

2024

Annual Impact Statement

The CommuniCare Trust (Reading)

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

Proverbs 31 v8-9

Registered Charity Number

1078694



Board of Trustees

Chair: Andrew Taylor
Treasurer: Helen Taylor
Member: Alison Burford
Member: Gary Brooks
Member: Rosemary Croft
Bookkeeper: Bridget Barwick

CommuniCare Staff

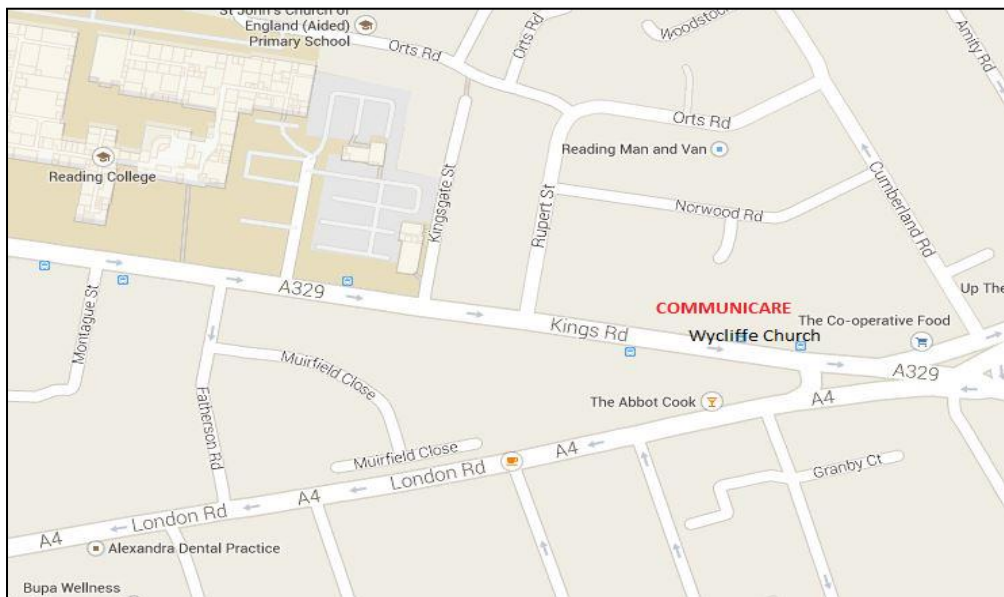
Executive Director: Francesca Yates
Advice & Outreach: Lynn Mann
Advice & Outreach: Sara Harwood
Advice & Outreach: Joanna Cowley
Advice & Outreach: Tara Hensford
Advice & Outreach Hayley New
Administrator: Edyta Worozbit

Thank you to **Martin Chalmers** and **Marjory Codling** who both stood down as Trustees in 2024

Advice Centre Volunteers

Isabel Allinson	Sheila Cox	Sue Jupp
Stephen Barnes	Sally D'Sa	Moira Oram
Rukshi Brownlow	Puja Gurung	Philip Pereira
Rosemary Croft	Stephanie Hall	Andrew Taylor
Mike Crone	Neil Hooley	Helen Taylor

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).



Dear Supporter

I am writing this in early January 2025 having advised the CommuniCare Board of Trustees that it is my intention to stand down as Chairman of the Trust at the end of March when I will have completed 17 years in the role. I have been involved in CommuniCare for nearly 25 years, and it has been one of the greatest privileges and most fulfilling roles of my life.

You will see from this Impact Report that we have helped over 6,000 people in 2024, an increase of 15%. The increase in clients helped occurred through all our ways of helping but there was again a very significant increase in clients helped at our 7 outreach locations where over 1,000 were helped. The largest group of issues dealt with continues to relate to benefits and we assisted clients to claim the annual equivalent of over £6.7m in benefits in the year. Whilst helping people navigate the welfare benefit system continues to grow and remains the largest area of our work, I would like to draw your attention to growth in housing issues. The number of clients seeking help with housing issues increased again to around 900 and this reflects the growing housing crisis in Reading.

As you may be aware, a large proportion of CommuniCare's income comes from three contracts we have with Reading Borough Council in partnership with other local voluntary organisations and which are due to end during the financial year 2025/26. The process leading to the tendering for future contracts with RBC has begun with informal meetings between the Council and the local voluntary sector. The outcome of this process will be very significant for CommuniCare's future.

