

THE POVERTY ISSUE

THE PENSION TOP
up

“With extra money in my pocket, I can spend more doing the things I love.”

Lynda topped up – have you?

Welcome to Issue 28 of the Greater Manchester Housing Providers newsletter, shining a light on the work we do to help reduce poverty, and the people and communities we work with.

Our cover photo shows one of the images used in our Pension Credit Campaign, more on the next page. In this issue we are focussing on the work we do to maximise people's income and we have contributions from Arawak Walton, Bolton at Home, ForHousing, Great Places, Irwell Valley Homes, Jigsaw Homes, Motiv8, One Manchester, Regenda Homes, SixTown Housing and Stockport Homes.

“It was so simple. After a few minutes filling in my application, I’ve now got a pension top up.”

Beth topped up – have you?

January saw the start of our Pension Credit campaign, launched in response to research undertaken by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority which shows that a massive £75 million is going unclaimed in the region. Between us GMHP own and manage 1 in 5 homes in the region so we are well placed to get the message out and guide people through the claims process. If you haven't already seen it, we've put out a call to action for housing providers to support the campaign. We've held two briefing sessions to go through the campaign resources and we'll be holding a follow up session in a couple of months to see how the campaign is going and to learn from each other on what has worked well.

We owe a huge thank you to MaxMedia for adding their support to the campaign by providing us with some free resources. MaxMedia worked with the GM Ageing Hub and the Behavioural Insights Team to make sure that the comms assets in the toolkit address the points raised in the research on why people haven't engaged so much with previous campaigns and what might motivate them to do so this time. The toolkit is available [here](#). Please get in touch if you'd like to find out more.

Also included is our regular update from Motiv8, another collaborative project from some of the GMHP partners. In coming issues we'll feature more from the GMHP workstreams and other partnership projects that relate to our work to reduce poverty and inequality.

Thank you to our contributors for sharing your stories. As usual you are very welcome to send your feedback or suggestions for the next issue to Julie.Ralph@boltonathome.org.uk

Festival of Learning

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WINNER

Motiv8

Project Award

GET BACK ON TRACK WITH MOTIV8

Motiv8 is a Greater Manchester programme to help unemployed people aged 25 and over. It supports some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in society to overcome a wide variety of complex issues and barriers to improve their lives and help move them closer to work.

Motiv8 is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and the European Social Fund. It is a voluntary programme and participation can help to improve people's health and wellbeing, self-confidence, self-esteem and other crucial employability skills to improve their chances of accessing training or finding a job.

MOTIV8 - FESTIVAL OF LEARNING'S PROJECT OF THE YEAR

In November, Motiv8 was announced as the national winner of the Festival of Learning 2020 Project award. Organised by the Learning and Work Institute, and supported by the Department for Education, Festival of Learning is an annual campaign which aims both to celebrate the power of learning to transform lives, and to encourage more adults to take part.

Stephen Evans, chief executive of Learning and Work Institute, said, "We congratulate Motiv8 on the outstanding and crucial work they are doing to support people living in some of the most deprived areas of Greater Manchester to overcome significant barriers to employment. The personalised approach is making a notable difference to individuals and in turn to their families and communities."

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT MOTIV8?

Further information about Motiv8 and the eligibility criteria for the programme, can be found at www.motiv8mcr.org or call 0161 331 2048 or email info@manchesterbbo.co.uk

You can also view some case studies and success stories at www.motiv8mcr.org/success-stories

Jigsaw Support, part of Jigsaw Group, is leading the Motiv8 programme in partnership with other Manchester Athena housing providers - Bolton at Home (through Starts With You), ForHousing, Stockport Homes Group (through Foundations Stockport) and Wythenshawe Community Housing Group.

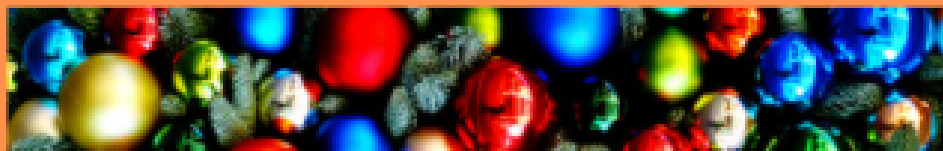
MOTIV8 REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Motiv8 has produced a round-up of highlights of 2020 that show how they continued to support their Motiv8 clients during 2020.

Hazel Clarke, Head of Jigsaw Support said: "It was a challenging year, but also busy and productive too as you can see in our 12 Months of Motiv8 newsletter. We hope that you enjoy catching up with our news and finding out about how we continued to support people to get back on track."

