



Friendly, local and
fit for the future

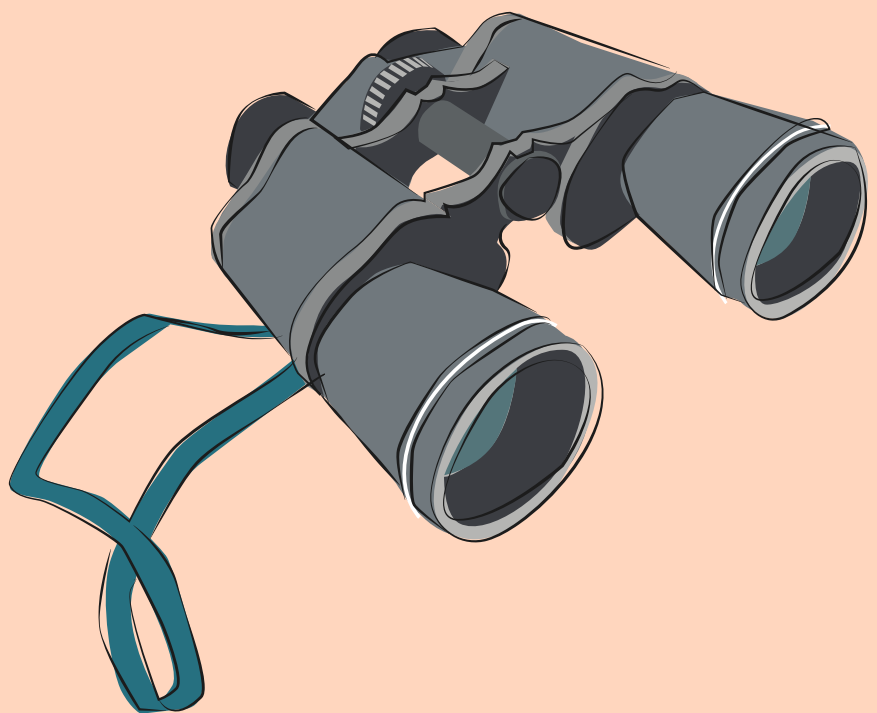
Strategic Plan 2019-2024

Friendly, local and fit for the future

We are St Pauls Advice Centre and we fight poverty and injustice in our community by providing free professional advice and equipping people with knowledge and skills so that they can access their rights and fulfil their obligations.

This strategic plan is rooted in a series of enquiries and stakeholder consultations, including staff, trustees, clients and partners, that took place throughout 2018. Using appreciative inquiry methodologies, we assessed strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results (SOAR) and examined the external challenges and changes facing the sector, the organisation and the community we serve. Exploration and analysis of the resulting data determined key areas where SPAC will focus its energy over the next five years.

Our plans for the next five years highlight four areas of focus to realise our aspirations. Operational plans underpin each goal and will be communicated so that trustees, staff, volunteers and stakeholders clearly understand our vision, values, goals and how we measure our progress towards them.



Foreword

People come to SPAC when they are stuck, scared, bewildered and frustrated. They need to sort out a problem with their benefits, perhaps by challenging an unfair decision. Some need help dealing with a debt to stop it escalating, whilst others seek clarification of how to secure their immigration status and documentation.

Working in areas of high need

We give free independent advice to people living and working in St Pauls and East Bristol – areas of high urban deprivation. Our team is dedicated to helping vulnerable people achieve positive outcomes by helping clients clarify their situation, understand their options and secure their rights.

Building on our foundations

When they established SPAC almost 50 years ago, our founders understood that addressing peoples' problems would alleviate immediate hardship and help build foundations for them, their families and the community by increasing independence, stability and wellbeing. The communities that need and use our services now have diversified and changed since the 1960s but our drive to pursue positive outcomes for them has not.

With so many community organisations cutting services or closing, it is an achievement in itself that we have been able to maintain services. Made possible through a combined strategy of income diversification, partnership working and new projects, this strategy remains central to the new 5 year plan.