I encourage you to read the whole of this report to gain a fuller picture of the scope of the work we do, the ways in which we do it and the outcomes for clients both in practical terms, often financial, and in terms of their wellbeing.

I would like to thank our long-term supporters, Reading Borough Council, Wycliffe Baptist Church, St John and St Stephen's Church, Redland's Church, Shoosmiths and a growing number of individuals for their continued generosity. We are very grateful for all this support.

I would also like to record my thanks to all our Trustees, with a special mention for Martin Chalmers and Marjory Codling who stood down during 2024, and to Gary Brooks who joined us during 2024 and who will be succeeding me as Chair of Trustees in April. As always, my thanks go to all 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.

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

The Headlines for 2024

Total Number of Clients Supported:	6,083	15% increase on 2023
Total Number of Client Issues	7,905	2% increase on 2023
New Clients Supported	2,735	5% increase on 2023
Clients Issues face to face	6,311	2% increase on 2023
Client Issues by Email	376	11% decrease on 2023
Client Issues on the telephone:	1177	9% decrease on

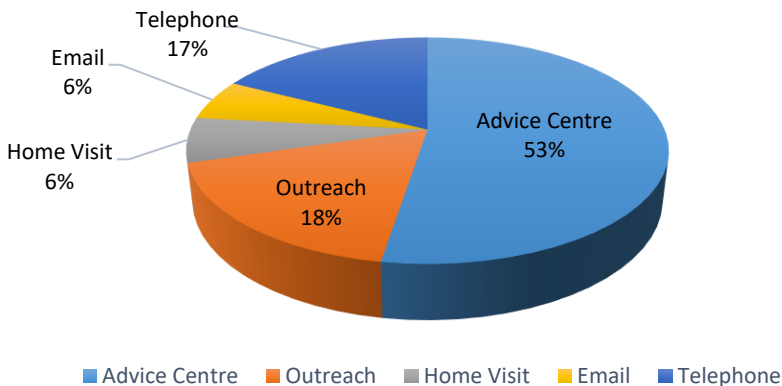
What does CommuniCare do?

We are a Christian led charity providing information, advice and support to anyone in need. We aim to support people in understanding and navigating the everyday services that they need to access to enable them to live better lives. We deal with a large range of issues including benefits, form filling and housing advice. We work closely with both voluntary & statutory sector groups across Reading to provide the wrap around support our clients need.

How can people access CommuniCare?

We aim to make our services as accessible as possible for everyone in Reading. Our Advice Centre in East Reading is open Monday to Thursday for confidential 1:1 drop in sessions. As well as the Advice Centre, we run several weekly outreach advice sessions based in community locations across the town, making our services accessible to as many communities as we can in Reading. Clients can also ring us, email us or use the on-line enquiry form on our website. For the more vulnerable clients we offer home visits.

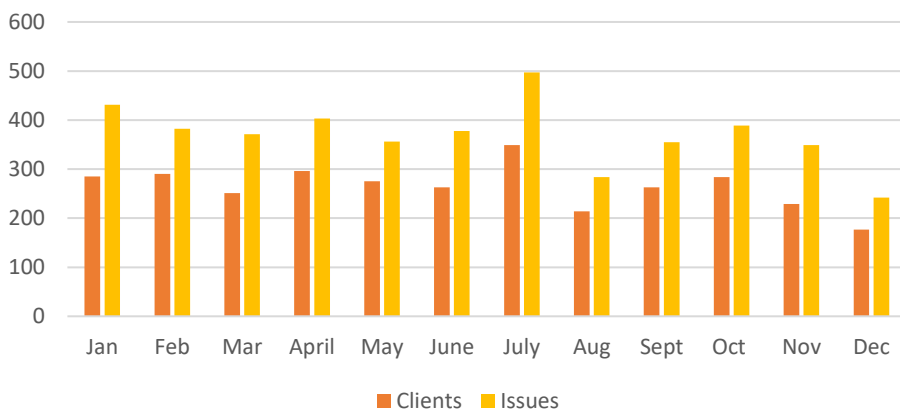
Where Clients Are Supported



The CommuniCare Advice Centre

We run a drop-in service rather than an appointment system. We open at 10am Monday to Thursday and see clients in the order that they arrived. This means we can see clients on the same day and there is no need for them to wait several days or weeks for an appointment. Clients are given a 1:1 confidential session in one of our advice rooms. We do not limit the amount of time a client spends with an adviser as many come in with multiple issues and, due to the chaotic lives some clients have, we recognise that we may only have the one opportunity to support them. We work closely with other agencies in Reading and our service compliments those of our partner agencies. Clients are often signposted to us from these agencies as they have urgent issues or tight deadlines, and they need immediate assistance.