Click on this link to view:
<http://bit.ly/12monthsmotiv8>

The 12 Months of Motiv8



January

We started the year on a high! Shortlisted as finalists for 2 prestigious awards:

UKHA - Resident employment and training award category

Tpas Awards - Excellence in Employment, Skills & Training



February

We had a great meeting with the Through the Gate team from HMP Forest Bank to discuss our mutual work in getting people back on track. (Since then we have supported 49 people from HMP Forest Bank through our Motiv8 programme.)



Our development team also had a great meeting with job centre coaches in Oldham to share information about Motiv8. Great teamwork.



ARAWAK WALTON HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Arawak Walton has a proud heritage in helping to create vibrant and sustainable multi-cultural neighbourhoods in inner city areas. We are the smallest member of GMHP employing 33 highly trained and committed staff members and we support thousands of people in over 1000 homes across Manchester, Stockport and Trafford.

With its roots in the African-Caribbean community, Arawak Walton continues the work of its founders in contributing to local regeneration activities and continues its commitment to tackling social deprivation.

The COVID19 Pandemic has had a massive impact on many of our tenants with the most devastating effects being on household finances.

Miss A was in gainful employment shortly before the pandemic however, she was forced to stop working due to her physical health deteriorating. As a result, she applied for Universal Credit but was informed that as she lived in a 2-bed property, she would not be entitled to the full housing element of rent and would be liable to pay bedroom tax for the second bedroom.

Miss A was reluctant to seek and help or advice as she has always been independent, and she had no idea who to speak to or whether she was entitled to financial assistance.

At the beginning of the first lockdown, Arawak Walton proactively worked their way through the entire tenant database to contact each tenant to establish how they were coping mentally, physically, and financially.

It was during one of these calls, that we spoke to Miss A who advised us of her situation and confided that she was struggling to make the shortfall required towards her rent as well as finding it difficult to buy food and heat her home.

We advised her that there was help available via Discretionary Housing Payments. We were able to assist her to apply for this by completing an online application with her over the telephone. In addition to this, by working in partnership with another Housing Provider, we also sourced a fuel voucher for £49 which helped Miss A with her gas and electric on a fortnightly basis.

We recently spoke with Miss A and she is still in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payment, her health has improved greatly, and she has been made aware that a job opportunity is about to become available in the local community which she intends to apply for.



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP IN BOLTON

Bolton at Home has a well-established Money Advice Team with a great track record on income maximisation for tenants and residents. We are a member of Bolton Community Homes (BCH), Bolton's strategic housing partnership, and when BCH identified a gap in service provision across the borough around welfare rights advice and support, we offered to host this post on their behalf.

The role began at the start of lockdown, providing an offer of support to anyone living in Bolton who requires a benefit check, advice and assistance completing applications. The role has become invaluable across Bolton, linking closely with the NHS to ensure anyone who is struggling has access to support.

Through this new role we've built a great partnership with the social prescribers, who refer into the service. We're identifying people who previously had no access to welfare rights advice and we're also identifying customers who are experiencing mental health issues linked to their finances, which has been an area we wanted to tackle.

From April 2020 the BCH Welfare Rights advisor has:

- Supported 113 families from seven BCH member Housing Associations within the borough
- Achieved £402,000 in financial benefits, with a large number of outcomes still to be recorded.

A Great Places tenant was referred by Bolton Money Skills to complete a PIP application. The BCH Adviser carried out the following:

- Quick benefit check
- Identified Severe Disability element missing in their claim (due to living alone)
- Completed PIP application – which was awarded at the highest rate daily living and standard rate mobility.
- Provided support for claiming the Severe Disability element, including medical notes to DWP.

Customer outcomes:

- £19,000 in backdated benefit
- £9,737 increased annual income
- Prevented the customer completing a debt relief order with Money Skills as they were able to clear their debts.
- Customer was able to clear their full rent and council tax arrears.

There is also the wider offer for families which the Money Advice team have provided throughout the pandemic, which has seen the following outcomes:

- £8.2 million in financial benefits
- Of the £8.2 million, £3.7 million is £'s in customers pockets.
- Successfully supported 1700 families.



TENANTS MOVE INTO FIRST PHASE OF £3.7M HOUSING DEVELOPMENT BUILT TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS.

Young people who had been at risk of living on the streets have begun to move into the first phase of a £3.7m housing scheme in Salford, aimed at tackling homelessness. ForHousing has completed its first homelessness prevention new build scheme at Haddon Road, with the first tenants starting their new lives in the 12-apartment development.

