



LONDON CALLING

Lasa's Pan-London welfare rights advice line user survey:

August 2010

"I think it is an invaluable resource for organisations that don't have the time or money to undertake training and stay up to date with relevant legislation".

The Highlights:

- 261 advisers, from 30 London Boroughs, asked about 410 different benefit problems.
- 9 out of 10 advice workers (90%) said their knowledge and understanding of benefits and the tax credit system had improved
- 9½ out of 10 (96%) said they were more likely to be able to deal with a similar enquiry on their own in the future
- More than two thirds (67%) of individuals' financial situations were improved after the advice worker had used the advice line
- 9 out of 10 (87%) said their clients had a better chance of a successful outcome, following advice line support
- 9 out of 10 (93%) said our advice was clear, comprehensive, and accurate

Introduction:

The London Advice Services Alliance (Lasa) provides a wide range of second tier support services to organisations within the Greater London area. One of these services is the London Welfare Rights Advice line funded by London Councils.

The advice line provides telephone and email support to voluntary sector organisations, giving them access to Lasa's highly skilled and expert welfare rights advisers. This in turn enables those organisations to offer their clients the most up to date and accurate advice, ensuring improved outcomes for clients and more effective and efficient local services.

In the year ending 31st July 2010 the advice line was contacted by 170 London based organisations, from 30 different London Boroughs. Twelve of those organisations provided a London wide service, e.g. The Royal Marsden hospital.

The advice line spoke to 261 different advisers concerning 410 different welfare benefit enquiries.

The advice line is open 3 days per week, for 2 hours each day. Callers can leave telephone messages at any time which are then followed up at the next advice line session. Many users email their enquiries, which are responded to at the next advice line session. All data is recorded using the AIMS case management software.

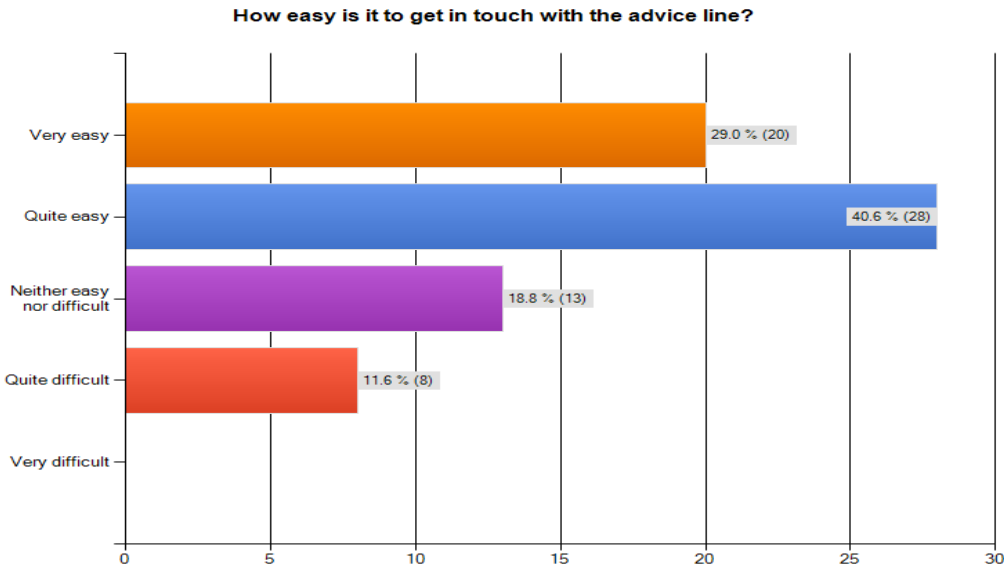
The Survey:

Lasa monitors all of its services on an ongoing basis, for quality, performance and user feedback. Between the 9th–23rd July 2010 we undertook a user satisfaction survey regarding the advice line. Advice line users were invited via email to take part in the online survey. The survey achieved an incredible 47% response rate, which in itself demonstrates the high regard and value placed on the advice line by its users.

We are very grateful to all those who participated.

Accessing the advice line:

We asked users how easy it was to access the advice line and why they needed to do so. Over 70% of users said it was very easy or quite easy to get in touch, with 11.6% saying they found it quite difficult.



