**Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) is a partnership of local advice centres that provide free advice and representation in areas of social welfare law. The advice centres work together to ensure Tower Hamlets residents have access to free, high quality advice on welfare benefits, debt, housing and other areas of social welfare law.  Our website** [**www.thcan.org.uk**](http://www.thcan.org.uk) **has information on advice providers services, factsheets and contact details –feel free to send me information / updates on advice services to include on this o**

**The outbreak of coronavirus has resulted in closure of advice centres for Face to Face services, we are continuing and support our clients by phone/digital means contact details are available on the THCAN website and ‘advice services delivery’ document attached.**

**Items**

1. Welfare rights advisors July meeting details (zoom login/password)
2. Welfare rights advisors minutes June meeting (NRPF clients, Resident Support Scheme, Bedroom Tax DHP automatic extensions,)
3. Information and resources (CPAG win case re 2 paydays in UC assessment period, Children Society individual grants information, tribunal services user group meeting info)
4. Vacancies (Age UK and Young Foundation)
5. FREE  Training (NVQs In Advice and Guidance, Benefits and Coronavirus, Employment rights and coronavirus)
6. Specialist advice workers emails
7. **Welfare Rights Advisors Next meeting  Thursday  23/7//20   2pm**

Topic: Tower Hamlets Welfare Rights Advisors Forum  - Time: Jul 23, 2020 02:00 PM London – NOTE you don’t need to register

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/5190676838?pwd=c0N1dFRQaGI0Ynl1bFlRR2ZKM21hUT09>

Meeting ID: 519 067 6838

Password: 1DcHqf

1. **Minutes 11/6/20  Welfare Rights Advisors Zoom meeting**

* Advice Centres represented (Island Advice, Limehouse Project, Firstlove, East End CAB) and Housing Associations benefit advisors (Gateway, Spitalfieds, East End Homes, Newlon, Gateway) stated all centres are closed for face to face visits but they are still offering advice by phone/digital means.  Services are being well used but all have capacity to continue to advise new clients

**ACTION**:  housing associations with benefit advisors please send me your details, advisors thought it would be useful to have a list of these services (they are not included on the THCAN website as they not independent advice agencies)

* Amber Island Advice Centre did presentation on benefit changes since last meeting
* Self Employment Income Support Scheme will be extended with those eligible able to claim a second and final grant capped at £6,570.
* From 1 July 2020, businesses will be given the flexibility to bring furloughed employees back part time. And from August 2020, the level of government grant provided through the job retention scheme will be slowly tapered.
* The suspension of evictions from social or private rented accommodation in England and Wales has been extended by 2 months until 23 August.
* Discussion on **clients who have No Recourse to Public Funds**  – we agreed to do an email from ‘THCAN’ to Ellie Kershaw (head of Tackling Poverty Team) to see the  Council were considering additional support for NRPF migrants who have been impacted by loss of jobs due to coronavirus

IAC and CAB had some clients who were impacted and there is some research identifying this is an increasing need/concern.

Please could agencies to send me brief details of cases/increase in numbers or types of problems they are encountering and I’ll do an email to LBTH about this next week (send me info before next Friday please) – also see details below about support that is available (council has allocated some additional funding through Praxis grant)

* Citizens Advice research info

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/policy-research-topics/welfare-policy-research-surveys-and-consultation-responses/welfare-policy-research/nowhere-to-turn-how-immigration-rules-are-preventing-people-from-getting-support-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

* Info when a person or family with NRPF may be able to get housing or financial support from social service

<http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information/Pages/Social-Services.aspx#exclusions>

* Factsheets for advisors working with NRPF families

<https://www.project17.org.uk/resources/factsheets-for-advisers/>

* Praxis small grants and referral information

Praxis is providing migrant residents with immigration advice and support in addition to the small emergency grants funded by Tower Hamlets which enable people to buy food, toiletries, mobile data and other essential items. Please note Praxis currently has a long waiting list for advice referrals – so please use telephone/online advice services (see details below).

Online advice form: [https://www.praxis.org.uk/email-advice-form-for-tower-hamlets-residents](https://gbr01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.praxis.org.uk%2Femail-advice-form-for-tower-hamlets-residents&data=02%7C01%7CAli.Ahmed%40towerhamlets.gov.uk%7C88c7c2e24a5e4be60ab608d811e66086%7C3c0aec87f983418fb3dcd35db83fb5d2%7C0%7C0%7C637279028437983364&sdata=aZThDMCEt8GkbZHD3br5pj7Idm7K4V%2Bf5XtXtSzf1Uc%3D&reserved=0)

Telephone advice: Wed 2pm to 4pm; Thurs 10am to 12.30am 020 7749 7608 or 020 7749 7605

Online form: [https://www.praxis.org.uk/email-advice-form-for-tower-hamlets-residents](https://gbr01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.praxis.org.uk%2Femail-advice-form-for-tower-hamlets-residents&data=02%7C01%7CAli.Ahmed%40towerhamlets.gov.uk%7C88c7c2e24a5e4be60ab608d811e66086%7C3c0aec87f983418fb3dcd35db83fb5d2%7C0%7C0%7C637279028437993356&sdata=ticepT74%2F5peBpQC4Ag9tSeGnvkdlaqfiGQkynEBOEc%3D&reserved=0)

