

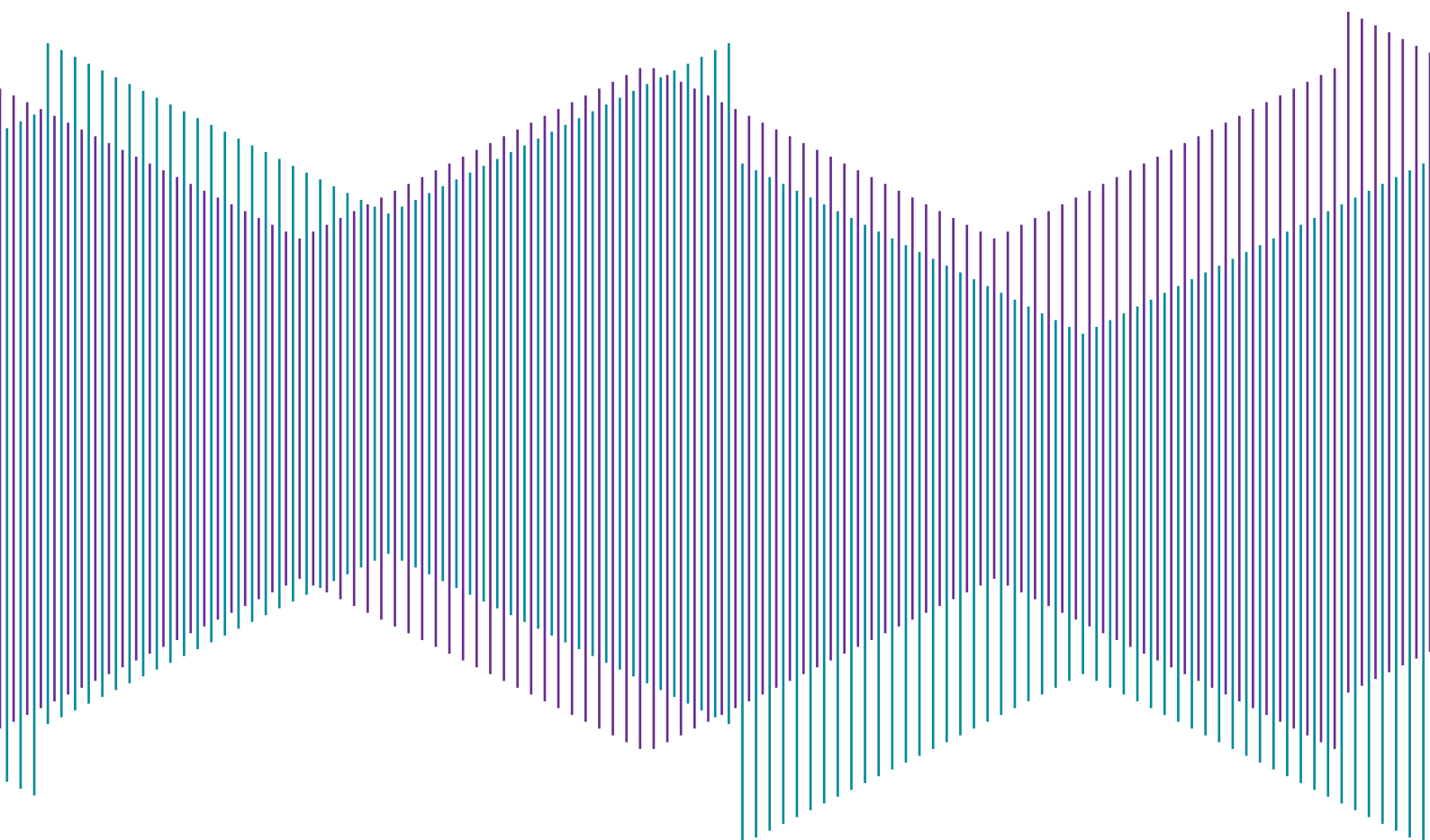


Summary of an Evaluation Report
on Advicehub 2009-2012

produced by

Anglia Ruskin University's

3rd Sector Futures Research Team



Anglia Ruskin
University

Introduction

The Advicehub project was originally funded by the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) 'Advice Plus' between July 2009 and June 2012. It received a further one year's funding to support the development of the most successful elements of the work, make any changes to help the service become sustainable, and evaluate the impact made by the project.

The Advicehub business plan defined three strategic areas:

- **Objective 1:** *Increase access to core/generalist advice services;*
- **Objective 2:** *Ensure a full range of specialist level advice services are available for all clients who need them;*
- **Objective 3:** *Make the best use of resources through efficiencies achieved by sharing resources across the partnership.*

The key achievements of the Advicehub project:

- 120 advice workers trained to act as Gateway Assessors;
- Gave access to self-help advice to over 24,000 people via a network of 18 digital touchscreen kiosks and two PCs – located in places like GP surgeries, libraries, community centres and hospitals;
- Established a 50-member Partnership Forum for advice organisations to share knowledge, skills and resources;
- Raised publicity and profile via PR and an e-newsletter;
- Influenced social policy on the need for, and value of, free and independent advice;
- Obtained representation on various bodies relevant to advice services.