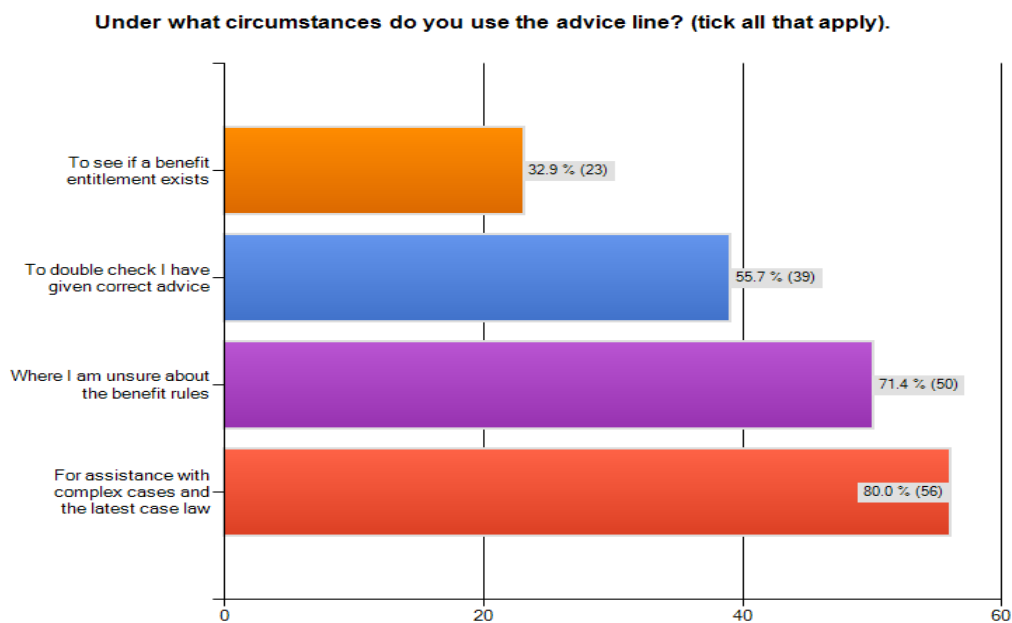
"We use lasa advice line on a regular basis. It's very easy to get through to an adviser, and they have all been extremely helpful. If the adviser needs time to answer our question they always call back the same day. Also the advisers fax us the answers and the regulations they used in our case".

Four out of five of our callers needed help with complex cases and the latest case law. This was closely followed by people seeking clarification regarding the benefit rules. At the same time a third of our users said they would use us to check a benefit entitlement exists.

It is important to recognise how wide the range of support needs and benefit knowledge is amongst our advice line users, and the advice line staffs ability to provide appropriate levels of support to each caller.

"Your advisers aren't patronising!"

Why were you using the advice line, and how good was the advice?