Adapting to increasing complexity

The information we gathered in the process of developing this plan emphasised a trend we've noticed for some time. The issues that clients bring, their lives and histories, and the systems surrounding them have increased in complexity. It's rare now that we can give a quick bit of advice enabling a client to take action for themselves.

We need (and want) to unpick issues, find out how they are connected and work systematically to solve them. Unfortunately this is not easy: restrictions on funding mean we have resources to help with some issues but not with others; this is unhelpful for clients and frustrating for us.

People centred

A key theme of this strategy is *People Centred* and we have renewed our commitment to delivering a more holistic model focused on our clients' wants and needs. This might involve difficult choices; this plan will be essential in guiding us to make confident, strategic decisions. Our other key themes are *Reach*, *Challenge & Influence* and *Resilience & Sustainability*.

A bit about us

St Pauls Advice Centre (SPAC) is a long established Bristol charity at the heart of St Pauls. Our welcoming and helpful approach has established a high level of trust amongst local people, including those that find it difficult to engage with other advice services because of obstacles including language, culture, disability and mental health.

We provide our services for free because our clients must already overcome barriers to access help and our free service enables those that feel excluded from mainstream services to access professional support.

Historically, households arriving from overseas settled in St Pauls because more prosperous neighbourhoods were inaccessible. This is still the case, although the impact of gentrification on affordable housing is being felt.

This is a vibrant and diverse neighbourhood but many live in poverty, affecting all aspects of life: health, housing, education, employment and mental wellbeing.

Many of our clients experience further inequalities and discrimination for reasons of race, religion, mental health and disability. Harsh welfare, legal aid and immigration reforms have affected our client group disproportionately.

Client snapshot for 2018

- 38% reported having a disability, chronic ill-health or mental health issue
- 63% were Local Authority or Housing Association tenants
- 88% were not employed full-time
- 69% were from BAME communities
- 66% speak English as a second language



Our wider strategic fit

We are firmly committed to support and promote changes to policies that will improve the lives of our clients.

Local connections

At a local level, SPAC is active within a vibrant voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector working to realise Bristol's One City Plan.

We are a lead agency in ACFA, the local advice network that collaborates, co-ordinates and develops advice services across the city.

National membership

Nationally, our membership of and accreditation by organisations and regulatory bodies including Advice UK, Advice Quality Standard (AQS), Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) ensures that our advice services comply with robust national standards.

Delivering services in partnership has become integral to much of our work and we will develop this during the lifespan of the plan.



Member of



The voice of independent advice

Vision

A thriving community where people feel secure knowing they have a good standard of life built on equality and justice.



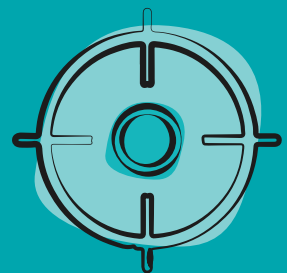
Mission

We fight poverty and inequality in our community by providing professional advice and equipping people with knowledge and skills so they can access their rights and fulfil their responsibilities.



Charitable aims

To relieve poverty by providing and promoting the provision of free legal advice, assistance and other legal services which would not otherwise be available due to lack of means.



Our values



Client focus

We take time to listen and understand our clients' stories. Our advice and support helps people solve urgent challenges. We help clients develop their skills and knowledge so that they're equipped to solve their own problems.



Justice

We champion the legal rights of individuals. We pursue fair and just outcomes for them. We challenge discrimination and disadvantage, and tackle systemic inequality.



Community

We listen to and prioritise the needs of the communities we serve, ensuring good accessibility and availability of services. We work with partners that share our vision and make change happen for the community.



Integrity

We behave honestly, ethically and openly with clients, colleagues and partners. We are consistent in our actions, principles, expectations and outcomes.



Expertise

We are professional, organised and competent. We adapt to changes in policy and the law, keeping our advice and support as helpful as possible. We value and support our experienced and skillful team.



