?

Similarly to the interviews with the managers, time, funding, good communication with roles clarified and maximised emerged as vital to good partnerships. Services also discussed how being co-located made communication and working together much easier. Overall, again it was felt that these partnerships are about people more than organisations coming together to work towards a common purpose.

Time, funding and good communication

Time, funding and good communication was felt to be vital, working to compliment rather than duplicate service provision. For those services that

were really about attempting to do something different, communication and flexibility was particularly important and an understanding of what people were willing and capable of doing.

The reason for the partnership is that there was a need for it. Also, we were all willing to have a suck and see it attitude. There were no service level agreements or anything but we were quite clear about our roles. (Service 3)

We have just worked well. Any issues that have arisen we have raised them and worked around them. (Service 4)

We knew where the boundaries lay and so there were no grey area. We are quite clear about our different roles. We have worked hard over the past 20 years to build those relationships. No one is precious about what we do and we are there to work with the people who need the help above all. (Service 6)

Continued and regular contact is important to keep the partnership successful. (Service 5)

Co-location and coproducing support

Four services were co-located with the bureau and felt that this meant that advice and support could be given quickly and easily, leading to an extremely effective partnership having been developed.

We share an office, we encourage clients to go and get advice. Sometimes we just chap the door and the advisor can sit in. If there is someone at our centre we can take them down in the car and get them the help. (Service 4)

They are in the same building as us. When it is a crisis we are able to ask there and then. (Service 5)

It used to be a five-minute walk before but now it is through the wall and can take them around in 2 minutes... We can literally deliver them to the door. (Service 8)

Personalities and People

Like the managers, partnerships were said to be about the people that they met who had the same drive and passion and wanted to make a difference. All discussed individuals that they specifically worked with and this is not to say that these people were atypical of the organisation, but rather that the services discussed them as individuals.

The partnership that we have is a positive one and it is about the people. (Service 4)

Do services work better together in rural areas?

It was acknowledged by those co-located with other services, which was evidenced in rural, mixed and urban areas, that having close proximity to one another was a key reason why they worked so well. Equally though this co-location had come about because of the cross over in services identified. It was agreed that those in rural areas had to work harder to work together due to the distances and time involved between services. However, it was also felt by one manager that living rurally meant that they were already a part of a culture of partnership working. They said:

I think that because of the rural location here we have to rely on each other and we all know each other. Again though it is confidential and professional. The nature of the geography and distances involved. Definitely, it leads to closer ties to benefit service users. The other thing is, if you go to cities and so forth, there are a lot of services that are bound in protocols and that can make things stagnant. You have to be willing to be open and discuss what we can do and how to do it.
(Service 3)

BARRIERS TO CREATING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Lack of Time and Funding

Like the Managers, the organisations also identified a lack of time and funding as the main barriers to creating good partnerships.

Big issue is funding. We have cheap rent and we run a low cost service. I worry about the future. There are a huge number of people who have no access to IT and do not have that literacy. It is harder to get that funding, but we will get there. (Service 4)

The only thing is that the volume of people that we are getting is not able to be matched to what the bureau can provide. There is a cry out for the bureau service and that is the only thing. (Service 1)

THE FUTURE OF PARTNERSHIPS

All of the services felt that bureaux would be increasingly needed because of the changes to social security benefits and would result in partnerships continuing to develop.

I think that with the changes coming up we will all need each other more. We have a lot of people with mental health issues in this area and people who are working in the bureau will refer onto us. As long as we keep talking to one another and clarify what we do it will be for the benefit that need the support. (Service 6)

Just for the bureau to still be there and do what we are doing now. Really for it to keep on as it is. It doesn't feel like hard work to keep the relationship going. It is really easy. I just hope that the bureau and organisations like us are recognised for what we do. (Service 8)

Conclusion

Through these interviews it is clear that the work that Citizens Advice Bureaux do is regarded as being highly specialised and increasingly needed. All of the services really valued the outreach work and protected allocated time that their clients benefitted from, and workers were viewed as really caring and tactful in their approach.

The changes to social security benefits had generated concerns for all involved and they were worried about the potential cuts to services in the future, when it was felt they would be needed more than ever.

In order to create effective partnerships, time, funding and good communication were said to be vital. By working together, not only could clients get the best support but also opportunities for funding and more innovative ideas were likely to come to fruition. Bureaux are both independent and national in the way that the other services were not, they were therefore seen as an important contributor to policy, practice and holding other services to account. The main concern for the future was that organisations like bureaux may not get the funding that was needed to meet the increasing demand placed on what they provide.

