

The Big Lottery Project

The Big Lottery Project has been running for nearly two years now and we have again exceeded our annual targets. More and more people are coming to the service through our surgeries and the project has developed an excellent reputation through word of mouth. We are seeing a marked increase in the numbers of people needing help and support with financial problems. Older people on low incomes are hit hard by the effects of recession and rising costs in energy and basic living expenses. Often people present to us in chaotic circumstances and we help them often through a combination of crisis and citizen advocacy, with a volunteer working alongside me in the initial stages and then taking over the partnership in the longer term once the most immediate problems are addressed.

Experience emphasises for us the increasing need for advocacy provision to help those directly affected by front line cuts to services. We are pleased to have recruited sixteen new volunteers to help extend the reach of the project and the scope of the work undertaken. We are enormously grateful for the tireless support of our increasingly large team of volunteers who staff the drop-ins, help with admin and take on direct advocacy work with partners. Our volunteers and partners are a great source of inspiration and ideas about the future direction of the project also and we value all their input.

We seek to work with as diverse a group of partners as possible and to this end have opened a new drop-in in Abbey Wood in addition to the three which are already well established. Working in partnership with a local BME community group called 'Listening Ears', we are

now holding sessions every first and third Friday as part of 'Feel Good Friday' from 1pm till 3pm at The Pavilion, Viola Avenue SE2. We hope to provide training for volunteers working with 'Listening Ears' in order to continue our work of raising awareness of the benefits of advocacy and to share experiences to help us better understand the communities we are working in.

We are looking forward to another productive year of making advocacy more accessible to older people locally and with funding support expanding the project and making it sustainable in the longer term.

Gina Aston, Advocacy Project Worker