Clients Seen in Advice Centre



Whilst we support clients with many different issues, **49% of the work** we did in the Advice Centre in 2024 was **benefits related**. We work with clients to ensure they are receiving the benefits that they are entitled to and challenge any incorrect decisions made by the DWP.



Case Study: Client had long term health issues; we advised them that they could apply for Personal Independence Payment (PIP). We supported the client to make this application. Their initial award was for standard Daily Living and nothing for mobility. We assisted the client to do a mandatory reconsideration (MR) as we

believed they were entitled to the higher rate for both elements. The MR was unsuccessful, so we supported the client to go to appeal. The appeal was successful and the client was awarded enhanced rate for both daily living and mobility. The client received a **backdated payment of £10,833** and on-going **monthly payments of £748**.

CommuniCare Outreach Sessions

DROP IN ADVICE SESSIONS

Whitley Community Café

(Northumberland Avenue, RG2 7QA)

Monday & Wednesday 10.00am – 12.30pm

Reading Community Learning Centre

(London Street, RG1 4SJ – ladies only)

Tuesday 10.00am – 12.30pm

Atrium Café

(Friar Street, RG1 1EL)

Tuesday 10.30am – 12.30pm

Change Grow Live

(Oxford Road, RG1 7UR)

Wednesday 1.00pm – 4.00pm

Café 12

(The Pavilion, RG1 7UY)

Thursday 10.00am – 12.00pm

Norcot Pantry

(Norcot Mission Church, RG30 4YP)

Friday 10.00am – 12.00pm

Job Centre Plus

(Adelphi House, Friar Street)

Monday – Friday 9.30am-11.30am

We run outreach advice sessions in different areas around Reading. We partner with local community groups or services so we can run our advice service alongside services that are already being offered. Our aim is to make our service as accessible to as many people as we can.

In 2024 **61% of the work** we did (excluding the Job Centre Plus) **on outreach** was **benefits related**.

The issues we support during our outreach sessions at the Job Centre Plus are **91% benefits related**

We continually review where we run our outreach sessions and consider potential new locations as we identify them.



Case Study: The client was struggling financially and came to see us at one of our outreach sessions. We uncovered that the client had reached retirement age a year earlier but had not claimed their state pension as they did not know how to. They had been using their savings to live on and these were now gone. We

supported them to contact the pension service and provide all the information they required. The client received a **backdated payment of £10,500** and on-going **monthly payments of £958**.

CommuniCare Home Visits

We offer home visits for clients who are unable to access support out of their home. The people we visit at home are some of the most vulnerable clients we support. Referrals for our Home Visits come to us from other agencies across Reading, including other voluntary sector organisations, Reading Borough Council, Adult Social Care, Health Care Professionals, Social Services, Social Prescribers and the Community Mental Health Team. During 2024 65% of the work we did on home visits was benefits related.



Case Study: Client was an unpaid carer. Whilst reviewing their benefits we identified that they should have been receiving the Disabled Child Element of Universal Credit. The client was unaware of this. We amended their UC account. The client received a **backdated payment of £11,700** and an on-going additional **monthly element of £487** on their UC.

Email, Telephone & On-line 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, we have adapted our service to include remote support via the telephone, email and an Enquiry Form on our website. We also have useful information and links on our website that people can access and use as appropriate.

