

Annual Report 2022-23
Making A Difference Matters

advice
space
support & guidance



Margaret Marshall - Margaret is aged 90 and remains a volunteer with Advice Space at our reception, Margaret has been supporting our work for over 30 years now and is a shining example what volunteering means in Advice Space and to our team.



Chairperson's Report



I am honoured to present Advice Spaces annual report for 2023. It was a pivotal year for Advice Space with Peter McMahon being appointed as the new Chief Executive. I know that we will accomplish great things with Peter's expertise and dedication.

The 2022/23 year was a difficult period for Northern Ireland with the continuing absence of our Executive, and rising inflation and interest rates adding to the burden already being felt by cost-of-living pressures. At Advice Space we believe no one should have to face these problems alone. Taking a holistic approach, we treat clients as a whole person, not limiting our advice to any single issue. Our approach is the bedrock of our service and is vital to empowering people to find the best solution for their situation.

In the 2022/23-year Advice Space completed around 8,000 benefit checks, ensuring people received all that they are entitled to, and helping maximise their income by £7 million. Our long established and trusted partnerships have allowed us to proactively reach those clients who were unaware of our services. As we close out our previous strategy and begin preparing for the next strategy cycle Advice Space remains dedicated to working in partnership so that we meet client needs in innovative ways.

Our dedicated staff, volunteers, and Trustee Board are the cornerstone of Advice Space and enable us to deliver our services effectively and efficiently in a framework of sound governance. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Board members for their dedication and hard work during a period of considerable change and the staff and volunteers of Advice Space who continue to produce high-quality work and to demonstrate great commitment to our goals.

As I look forward to 2024 and Advice Spaces 60th anniversary, we have much more to achieve to ensure we continue to meet the changing needs of those accessing our services. However, I remain confident that by staying focussed on our purpose we can continue to make a positive impact upon the lives of those we serve.

Andrew McCartan

A photograph of a middle-aged man with short, grey hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark green, quilted jacket over a light blue collared shirt. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The man's right hand is visible, wearing a watch and a ring.

ADVICE SPACE WANTS TO BE KNOWN AS

A place where people can fulfil their potential. We work with volunteers, offer employment to trainees and apprentices and foster an environment where continuing professional development is promoted and valued. We support our clients to develop the knowledge, and confidence so they can make informed decisions about their own circumstances.

A place where we all enjoy long healthy lives. We believe providing quality advice and wrap around services can alleviate pressure and stress which our clients face daily.

A place where we give clients space to discuss their problems in a confidential and non-judgemental way. Where they can feel safe and are treated with dignity and respect.

CEO's Report



I am immensely proud to have joined the Advice Space team as new CEO in Summer 2023. I have worked within advice organisations for over 30 years and it is a pleasure to be tasked and trusted to help lead Advice Space into the next stage of its exciting journey. Advice Space has a wonderful team of dedicated staff and volunteers across all our offices who possess vast experience and knowledge.

During 2024 Advice Space will celebrate its 60th anniversary year. We are in a good financial position with a diverse range of income and are currently developing our new 5-year Strategic Plan. We will be here for as long as necessary as we continue to make a positive impact upon the lives of others, and I look forward to joining our 60th celebrations being planned across the year ahead.

Quite often it just takes a simple change of circumstances to have a huge impact on a person's life such as redundancy; relationship breakdown; bereavement; homelessness; addiction or mental health deterioration or perhaps an unexpected illness be it critical or terminal. Whatever the reason and based on our experience and track record you can trust Advice Space and find us at your disposal. Together with our staff, volunteers, and trustees we will continue to work hard to deliver and develop our services for those who rely upon and need our help.

As our Chair outlines in his foreword there are many challenges people in N.I. currently face. In line with the commitments set out in New Decade, New Approach and now that our Assembly has been restored, we need to continue to work to ensure the Department agrees and delivers on the Anti-Poverty Strategy commitment for N.I.