PART III: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH CLIENTS

Overview

The interviews with the eight clients highlighted the reach and impact that bureaux achieve by working in partnership with other services. Six had come to the bureau through their outreach work and two others had been referred by another service.

The advisers are viewed as being kind and compassionate which all felt was in sharp contrast to the benefits system that had been and was a cause of much stress. Bureaux emerge as acting as an interpreter of the information received going through 'the system', and by providing some emotional support and linking in with agencies which are specialised in this area, they are able to minimise the adverse impact.

The interviews were with men who had been in acute crisis and at one point suicidal. They were keen to share their stories because they believed that without the support of the bureau they would not be here. By working with other partners, bureaux and the partner agencies are able to bring their assets together and deliver a more holistic service.

Methodology

Eight clients were interviewed from November to mid February. One interview took place on the phone with a client from a mixed area and the other seven took place face to face. All of these seven came from the same 'urban' region.

The face to face interviews were achieved as the result of the support given through the partnership established between the local bureau manager and a specific suicide prevent service that had been set up for men in the local and surrounding area (referred to as the 'men's service').

This analysis therefore is heavily weighted towards an insight of a particular manager and service, and their approach to supporting people, but other bureau staff had also supported many of the men too, so their comments are able to be more representative of the service. As well as giving an insight into the support given to clients, this is also strong evidence of the value of good partnership working.

The Added value of Partnerships

The following analysis of the value of partnerships has been split into three areas, namely that it results in access to the wider community; engagement with those who may not have accessed the service otherwise, and greater impact on communities.

Widening access to communities and having a further reach

It was apparent that through bureaux working with other services, they are able to have access to and engage with a much wider group of people in communities. Specifically, all eight had, come to the bureau as a result of being referred or accessing the service through their outreach support. The Job Centre had referred one and six had accessed support because the bureau was providing an outreach service to the partner organisation.

Outreach means reaching out to those most vulnerable and therefore unlikely to engage otherwise

Only one of the seven, who had met approached the bureau through the outreach, said that they would have probably gone to the service on their own. All the others doubted that they would have come in contact with the bureau if it had not been for the outreach. All reasoned that the 'men's service' that had been attending had come to be viewed as a safe space and they felt that they could open up in a way there that they could not elsewhere. It was also raised that when you are especially vulnerable, and particularly for the four who had had a mental breakdown, if it had not been for the outreach, the 'outside' problems with their housing, bills and lack of food, was something that they had actually not connected with at all. The problems in many ways at this point seemed insurmountable and so it was only when what appeared to be an 'expert' offered help that they had hope of making the changes needed and recognised that these could be faced and addressed.

The service doesn't have limitless funding to reach out to people and instead they have to go to them. It is the biggest issue with people who miss out on the help, is that they just don't know where to go. It is hard too to admit that you need help. (Client 4)

I don't think I would have gone to the bureau if the adviser hadn't come. They should try to reach out to people like us. They need a lot of help. (Client 5)

I might have made the journey into the office but it was easier. The centre is closer and a safe space for me, whereas, if you have never been to a bureau, it is a strange place. At that point, there weren't many places where I felt comfortable and secure. It was a known space for me. I think I was more likely to open up to someone there. (Client 7)

One man also said that he had not been aware that the bureau dealt with the issues that he had.

I wouldn't have gone to the bureau if Jim hadn't told me. I think it would be good if they told people more about the help that they do. They really helped me with that appeal. (Client 1)

The bureau and the men's service work very closely together and this is an excellent example of the what can be achieved by bringing assets together, of the service's compassionate approach and expertise in mental health and of the bureau's compassion, but also crucially expertise in the complex matters that these men had let fall behind.

Five of the men interviewed said that they felt comfortable now to attend the bureau offices. All interviewed felt that without the support provided by the bureau they would no longer be here and had become suicidal because of their financial situation, this included the man who had been interviewed from another service by phone. These interviews are direct evidence that some people who come to the bureau service are in acute crisis.

Impact on Clients

Through the interviews, bureaux were regarded as giving practical and emotional support, and the care, patience and compassion shown helped the clients to feel less vulnerable and more confident about regaining control and wanting to carry on living their lives.

Bureaux humanise the experience of being on benefits and they act as an interpreter

All interviewed felt that services such as DWP and the Job Centre did not care about them and when they went to the bureau, the way in which they were treated meant that they could regain some respect that had been lost during the process of being on or trying to get benefits. All felt that there were too many medical assessments, in those cases where the conditions were chronic it was felt to be unnecessary and that the assessors did not seem to listen.