The one-bedroom homes are aimed at people who face being left with nowhere to live for a variety of reasons and are let at a low-cost sub-social rent. The homes are furnished, and the low rent includes all bills and Wi-Fi. Every tenant is allocated a dedicated support worker and provided with support to link them into employment, training and enable them to access new opportunities and a pathway to a better life.

ForHousing has worked closely with Salford City Council on the development, with the local authority helping to select people in the most need to move into the homes. Chloe Fox, aged 21, was one of the first tenants to move into the scheme. She moved into her apartment after a breakdown in their relationship meant she had to leave the home she shared with her sister. After living in bed and breakfast accommodation and then a homeless shelter where she shared space with 30 other people, she was referred to ForHousing and allocated a home at Haddon Road. Chloe said: "I am really pleased with my flat. I love my own space and feel I can live independently for the first time. The flat is really nice, and I can be my own person there."

ForHousing is working with Chloe to help her gain skills to follow her ambition to work in social care. Kirsten Foy, Tenancy Sustainment Officer at ForHousing, said: "Chloe seems to be thriving. Initially she had massive worries about living independently, but she's doing really well, even helping to deliver supplies to other tenants. Now she's got a safe place to live and has been working with us to get the extra support she needs, I'm confident she will go on to turn her life around permanently."

FORHOUSING

The Haddon Road site is part of a wider plan from ForHousing to build 39 homes for those facing homelessness in Greater Manchester. Other sites in Salford at Vicars Street and Somerset Road, are expected to be completed later this year. ForHousing, which owns and manages more than 24,000 homes across the North West and is part of the ForViva Group, secured a grant of £1.46m from Homes England towards the scheme, which was designed by JDA Architects and built by Bridgestone Construction.

ForViva's Chief Executive, Colette McKune, said: "We are delighted to have welcomed the first tenants to begin their new lives at Haddon Road, particularly during such difficult times. Homelessness is a growing problem we all must strive to solve so that we can safeguard the health and wellbeing of people across our region. Having a stable place to live builds a strong foundation for people's wellbeing, enabling them to stay safe, rebuild their lives and flourish. We are keen to work with the people at Haddon Road to take advantage of new opportunities and, further in the future, we look forward to welcoming the next group of tenants at Vicars Street and Somerset Road."

Salford City Mayor Paul Dennett and Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham were on site as work started on the homes in May 2019. Salford City Mayor Paul Dennett said: "Providing affordable homes for those who need it most is an absolute priority of mine and Salford City Council. In April 2020 around 5,800 households were on the council's housing register, a list of people who have been assessed as having a housing need. This is absolutely unacceptable. We will continue to lobby government to provide us with finances to provide much needed social housing for local people."

Councillor Tracy Kelly, Statutory Deputy City Mayor and Lead Member for Housing, said: "It is fantastic news to hear the young people have moved into their new homes and I wish them many happy years in their community. At Salford City Council we will continue the fight to provide more affordable homes for local people."

Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, said: "Developments like this one at Haddon Road – a valuable scheme as part of a wider joined-up approach to tackling homeless and in particular rough sleeping across Greater Manchester – demonstrate a proactive solution to one of the biggest social challenges we face. It's fantastic to see that people in Salford who were at risk of homelessness are beginning to move into these homes. The securing of somewhere safe to live will no doubt enable residents to make a fresh start and I wish everyone at Haddon Road every success."

The completion comes as ForHousing, whose purpose is improving lives, has been supporting homeless people during the coronavirus pandemic by working with local authorities and other partners to find a safe place to live for those sleeping rough. The progressive landlord worked with councils in Salford and Oldham to make 133 void homes available as temporary accommodation during lockdown to enable homeless people to practice social distancing. The homes, which were provided with basic furniture items, also enabled some homeless families to move out of accommodation where they were living in one room. Everyone who moves into the homes will either be offered a permanent tenancy or offered support in finding more appropriate long-term accommodation.



Great Places established a hardship fund in April 2020 for customers that were affected by the pandemic and experiencing immediate financial hardship. Our neighbourhood teams, tenancy sustainment service and independence and wellbeing team have referred customers in need to the Community Investment Team and payments have been made or essential items purchased to support them through the crisis. To date 118 customers have been supported in Greater Manchester and £16,405 has been utilised from the Hardship Fund.

Customers have also been referred for employment and skills support and our two Employability Coaches have helped a number of customers onto training courses or back into employment.