This Strategy should aim to focus on and address inequalities and barriers affecting the lives of the most vulnerable. The high-level outcomes also envisioned within the draft Programme for our Government should align when it commits to: creating a society where all can enjoy long, healthy active lives; supporting people throughout their lives; enabling everyone to reach their potential; enabling our children and young people to get the best start in life and to creating an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect.

Delivering on these commitments presents opportunity and a pathway to achieving social justice and I would expect and desire no less. The reward if we are to achieve this together is enormous and for Advice Space it provides all the motivation and drive needed for our good work ahead!

Peter McMahon, CEO

Our Partners



Chest Heart & Stroke

At Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke our partnership with Advice Space has become a vital part of the family support service we provide. Many of the service users we work with experience changes in their work and home situation following the diagnosis of a chest, heart or stroke illness and it is invaluable to them to have access to the fast and efficient advice provided by Advice Space.

The service that Advice space delivers provides our service users with vital information that often helps improve their situation and support them to make informed choices on the next stage of their life. ...

Gillian Thompson, Head of Cardiac Services at NICHs.



Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

caring supporting improving together

Carers and Advocacy Support Service Belfast Trust

The service provided by Advice Space has been invaluable for many service users - which has increased their quality of life through benefits advice/support, support with asylum queries, carers queries and Housing Issues. As a social worker I have also benefited from your expertise - which has enhanced the support I am able to provide to my service users.

I truly hope that the support provided by Advice Space will continue into the future, as without it many individuals would likely see their incomes fall and carer stress to increase - all putting more demands on an already overstretched social care system ...

**Judith McNulty, Social Worker
Physical Health and Disability Team**



Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

caring supporting improving together

Belfast Trust Aftercare

The Advice Space advisor was professional, thoughtful, polite and patient. This was apparent in their willingness to consider matters in the round and from a variety of viewpoints. With matters beyond the scope of their expertise they were also able to very helpfully signpost to other supports and services.

Because of this empathetic approach, my client was put very much at ease and was able to focus on what was being said and on the advice being given - a very positive experience. ...

Support Worker Belfast Trust



Cystic Fibrosis

I have referred parents Cystic Fibrosis Service at Advice Space. This has been for DLA or PIP applications, financial or debt management advice. I have found the service to be invaluable, the advisor's expertise and knowledge has resulted in positive outcomes for the families I refer.

Financial matters can be a significant stressor for the families I work with and the input from Advice Space has helped manage, and many times alleviate this stress. ...

CF Social Worker

WE ARE MACMILLAN. CANCER SUPPORT

Macmillan

I would like to highlight just how valuable Macmillan Welfare has been for my patients diagnosed with cancer. They always provide first hand advice and support to ensure patients financial concerns are dealt with and managed appropriately. This includes both cancer and palliative patients.

I have had patients who have contacted me to say how grateful they were to the Macmillan Welfare team, and they don't know how they or their family would have managed without their support.

The team are always very prompt in dealing with my patients and are always professional and courteous.

I have nothing but praise for all the work that they do. ...

Sharlene Mansell, Cancer Nurse, Ulster Hospital



**Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust**

caring supporting improving together

Belfast Trust Sensory Service

Advice space provides an invaluable benefit advice and advocacy service for service users living with hearing and sight impairments. Service users known to the Sensory Team within the BHSC are some of the most vulnerable people in our community. By the very nature of their disability, many are unaware and/or unable to claim appropriate benefits and consequently living in impoverished circumstances.

The following are comments from two of my service users who Brian McLarnon, Benefit advisor Belfast helped over the last year.

"Before Brian helped me I was not able to heat my home for weeks on end and it was a constant struggle choosing between food and heat. The lowest point was when the electric ran out and I sat in darkest for a couple of days I just cried and thought about ending it all. He has completely changed my life and I cannot thank him enough."

