

## *Case study – CLAS (Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme)*

In 2016, we campaigned to maintain a Local Assistance Scheme because we know how vital it is to support people in financial hardship. We worked with Cambridgeshire County Council to shape the commissioning of the service and when the service was tendered, we brought four core partners including Cambridge and District Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire, Cambridge Re-use and CCORRN together to develop a model of delivery based on providing the most impact with the resources available. This included connecting publicly funded support with the wider system provided by voluntary, community and faith-based organisations. Partnership was the cornerstone of the model as our understanding is that systems produce outcomes and that addressing complex issues around poverty requires the contribution of many different players, and no one service, organisation or person can do this on their own.

The **Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS)** provides a safety net for individuals and families experiencing financial hardship. CLAS's initial objectives were to provide information and advice services, alongside practical support: new white goods; recycled white goods, furniture, and paint; new beds and mattresses; food, energy, and data vouchers; access to food parcels/social supermarkets.

We have delivered CLAS, since April 2017 and deliver the scheme through the four core partners to enable us to reach all parts of the county, using a network of 21 CLAS Champions hosted by associate partners, and our Charities Networks.

CLAS Champions help us reach people likely to be eligible for CLAS and support clients within their constituency e.g., housing association tenants, domestic abuse survivors. Our Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) partners deliver our CLAS Information and Advice services to the public and can grant CLAS awards. Our recycled goods partners, Cambridge Re-use and CCORRN, enable our limited budget for practical goods to stretch further.

We set up local Charities Networks across the county with the aim of working closely with local groups, such as Besom, and linking up to other services available to our clients so that the safety net is tighter and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This has meant, for example that clients have benefitted from an extra 25% of financial support than they would have if we had just delivered the publicly funded services. Our partnership approach recognises the importance of taking a coordinated response to emergency provision. Bringing together and working with local groups helps us to address gaps and avoids duplication. It improves the sustainability of local crisis support and community led initiatives.

Organisations in the Charities Networks include community, faith and voluntary sector groups, and public sector bodies. We facilitate regular place-based meetings in Cambridge, South Cambs and Fenland where attendees can learn from each other, work together, make best use of resources, provide the immediate support, and address longer term causes of financial hardship.

The networks have grown in the last six years, and, more recently, a similar group has been set up in East Cambridgeshire, which we are also linked to. Meetings are well attended with a steady stream of new people joining. Over 270 organisations meet regularly, and our learning shows that attendees build relationships and continue to work collaboratively outside of meetings.

***“Thank you for organizing and hosting these meetings. Joint up work and useful resources is invaluable to the work we do to reach the people in our communities” (John Huntingdon’s Charity)***  
***“As always, thank you so much for hosting. It is a privilege to be part of such a fantastic, enthusiastic, and effective network of wonderful people” (Cambridge Aid)***

Examples of how we work together:

A) A single mum was trying to get her house in order so that Social Services would allow her children home for supervised visits. Social Services would not allow this until they were happy with the state of the property and the bedrooms. The mother was awarded recycled furniture and paint via CLAS, was referred to Cambridge Aid which helped towards the cost of new doors, and to the Besom charity which provided carpets, furniture, soft furnishings and helped her decorate the house.

***“I am overwhelmed with all the help that everyone has given. Wouldn’t have been able to start to get the kids back. It has been life changing”***

B) We are aware that many households are missing out on entitlements such as benefits, Free School Meals, social tariffs for household bills etc., so we worked with various members of our Charities Networks and CLAS Champions to design a Money Help in Cambridgeshire check list and an Energy Support in Cambridgeshire document. They are helpful resources for professionals and volunteers working with people who are struggling financially. The documents are updated regularly and circulated widely.

***“This sheet is very popular with both volunteers and visitors. They really like the fact that it’s a single sheet and full of useful and relevant links” (Cambridge Foodbank)***

***“Super helpful, I was just starting to think about winter planning. Thanks! (Care Network)***

We appreciate the value that our all our partners bring to CLAS: our core partners are represented on the CLAS Project Board, so they are plugged into the governance of the project; quarterly CLAS Champions meetings enable us to reflect, learn and adapt policy; and quarterly meetings with Cambridgeshire County Council LA allow us to escalate issues.

Through the partnership CLAS delivered the following in FY 22/23:

- £270,000 of CLAS awards to 1,036 households
- 25% received an additional £34,000
- £3.4m extra income to 1,560 households, £2m were welfare benefits
- 99% customer satisfaction rate – maintained throughout the year
- Social Value (HACT)
  - Average uplift of £8.7k per client
  - Total social impact figure of £1.9m
  - Budget to social impact ratio: 1:4
  - 55% of people reported feeling relieved from being heavily burdened with debt
  - 25% said that they felt they could sleep better
  - 23% said they felt that they felt more comfortable with their financial situation
- Secured extra £158,000 throughout FY 22/23 to help respond to rising demand due to cost-of-living crisis