Finally, two people spoke in depth about the 'generic' letters that were sent out which they found disheartening and confusing. Bureaux in some ways then act as an interpreter for those going through the system, helping them to understand the information that has been sent to them and the steps that they then need to take.

When I first got knocked back and I got the letter and I read it, I was like 'that wasn't me.' All of the things that they had written about my condition, it wasn't correct. I was reading the letter over and over, I thought I was reading their assessment wrong. I had to keep checking it was my name on it. It was as though they hadn't listened at all.
(Client 6)

The generic letter – it is never to the one person. You get the generic letter that you have not done this or not done that and this could be despite that you are doing all you can to keep your head above water and keep your sanity. These generic letters are more hassle than they are worth, even if they come with good news. There are people there who are feeling the lowest of the low. They should break it down to you

about what you need to do. Here they care about you. You are talking to the bureau adviser one to one and so it helps you to understand that generic letter. (Client 8)

The system that they go through causes stress and in some cases is even distressing. No one felt that the system cared for them or treated them as human beings.

Waiting on the appeal for five months, I was so stressed out. I had no money and was behind on bills...My daughter was trying to help me and checking on me that I was ok. That was stressful as well. (Client 1)

Bureaux are regarded as being the opposite of this, 'caring', 'kind' and 'going beyond the norm.' They were said to offer reassurance, help, and hope at a time when those vulnerable had not felt heard or listened to.

Daniel reassured me that I should get PIP and as I said I was only one point off. She didn't care what I had to say that woman. She didn't care. When I had gone in there she had shut the door behind me and I don't like when I have a shut door behind me and I just wanted to get out. (Client 1)

I can't describe the job centre, they don't really care. (Client 3)

She (bureau adviser) asks me too 'Are you sure? Are you sure?' Cause I don't always say everything at once. I don't want to say when things are not good. She helps me to open up. (Client 6)

The benefits system is not equipped to connect with the most vulnerable and bureaux minimise some of the adverse impacts

Two men interviewed were illiterate and they spoke about how impossible it was for them to fill in forms. These cases give an insight into the effects of what appears to be a lack of consideration or no consideration that has been given to those who are illiterate, digitally excluded and suffering from mental health issues.

They give me information but I can't read it. Without her (bureau adviser), I wouldn't be able to do any of that. People in my situation, I can't read the paper, it would take me all day to be able to read it, she tells me straight away what needs to be done and what help you need and what you need to do. When I first got my DLA, I had to go to my medical thing and she set me up with a guy so I had someone that I wasn't on my own. (Client 5)

Help with filling in forms was a crucial role played by bureaux for those most vulnerable

I got a lot of advice on how to deal with the benefits system. My paperwork, I tend to not do it. When you are in a melt down, the last thing on your mind is filling in forms. (Client 2)

I had a mental breakdown and I was really struggling, I cannot handle stress. I would completely shut down, glaze over and not take anything in for about an hour. It made a huge difference...When I came home I didn't have anything sorted out. I was back with parents and couldn't deal with benefits agencies and was really struggling. Through the centre I got an appointment with Michelle and she did an immense amount and so she took the stress out of the situation for me. I just wouldn't have been able to do it at all. (Client 4)

Bureaux help to clarify decisions and processes

The benefits system is confusing and those interviewed had felt in the dark until they had met with a bureau adviser who through their expertise and advice made their position and what they needed to do clearer. However, it is important to note that there was an ongoing state of confusion revealed, with some not now knowing which benefits they were being put on or might be moved on to with the proposed changes.

They didn't tell me anything about my benefits, they just stopped it and that was that. I didn't know about it at all. So when I went to see Jim because I couldn't understand anything, he was able to see that I was one point away and we both couldn't understand that either. David really helped with that. (Client 1)

I came to the bureau because I couldn't quite understand all the things I was being asked to give for my ESA. It was driving me up the wall. I had been taken off ESA and put on Job seekers. I didn't fully understand how the system works and got in touch with CAPS and CA through the bureau. (Client 7)

Bureaux are the experts and their knowledge means that people can become aware of their options and what they may be entitled to

Bureau advisers were seen as experts in this field, not only in terms of understanding the sometimes bewildering system, but also their tacit knowledge about how to input the information correctly.

