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Social and economic research

Advice in Community Settings

Key Evaluation Findings

Programme Summary

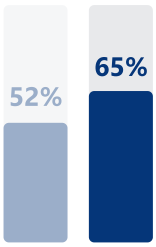
The Advice in Community Settings (AiCS) programme was launched by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2021.

Eleven partnerships brought together advice services and community settings such as schools, food banks and community centres, providing advice and support for Londoners experiencing or at risk of financial hardship.

Read the full evaluation here.

Access and Reach

Since its launch, **nearly 11,000** Londoners have directly accessed support. Including any other household members we know are living with the primary client, the support has impacted at least an additional 10,000 people.



The proportion of clients who had never accessed advice before rose from **52% to 65%** over the three-years of delivery, **an increase of 13% points.**

AiCS clients were **more likely to be female, Black or Black British, and of working age** compared to those using London branches of Citizens Advice.

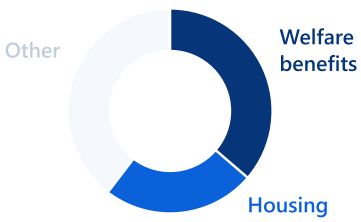
Different community settings have effectively reached different client groups, with factors such as **trust and familiarity influencing where clients feel most comfortable accessing support.**

"By embedding services within food banks, schools, and local community hubs, we've connected with clients who might not have otherwise sought help, leveraging the existing trust and accessibility of these locations to provide culturally sensitive debt and welfare advice"

- Partnership Lead

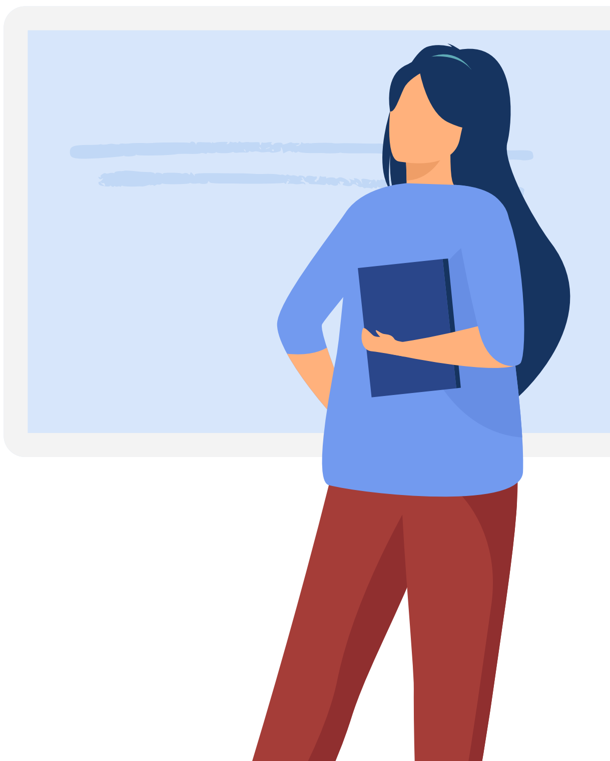
Meeting Client Needs

Many clients presented with **complex, overlapping issues** that required holistic support. Partnerships were **well placed to offer this holistic support** by drawing on expertise and services from multiple providers.



Welfare benefits (36%) and **housing (24%)** were the most common topics of advice

91% of interviewed clients reported that the programme helped them a lot

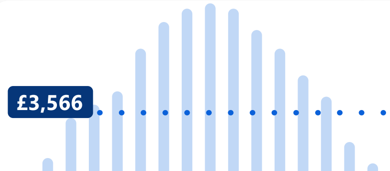


Financial Outcomes

Financial gains achieved by clients as a result of accessing advice and support through the programme came in a range of forms including new **benefits**, one-off **grants** or **debt resolution**.

Over £8 million

in financial gains were achieved for **more than 2,200 clients**



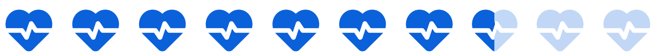
The **average financial gain per client was £3,566**, with older and disabled clients seeing the largest financial gains

60% of clients reported improved or stabilised financial situations following the advice and support received.

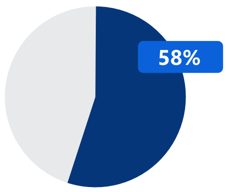
While food banks provided vital access, they were **associated with smaller one-off grants compared to community centres or advice services.**

Health, Wellbeing and Confidence

Evidence from interviews with clients **demonstrates the positive impact** achieved in **improving health, wellbeing and confidence.**



74% of clients reported **improvements in health and wellbeing**, with over half reporting **sustained improvements into the longer term**



58% of clients felt **more confident in dealing with future challenges**

Partnership Working

- Funding enabled partnerships to strengthen existing relationships and build new ones with schools, health providers and community hubs.
- The GLA funding allowed staff to dedicate time, capacity and resource for relationship building and the GLA backing lent legitimacy to the service, making other organisations and institutions more willing to engage and collaborate.
- Challenges were most common in the implementation phase and included establishing referral systems and data sharing processes.

"It has allowed us to have the staff and resources to be able to partner with the family wellbeing centres in [the local area]. This partnership is now deemed vital, with [the partnership] being invited to meetings with the deputy mayor of London and the Minister for the DWP, who have praised the working model. This work would not have been possible without this funding"

- Partnership Lead

Recommendations for the strategic development of community advice provision:

The GLA should:

- **Facilitate discussions** with health partners, such as ICBs, to explore potential funding options
- **Lead work to convene advice sector partners** across the capital to develop a pan-London advice strategy

Funders should:

- **Recognise the value** of embedding advice services in community settings to reach new groups of Londoners
- **Ensure funding is flexible** including multi-year programmes to better support recruitment and retention of staff
- **Prioritise advice programmes** which allow multiple, intersecting issues to be addressed
- **Work together** to standardise core data collection across different grant programmes

Recommendations for future advice programmes:

When designing future community advice programmes, funders should:

- **Prioritise diverse partnerships** between advice services and a range of community settings, especially those with strong relationships to minoritised or vulnerable communities, ensuring access to advice for a range of communities
- **Ensure appropriate resource to embed an implementation phase,** allowing partnerships to develop and strengthen through adequate recruitment and establishing referral pathways and data sharing protocols
- **Ensure partnership staff are representative** of the communities being served and there is adequate provision for interpreting and translation services
- **Build in flexibility** to cope with the rapidly changing social, economic and political context
- **Share learning and best practice** between partnerships throughout delivery, but especially during the implementation phase