In December we held a virtual jobs fair which concentrated on jobs in construction, health and social care and self-employment. Thirty four Great Places customers attended the event and will continue to be supported by our Employability Coaches.

We've established a partnership with Energy Action Advice and customers that have experienced financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic and have struggled to pay their energy bills, have been referred to the NEA where they will receive a top up voucher and just as important advice on accessing energy grants and how to reduce their energy bills by changing their energy tariff.

From March to December 2020, thirty two Great Places customers living in Greater Manchester have been referred to the NEA with ten receiving a top up voucher. All customers have received information on how they can access energy grants and reduce their energy bills.



DELIVERING FINANCIAL SUPPORT, PROMOTING ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Since the start of the pandemic Irwell Valley Homes has made 15,000 welfare calls to customers and supported people in financial difficulty. Helping them to maximise their income, providing support with budgeting and working with partners to provide debt and money advice. This has resulted in £218,000 of extra income being secured in total for people in need.

It has widely been reported that poverty leads to poor mental health, and poor mental health can lead to poverty - so it's no surprise that there has been an increase in complex cases. The tenancy sustainment team at Irwell Valley Homes provides intensive support with specialist agencies, to deliver interventions to address the intrinsic problems causing, and relating to, financial difficulty and mental wellbeing.

Fuel poverty has become a growing concern. Whilst the first UK outbreak happened in the spring, the latest wave in the colder months has meant that addressing affordable warmth has become a crucial element of Irwell Valley Homes' support offer. Laura Norris, Tenancy Sustainment Manager shares: "By working with HACT we have secured free top up vouchers for residents on pre-payment meters to ensure they can stay connected and warm. We're promoting the warm home discount scheme, plus the support available from the major utility providers. Our gas team are also providing energy saving advice, products and support during all gas appointments."





Irwell Valley Homes has also developed a new employment, skills and training offer to support those worst affected, making the most of the opportunities and funding available and working with partners and their supply chain to maximise our impact. Instrumental in this is the Irwell Valley Foundation. Ceris Esplen, Head of Communications and Community Investment explains: "Every year we invest £100,000 from the foundation to help people to reach their potential and improve their personal circumstances and prospects. We know that it's not easy for everyone to access training, education or employment. So, our financial grants remove barriers that may prevent people taking up opportunities to develop, barriers like childcare costs, transport or college course fees."

The Irwell Valley Foundation also funds various organisations across Greater Manchester that help to alleviate poverty such as local Citizens Advice services, youth engagement programmes, digital inclusion projects, foodbanks and furniture banks.

Meet some of the people who have benefitted from the Irwell Valley Foundation.

With funding from the Irwell Valley Foundation Ian, pictured on previous page, completed his level 3 in Dementia Care and secured a job in a Dementia Care Home in one of the communities we serve, supporting residents living there through the most challenging of times.

Michael has described the funding he received as life-enhancing, and lifesaving during the pandemic. The laptop, software, and musical equipment he received have enabled him to complete his Level 3 Teaching Certificate and continue to deliver online lessons for his students. The equipment has also enabled him to attend weekly workshops run by Bolton charity Headspace, to improve his mental wellbeing by staying creative and connected.

Colette was supported by the foundation to set up her own cleaning business. The funding enabled her to buy uniform, cleaning equipment and a laptop to get her business off the ground at a time when cleaning and hygiene has never been more important.

MONEY ADVICE

The Money Advice Team at Jigsaw Homes (East) is a small team of 2 Debt Advice Officers and 3.5 Welfare Advice Officers. We have seen an overwhelming demand for our service especially since the start of the current Coronavirus pandemic. Since April 2020 the Welfare Advice Officers have dealt with over 1,000 referrals for assistance with claims for Welfare Benefits. The Debt Advice Officers have also seen a large increase in their referral numbers with over 270 referrals for Debt Advice alone. In general Debt Advice referrals always increase following the Christmas period and with the current lockdown further affecting income for many customers, we are expecting cases to rise quite sharply in the coming months.

Our small team has managed to assist with Welfare Benefit claims which have resulted in confirmed awards of over £1.3m between April and December 2020. The Debt Team have assisted in managing/writing off over £780,000 worth of our customers debts to date. Not only have the team dealt with standard benefit claims and debt management, but we have also applied to different agencies for help and support regarding other situations that arise. We have completed multiple successful applications to the Jigsaw Hardship Foundation and other local charities/trust funds for assistance with everything from white goods to carpets and funds for gas and electric and toys for children for Xmas, in each case demonstrating that the customer was experiencing extreme financial hardship. We have also submitted countless applications to our local authority for Discretionary Housing Payments to provide additional awards to cover the bedroom tax and clear arrears balances, relieving exceptional pressure on the customer and their families.