I didn't have a clue about how to work things out and she has a ridiculous amount of knowledge. I don't know where she stores it all. (Client 4)

She goes well beyond the norm. She knows us all and she knows that people like us can't speak to other people. I can't fill in forms, I can't

understand them. When I first had my breakdown I went to the council and asked for help and they pushed me out the door. They treated me like a piece of dirt. I had worked all my life. She treats me with respect. It means that when you need the help you get it. (Client 5)

She helped me to get my right kinds of benefits and support. I was on Job Seekers and was looking for a job 5 years ago. Now I am on ESA. I didn't know about that, I only knew about job seekers and since coming here I have learned a lot. She helped me with the forms and I always need help with them. (Client 3)

They are used to the letters that come out. They understand how to read between the lines, whereas an individual who reads this generic letter and is like 'that doesn't concern me.' This letter tells you, you are a useless waste of space, and they help you to instead read between the lines. (Client 8)

The forms are confusing and Michelle understands their key words that they are looking for. I might be expressing myself clearly but it is not what they are looking for. (Client 7)

Case Study 1

We went to an appeal together. He sat and discussed with me what was involved, who was inside the room and that. There is a judge, Dr and someone from DWP. He was beside me and keeping me calm and kept saying to stay calm. I was starting to panic and I don't like going into rooms where the door is closed. I thought there was a social worker there too and so it brought back a lot of old memories too. I didn't like it. I think if he hadn't have been there I would have had to get up and leave. David was really patient with me and said to me that I would get my benefits, it was that he wasn't sure how I hadn't got it before. On the day of the appeal though when they had shut the door, I was so nervous and started to swear and everything and David helped me to stay calm. I just wanted to get out. When I came out, he spoke to me. He has a really nice way of speaking to you. He is really kind. He really helped me. (Client 1)

The system is failing and those failed need support to challenge 'bad decisions' and gaps

All of the interviewees gave evidence of bad decisions being made and having to fight with the support of the bureau for these to be overturned. This raises questions about the initial decision making process within the systems. The impact of losing benefits or mobility schemes is disabling and therefore should not be taken lightly at all. The oversights that were also discussed did

not seem to be justifiable and it was only with the support of bureau advisers that those most vulnerable felt they could challenge these.

I was supposed to have my payments reinstated in July but it took until now. So I have had no money for 8 months. I owe people money. I ran up a slate at the local shop. I have had to sell things that I had bought, thinking that I could have that. So I always wanted to do photography and had bought a camera, but I have had to sell that. (Client 7)

She helped me again to get a discount on something to do with my rent. I was going to lose my bus pass but now she has helped me so that I am now. These are bad decisions. I moved from DLA to PIP, they are no' giving you the same benefit as you had before. I had it so I was getting a bit more money and my bus pass and they were taking that and giving me less money. I need a bus pass and I need another person with me. I can't travel long distances. A lot of my problems because I was in the army and I had to go there for five years. Five years to see a psychiatrist and had to travel up and down to the town and it took my two hours cause I had to get off. If I have someone with me, it occupies my mind. (Client 5)

Case Study 2

Dan had been a manual labourer all his life, until an accident at work left him unable to work. He became depressed, having gone from being the main breadwinner to not being able to get around without help. Over only eight weeks he was in arrears with his rent and had been sent an eviction notice. Dan attempted suicide and as a result of this came in contact with mental health support and the 'men's service' in the community. Through the bureau outreach, Dan made contact with an adviser.

The adviser was able to help Dan to get his benefits in place, and his rent arrears and bills managed. Dan looks back on this time and believes that without the adviser he may have attempted suicide again and the relief of having his financial situation in order was indescribable. For someone who had never had debt, this unknown situation had been unbearable. Dan's condition is chronic and he has to go to medical assessments every few months. At his last assessment they put him in the wrong group and he was able to go to the adviser to get help resolve this.

Dan finds it difficult to speak to people and said that when he became disabled he thought of himself as worthless, and having people like the adviser helps him to realise his self-worth and build self-belief. He has another medical assessment within the next few weeks and the adviser is supporting him to link up with an advocate who can go with him on the day, as well as helping him with the paperwork. Dan finds it hard to complain and tell the full truth of the extent of his condition, so the adviser plays a key role in helping him to access what he is entitled to.

Case Study 3 based entirely on direct quotes: Malcolm

I lost my job through deteriorating sight and I became registered blind. Through losing my job I was unsure how I would apply to recover any benefits through various registered charities I was getting nowhere. They didn't understand where I wanted to go and deemed useless. Also, having to apply for jobs that I was not interested in, like stacking shelves.

I got in touch with the bureau when Michelle did a clinic in the library and she was able to fill out forms for me. I had went from being the main bread winner to then having to rely entirely on my wife...I had to work out what I was going to refocus my career on at the age of 36. For the last year and a half I would get into massage as I was used to using my hands. I left school with no qualifications that could be considered academic.