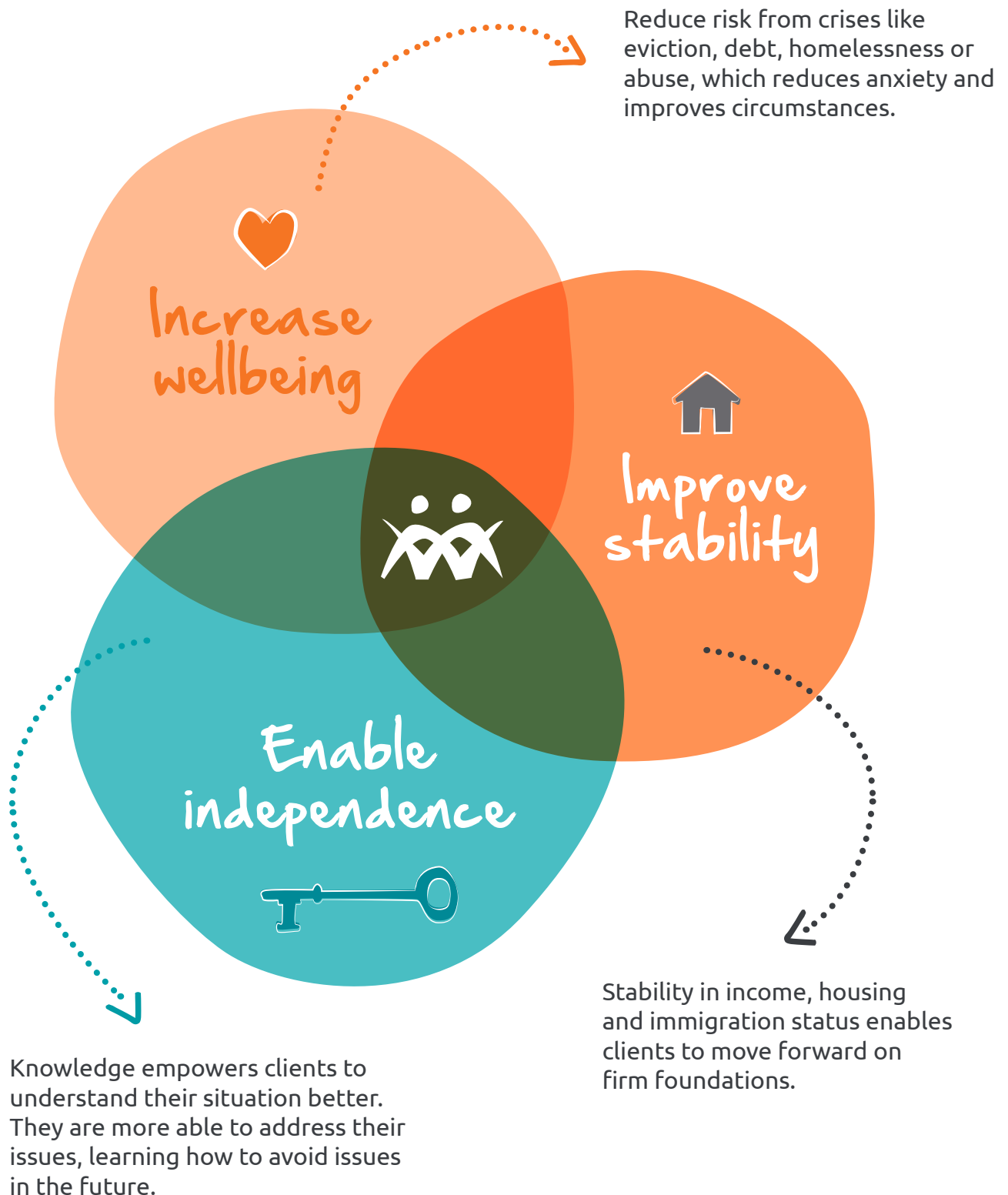
Respect

We treat people kindly, fairly and consistently. We focus on giving the right advice rather than judging the people who need it.

We aim to treat everyone equally whilst valuing diversity and respecting people's differences. Where possible, we adapt our services to take account of different needs.

Our aims: outcomes for clients

We have three key aims when we think about outcomes for our clients, all centred around a belief that if we empower clients, they will be better placed to meet their own needs in the future.