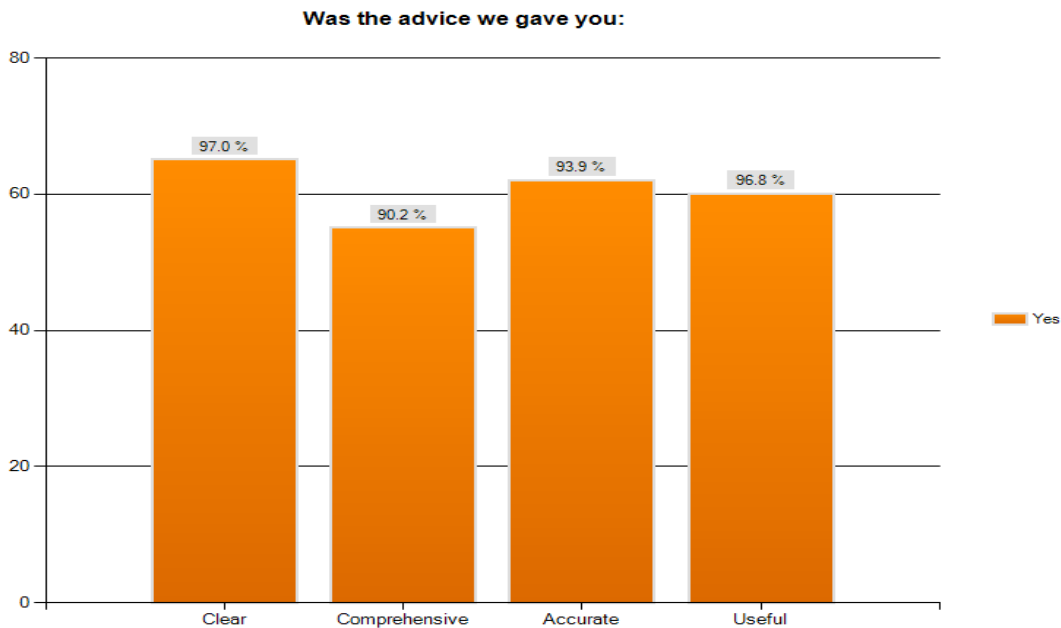


We asked users to evaluate the quality of the advice provided by the advice line.

Information needs to be:

- clear if it is to be understood,
- comprehensive to ensure all aspects are covered,
- accurate otherwise it is dangerous
- useful, meaning what they have been told gets put into use.

On all of these measures nine out of 10 of our users said we met those targets.



“As a benefits adviser often working on complex issues that need specific and accurate references to case law in order to challenge an award, I know I can confidently rely of the professional support of the advice line”.

What difference did the advice line make?

We asked what difference the service had made to both the advisers and to their clients.

- ❖ 90% said their knowledge and understanding of benefits and the tax credit system had improved.
- ❖ 87% said their clients had a better chance of a successful outcome.
- ❖ 96% felt their ability to deal with a similar enquiry in the future had improved.

“Lasa is an excellent service. I know I can rely on the most updated and professional advice when dealing with complex cases or [help] understanding the welfare benefits handbooks”.

And what did the members of the public, the real clients get out of it?

- ✓ 66% were assisted in applying for a benefit
- ✓ 67% had their financial position improved
- ✓ 68% appealed against the loss of, or reduction in a benefit

Case Study:

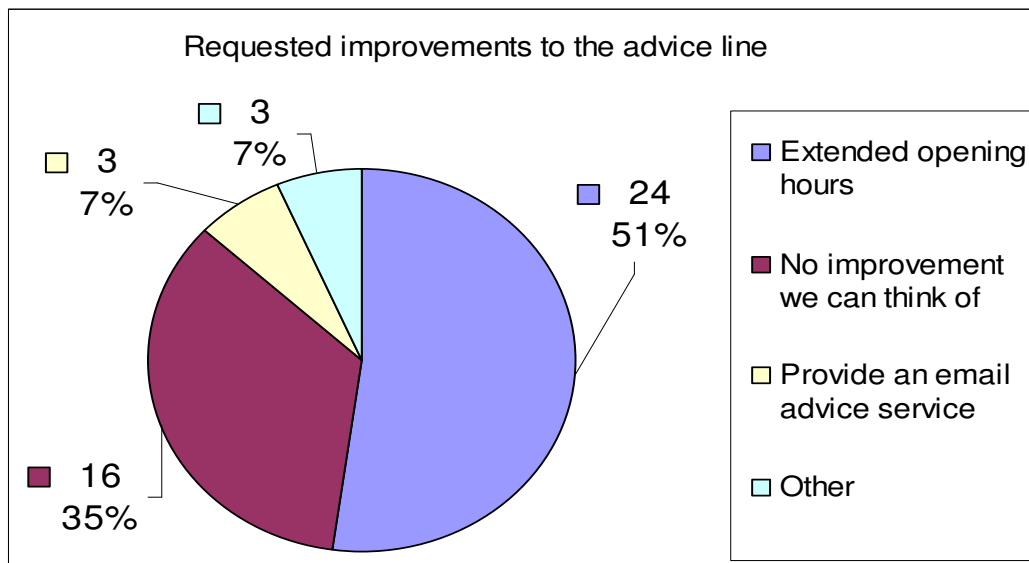
“Young couple under 18 with a baby on a care order in a residential placement paid for under S20 of the Children Act. Lasa advised they were entitled to financial support from social services as they were “looked after children”, but could also claim for the baby.

The extra support they received helped to ease the pressure they felt and was definitely beneficial to their relationship and to their well-being as a family, and enabled them to focus on improving their parenting skills”.

What improvements would you like to see?

We asked users what improvements we could make to the service, and provided a free text field. Of the 46 responses, the overwhelming single suggestion was for extended opening hours to the service.

We noted that a few people suggested an email service, which means we will need to advertise its existence and current availability.

