

# 2020

Annual Impact Statement  
Covid-19 Edition

## The CommuniCare Trust (Reading)

*<sup>8</sup>Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. <sup>9</sup>Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and the needy.*

**Proverbs 31 v8-9**

Registered Charity Number

1078694



### **Board of Trustees**

<b>Chair:</b>	Andrew Taylor
<b>Member:</b>	Alison Burford
<b>Member:</b>	Martin Chalmers
<b>Member:</b>	Marjory Codling
<b>Member:</b>	Rosemary Croft
<b>Member:</b>	Sarah Adlard
<b>Member:</b>	Helen Taylor
<b>Bookkeeper:</b>	Bridget Barwick

### **CommuniCare Staff**

<b>Manager:</b>	Francesca Yates
<b>Advice &amp; Outreach:</b>	Lynn Mann
<b>Advice &amp; Outreach:</b>	Sara Harwood
<b>Advice &amp; Outreach:</b>	Joanna Cowley
<b>Administrator:</b>	Kath Tuthill
<b>Reception:</b>	Dave Toney

### **Advice Centre Volunteers**

Isabel Allinson	Sally D'Sa	Ian Maynard
Stephen Barnes	Puja Gurung	Philip Pereira
Rosemary Croft	Sue Jupp	Andrew Taylor
June Cox	Jacob Konadu	Dave Toney
Sheila Cox	Tara Limbu	Ruby Shipton
Marina Darby		

### **How to Find Us**



Our office is situated behind Wycliffe Baptist Church on Kings Road.

We have a private car park in Norwood Road,

Bus number 4, X4, 13, 14 or 17 stop outside the Church (Cemetery Junction).

## Statement by the Chair of Trustees

Dear Supporter

As with most, if not all, aspects of life in 2020, the work of CommuniCare has been dramatically affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In this Report you will read of the flexible ways in which the CommuniCare team, brilliantly led by our Manager, Francesca Yates, have responded in order to continue to support clients. The whole team of staff and volunteers deserve enormous credit for this response highlights of which have been:

- In the first lockdown, switching, within 24 hours, to helping clients via email and telephone despite staff working from home.
- Becoming the agency chosen by Reading Borough Council to handle advice and foodbank queries via the One Reading Hub.
- At the earliest opportunity in June, reopening our Advice Centre, in a Covid-19 secure manner, to face to face sessions with clients and recommending home visits.
- During the second lockdown in November, continuing to offer face to face appointments in our Advice Centre to those we judged to be most in need.

I draw your attention to the Case Studies in this Report which we hope will increase your sense of how we have been helping our clients.

In the midst of all this, we were reassessed for and successfully retained our Advice Quality Standard award.

You will see elsewhere in the report that our finances remained in a good position and at the end of 2019/20 we had net assets of about £158,000 thanks to the fundraising work we have undertaken over recent years.

I would like to thank our long-term supporters, Reading Borough Council, Wycliffe Baptist Church, St John and St Stephen's Church, St Luke and St Bartholomew's Church, and a growing number of individuals for their continued generosity. In addition to the Big Lottery funding, during 2020, we continued to receive a grant from the Whitley Community Fund. We are very grateful for all this support.

I would like to record my thanks to all our Trustees, three of whom are also volunteer advisors, and to the staff and volunteers of CommuniCare for all the work they do for an organisation with which I am very proud to be associated.

Finally, thank you for your ongoing support without which we could not continue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "AT", written in a cursive style.

Andrew Taylor  
Chair of Trustees



## MISSION AND VALUES STATEMENT

CommuniCare is a team of Christians motivated by their faith who care for and help people to meet their complete needs through offering information, advice and support. In particular, we look to help people who are in need, hardship or distress because of their social or economic circumstances.

We seek to do this by:

- Treating all the people we help equally and, in particular not discriminating on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity
- Always acting in the best interests of the people we help
- Working with people not issues and establishing an appropriate relationship with each person
- Empowering people in their situation and, thereby, building independence
- Being flexible in our approach and extending our service to meet the needs of an increasing number of people
- Linking people into community activities where appropriate
- Operating on the understanding that our activities are an outworking of our faith; that our “doing” derives directly from our “being” and that the link between who we are and what we do cannot be broken
- If invited, praying or sharing with people something of ourselves and our faith
- Building on our strengths as a team, demonstrating trust, patience and sensitivity to each other
- Believing that each team member has a contribution to make
- Encouraging a sense of community within our team



## **What We Do.**

We are a charity providing information, advice and support to anyone in need. We aim to support people in understanding and navigating everyday services that they need to access to enable them to live better lives. We deal with a huge range of issues including helping with benefits checking, welfare rights, form filling and housing advice, information on living with disabilities, help for carers and much more.