Our work: how we deliver for clients

We deliver these strategic outcomes through the provision of free, independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgmental advice.

Advice and support

We offer advice and support through drop in and appointment sessions, by telephone and in community venues, where a conversation with an adviser can help clients create a plan of action to turn problems around.

Timely interventions

We aim to work with clients at an early stage to prevent problems becoming crises.

Understanding complexity

We understand that problems are often complex and interrelated so we work with clients to identify root causes and take the right actions, in the right order, to find a resolution.

Focused expertise

We take action on behalf of clients, but only where our position and experience will help achieve a better outcome – for example, in negotiating debts.

Speaking the right language

We offer services in English, Somali, Punjabi and Urdu (and use external interpreters for other languages) so that any individual can understand and take action on their problems.

Partnership working

We work in partnership with other voluntary and public organisations to provide services and increase our impact in the community.

Developing community resilience

We build capacity and resilience within the community, developing the skills of peer advocates and supporting them to aid others around identified goals.

Our context: changes and challenges

We analysed challenges and changes, external to and within SPAC, that have or will have a notable effect on our clients and operational development. These are our main findings.

Challenge 1: Severe deprivation

Most of our clients live in extremely low income areas, including the UK's most deprived 1% (Lawrence Hill), where 46% of children are growing up in income stressed households.

Clients are unable to pay for essentials such as food and rent.

Crises arise from a shortfall in funds when unexpected payments need to be made.

Mistakes in benefit payments frequently cause high stress, rent arrears and increased debts.

Challenge 2: Hostility, discrimination and exclusion

Our clients are amongst the most marginalised in the community with 70% from BAME backgrounds and 38% who are sick and long term disabled.

Hostility to immigrants has risen since the Brexit referendum. Some EU citizens are facing difficulties establishing 'settled status'.

Some clients have been affected by the Windrush scandal and need help securing their immigration status.

Government systems have been digitised and many clients do not have access to computers or devices or have the knowledge or confidence to utilise them.

Challenge 3: Complexity of need

Most of our clients don't speak English as their first language, so it's difficult for them to understand and engage with processes.

Peoples' rights have been steadily reduced, making it more complex to fight their corner and correct poor decisions by agencies including the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Clients tend to have multiple issues that need unpicking and addressing in sequence.

Although many of clients are new to us each year, a significant number (46% in 2018) have returned to us with additional or follow up issues.

Challenge 4: Reduced and less secure funding sources

It is increasingly difficult to secure reliable funding to plan and deliver services. Cuts to Council funding have been deep and are set to continue.

Identifying new funding takes time – although we have diversified our funding base and developed innovative collaborations with partner organisations.

An increasingly competitive marketplace focuses on delivery of contracts.

While funders rightly require evidence of quality, impact and sustainability, this results in needing to develop specific systems for each one's varying measurement requirements to demonstrate our effectiveness.

We are in danger of delivering services that meet an agenda that does not align with our own or with the needs we have identified.

Challenge 5: Cuts to local government & voluntary sector

Bristol City Council information points and libraries have closed leaving people with fewer places to access information and help.

This particularly affects people that are not able to travel out of their local area.

There is a lack of free immigration advice available.

Challenge 6: Demand – from clients and funders

Demand for advice remains high and we are not able to give everyone the help they need. Onerous targets and reporting schedules for contract work means staff

experience stress as they seek to deliver both services and the data analysis required to fulfill obligations.

Challenge 7: Physical infrastructure deteriorating

As the building from which we operate ages, it becomes less fit for purpose. There are health and safety issues for staff and

clients as well as poor accessibility to the majority of the building.

Challenge 8: Harsh government policies

Welfare reforms in the name of austerity have fallen hardest on low-income families with children, on women, and on sick and disabled people, as seen in benefit caps, restricted eligibility for benefits, rising pension age and falling value of pensions

and benefits in real terms. The 'hostile environment' for immigrants, removing legal aid and the right to appeal, has led to much suffering and miscarriages of justice, particularly affecting BAME people.

Our focus: plans for 2019-24

Reflecting on the changes and challenges ahead, we explored how SPAC can most effectively support the community over the next five years. Four themes emerged; these are the goals that will determine our focus.