Indicators of key achievements

Objective 1: *Increase access to core/generalist services.*

■ **Indicator 1:** *Advicehub creates 20 more physical and virtual access points.* 14 community-based outreach mini hubs have been set up to deliver diagnostic assessments and 20 virtual access points have been installed, comprising 18 kiosks for self-help and two PCs which are also capable of video conferencing, document scanning etc.

It was reported that during 2011/12 a total of 6,470 people were given assisted information by Gateway Assessors, with no further steps needed, from which it was inferred that they may be also able to help themselves in the future given the right tools.

Excellent statistics are available for the physical use of the self-help kiosks obtained using Siteremote software – for example, between March and September 2011, 5,784 individual users were recorded across Cambridgeshire, with over 54,000 pages accessed. This averages to around 830 users per month. Figures recorded for July 2011 to the end of May 2012 showed that a total of 24,329 users visited a total of 180,012 pages, showing a 270% increase to 2,200 users per month. The statistics also include information about advice categories viewed (benefits, debt, housing etc.) which, when at a particular high level in a specific locality, could indicate local prevalence of that particular problem there and serve to inform advice service planning, delivery and funding.

Reports for 2011- 2012 using CASE and Petra (the Citizens Advice case reporting tools) statistics estimate that the partners helped 460 clients to claim over £1.788 million in benefits and tax credits, averaging out at £4,160 per client. When all financial outcomes were included, in 2011- 2012, a total of 860 clients were helped to claim an estimated £4.24 million, averaging £4,922 each.

■ **Indicator 2:** *40 new volunteers to be recruited p.a. to train as local Advisers.* Advicehub introduced what is referred to as the 'Gateway Model', which can be seen as a form of triage. A Gateway assessment is a quick mechanism of determining the most appropriate next step for the client. This can include assisted

information, referral to another agency, or an appointment with an Advicehub partner organisation. Volunteers, referred to as Gateway Assessors, have been trained to provide these diagnostic interviews. By the end of year 2, 47 new Gateway Assessors had been recruited between the partners, with four having since left to go into full-time employment. In the course of Year 3, Cambridgeshire Bureaux trained 59 Gateway Assessors, seven Generalist Advisers, seven Receptionists and four community-based signposting Volunteers. This adds up to 120 advisers in total.

■ **Indicator 3:** *1,500 p.a. more people will be able to get to advice more quickly and 60% will resolve their problems in one visit.* The Gateway Assessors saw 6,470 clients in 2011/2012 and it was reported that the Gateway triage assessment ensured that all clients were seen, on average, within 20 minutes of arriving. Previous waiting times were frequently between 1-2 hours.

■ **Indicator 4:** *500 people p.a. avoid problems though training.* A series of specialist training seminars and workshops was delivered over the course of the project targeted at frontline workers of partner organisations. Surveys revealed that delegates found the training useful and gained extra knowledge.

A survey of 69 delegates trained at one-day debt management workshops in early 2011 reported that 70% rated the training as "excellent" and 30% rated it as "good". An analysis of a survey of the delegates attending various training courses in 2012 reported that 95% of delegates said the training had enhanced their knowledge of the subject, 95% said that the courses helped them give better quality advice, 94% said they felt more confident about providing help and advice and 67% said that the training had enabled them to help or advise more clients without referring them to other agencies.

■ **Indicator 5:** *2,000 p.a. do not have to travel to central advice centres.* This measure was exceeded by over 200% by the use of self-help kiosks and outreach Gateways.

■ **Indicator 6:** 500 helped to avoid problems by latest news/legislation bulletins. A quarterly e-Newsletter was sent out to around 700 people working in advice organisations across the county. A Twitter account has also been set up to give news of the latest changes in legislation/new benefits and there is a blogging site on the Advicehub website.

■ **Indicator 7:** 100 p.a. 'prescribed' advice from their local GPs resulting in a reduction in GP prescription bills. In the six-month reporting period 238 clients were seen at two main medical locations. The Advicehub Partnership Forum is developing a streamlined referral procedure that will use a common registration form and facilitate an electronic trail for statistical purposes. A survey of clients obtained 21 responses, with 100% of respondents stating that overall help received from Cambridge Citizens Advice Bureau (CCAB) was very good. 95% felt that after their help, they felt more secure about their money and/or housing, 85% stated that as a result of help, their confidence was better or much better and 90% stated that as a result of help, their general health/ stress levels were better or much better.

