

# BENEFITS IN PRACTICE

- A project to enable people who would not necessarily consider or be able to access Welfare Rights advice by visiting City advice agencies or contacting them by telephone.
  - The main target groups are the sick and disabled (43% of clients), the over 50s (39%) and ethnic minorities (33%). Oxford City has 25% more people suffering from long term illness than the S.E. regional average. Less than 10% of City pensioners claim attendance allowance. Oxcab deals with over 8k benefits issues a year at its city centre office – the demand for our service seems infinite even though we have doubled the number of clients we advised in the past four years.
  - Contact is made by clients who visit G.P. surgeries for medical reasons. They are referred to our service by G.P.s and receptionists and 45 minute appointments are arranged. The relationship between health and the stresses of low income are well documented and this project aims to increase income, reduce stress and improve health.
  - Research has shown that there are significant positive effects on older people and the disabled if income is enhanced by increased benefits. Extra spending on food will obviously improve health and well being. Spending on travel, clothing and household goods gave people greater dignity and self sufficiency. There are a number of beneficial effects on the local community. Most of the extra benefit gains we spend in the local area – research shows that up to five times the actual benefit gain is circulated in the local economy.
  - The project began in April 02 with funding from the Legal Services Commission £127k, Oxford PCT £10k, Oxcab £6k, Age Concern also offered support as did Oxford City Council. This funding ended in March 05.
- **For the past 9 months the project has been funded by the Legal Services Commission £19k; Oxford PCT £5k; Oxford City Council £20k. Both the LSC and Oxford PCT are prepared to continue funding the project if OCC also makes their £20k contribution.**
- The project is proving to be very successful. We have run weekly/fortnightly appointment sessions in eight G.P. practices in the City, East Oxford, St Barts, Bury Knowle, Barton, Donnington, Beaumont Street, Luther Street and Wood Farm. During the past four years we have helped over 600 clients and raised over £550,000 in the form of benefits and grants. This figure is based on the gains that clients have told us about for one year. Most clients will make a gain in benefits for many years and therefore this figure dramatically understates the ongoing gains for clients and the local economy.
  - Many clients have other related problems, e.g. employment, debt, housing, and we enable them to access the full CAB service when this is useful. We make home visits when clients find visiting the surgery difficult and although this is time consuming we know that such visits make a positive impact on such clients benefits uptake.
  - This project has relied on the OXCAB for its training, advice giving procedures, policies and management. However it is an independent project separate from the Bureau's core service to the City.
  - Now that the project is set up running costs are £44k p.a. We would wish to continue the B.I.P. project if extra funding can be found but our core service (helping 9,000 new clients p.a.) is already under funded and cannot subsidise this project without reducing our present level of service at our City Centre drop-in and telephone service.
  - Our caseworkers are now highly skilled at supporting clients and have developed excellent relationships with G.P.s and practice staff. The service we offer is now an intrinsic part of the care given at these practices and therefore the demand for our caseworkers appointment times is high.
  - This innovative project is being used nationally as an example of practical effective care in the community. We hope that we will be able to maintain the service and even introduce it to other G.P. surgeries in the City if further funding can be accessed.