The Debt Advice and Welfare Advice Officers work hand in hand to assist our customers to the very best outcome possible and we have had some great outcomes this year alone. Some of the financial amounts in the case study below might not be very large, but the positive impact that this has had on the customer has been significant.

Ms H – Both Ms and her partner were furloughed at the beginning of March 2020, they were worried about losing working tax credits, paying full rent themselves and were trying to manage on their much-reduced income. A full benefit assessment was undertaken, and the outcome explained to the customers. A successful claim was submitted, and the couple found themselves over £500 per month better off. We were able to offer advice to the couple regarding a seriously ill close family member and then advise them on the possibility of becoming carers which in turn increased their income once again without affecting the income of the ill family member. Finally, we made a successful application for DHP which cleared their rent arrears in full.



Creating homes. Building lives.

ENERGY ADVICE

As part of The Neighbourhood Engagement Team's energy advice drive to combat fuel poverty, the team have partnered up with our Independent Living Schemes, to provide energy advice and winter warmer packs. The team have put together and delivered 90 packs to people living in sheltered scheme bungalows across various sites, with the Winter Warmer packs containing information on how to stay warm this winter, hats and gloves and some food provision. Winter is a challenging time for many, and with the added issue of social isolation the team wanted to form an outreach project to get the packs to those that need it.

The Engagement Team are able to take referrals for people interested in energy saving measures in the home and provide advice and support. The Team can also refer into specialist services such as the Local Energy Advice Partnership. If you wish to refer anyone into our service, please email the neighbourhood engagement inbox NeighbourhoodEngagement@Jigsawhomes.org.uk

FOODBANKS RECEIVE THOUSANDS THANKS TO HOUSING PROVIDER'S CANCELLED CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

Jigsaw Homes Group donated thousands of pounds to charities across the region to help its residents over Christmas. Around £22,000 was donated to help residents in areas where Jigsaw manages homes including Manchester, Tameside and Wigan and Leigh. Since March 2020, Jigsaw has donated £80,000 to foodbanks across the regions.

Hilary Roberts, Chief Executive of Jigsaw Homes said: "Like many organisations across the country, we set aside a budget for our annual Christmas celebration where we take the opportunity to thank colleagues for their hard work during the year, in often demanding and challenging situations. Circumstances meant that it was not possible this year, so by holding a virtual celebration, we used the money saved to help our residents and our communities. 2020 has been a difficult year for many people, so we wanted to further support these vital foodbanks and we hope this will go some way to help."

Karen Ursell, Project Manager from the Chorlton and Didsbury Foodbank said: "The extremely generous donation received from Jigsaw Homes will make a huge difference and will ensure that anyone experiencing food poverty in our community will be given food and other essential items to help them through these difficult times".

Innocentia Ezeh from Restore Life Community Outreach Group in Gorton said: "This donation has been an answer to our prayers. We had been asking how we were going to manage this Christmas with people needing and asking for support, so this helped so much."

Susan Ayres, project co-ordinator at Tameside South and Longdendale foodbank said: "We provide food in Hollingworth, Hattersley and Hyde to families in crisis. As well as providing breakfast, dinner and tea for three days, our parcels help to keep families out of debt and in their homes. This donation from Jigsaw Homes Group towards the work of our foodbank is very much appreciated."

ONE MONEY TEAM

The pandemic has been a challenging time for us all and has forced us to change and adapt the way we work with our customers.

The One Money team at One Manchester have been extremely busy helping any and all problems, such as first time Universal Credit claimants, getting additional benefits for those on long term sick and helping with budgeting and money saving tips at this difficult time. The team have already secured nearly £1m worth of benefits for our customers and we feel confident this figure will continue to rise.

We have seen a small decline in customers asking for help to deal with their debts mainly due to the hold on collection practices but we're ready to go when the restrictions are lifted and expect to be busier than ever.

To make sure that we follow Government guidelines, customers are assisted over the telephone and video chat by our triage service which means they will be able to speak to one of our advisers within 24 hours, helping to alleviate any unnecessary worry.

One Manchester are currently on a second round of calling all our tenants to check on their welfare and this is picking up lots of issues that we are able to tackle such as isolation, lack of food and medicine and financial support with fuel vouchers. We've even spoken to a few people who had no cooker or fridge which we have been able to provide.