Through continuous applications and Michelle and Sean helping me, fighting tooth and nail, I fought to get on my college course. So in 2014 I was accepted into an access course to show that I could be trained. That was for six months and then I got accepted onto HNC and then after that I got my HNC in soft tissue therapy. So the last year I qualified as a sports therapist. It could easily have been spilt all over except for Michelle and Sean always questioning and helping me to fight my corner....Without them I would have given up and might not even be here today from pure frustration. Through the frustration you can get so anxious.

You have to fight the storm...I went from DLA to PIP and so I lost high rate mobility, however I was grateful for something. I just want to get away from everything and build my business up and get away from this environment. It has been great to me, but I don't want to be categorised as someone who claims benefits. I don't want to be branded in that way. I appreciate that I have it but I want to get out of the situation and produce again...I think that the most important thing to realise is that these generic letters affect people. It categorises people and portrays them in a position that you don't want to be in.

General views about the service

Workers are Trusted

All interviewed felt that they could trust all that they had met at the bureau, not only with their information, but to do the best job that they can on their behalf.

She has always been really understanding and you trust her implicitly.
(Client 4)

I think the most important thing for me with the bureau is having someone who I trust to help me to deal with things. They can also refer you on to who can help. They give you advice on all things.
(Client 8)

The emotional support provided by the workers was felt to go beyond the norm and key to those most vulnerable remaining persistent in appealing their cases, getting their information correct and pursuing their claims.

The growing need for Citizens Advice Bureaux

All felt that things were getting harder with the benefits system increasingly more difficult to navigate and the money received less and less, so surviving was a challenge.

I don't think I could cope if I was looking for a job now. If I was to go back it would be game over. I am happy enough being here and in this group... I think if I wasn't living with my mum I would be on the streets, I would be snookered. (Client 3)

I think things have got harder through the Government side. I don't have anyone else that I can rely on for this type of support. To be honest though I need more support. I am managing on the bare minimum. I would love to see the people who decide on these things try to live, not for a week but for six months. Live like I have to live and see how you get on. I have to manage on such a small amount every day. I don't take, take, and then go crying, I try to manage. Client 2)

I have been dealing with them as a welfare claimant, the service here is very good because they have been around long enough to know how to work with different services. The question is whether they are going to have the capacity. How are they going to cope when they bring in all the changes. I don't understand if I am on UC or on ESA. (Client 7)

Conclusion

These interviews are strong evidence that the impact Citizens Advice can have is life changing and saving. The men interviewed had been in acute crisis and therefore the glimpse given here is of when support has been most needed.

Bureaux are seen as being trustworthy, friendly and approachable experts in the field of financial advice and help with benefits. Interestingly, most of the men did not think that they would have accessed the office and it was only through the outreach that they got in touch.

The partnership working between the 'men's service' and the bureau in the local area highlights the benefits of bringing assets together. This approach put the clients at the centre and through the outreach, the service is able to reach further and develop relationships with the wider community.

The recommendations arising as a result of these interviews are that bureaux should continue and expand their outreach service if this is possible, and also help to change the dominant narratives about poverty that currently exist in society of people being 'scroungers.' As has been reflected here, living on

benefits can mean that surviving is a challenge. It is vital as a society that we understand more about the realities of people dealing with and living with mental health and that service provision in the community can be more responsive to reaching out to those who are for the most part, on and feel as though they are on the outer edges.

PART IV: CONCLUSION

This small study highlights the importance of partnership working and the outreach service from the views of managers, partner organisations and clients. Through working with other services, bureaux are able to combine their expert knowledge and tacit knowledge in how to support clients with other specialised services, and in doing so, not only have a greater reach but more positive impact on individuals and communities.

Managers are acutely aware of the benefits and as well as making connections at events, were also using social media and offering office space to be used by other services and the community. As a result of these networks, not only could clients benefit but it also meant that the agencies had more access to funding. There were no notable differences in how bureaux made connections or viewed connections, but it was accepted that because of the distances between agencies, it was more challenging in rural areas to make initial contacts.

Bureaux have made a conscious effort to get to know more about the agencies they work with and have a named contact, especially within the local Job Centres and DWP. These informal and formal connections mean that managers can try to remain ahead of the changes and this is all for the benefit of those they support.

The changes to social security have meant that bureaux have more people coming to them now than ever and with more complicated cases, in increasingly acute crisis. Universal Credit is regarded as part of a confusing and ever changing system that is stressful, with many gaps. Those digitally excluded, digitally illiterate and most vulnerable are at a very high risk of slipping through the gaps and managers and organisations alike were worried for the future and particularly with the cuts expected to services.