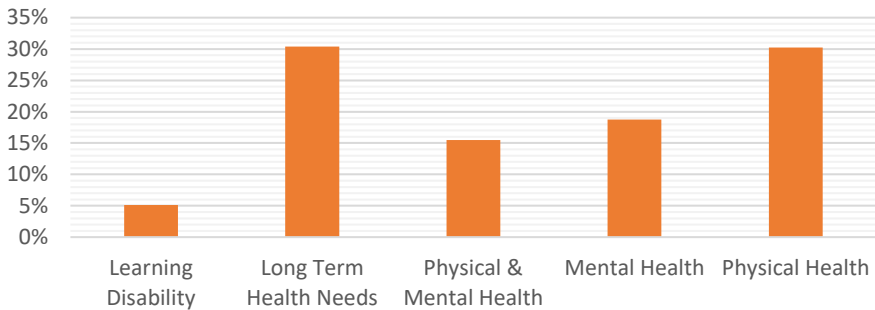
Who does CommuniCare support?

We offer support to anyone who comes to us. However, many of our clients have complex and difficult lives and face many barriers in their day to day lives, such as English as a second language; low literacy levels; poor mental health; long term health issues; being digitally excluded and homelessness.

Poor health is an increasing issue with the clients we see, particularly poor mental health. Understanding and supporting these clients takes time, patience and understanding. We work with all clients to understand what they need and how we can best support them. It can take time to gain the trust that is needed; we start by just listening and allowing the clients to tell their story, this helps to put them at ease and show them that we genuinely care. Once the trust is established our work can begin, and many clients will return numerous times.



CLIENT DISABILITY & HEALTH NEEDS



How does CommuniCare work?

We offer an holistic approach and walk alongside our clients, working with them to access the benefits & support they need. We work with clients to help them grow their confidence and become empowered in the decisions they must make, working with them until they feel able to do this.

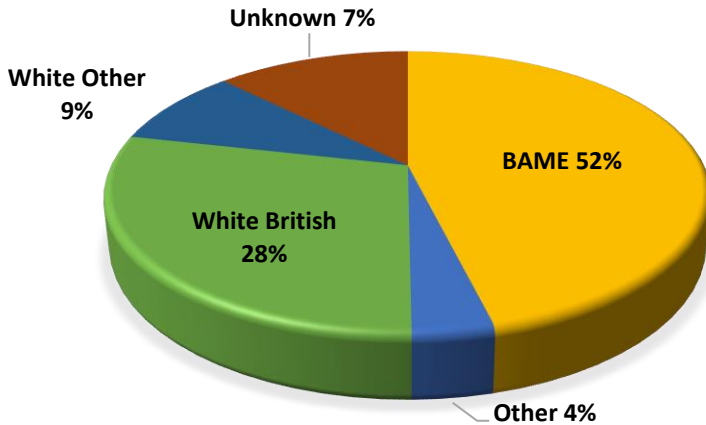
A high percentage of our clients have complex needs and are vulnerable; many falling into the 'hard to reach' or 'at risk' categories in the town.

Due to the complex needs of our clients, and the language and literacy issues many have, we give as much time as we can. This can lead to clients spending many hours with an adviser. Allowing this time enables us to uncover some of the many needs they have.

Giving our clients time to talk shows them that we genuinely care about them and their situation. Many clients have told us we have been the first people to listen to their story, and just having us listen and knowing we care, eases a lot of the stress they are feeling. We feel this is as important as any of the practical support we can give.

Many of our clients have English as a second language. Through the diversity of the volunteers we have at CommuniCare we cover 9 different languages.

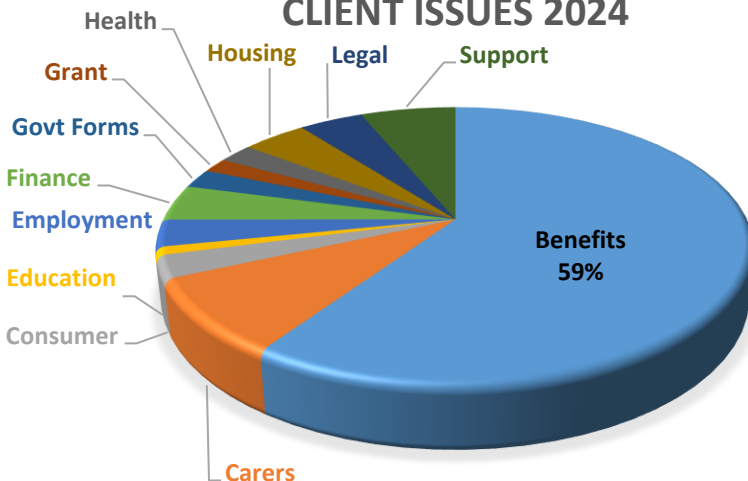
CLIENT ETHNICITY



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.