Objective 2: Ensure a full range of specialist level services for all clients who need them.

■ **Indicator 8:** Waiting times for appointments for specialist casework are reduced to an average of one week by the 2nd year of the project. The current waiting time for specialist appointments at CCAB for debt, housing and benefits is less than one week, previously 4-6 weeks.

■ **Indicator 9:** 200 legal aid clients p.a. get to LSC specialist provision more quickly. The target was met whilst LSC existed.

■ **Indicator 10:** Earlier referrals reduces the number of cases going to appeal by 10% p.a. CCAB has been actively trying to prevent the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) appeal system becoming further clogged by the huge number of clients being turned down. From September 2011 to March 2012, 203 out of 232 Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) clients seen by generalist advisers did not require referral to another agency or bureau specialists.

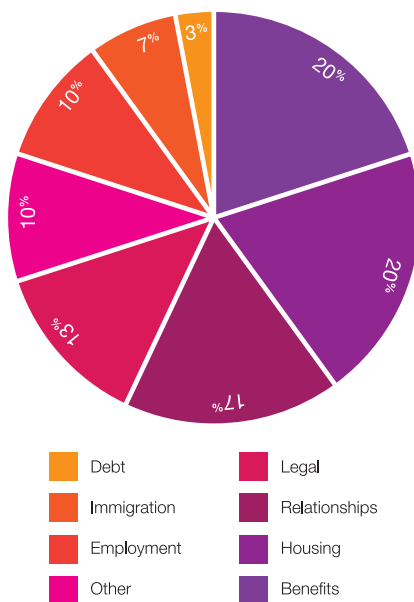
■ **Indicator 11:** 400 specialist casework clients p.a. are helped more quickly by being advised in their community. 538 clients were given specialist help through the outreach locations.

■ **Indicator 12:** Triage system ensures that clients are processed 40% more quickly and therefore 1,000 clients p.a. get more timely help. The diagnostic Gateway interviews have led to an increase in the number of clients seen. The average waiting time for a client waiting to be interviewed is reported as approximately 20 minutes.

Objective 3: Make the best use of resources through efficiencies achieved by sharing resources across the partnership.

■ **Indicator 13:** New methods of delivery – 5,000 people a year avoiding legal problems by getting advice earlier. 14 outreach advice hubs and 20 self-help kiosks have been set up and at least 6,470 people are getting advice earlier, on average within 20 minutes of arriving.

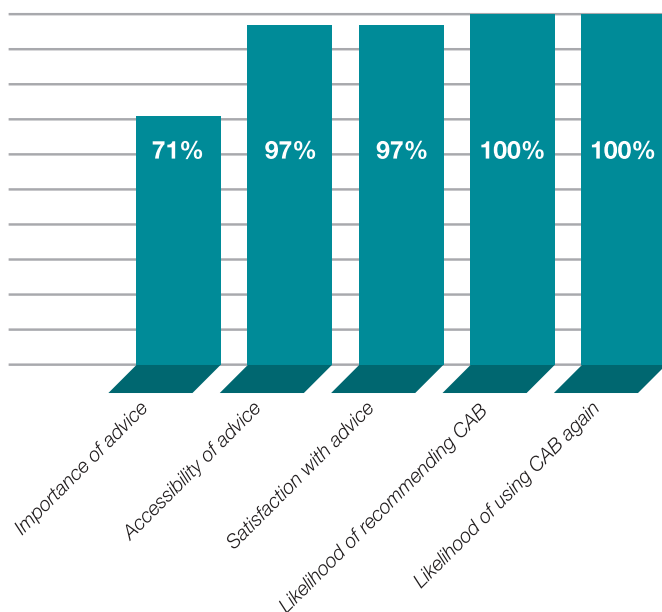
■ **Indicator 14:** Marketing and profile results in 5,000 people per quarter solving their own problems by using the improved website and links from website without having to visit an advice agency. Numerous articles have been published in local and national newspapers, radio stations and TV. Special events have been arranged to demonstrate the various strands of the project and specific campaigns have been launched to tackle social policy issues.



Statistics obtained using Google Analytics from the use of the website show that there were 8,081 unique visitors to the **www.advicehub.org** site in May 2012. This represents a 37% increase compared to May 2011. The average number of unique visitors over the 12 month-period was 7,277. There were 24,329 kiosk users in the 11 months from July 2011 to May 2012, roughly 6,600 per quarter. Of these, 26% thought that the use of the kiosks had helped them to resolve their issue. This approximates to around 1,730 per quarter.

■ **Indicator 15:** *Bite size virtual training sessions helps 500 people p.a. to learn how to cope with problems they have or to avoid them e.g. what to do about tax credit over payments.* Five short information/training videos aimed directly at clients and frontline workers of advice organisations were produced. These addressed benefits and recent changes and cuts. Relevant videos made by other groups have been signposted on the website.