## **Normal Service.**

We recognise that people face different challenges in accessing the services and support they need. We work hard to make our service available to as many people as we can, in ways that are most accessible to them. At our advice centre in East Reading we run daily drop in 1:1 confidential advice sessions, allowing us to see an average of 18 clients a day. Across Reading we run a number of weekly and monthly outreach advice sessions in other locations, covering the key areas across the town. For the more vulnerable clients we offer home visits.

## **Covid-19 Service.**

For the first 2 ½ months of 2020, our service ran as normal. Then, in March 2020, everything came to a sudden stop! We, with the rest of the country, went into lockdown. This presented us with the unprecedented challenge of offering support to our clients, without the ability to see them and with just the paid team, all of whom were working from home. We also had to cope with the increased demand as more and more individuals and families were thrown into hardship due to the pandemic.

This 2020 Annual Impact Statement aims to give an insight as to how we kept our service running throughout the pandemic, and how we have continued to work hard to support those most in need in Reading.

## **The Headlines for 2020**

<b>Total Client Issues Supported</b>	<b>5,135</b>	<b>up 6% on 2019</b>
New Clients Supported	1,698	down 1% on 2019
Clients Issues face to face	2,494	down 61% on 2019
Client Issues by Email	299	up 339% on 2019
Client Issues on the telephone:	2,342	up 590% on 2019



## How We Worked in 2020

### CommuniCare Advice Centre

The Advice Centre closed its doors from March until June. During this time PPE equipment was sourced, screens were purchased, and the Advice Centre was made Covid-Secure, in line with the Government Guidelines. We re-opened the doors of the Advice Centre in June as we had several vulnerable clients who we had struggled to support due to language issues or digital exclusion.

We opened the centre for 3 days per week with the support of the paid advisers and just 3, of the usual 24, volunteers. We formed work 'bubbles' so that contact was limited. Clients were still encouraged to call or email first and, if we felt a face to face was necessary, we invited them to come into the centre. Numbers within the Advice Centre were limited, and clients were encouraged to wait in their cars, or outside, with us texting them when they could come in.

A thermometer was used, track and trace set up and everyone made to wear a mask, even when behind the screens in the advice rooms. Each staff member was issued with a visor, mask and gloves. Hand gel was given to each client and the staff used hand gel, anti-bacterial handwash and bacterial wipes continually throughout the day.

We worked closely with other agencies across Reading, and we notified them that we were open so they could refer any particularly vulnerable clients to us.

At our Advice Centre, clients were given a 1:1 confidential session in one of our advice rooms. Whilst we supported clients with many different issues, **59% of the face to face work** we did in the Advice Centre in 2020 was **benefits related**. We worked with clients to ensure they were receiving the benefits that they are entitled to and need for their daily living.

We continued working in this way until the second lockdown in November. When the second lockdown was announced, we made the decision to NOT close the Advice Centre, but instead offer appointments to those most in need. With this in place we stood down the 3 volunteers who had been supporting us and continued with the paid staff. We kept the appointments to a minimum, still doing as much as we could via telephone and email.



with these home visits up until December 2020. During 2020 **82% of the work** we did on home visits was **benefits related**.

### Home Visits



### Outreach

We have run outreach sessions across Reading for a number of years. We have always focused on areas of high deprivation and in areas where we know the clients struggle or are reluctant to access services out of their local area.

During 2020 we focused our efforts on supporting the most vulnerable clients and working with other organisations who were being very active in supporting clients through the pandemic. We focused on strengthening our links with Whitley Community Development Association and supported them by continuing our outreach each Monday and responded to demand by adding an additional session each Wednesday. We were unable to continue other outreach sessions as these locations closed in March and have not reopened.