Goal 1: Person-centred

Put people at the heart of our service

Maintain an integrated advice service tailored to the needs of individuals

- Take a holistic approach to advice giving – listening to and understanding the objectives and outcomes that the client wants.
- Provide an environment that is welcoming, non-judgmental and accessible.
- Maintain specialisms including debt, immigration and welfare benefits.
- Explore ways of helping our clients engage with digital solutions.

- Secure funding that enables us to support our clients in line with our mission, vision and values.

Focus the motivation, contribution and fulfilment of staff and volunteers towards SPAC's aims and objectives

- Continued professional training and expert supervision.
- Supportive environment and access to help and support when needed.
- Review staff roles/resources.
- Evaluate internal processes and systems.

Goal 2: Reach

Target deprived communities in East Bristol through asset based approaches that recognise the strengths of our clients and community networks.

Provide a generalist advice service to meet the changing needs of the community

- Identify, respond to and manage future community advice needs.
- Provide accessible advice at venues within the community.
- Provide dual language service.

Work in partnership with other organisations to enhance support available to our clients

- Develop delivery and funding partnerships with other public and voluntary sector organisations.
- Continue networking with other advice agencies, sharing best practice and pooling resources where possible.

Each goal is broken down into strategic objectives. Annual work plans will be used to guide, track and monitor the delivery and success of this plan, all driven and underpinned by our vision, mission and values.

Goal 3: Challenge and Influence

Campaign in a strategic way, using our limited resources to deliver the greatest possible changes for the most beneficiaries

Champion and contribute to wider social policy issues

- Influence the reversal/adjustment of strategies and policies that negatively affect our beneficiaries.

- Build a strong evidence base.

Promote value of community advice in Bristol

- Work with ACFA to influence BCC policy/decision makers.

Goal 4: Resilience and sustainability

Be a robust organisation equipped to respond to change

Embed a robust, sustainable mixed funding model

- Continue to develop multi-year strategic funding plan.
- Investigate the options and opportunities to create chargeable services in addition to our core, free generalist advice service.
- Increase partnership working to access opportunities.
- Innovate in service delivery to access different funding.

Secure sustainable premises

- Secure long-term tenancy.
- Negotiate asset transfer of building from BCC.
- Develop a fundraising strategy, case for support and plans to renovate and extend the building.

Uphold reputation as a trusted organisation delivering quality services

- Maintain quality standards.
- Develop and adapt governance protocols to changing times.
- Develop strategic approach to evidence the difference our services make.



Outcomes: impact of our work

Our work contributes to a number of positive outcomes for clients as illustrated by these stories from people we have helped.

Retention and take-up of benefits

Arriving from Pakistan as a young bride, Amina faced persecution by new family members, resulting in chronic physical and mental health problems.

Now in her late 50s, Amina's incapacity entitled her to receive help, including employment support allowance (ESA).

This was until a change of policy when she was assessed fit to work and her entitlement stopped, leaving her without money and any independence.

We compiled a strong appeal with

compelling evidence of her difficulties and continued incapacity to work. This submission led to an overturning of the DWP's decision and the reinstatement and back payment of her entitlements.

Amina's situation remains difficult because her physical and mental health is very poor.

However, she has regained some self-confidence and dignity, as her niece explains:

"Auntie was suffering from insomnia, suicidal thoughts and panic attacks – she wouldn't leave the house. It's very good that she is visiting family again. You made this happen."



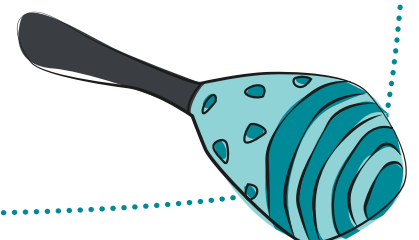
Improved housing situation

Farnaz and Sabha are proud of their home – their three young children are happy and healthy here, but this was not always the case.

