

## DASL Specialist Advice Service Survey, October/November 2014

### Introduction

Disability Advice Service Lambeth provides advice and information for disabled people living and working in the London Borough of Lambeth. The Specialist Advice Service is targeted particularly at people with mental health issues and young disabled people under the age of 18 because of the lack of expert and accessible advice casework provision in Lambeth for these groups. However, the service will also take on other disabled clients and those with long term conditions when the services available through other providers (LBL Every Pound Counts and One Lambeth Advice) are not appropriate or sufficiently accessible or where advice is best provided for a client alongside other DASL services.

The service can help people with advice casework on a variety of issues including: welfare benefits; debt; housing; community care and accessible transport services.

### The survey

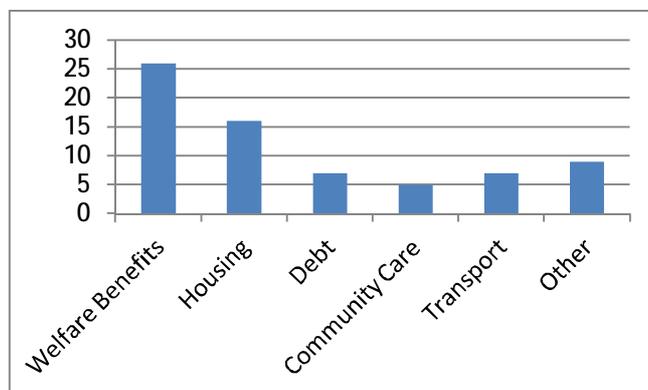
In order to make sure that the Advice Service is effective and catering for the needs of the people it is serving, a survey is conducted periodically to look at the satisfaction of service users.

This survey was carried out in October 2014 when 60 questionnaires were sent out to clients who had contacted the service during the period October 2013 – October 2014. Of these, 28 were returned to DASL completed. This is a 47% response rate. Whilst most respondents answered the majority of the questions posed, some people did not answer all the questions so total responses to each question do not always add up to 28.

### Results

#### 1. What did you receive advice about?

Welfare Benefits	26
Housing	15
Debt	7
Community Care	5
Transport	7
Other	8



Other issues included Tribunals, form filling, ATOS reviews, dealing with the Home Office and A4E

## 2. How did you hear about DASL's advice service?

Mental hospital	1
Brixton Advice Centre	1
Lambeth & Southwark MIND	1
Lambeth Council	1
Terrence Higgins Trust	1
GP Surgery	1
Friend	9
Community Health	1
We Are 336 (Lambeth Accord)	1
Jobcentre	1
Support Worker	1
Relative	1
Waterloo Action Group	1
Not sure/Can't remember	3
Total	24

## 3. Did you find it easy to contact us?

Yes	27
No	1
Not sure	0
Total	28

Comments: Sometimes when the adviser is away for long periods of time this may cause problems if no-one can cover his caseload; It would be helpful if someone could callback to say he is away ill; Sometimes he is too busy to call - and if this goes on for a long time it gets me feeling anxious - I don't know if he will ever call back or what. Other than that he is a deep well of good advice and information and a generally lovely (but sometimes grumpy) human being; It has improved now as in 2013 John Martin and DASL enquiry line were hard to contact and sometimes it would take several days before speaking to anyone

## 4. How clearly did the adviser explain how our service works and what we could or could not do for you?

Very clearly	20
Quite clearly	5
Not very clearly	2
Not clearly at all	0
Don't know	0
Total	27

Comments: When all is going well, advice is super and help top notch

## 5. Did you understand the advice you were given?

Yes	19
No	0
Not sure	0
Total	19

## 6. Were you satisfied that we were helpful and friendly?

Very satisfied	26
Fairly satisfied	1
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0
Dissatisfied	1
Not sure	0

Comments: I was only dissatisfied once. The issue was resolved. There was only the once which I am happy enough with the outcome. Things were resolved by the adviser and I have the utmost respect for him and I know he does an amazing job under difficult circumstances at times.