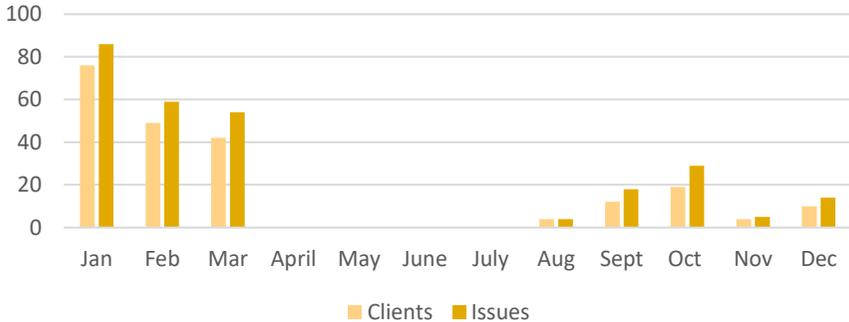
During 2020, **81% of the work** we did on outreach was **benefits related**.



**Case Study.** We supported the client in appealing the decision Universal Credit made against her for Limited Capability to Work. The client was very anxious and very stressed, and we had planned to support them at the Tribunal hearing. Due to lockdown the hearing was held over the telephone and we could not be there with the client. This caused them great anxiety. We spent time reassuring them and helping them to prepare a personal statement that they could read out during the tribunal hearing. The client won the case, was granted the LCWRA award,

received over **£7,000 in backdated payments** and an **additional £341.92 per month on their UC.**

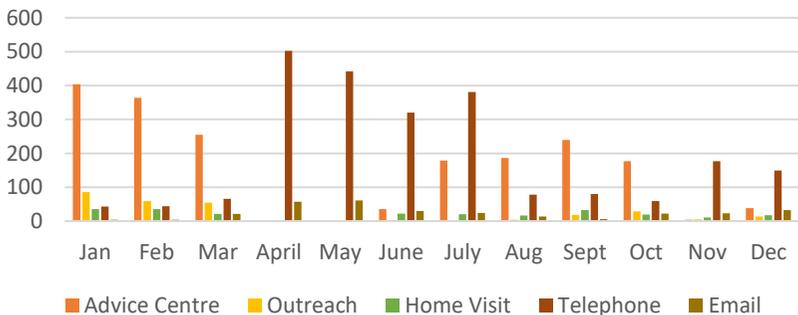
## Outreach Clients



## Email & Telephone Support

CommuniCare is primarily a face to face service and we would normally direct clients to come in to us, or one of our outreach sessions. However, this all changed in 2020. Literally overnight we had to adapt our service to take it from face to face to purely telephone and email, with the added complication of all the team working from home. We had everything set up within 24 hours, with the CommuniCare office telephone diverted to a mobile phone, and the team were able to start dealing with enquiries. The main challenges we faced were the language barriers, literacy levels and digital exclusion of our clients. But, with time and patience, and some inventive ways of working, we continued to be able to support many of our clients through the lockdown period.

## Where Clients Supported



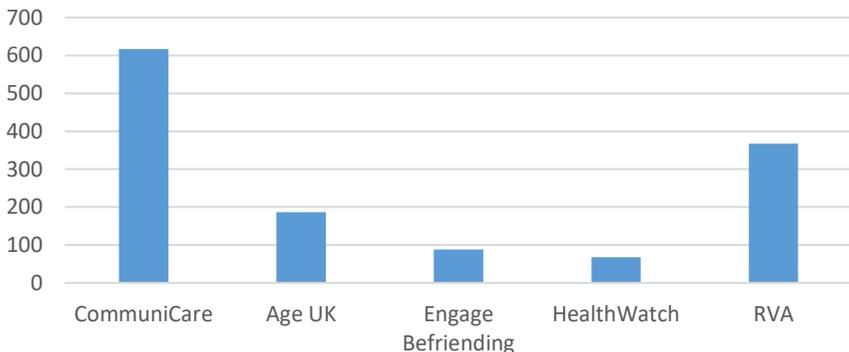


## One Reading Community Hub

Within the first week of the lockdown Reading Borough Council (RBC) had set up the One Reading Community Hub. This was one telephone number and one website enquiry form for all people in Reading to call / complete with any issues, concerns or problems they had concerning Covid-19 and the lockdown. Calls were triaged and then referred out to the relevant voluntary sector organisations. CommuniCare was one of 5 voluntary sector organisations that supported RBC with the Hub. All partners involved with the Hub worked hard to support the clients. The key areas covered included befriending services, shopping services, prescription collection, food parcel referrals and benefits information. CommuniCare took referrals for clients concerned about financial matters, employment issues and benefit enquiries. During this time **47% of the referrals** made by the Hub, were **referred to CommuniCare**.