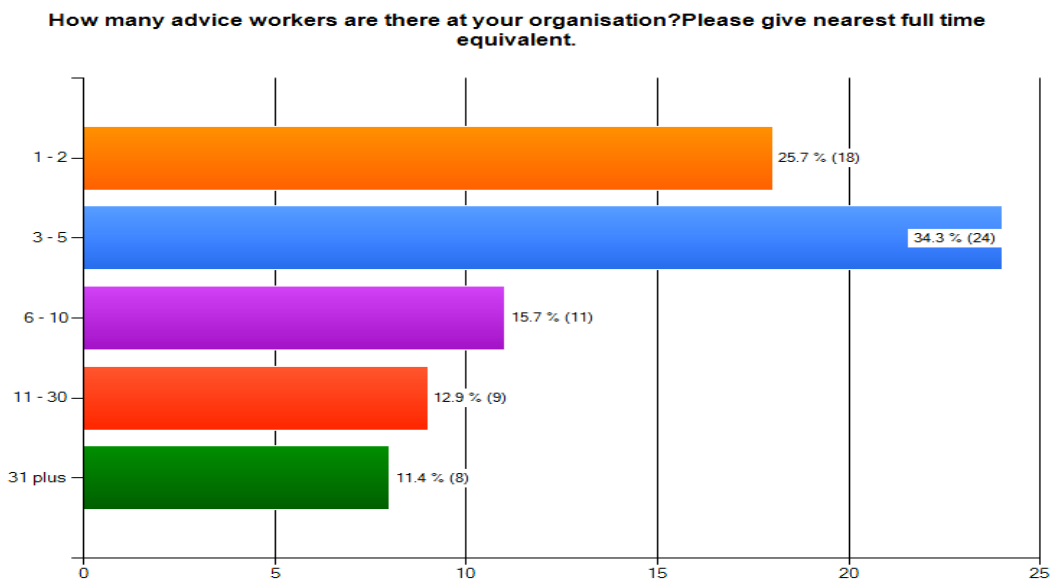


About our Users:

The organisations we work with range from very small groups with just one or two workers to large institutions employing 31 plus workers. This demonstrates that all organisations need access to high quality advice and support regardless of size.

Workers in smaller organisations are often isolated and can lack access to training and peer support.

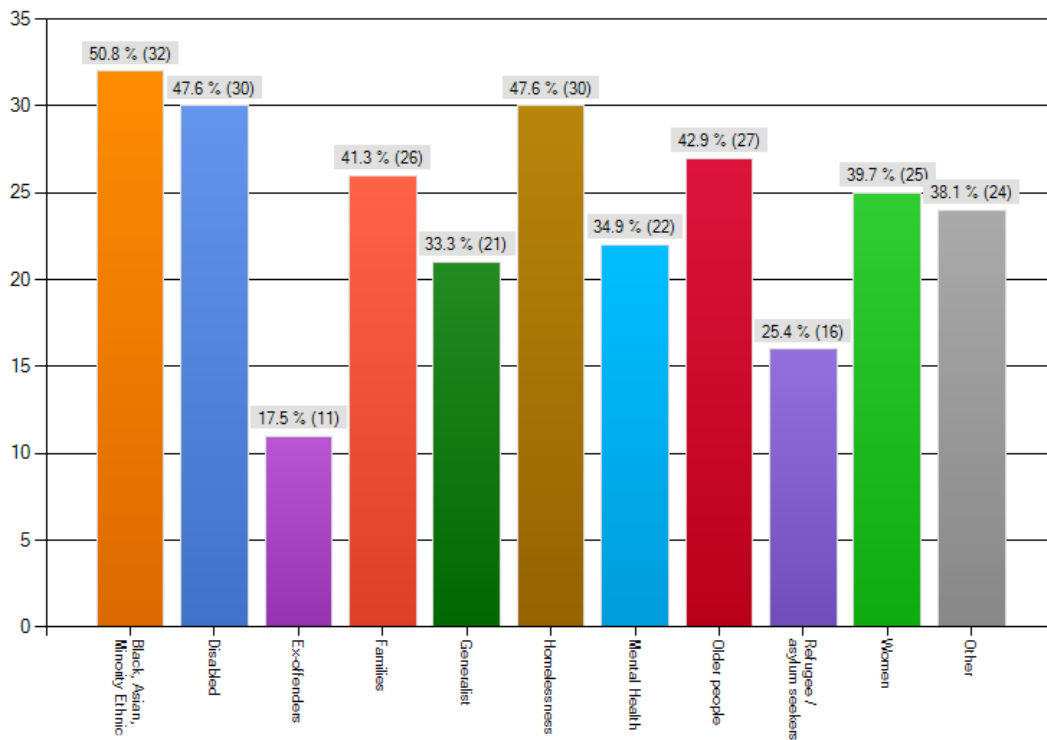
"I am one of two advisers in a small team... there may be an element of doubt about the advice we are giving... an issue we have no experience of. The support is invaluable and enables us to do our job more effectively".