"I don't know how long I have left to live as I have an incurable condition. Brian obtained me Attendance Allowance, and this has made a huge difference to the quality of my life as I no longer have the financial worries. I also want to say I was nervous about a stranger coming into my home and Brian completely put me at ease. I found him really friendly, non-judgemental and compassionate." ...

**Lorraine Finn, Social worker
Sensory Support Team, BHSC**

Our Impact

The Advice Story

We helped
29,613
people

With
94,177
problems

The clients received
£7M
in benefit entitlement

This was spent in our local communities

We are a
**Living
Wage**
Employer

Through advice,
support and guidance,
we sort out your
problems together.

Social media

Advice Space has 3,441 followers
across 6 social media platforms. **3,441**

Our TikTok's have
28,740 views. **28,740**

Our Facebook has reached
23,049 accounts. **23,049**

Our LinkedIn has 1,958
impressions. **1,958**

Our X (formally Twitter) has
19,179 impressions. **19,179**

We have 13 followers on Threads. **13**

There was a 20% increase in
accounts reached on Instagram. **20%**

Our Clients

Julie Swindell, Belfast City Council Funded Advisor

Client is a single 76-year-old man who contacted Advice Space to ask if he was entitled to any benefits. The client worked self-employed for most of his life, he never claimed his State Pension when he became eligible in 2012 because he did not think he had paid enough National Insurance contributions to qualify. With the client's consent I contacted the NI Pension Centre and made a claim on his behalf for state pension. Our client has never had a bank account so there was nowhere for the client's pension to be paid to him. I advised client on setting up a bank account. The client needed photographic ID to do this, which he has never had either. I contacted the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland and was able to make an appointment for client to go to their office and they would provide him with an electoral ID card which he then used to set up a bank account.

Clients state pension claim was successful. They received a lump sum of £62,333.08, plus weekly payments of £114.10. Client is also entitled to Pension credit of £6.95 per week, which he has also been able to claim successfully, with my help. The client is delighted with the outcome. The client says he can pay for a funeral now for himself, which has eased his stress and help his children with some money as they are having a challenging time financially due to rising costs of essentials.

Graham Higgin, Welfare Rights Advice

This Welfare Reform client is a 46 year-old single lady who has physical and mental disabilities. She is iro PIP (ERDL & ERM), IBESA(SG) and full HB on her HA flat in Belfast. She has just been offered a NIHE ground floor flat in Newcastle, Co Down that is much more suitable for her, given her health conditions. Client is now reluctant to move because, on two occasions, telephone call handlers at ESA have warned her that changing address will lead to her automatically being switched over to a UC claim. Client was understandably concerned about losing her premiums if she was forced to become a "natural migrant" onto UC ie. forced to transfer over to a UC claim from an IBESA claim. Client contacted AS and was advised by a specialist WR adviser that the ESA handlers were giving wrong advice. Northern Ireland is treated as a single local authority area with respect to Housing Benefit. There was no question of her having to change over to UC. Client was reassured and has now moved to Newcastle into the more appropriate accommodation.

BHSCT Aftercare

One young person wanted to take up paid work but was fearful it would leave her worse off. We calculated her earnings and benefit entitlement, showing that she would be better off financially in paid work, while still getting some support with rental costs. This support has enabled her and many other young people to make more informed decisions about their financial futures, helping to open employment opportunities for them.

Cedar Foundation

One client had previously applied for PIP without support and was subsequently turned down. This client was later referred to our service via the Cedar Foundation and received advice and assistance with a fresh PIP application. The client was awarded the standard rate of both components of PIP and a backpayment of almost £2,000. The client was very pleased with this outcome, stating that the money will help her a lot given the impact of inflation and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

CCHS

We supported a client with multiple benefit issues following a debilitating stroke. Our advisor initially assisted the client with an Attendance Allowance claim, identifying that the client could also claim Housing Benefit. The client was subsequently awarded both Housing Benefit and the High Rate of Attendance Allowance. During a follow up consultation, further entitlement to Pension Credit was identified. The support we provided increased the client's income by over £14,000 per year. The client was very thankful for all the support and said it had made a big difference to his life

Positive Life

A client came to us stating that her Child Tax Credits had been reduced after HMRC removed her 16-year-old son from the claim. The client had notified Tax Credits that her son was going to remain in education (and thus should remain on the claim), but they did not act on this information. Following support and guidance from ourselves, the client successfully challenged this decision, with her Child Tax Credit reinstated. The client was very happy for all the support, ending a stressful and difficult time for her.