## 7. Overall, how satisfied were you with the service from the adviser?

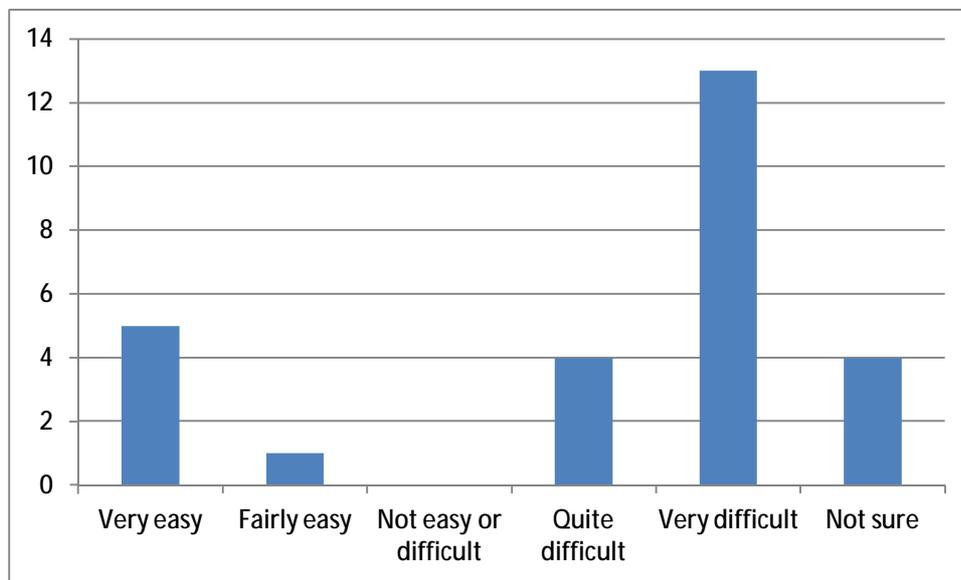
Very satisfied	27
Fairly satisfied	0
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0
Dissatisfied	1
Not sure	0
Total	28

Comments: Time taken was too long.

## 8. How easy or difficult would it have been for you to have received advice about this issue without DASL's help?

Very easy	5
Fairly easy	1
Not easy or difficult	0
Quite difficult	3
Very difficult	14
Not sure	4
Total	27

Comments: If this is about the time when John was away, I contacted David Strong and the issue was resolved quickly. David Strong seems to me to be a good person who wants to have a calm resolution for everyone. At the time he was very helpful. Much appreciated.



9. Which one of the following best describes how you would tell other people about our service?

Would recommend without being asked	19
Would recommend if asked	8
Would neither recommend nor be critical	1
Would be critical if asked	0
Not sure	0
Total	28

Comments: The problem is that people who I've said to call DASL have had very different experiences - mostly no-one has replied to their messages left on the answerphone so friends' experiences are different from mine. It seems DASL is very busy and sometimes too busy to cram in all the return calls. I'd recommend DASL more if I thought it would help

10. How do you think we could improve our service?

Comments: To be available all the time;  
 More staff to answer the phone and not always answerphone;  
 I am not sure as I am a new service user. My case and support has just started and I would like to say more but I can't at this time. Maybe in the future if you'll send me a new form;  
 There's not much more you could do to improve except, maybe, expand. Be more of you;  
 Very friendly approach, very organised;  
 Employ more people like John Martin who understands our needs;  
 Return calls! Reply to pleas for help. Answer the phone, collect messages on the machine AND reply!;  
 Time taken was too long;  
 Already doing more with the cuts;

More staff and more funding;

I found your service to be extremely helpful, I was listened to, given productive advice oral and written. Information received was clear and constant in convenient, timely and professional manner. I would not hesitate in recommending this service;

More staff;

I believe you need more staff as you are increasingly in demand;

To have a drop-in time each day;

Having more staff/volunteers to answer the phones. John Martin is a caseworker and needs help with the phones;

The answerphone is always full and it needs to be empty every day;

I doubt you can except training more advisors in order to reduce the workload of John Martin;

To have a drop-in time each day;

Need more staff to answer phones and help John Martin with excessive workload.

11. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about our service?

Comments:

It's been very wonderful. You save my life, I could've been dead a long time ago; 10/10 for all the staff that I have met;

I would like to say that the few times I came or got in touch with John Martin. I felt very welcome and felt a lot of empathy and understanding;

Very good service and helpful and friendly staff;

Without your help and support I would've found things very difficult. You're a great help and I hope you'll always be around to help others who are mentally ill and disabled;

Perfect and very professional;

David Strong is also a nice person who will do his best to they to get to the bottom of things;

DASL actively involve to support and advise from start to end on social issues that significantly affect family life and disability issues;

Without it I would have ended up killing myself because I was on my own;

You are doing a good job working with limited resources;

Thank you forever for the help I have had over the years;

DASL are always helpful and knowledgeable whenever we need them. They understand how we feel not just what we want; before coming to DASL my benefits and my brothers were wrong. John Martin sorted our benefits out, advised me to register with the Carers' Hub and is now trying to resolve our housing problem.

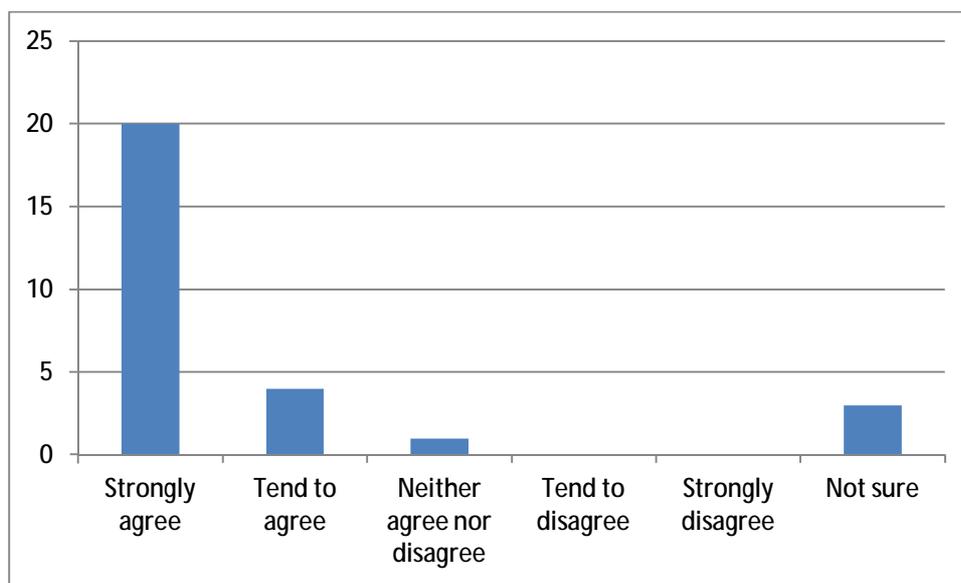
## 12. How would you rate your quality of life generally?

Very good	6
Fairly good	4
Neither good nor poor	8
Fairly poor	7
Very poor	1
Not sure	2
Total	28

## 13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement; 'DASL has improved my quality of life'?

Strongly agree	20
Tend to agree	4
Neither agree nor disagree	1
Tend to disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0
Not sure	3
Total	28

Comments: John Martin is an angel, he knows not what he is. His redeeming factor, besides answering the phone, is his smile when I see him again.