The groups using the advice line provide services to London's most disadvantaged and marginalised communities. The advice and information we provide to advisers in these groups has a real and significant impact on the real life experiences of Londoners.

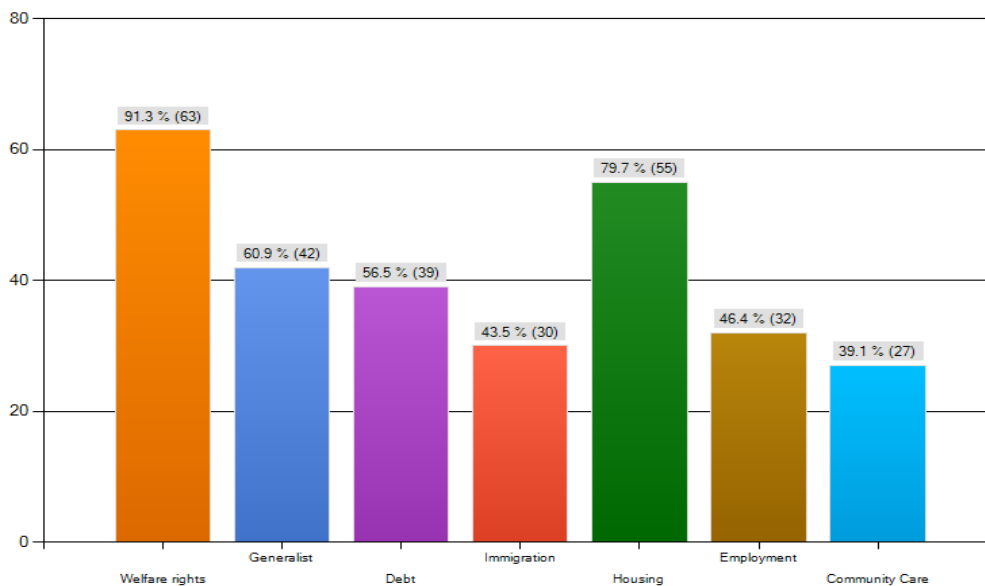
"The client had their JSA suspended. Through the advice of Lasa this decision was successfully challenged. The client was able to continue to attend an educational course and do voluntary work. This improved the clients self esteem and level of qualifications and work experience. The client has been successfully resettled and is currently applying for work".

Do you have a target group or particular service users?



Examples from the “Other” category included victims of domestic violence, agencies working with users with HIV/AIDS, those supporting the Irish community, services targeted on working with cancer patients, etc.

Which areas of law do you advise on? Tick all that apply.



The majority offer welfare rights advice, but they also cover housing, immigration, community care, employment and debt problems. The welfare rights advice line supports organisations with a wide range of specialisms where welfare rights may not be their main or sole focus.

78% of our advice line users had attended one or more of our welfare rights training events, and 65% made use of rightsnet, our welfare law website providing benefits information and discussion forums. This demonstrates how many of Lasa’s welfare rights support services are integrated, with the use of one leading to take up and use of others.

Asked how they had heard of the service, nearly 50% said they had always known about it, with a further 30% saying a colleague told them. The Lasa advice line has been running for over 18 years and maintains high levels of visibility via regular advertising (21% had seen a flyer).

From the survey replies it is clear that trust in the quality and reliability of Lasa support services is an important factor ensuring customer’s loyalty and continued use.

“Always very helpful, advisers easy to talk to and give a lot more than is asked of them”.

and finally...

When asked would you recommend another agency to use the advice line, we were disappointed that only 97% said yes.

We will be working hard on the 3% that said maybe!