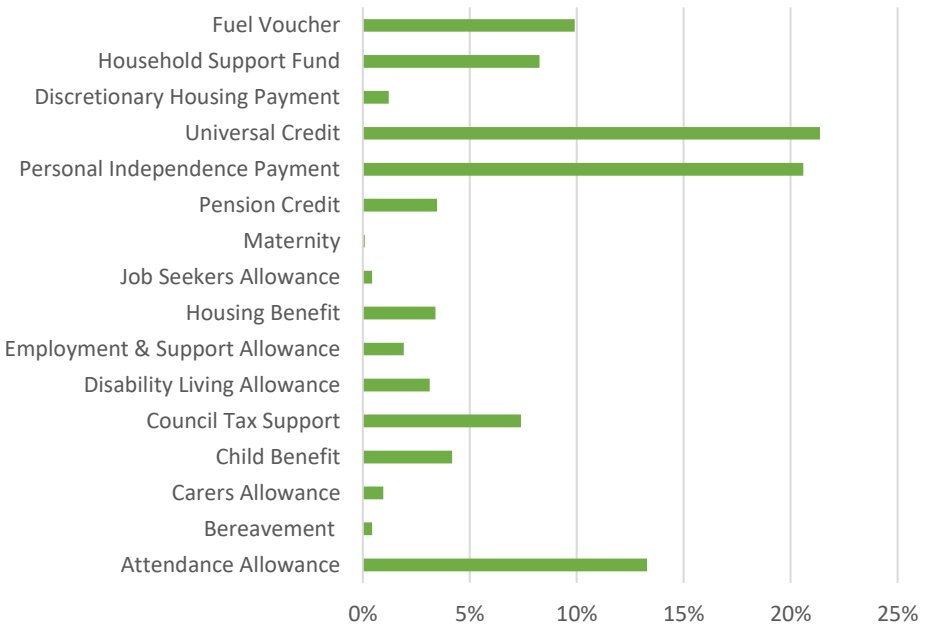
CLIENT ISSUES 2024



In 2024 **59% of the issues** we dealt with were **Benefits** related. In total we assisted clients to claim the annual equivalent of **£6,733,056 in benefits**

Case Study: We supported the client with their Personal Independence Payment application. This was turned down by DWP. We assisted with a Mandatory Reconsideration, this was also turned down. We supported the client to take it to appeal. The appeal was successful and the client received a **backdated payment of £7,200** and on-going **monthly payments of £440**.

Benefits Claimed



Case Study: Client had reached pension age and their Universal Credit had stopped, they were unsure what to do. We assisted them to apply for their state pension. Once they received notification of how much pension they would receive, we assisted them to apply for Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax

Support. This equated to a **monthly income of £1,562**.



Partnership Working

CommuniCare has always worked closely with both voluntary and statutory organisations across Reading. We strongly believe that partnership working is the key to giving people in Reading the support they need. We actively participate in numerous focus groups, steering groups and co-production meetings with Reading Borough Council and other voluntary sector organisations.



Reading
BOROUGH COUNCIL

CommuniCare works with a number of other Voluntary Sector Organisations in Reading to deliver 3 separate services for Reading Borough Council. These partnerships have been in place since 2022 and the contracts are running until October 2025.



**Carers
Partnership**
Reading & West Berkshire

Reading & West Berkshire Carers Partnership. In partnership with Age UK Berkshire, Age UK Reading and Reading Mencap, we are supporting unpaid carers in Reading & West Berkshire. We are supporting the 2 local borough councils by completing Carers Assessments, giving information and advice and running support groups for the many unpaid carers in the area and working to have unpaid carers voices heard.