As well as the partners involved at the front face of the Hub work, there were many voluntary sector agencies across the town actively supporting the people of Reading. The Covid response was a huge TEAM effort across the town, and we all very much relied on each other in supporting the clients.

### One Reading Community Hub Referrals



### CommuniCare Figures for 100 days of Lockdown

- 872 Clients supported.
- 1,412 Client Issues dealt with.
- 670 New clients made contact.
- 617 One Reading Community Hub Referrals received.

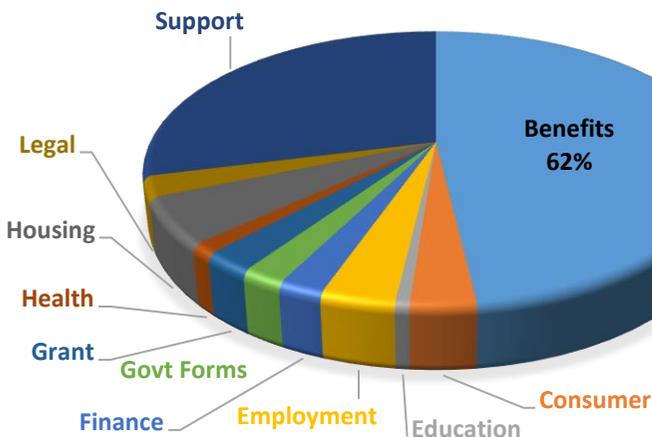


**Case Study.** The client was really struggling as they had lost their job and their partner was on reduced hours (all due to Covid-19). They were very worried as could not pay the bills and had no idea what to do. We supported the client in applying for a mortgage holiday, contacting their utility providers to reduce their payments and to claim the appropriate benefits. This reduced the immediate stress they were under and they were very thankful as they had not known these things were available to them.

### The Issues We Deal With

CommuniCare assist clients with a wide range of different issues, from benefit claims to letter writing. Clients will often come to us with 2 or more issues at any one time. Also, through the listening skills of our advisers, and the time we give to our clients, we will often uncover additional issues that the client needs support with. Although we have had to work differently during 2020, the time and support we give to our clients has not changed. One change we noted in 2020 was an increase in the number of food parcel requests we made to Readifood (coming under the 'Support' category). From April - December we requested food parcels for 267 clients.

### CLIENT ISSUES 2020



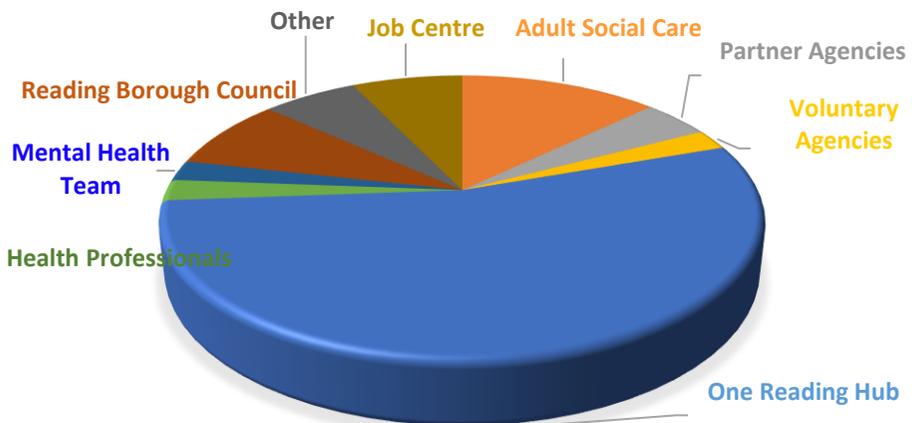


**Case Study** The client went into hospital in March and contacted us from there. They had become very poorly and, during this time, all benefits had stopped. It was 6 months before the client was well enough to deal with this, during this time someone had made a UC claim for them. The client was still in hospital and suffering life changing conditions due to their illness. This was a very complex case, dealt with purely by email & telephone. Over the next 4 months we were able to have the PIP re-instated, with backpay, the UC claim closed, Housing Benefit re-instated, with backpay and the Severe Disability Premium re-instated, with back pay. This was all in place for when the client was discharged from hospital in mid-December. This case would not have had this outcome had it not been for the excellent teamwork between CommuniCare and the Revenue & Benefits Team at Reading Borough Council.