We have linked in with Manchester City Council's food hub to provide hundreds of food parcels as well as providing emergency parcels through our own teams and supporting The Bread and Butter Thing serve nearly 100 customers in one afternoon.

Case study

EB needed our support as she had been furloughed three times since the first lockdown in March 2020. EB is a single parent with two teenage boys and was struggling to make ends meet.

We supported EB to update her housing benefit claim, reflecting her new circumstances, to work with the council and secure over £300 in council tax hardship support, numerous food parcels, a £50 Christmas hamper and support with fuel bills.

EB said that they have "only been able to manage and get through the pandemic with the help of One Manchester and The Place at Platt Lane".



Thriviving Hollinwood is the culmination of years of strategic partnership working. A place-based initiative in Oldham led by Regenda Homes, it provides a holistic range of services and interventions which enable local people to begin a journey of change and fulfil their potential. Throughout the social and economic pressures of the Covid pandemic, Thriving Hollinwood has supported people from a variety of backgrounds in numerous ways.

The pandemic has had an enormous impact on our residents. Loss of income has seen families struggling to pay for food, utilities, housing, and child-related costs. Through Thriving Hollinwood, we have supported families to maximise their income. Financial gains totalling £56,685.52 have been awarded to families to help reduce financial pressures.

In addition, we have:

- Delivered over 160 hampers containing basic essentials, fruit and vegetables and treats.
- Delivered 60 Christmas presents to local families
- Provided hot meals on a weekly basis to local families.

This was funded through:

- £845 raised through crowdfunder.
- £400 donated by Regenda to purchase food.
- £850 donated by Oldham Council for fresh fruit and vegetables
- Luxury items were donated by staff and students of the Oasis academies
- £475 in individual donations for specific families in need.

Last year was especially challenging. However, Thriving Hollinwood has been able to deliver many front-line services to the community, and will continue to provide the valuable help and support that is needed.

REGENDA HOMES

Regenda Homes' dedicated and expert Financial Inclusion Team secured over £1.5million for over 1,100 Regenda Homes residents in additional benefits and grants. This was money our residents did not know they were entitled to. They have provided specialist money, debt, and welfare benefit advice, helping residents to sustain their tenancy and manage their money. They have recently teamed up with our neighbourhood colleagues to identify cases where Tenancy Support intervention is required to provide a holistic approach to support our residents. Our expert and impartial Financial Inclusion Team can provide help with:

- Benefits advice and help to apply (online, form filling, telephone applications, etc)
- Benefit appeals and challenging incorrect decisions (including sanction
- Specialist support with Universal Credit (including making claim, changes in circumstances and checking that awards have been worked out correctly)
- Grants to help with urgent needs such as rent arrears or essential household items.
- Support with utility debts (gas, electric and water)
- Budgeting advice
- Advice on opening a bank account.
- Signposting for free, confidential debt advice.

Here are some real examples of support we have provided to Regenda Homes residents:

A real life line - Regenda staff had contacted a vulnerable resident to check that she was ok following a diagnosis of terminal cancer. She mentioned that she had not been well, was bedridden and had recently given someone who had knocked on her door money to do food shop. This person never returned. She was rationing medicine due to not having enough and had no credit on her phone and no family or friends that she could rely on. Our team spoke to the resident and contacted the local crisis support service. They arranged for a food parcel to be delivered and set up ongoing support, putting the resident back in touch with her GP to make sure she received much needed medication.

One less worry - A resident was struggling to pay his rent and contacted our Financial Inclusion Team for support. His partner had recently passed away and he had three young children. He was worried about losing his home. Our team secured Discretionary Housing Payment of almost £700, which cleared his rent arrears in full. They arranged for the housing element of his Universal Credit to be paid directly to us to help with budgeting and provided debt advice.

We send out regular communications to our residents and carried out a door knocking campaign to target residents in arrears who would not engage with us. Staff from our Financial Inclusion and Neighbourhood Teams spent six weeks visiting residents, increasing engagement, and providing support where required.

Members of the team also nominated residents across the North West to receive hampers which were handed out just before Christmas, with one resident saying "Just received a call from the team to say I've been nominated for a Christmas hamper - how thoughtful and lovely of you, I didn't expect that. I'm very grateful to you."

SIX TOWN HOUSING

PROVIDING A TAILORED SERVICE FOR TENANTS IN ARREARS

The Rents team at Six Town Housing are taking a bespoke approach to arrears based on the profiling and targeting of tenants, offering access to different packages of support to suit their needs.