■ **Indicator 16:** *Quarterly reports from the Management Information System (MIS) enables the group to target gaps in provision more accurately.* Partners are closely involved with Local Authority policy groups such as JSNA (Joint Services Needs Assessment), feeding statistical data into the Child Poverty Champions Group, Health & Wellbeing Board and Local Task & Finish groups.



Views from Clients

30 telephone interviews with Gateway clients were undertaken between December 2012 and January 2013. The main issues they had were with benefits and housing. The data collated during this telephone evaluation suggest that clients perceive a high satisfaction rating with the Advicehub Gateway service.

Results show that clients value Advicehub's support, information and advice provided and that it substantially helps individuals to overcome their issues. Respondents were asked to rate various factors of their experience on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being positive and 1 being negative. Of those who had completely resolved their problem, when asked 'how important was the advice you received in helping to sort out the problem?' 71% rated the importance between 7 and 10. Of those who hadn't resolved their problem, most would be returning to the Advicehub for further support.

59% of recipients reported they felt stressed before the Advicehub's intervention. Of these clients, 82% reported they had less stress following the intervention. 14% of respondents indicated that their confidence was suffering as a result of the issues they were facing. 100% of these reported that their confidence had improved as a result of the intervention.

97% of clients rated the advice service between a 7 and 10 which indicates a very high satisfaction level for the help given by the Gateway. 97% of clients also rated the accessibility between a 7 and 10.

100% of clients rated their likeliness to use the advice service again in the future between 7 and 10. Again, 100% of clients rated the likelihood of recommending the service to others between 7 and 10.

Views from Advicehub Partners

A key advantage of the project was the bringing together of 50 advice agencies to form a partnership, working together to deliver efficiencies, share resources and make good quality specialist advice more accessible.

Responses from the six partners interviewed suggest that four of the six saw tangible benefits to the project and could describe differences between the situation before the project compared to now. One such example given was an increase in the level of networking as a result of the project, meaning the organisation 'now had a greater relationship with CCAB and was on first name terms' with CCAB staff.

'Joined-up working' and increased knowledge were cited by one partner as the most important outcomes for their organisation. Another suggested a perception of increased reach.

Partners agreed that the project made them more up to date and informed regarding news and legislation in the advice sector and also agreed that as a result of the project they have used new technology to increase access to advice, including for people living in rural or hard to reach locations.

The value of the networking between advice agencies was highlighted and it was also suggested that Advicehub could be reinvigorated and could take technology further to encompass benefit changes, universal payments and government online services.

Partners were asked if any of their clients have a need for accessing financial education/capability workshops to improve their skills in budgeting, money management, and general information about illegal lenders. Four of the six partners interviewed gave a definitive yes and one went on to say that every client they deal with would benefit from this type of support. Five of the six partners stated that they would be interested in working with CCAB to deliver financial education capability workshops.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The Advicehub project during the period July 2009 to June 2012 has been generally very successful when measured against the performance targets set in the original bid. Most of the outcome indicators used as a measure of the original target objectives have been met and in some cases substantially exceeded.

These measures that have been met have not only increased access to core services, but increased access to and reduced waiting times for specialist services, resulting in a more efficient service, saving time and travel costs - not only costs which would have been incurred by clients previously having to travel to the main CCAB office but also costs which can result from delayed intervention, which can be considerable in cases involving debt and housing.

Advicehub Partnership Forum: Key to the project's success was the establishment of a Partnership Forum for advice agencies. A recommendation is to continue this partnership approach, as it appears to improve access to advice and prevent duplication. However, further work needs to be invested to identify new partners in South Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City, in order that a more representative partnership can be developed.

Advicehub kiosk network: Replicating the successful outcomes experienced by the project in Cambridge City and Fenland across all other parts of the county; in particular, establishing wider use of digital media as a medium for increasing access to advice within rurally isolated communities in all Cambridgeshire localities.

Social Return on Investment (SROI): A clearer understanding of the social value created by the project can be achieved in the future by undertaking an evaluative SROI analysis. This is a substantial task: however, the data produced from such an exercise would be of considerable value to Advicehub at this current time as it seeks to prove its value to customers and commissioners.

SROI is a framework for measuring and accounting for value across a triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental outcomes. It measures change in ways that are relevant to the people or organisations that experience or contribute to this change. It tells the story of how change is being created by measuring social, environmental, and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them.

To do this, further stakeholder engagement needs to be carried out in order to identify and value the outcomes. Stakeholder consultation, including in depth interviews and questionnaires with their clients and people working/volunteering with partner organisations, would provide valuable evidence to demonstrate the significant difference that streamlined advice services can make to people's lives.



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