### Partnership Working

CommuniCare has always worked closely with both the voluntary and statutory agencies across Reading. Many of the clients we support have been referred or signposted to us from another agency in Reading. This remained the same during 2020, although the One Reading Hub was the main source of referrals.

## REFERRALS INTO COMMUNICARE





## SHOOSMITHS

### Pro Bono Legal Clinic

CommuniCare run a legal clinic on the first Thursday of the month. The clinic is run with Shoosmiths Solicitors and law students from Reading University. Clients are seen by an adviser at CommuniCare first and an appointment is made for the legal clinic if they need to see a solicitor. This continued in 2020 but was adapted to fit in with the lockdown measures. Clients were supported by email and, if necessary, on-line meetings were set up with the solicitors and clients.

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### CommuniCare Client Feedback during 2020

“Thank you for listening to me, I feel so much better for just talking to someone”.

“This has been a nightmare for me, but you have been so kind and you have taken me seriously! Thank you for picking this up and working so hard on it. I can finally stop worrying.”

“I hadn’t seen anyone since February and I was worried about you coming to see me, but I am so glad you did. I have now got Attendance Allowance and this money will make such a difference. Thank you”

“you guys are so brilliant; I am definitely getting you chocolates!

“thank you for helping my mum. It is such a relief to know that everything has been sorted out for her.”

“I cannot believe I won my appeal. I was so stressed and never thought I’d manage to do it. Thank you for helping me with it and calming me down. I couldn’t have got through this without you.”

“Thank you for calling me back to check I was OK. It is so good to know people care.”

### General Feedback

When we followed up the referrals from the Reading One Hub, the main response we had from clients was one of relief and gratitude. We spend a lot of time just listening to people. So many people thanked us for following up with them and said it meant so much to know that we actually cared.

## Financial Details for the Financial Year Ending March 2020

### INCOME

Reading Borough Council	£45,796
Local Churches	£16,780
Individuals	£6,338
Grants	£39,657
Corporate & Other	£3,200
	<b>£111,771</b>

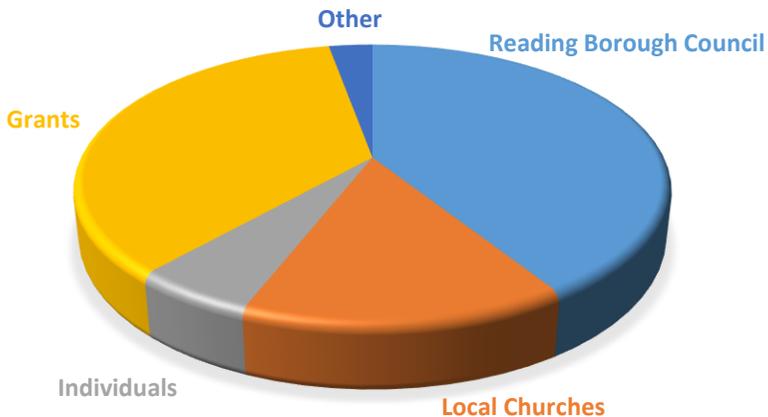
### EXPENDITURE

CommuniCare Salaries	£96,670
CommuniCare Overheads	£10,025
	<b>£106,695</b>

**TOTAL SURPLUS**

**£5,076**

### FUNDING APRIL 2019 - MARCH 2020





Thank you to everyone who supports CommuniCare financially. Without this support we would not be able to continue helping those in need



ST LAURENCE LANDS TRUST



If you would like to support our work, you can donate on our Local Giving page.



[Localgiving.com/CommuniCareRDG](https://Localgiving.com/CommuniCareRDG)

### CommuniCare Quality Marks & Accreditations



**AQS Accreditation** CommuniCare are assessed every 2 years for this accreditation, through Advice UK. We were reassessed in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic and retained our award. The assessor noted 5 areas of excellent practice.

### Follow Us:



[www.communicare.org.uk](http://www.communicare.org.uk)



CommuniCareRDG



@CommuniCareRDG

### Contact Us:



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