The new system includes use of automated text messages and emails that are sent to tenants when they miss rent payments, asking if they are okay or in need of support. Staff in the team then build an ongoing relationship with these tenants and others deemed to be at risk of falling into debt, ensuring they remain helpful and approachable.

Once their circumstances are established, the team will work with tenants to set up affordable payment plans or make referrals to different financial support packages and services that they would be eligible for to maximise their income. Examples include Winter Fuel grants from Bury Council, DWP benefits, Discretionary Housing Payments, or a referral to Six Town Housing's own tenant employment and training programme Steps To Success. Colleagues will support tenants with their applications for these services and for Universal Credit where required.

The team also make referrals to partner agencies such as Housing Benefit and the Citizens Advice Bureau that can provide further support, a partnership that has created in excess of £5m of income for tenants over the last 10 years. Referrals can also be made to Community Hubs for support with food parcels whenever this is necessary.

Automated monthly reminder texts can also be set up for tenants to help prevent accidentally missed payments and the development of a new app will make it easier to access rent statements.

A Communications plan for the team is currently in development, which aims to make the team even more approachable to increase the chance tenants contact them at the first sign they may not be able to pay their rent. As part of this, an upcoming video campaign will showcase several case studies where the team have helped tenants to access what they need to alleviate their debt.

As an example of the team's achievements, in January 2021 their support enabled tenants facing debt to be in receipt of over £20k of additional income.

Louise Chow, Co-ordinator of the Rent Team, said, "We do not want tenants to feel afraid about contacting us if they are worried about paying rent or find themselves in debt. We will do all we can to find a solution."



EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS

Stockport Homes' employment team has been busy helping people in Stockport in the last months during Covid. Our team delivers a bespoke employment service that guides individuals to find the employment role that is right for them. One of the customers the team has been helping is Carolyn Moston whose had a tough year; unfortunately losing her job, not only once but twice due to Covid-19. Luckily our Employment Support Manager, Amanda Ward met Carolyn through BBC Radio Manchester's '£10 Million Job Hunt'. Carolyn shares how this happened:

"I first lost my job in the beginning of February and my mum passed away a few weeks later, so it felt like my world ended. Luckily, I managed to get a job straight away in hospitality, but after the lockdown, that job wasn't viable anymore and in August I was made redundant. Since then, I have been struggling to get myself back out there, but BBC put me in contact with Amanda at Stockport Homes and rest is history!"

Employment Officer, Maria La Mattina has been supporting Carolyn in her job search since August. In less than two months this resulted in an interview that was successful, and Carolyn is soon starting her new career in customer services. "Maria has been amazing with our regular 1:1 sessions! Having that person who I can call for advice and support or to chat to, and sometimes cry to. I haven't been very happy in the last few months but this whole process has definitely boosted my confidence and my future now looks bright."

Our Employment Coaches provide advice and guidance to anyone living in Stockport. For more information you can contact the team on employment.support@stockporthomes.org or give them a call on 0161 474 3773 or visit <https://www.stockporthomes.org/advice-and-support/employment-support/>



YOUR LOCAL PANTRY

Your Local Pantry is run in collaboration with Foundations Stockport and Church Action on Poverty with the aim to depart from the food bank model, allowing users to shop with dignity. The majority of the food is provided by FareShare, Greater Manchester with some weekly supermarket donations, from Lidl, Co-op and Aldi stores in Stockport. Your Local Pantry Stockport has been quick to adapt to new ways of working, particularly during the pandemic, coordinating and delivering over 4,500 food packs working with Stockport Council during the first national lockdown to those needing additional support with food. The 5 pantries followed COVID – safe procedures and remained open for those to attend.

During the six weeks summer holidays, these pantries offered a family membership for £5 instead of the standard £3.50 shop, enabling them to purchase double the amount of food and a homemade meal for 4 provided by the local community cafes – First Stop Café and Offerton Community Café. The weekly value of a family membership, combined with their normal pantry shop, is around £30 which enables families to save this on their food shopping. This membership was popular, so the Stockport-based pantries now offer this weekly. During the lead up to Christmas the pantries offered 110 free Christmas dinner packs for members at Brinnington Pantry funded by Brinnington Big Local. These packs provided food to cook a Christmas dinner for four valued at £16 per bag.

Your Local Pantry have been working closely with families during the third national lockdown to offer free weekly lunch packs providing extra support whilst schools are closed. They have been working with several organisations within Stockport who have donated food items and funding for these packs, such as Brinnington Big Local. Families that attend the pantries in Stockport have expressed how helpful these packs are, on top of their 10 items for £3.50. Members across the Stockport-based pantries have been thankful and very grateful for our services over the year, with some commenting: 'Thank you all so much, you're truly appreciated, and I don't think we'd have managed this year without you!' 'Thank you, you have helped me a lot.'