## 14. In what ways has DASL made a difference to your quality of life?

	Yes	No	Not sure
a. My physical health has improved	7	8	9

Comments: Able to have good days when I can support my family; my physical health, unfortunately, is still deteriorating.

b. My mental health is better – I feel less stressed and worried	18	5	4
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Comments: I have a lot of problems dealing with benefits. John Martin has taken pressure off me by doing this; My mental health issue have not changed and I still have to see my GP on a fairly regular basis; I am able to bring official letters to DASL for support and guidance; I am no longer stressed due to the advice and support received from DASL; I have less financial concerns; I do not worry so much once John Martin is involved.

c. I feel more able to get out and about in my local area 14 6 5

Comments: About the same level as before; because of additional funds.

d. I feel like I have more choices and more control in my life 13 4 8

Comments: I tend to be quite isolated but try my best to look after myself; because of additional funds.

e. I am living somewhere more suitable for my needs and am managing my housing situation 12 8 4

Comments: Absolutely not. I am on Lambeth Council's waiting list for a transfer; Repairs issues and not adaptable to my family health conditions, long term issues; my property is not suitable to my needs and John Martin has been giving me advice on how to move (awkward as another agency is also involved); DASL are helping to resolve my housing issue (overcrowding).

f. I feel more safe and secure 13 3 5

Comments: Absolutely not. Anti-social behaviour from some neighbouring tenants within my estate and block

g. (If not in employment) I feel more ready to think about doing some training or looking for a job 6 11 6

Comments: No, I am not fit for any of the above; Getting a career advancement for future employment is now priority; because of my health situation regular employment is unlikely.

h. My social life has improved and I feel less isolated. I am now able to spend more time doing the things I enjoy 13 5 8

Comments: My social life is much the same and not very interesting; due to your service advising me as to my correct entitlement.

i. I feel better about myself and more confident to deal with issues that crop up 13 5 7

Comments: No, I find day-to-day living very stressful; With DASL's help; I still heavily rely on DASL services as my issues are complicated in nature.

j. My family life has improved 10 4 7

Comments: I have no close by family only one older brother in Kent; Just the same; My children don't talk to me.

- k. I understand my household budget better and feel more able to manage my money 12 3 9

Comments: I manage to the best of my ability and get by; definitely as my personal budget has improved considerably.

- l. I now have more money to spend on things which are important to me 10 8 6

### Summary and conclusions

- The survey shows that disabled people in Lambeth find out about the Specialist Advice Service from a wide variety of sources; however, further advertising may prove to be beneficial. The majority of people access the service through statutory or other voluntary organisations so it may be worthwhile considering other potential sources and targeting these sources in the future.
- People contacted DASL Advice Service for a variety of reasons, the most common being for advice on welfare benefits. This includes work for people who have to attend Benefits Tribunals. The adviser meets with people before the date of the Tribunal hearing to go through what they can expect with them and to make sure they are fully prepared for the hearing. Most callers had more than one issue they wished to discuss.
- People found the service easy to contact when it is fully staffed but several people commented that things are difficult when the Advice Service Manager is either ill or away. In future it may be advisable to ensure that the answerphone and/or the website gives details of how long the service is likely to be unmanned and alternative sources of help for those people with an urgent issue.
- The level of satisfaction with the service was high and the majority of people found it easy to understand what they were being told. Most respondents felt that they would have had difficulty in accessing advice without DASL's help.
- It may be a good idea to try and ensure that DASL publishes factsheets on commonly asked questions and that these factsheets are available both as hard-copy and on the website so that people can at least access some information when the adviser is not available.
- Improvements suggested for the service included increasing the number of staff available; ensuring that all messages were responded to in a timely fashion and having a drop-in service as well as a telephone/email service. All these improvements would be dependent on securing additional funding for the service to sustain the Advice Service Manager's post, enable additional volunteers to be recruited, trained and supported and to allow more flexibility to be built into the way the service is provided.
- The majority of respondents felt that their quality of life had improved thanks to DASL's intervention and that their health had improved as a result. Around half of the respondents felt safer and more secure than they had done before contacting DASL and half also felt that their financial situation had improved as a result of their contact with DASL.