Sensory

Client John was referred by Sensory Support Team at The Bradbury Health Centre for assistance to complete an application for Attendance Allowance. Client had diabetic retinopathy resulting in bi-lateral sight loss and was registered as severely sight impaired. John also had bi-lateral hearing loss requiring him to wear two hearing aids. John lived with his wife Joan who was in receipt of DLA –middle rate care and high rate mobility. They lived in Housing Association property and were required to contribute £60.00 per week towards rent as their income didn't entitle them to full help with Housing Benefit. John's application for Attendance Allowance was successful and he was awarded the higher rate of £92.40 per week.

The award of Attendance Allowance pass-ported John and Joan to being eligible to apply for Pension Credit. Carers allowance was also claimed to elevate their personal entitlement to Pension Credit. This resulted in award of £54.22 per week of Pension Credit. As they were now in receipt of Pension Credit this meant that they no longer had to contribute towards their rental costs as they were now entitled to full help with Housing Benefit.

Overall John and Joan were financially better off by £206.62 per week. They were delighted with the additional financial income and remarked that this would have a significant impact on their ability to budget towards heating and energy costs which they had been limiting the use of due to costs.

Our People

IT'S BEEN A TIME OF CHANGE. NEW PEOPLE JOINED OUR TEAM.

Trainees



Alice Baker

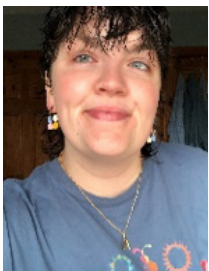
The trainee role at Advice Space has taught me a lot about what an adviser does and the social security system that we advise on. I am excited to start advising and continue to learn and develop.



Edyta Kalisz

I want to thank the Advice Space for an opportunity to complete the Adviser NI- Level 4 Certificate and Extended Certificate In Providing Social Security Advice. It allowed me to understand my

work better and equipped me with comprehensive knowledge and tools to help cancer patients during tough times. I appreciate all the support my line managers offered me throughout the time I was studying.



Annie Doherty

I started as a trainee Macmillan Adviser in June 2023. I've really enjoyed being able to soak up knowledge about the UK benefits system, social policy and many other areas of advice and cancer

care, both through my advice qualification and the training available through Macmillan. I'm happy to be putting my new skills and knowledge to use helping others through the service, and my colleagues have been so helpful along the way with tips and shadowing opportunities. I'm excited to further develop my career here and become a real asset to the team.

New Volunteers

Advice Space saw a substantial growth in volunteers this year and welcomed 10 new volunteers.

Jude - Triage (East)

Nicki - Triage (North)

Paul - Triage (Central)

Anna - Triage (Central)

Godfrey - Triage (Central)

Magdalene - Triage (Central)

James - Triage (Central)

Elen - Triage (Central)

Angela - Triage (A'Town)

Nuala - Reception (A'Town)

New Trustees

Chris Trotter



I was honoured to have been appointed as Treasurer and Trustee of Advice Space in March 2023. As Treasurer I exercise financial oversight over the charity and support the Board of Trustees with financial planning. It has been a privilege to work with the

dedicated staff and trustees of the charity over the past year as we continue to support the local community with free, independent, and impartial advice.

As a finance professional working in venture capital and supporting high-growth private sector companies, I was seeking an opportunity to help the voluntary sector while gaining new skills. Becoming a Trustee and supporting the governance of Advice Space has been very rewarding, especially gaining an insight into the experience and perspective of colleagues from different backgrounds.