For more information, please visit <https://www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/> or contact the Foundations Stockport Community Food Officer at pantry@foundations-stockport.org

MONEY ADVICE TEAM

Since 23rd March 2020, Stockport Homes Money Advice Team have helped more than 1,100 customers to access information, advice and support with benefits, securing over £6million in benefits and grants. We quickly adapted our service to ensure we could continue to support our customers whilst keeping everyone safe and we're proud of the assistance we've been able to continue to provide to our customers during this difficult period.

An example of some of the help we've been able to offer is SHG tenant Miss G. Miss G had never been in rent arrears prior to the pandemic. A fully qualified nurse, she was working in ICU at the local hospital on a part time basis when the pandemic started. Because of the risk of infection and the fact that she was living with her 4-year-old autistic child, she felt unable to continue working and left her position at the hospital. Keen to continue working in some capacity Miss G was able to secure some nursing agency work, and her sister was helping her with childcare, but her sister then became ill and was hospitalised, leaving her with no childcare support and unable to work at all. Having never been in this position before Miss G was at her wits end and admits that she buried her head; she found it really hard to cope, especially as she was also having to complete benefit application forms for her child. Her rent arrears were increasing as she hadn't been making regular payments to her account and she delayed claiming Universal Credit because she was really worried about it.

Despite regular attempts by the team to make contact and offer support, because of the stress she was under she did not accept this help straight away and the team have had to be persistent in their efforts to make sure she has taken steps to improve things. She has now claimed Universal Credit, is receiving ongoing support, is accessing childcare and is waiting for her first payment. This has enabled her to claim an Advance payment to meet her essential living costs and she has also been awarded money off her Council Tax Bill due to being directly affected financially by Covid, all of which has helped to ease the financial pressures she was facing and improve her mental wellbeing.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

Throughout the varying Covid restrictions, Stockport Homes has adapted its Independent Living service to suit our customers., carrying out weekly/fortnightly welfare calls to all vulnerable customers, ensuring they have access to everything they need around food, fuel and medication.

Cracking Good Food have moved into our communal kitchen at Wimborne Close, creating weekly food parcels for those in need. The Specialist Older Persons Outreach Worker based within the Independent Living Team works with older people living in the community to support them to remain living independently in their own home for as long as possible.

As part of an annual programme of Winter Welfare Visits , vulnerable customers are provided with support and advice on keeping warm, warm homes discount, energy advice, fuel top up vouchers, pension credit eligibility, money advice support, blue badge applications and general benefit checks. Additionally, numerous referrals are generated in relation to adaptations, fire safe and well visits, falls prevention, pantry scheme, assisted gardening, housing options and accessing our Carecall service.



FOUNDATIONS FURNITURE RECYCLING

Throughout lockdown, Foundations Furniture Recycling team has worked tirelessly to support households lacking essential items such as beds, fridges and cookers. Sourcing items and safe delivery was difficult, a creative challenge for the team who still processed over 300 enquiries, with 152 deliveries and collections completed. Human stories illustrate the range of households supported.

One family's fridge freezer broke on a Friday night, just after their weekly food shop using their monthly UC monies. No recycled appliances were available, but an affordable reconditioned device was sourced by the team, paid for by relatives and delivered outside normal working hours to save the food.

A young woman was pregnant with no bed or cooking facilities. With no cookers in stock, table-top hobs and microwaves were purchased in bulk and distributed to this lady and others with no cooking facilities.

Full furniture packages including kettles, toasters, soft furnishings (sourced from SHG staff!), microwaves and tabletop cookers were delivered at 48 hours' notice to local NHS staff forced to move into temporary accommodation.

FURNISHED TENANCIES

Stockport Homes' Furnished Tenancy service has remained open throughout the restrictions, as customers have faced financial hardship either through furlough or loss of income. It has also been more challenging to source second-hand items. Since April 2020, we have created a further 90 new furnished tenancies, supporting customers who have been homeless, fleeing DV or ASB during the pandemic and do not have the resources or family to help set up a new property.

THE POVERTY ISSUE

You can find out more about the work of
Greater Manchester Housing Providers by visiting the website
www.gmhousing.co.uk

or follow them on Twitter for the latest news
[@GMHousing](https://twitter.com/GMHousing)