TACKLING POVERTY
PARTNERSHIP

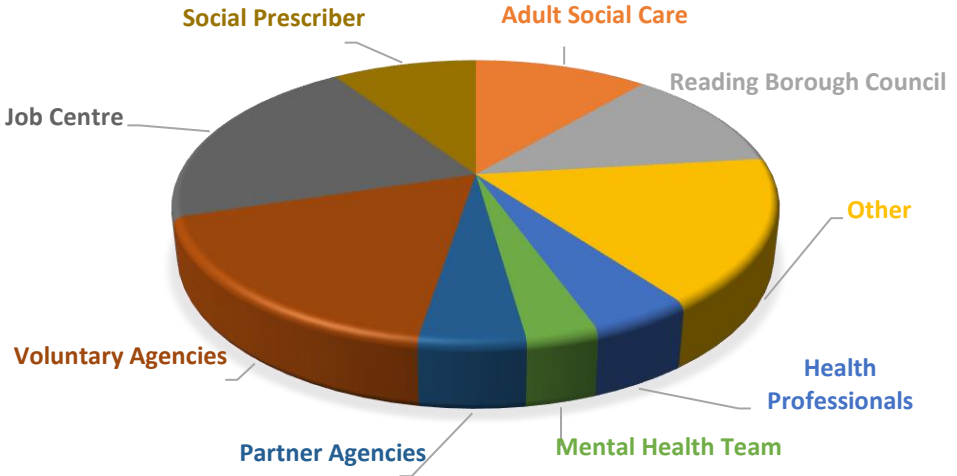
Tackling Poverty Partnership. In partnership with CCA, CiRDIC, Mustard Tree, Reading Welfare Rights, Readifood and Reading Community Learning Centre, we are working to support people in Reading to get out and stay out of poverty

**WELLBEING
Partnership**

Wellbeing Partnership. In partnership with Age UK Berkshire, Age UK Reading, Engage Befriending and Sports in Mind we are working to build resilience, independence and wellbeing and connect people to support and focus on individual and community strengths.

As well as the formal partnerships we have in place, we work closely with many other organisations across Reading. Many of the clients we support have been referred or signposted to us from other agencies in Reading.

REFERRALS INTO COMMUNICARE FROM

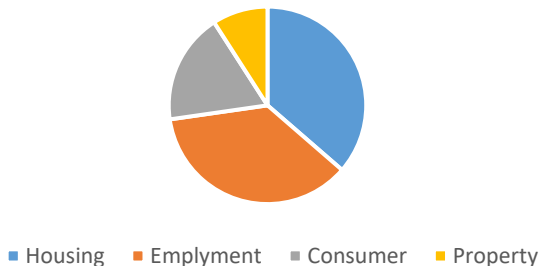


SHOOSMITHS

Pro Bono Legal Clinic

The Legal clinic is run with Shoosmiths Solicitors and law students from Reading University Law School. The client initially meets with a CommuniCare adviser so their situation can be assessed. If their case is appropriate, the client is referred to the Legal Clinic. The solicitor will work with their allocated law student to review the case. They will prepare the advice for the client and use the most appropriate method to communicate with the client, this can be by email, telephone, on-line meeting or face to face.

Issues for Legal Clinic





CommuniCare Client Feedback during 2024

“Thank you for all your support, it has made such a difference”.

“I can’t believe I won. I was ready to give up. Thank you for helping me to carry on, I am so relieved it is over.”

“You are all amazing. I do not know what I would do without you. I always know you will help me”.

“I cannot thank you and your team enough! You have done so much and I could not have got through this without you. The extra money will make all the difference to me. Thank you ”

“I just wanted to drop you a line to say thank you for everything you all do to support the people of Reading. Having CommuniCare to refer people to really is a God send. You are all so kind and caring and I just know you will always do your best for everyone”.

Financial Details for the Financial Year Ending March 2024

INCOME

Grants	£123,499
Donations	£40,778
Investments	£780
Other	£1,384
	£166,441

EXPENDITURE

CommuniCare Salaries (& pensions)	£138,975
Other Charitable Activities	£10,027
	£149,002

TOTAL SURPLUS

£17,439



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



Individual Donors



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



Localgiving.com/CommuniCareRDG

CommuniCare Quality Marks & Accreditations



We had our bi-annual assessment in October 2024. The assessor highlighted **NINE Areas of Excellent Practice.**

Contact Us:



www.communicare.org.uk



office@communicare.org.uk



233 Kings Road
Reading, RG1 4LS



0118 9263941

Registered Charity Number

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