I am continually amazed by the dedicated service provided by the Advice Space team to our clients across Northern Ireland. The charity also enjoys fantastic leadership from our Chair Andrew McCartan and recently appointed CEO Peter McMahan – both have been very helpful and collaborative with Trustees as we plan for the future.

Estella Dorian



I was delighted to be appointed as a Trustee for Advice Space in 2023 after a short process that allowed both Advice Space and myself to make sure we were a good fit! I have really enjoyed getting an insight into Advice Space and being able to influence strategic decisions.

Being a Trustee with Advice Space puts you at the heart of the service and since my appointment and induction I have been involved in collective decision making around financial management, recruitment, risk management and strategic planning – every meeting is school day!

For me, with a long career in Equality being a Trustee has been a great way of contributing to a cause that I care about. So...if you are interested in educating people about their rights, have an interest in social justice and capacity building then again being a Trustee with Advice Space might be for you?! As Trustees we are always looking for people to help us build a Board that draws on a diverse range of skills, knowledge, qualities and experiences.

This is my first Trustee appointment and, whilst initially daunting, I can honestly say that the support and welcome I received from fellow Trustees and staff has been second to none. Since joining the Board I have learnt so much, improved my problem solving skills and importantly feel part of a team that can really strengthen and grow Advice Space.

It is definitely an exciting time to join Advice Space as a Trustee as we have a newly appointed CEO with an appetite to lead, strengthen and build the charity to ensure it is sustainable, remains vibrant and continues to be recognised as a key partner in the Belfast advice sector.

If you enjoy working as a team, have some knowledge about what Advice Space does and have an awareness of the positive impact of the work of Advice Space – eg perhaps you, your family or a friend have used the service – then I would certainly recommend joining the Board of Trustees.

Annual accounts

Advice Space - Company Limited by Guarantee Statement of Financial Activities (including income and expenditure account) Year ended 31 March 2023

Unrestricted	Restricted Notes	Unrestricted funds £	2023	Total funds £	2022
			Restricted funds £		Total funds £
Income and endowments					
Donations and legacies	5	370	-	370	-
Charitable activities	6	59,154	1,014,037	1,073,191	1,136,670
Other trading activities	7	6,000	-	6,000	8,103
Investment income	8	1,259	1,014,037	1,080,820	1,145,713
Total income		66,783	1,014,037	1,080,820	1,145,713
Expenditure					
Expenditure on charitable activities	9	43,021	972,903	1,015,924	946,438
Total expenditure		43,021	972,903	1,015,924	946,438
Net income/(expenditure)		23,762	41,134	64,896	199,275
Transfers between funds		41,134	(41,134)	-	-
Net movement in funds		64,896	-	64,896	199,275
Net movement in funds/Net Reconciliation of funds		584,457	24,530	608,987	409,712
Total funds brought forward		649,353	24,530	673,883	608,987

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year. All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

Advice Space - Company Limited by Guarantee Statement of Financial Position 31 March 2022

	Notes	2023 £	2022 £
Fixed assets	15	81,262	90,607
Tangible assets			
Current assets			
Debtors	16	66,633	61,861
Cash at bank and in hand		570,310	481,999
		636,943	636,943
Creditors: amounts falling due within one years	17	(44,322)	(25,480)
Net current assets		592,621	518,380
Total assets less current liabilities		673,883	608,987
Net assets		673,883	608,987
Funds of the charity			
Restricted funds		24,530	24,530
Unrestricted funds		649,353	584,457
Total charity funds	19	673,883	608,987

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime. These financial statements were approved by the board of trustees and authorised for issue on 28 November 2023, and are signed on behalf of the board by:

C Trotter
Trustee

P McCartan
Trustee



Advice Space

Merrion Business Centre
58 Howard Street
Belfast, BT1 6PJ

0300 1233 233 

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