Sabha laughs about it now but it wasn't amusing to view her neighbours on the floor below through the rotting floorboards of their tiny rented flat. Their building, inadequately maintained, had fallen into disrepair and the boiler had

broken, leaving the family without hot water or heating. Numerous requests to the landlord to fix the problem had gone unanswered and the cold and damp was causing serious health problems.

We assisted with an application for emergency rehousing, securing a transfer to a housing association property where the family remain, happy and secure in safe and stable accommodation.



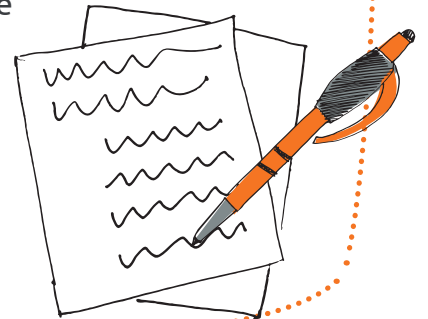
Increased ability to engage with systems, bureaucracies and finances

Widowed during the Somali civil war, Saynab came to Bristol with her baby in 2003. The new environment, culture and language was difficult to absorb and Saynab felt isolated and afraid.

Without childcare, attending English classes was impossible. Saynab first came to us for help to appeal a disability benefits decision but our interventions have gone much further and helped build real independence. Support to build financial capability, including opening and managing a bank account and paying bills has given

Saynab autonomy. Calling the housing office felt impossible but with practice and encouragement, it is no longer an issue. Now, Saynab is learning English, has become far more self-sufficient and her newfound confidence is irrepressible.

“My ambition is to work for the United Nations,” she explains. Her first step is a volunteer role with Bristol Refugee Rights, welcoming new arrivals to the city she feels proud to call home.



Debt reduction and increased income

A year after her relationship disintegrated, Donna came for advice when the bank threatened to repossess the family home.

Despite working full time, a drop in family income meant Donna had built up substantial mortgage arrears.

Her two teenage daughters, still upset about the departure of their dad, were finding it difficult to cope with the idea of moving to a new neighbourhood, home and school. Both were exhibiting signs of stress and anxiety through truancy and self-destructive behaviour.

This enabled the family to remain in their home, which has helped the girls feel more secure, leading to a better outlook for them all.

We helped Donna petition and make fresh arrangements with her lender and identified additional financial entitlements to increase the family income.



St Pauls Advice Centre is a local independent charity and voluntary donations are an important part of our income.

There are many ways that people, businesses or organisations can support our work:

Financial support

- Nominate us as your charity of the year
- Make a donation at www.stpaulsAdvice.org.uk/support-us
- Hold a staff fundraising event
- Leave a legacy to St Pauls Advice Centre in your will

Volunteer

- Volunteer your skills, time or resources

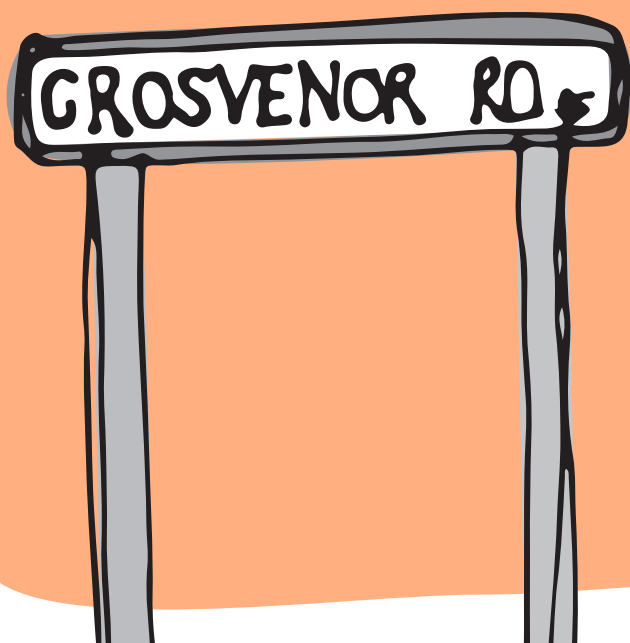
Raise awareness

- Raise awareness of what we do and the services we provide
- Let others know who we are – an independent charity who needs local support

Contact us to find out more

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