* Discussion about **inconsistency of Resident Support Scheme awards** – The LBTH scheme is designed to support residents who are either in or at risk of being in crisis, are in need of immediate help and have no source of financial support available to them.  Advisors make applications on behalf of clients but have found the guidance on what clients can claim for is vague (check link below) and advisors felt awards are inconsistent. We’d like to see if there is a policy/clarity on their decision making and perhaps ask someone along to next meeting.  There has been some relaxation on the rules apparently but some advisors stated they have not really seen any impact on their application results

<https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/advice_and_benefits/Residents_Support_Scheme.aspx>

**ACTION**   I’ve spoken to  Ali Ahmed who is going to come to our next meeting but states that stats show a very high award rate for advice centre applications and who will come along to the next meeting for clarification (I’ve also asked if someone from Northgate can attend)

* **Employment advice**.  Advisors would like a training session on basics of ‘employment’ rights.  We have seen increases in referrals to get employment advice (employers refusing furlough, redundancies, etc). We have agencies to refer clients to (LAC, THLC, CAB, Toynbee) but would like some basic training so we can identify appropriate referrals – provisional date for this below – email if you want to attend
* **Bedroom  cap** cases advisors wanted to know if there were going to be automatic increases?  See info below from Lee Fearon Benefit Policy Manager

‘The DHP Bedroom Tax cases are automatically ended on 31 March.  We have obtained a report of all Bedroom Tax claims where DHP ended on 31 March and we are reinstating DHP from 1 April. So, no these residents will not have to reapply for DHP but  it may take some time to reinstate the award’.

Note this doesn’t apply to Benefit Cap cases where clients will have to reapply

* Discussion that we would like a representative of DWP to come along to a zoom meeting – I emailed them and they can’t do this but said if you have a specific query/question, I can email them for an email response

1. **Information and Resources**

**CPAG win their court of appeal case about ‘assessment periods’**

On Monday we won our case in the Court of Appeal that involved four single working mothers whose regular monthly pay dates for their wages fell close to the start/end of their universal credit assessment periods, resulting in them sometimes having two paydays in one assessment period. Because of the way the universal credit computer system assesses earnings they had fluctuating income and significant cash losses. The government announced yesterday that they will not appeal the judgment.

**Children Society Grants for Individuals in ‘need’ information**

See attached really good list / info on possible grants/items for families in ‘need’ – some we need to register with before we can apply

**Tribunal Users Group Meeting Information**

Anyone who represents/deals with benefit appeals information on digital/telephone appeals and other information on attached document

1. **Vacancies**

**Age UK part time advisor**

21 hrs a week.  Salary would be up to 28k pro rata depending on qualifications and exp. i.e. level 3 and level 4 IAG Starting salary for 21 hrs would be £15,600. 6 months’ probation. 25 days holiday a year again pro rata’d.  A day off for your birthday, too.  Company pension scheme.  They’d be working across all our services in Hackney, TH and Newham, potentially, as since the pandemic all our work has been folded into one remote service.  We are hoping to have offices open and some fully risk assessed face to face advice back up and running as the summer progresses, but initially it would be remote working and a rota for office admin etc.

CV’s to me at my email.

[adam.pervoe@ageukeastlondon.org.uk](mailto:adam.pervoe@ageukeastlondon.org.uk)>

**Young Foundation various vacancies**

[Community Engagement Officer](https://www.youngfoundation.org/?vacancies=community-engagement-officer) and [Programme Manager](https://www.youngfoundation.org/?vacancies=programme-manager) roles at YF have been extended to 14th July. We would love it if you could spread the word and help us recruit some great people to come work with me and the team on Communities Driving Change! Some other great roles available too - <https://www.youngfoundation.org/about-us/vacancies/>

Please do encourage anyone you know with experience of working in the local community to apply. We strongly encourage applications from candidates from a BAME background and who are local to Tower Hamlets.

1. **Training**

* **NVQ Level 3 & 4 in Advice & Guidance**

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are accredited qualifications that judge a person’s ability to do a job/task/activity. Island Advice is an assessment centre for NVQ’s in Advice and Guidance – if you are interested please contact me for information there is a charge for the qualification but if you have lived in Tower Hamlets for the past 3 years you should be eligible for a grant for the cost– if necessary/preferred the qualification can be carried out ‘digitally’ Note **the deadline for a grant for this is approaching (31/7/2020) and you should contact me urgently if you are interested**

Level 3 is for advisers (paid or volunteers) involved in casework, action planning with clients and  referrals to other agencies.

Level 4 is for centre co-ordinators/specialist caseworkers/supervisors who still do some work with clients, get involved in networks or deliver training/workshops for clients.

* **NHAS Welfare Benefits and the Coronavirus webinar Tuesday 21st July 11:30am – 1:00pm**

Course outline below, please send me name, organisation and email for joining instructions

**Aims** The aim of this webinar is to explain the emergency measures and how they impact on individuals, and to put the measures into the context of the wider welfare state in order that advisors can guide people to their most appropriate means of help.

**Objectives**

The following areas are covered:

The revised rules for Statutory Sick Pay and ‘isolation notes’

The provisions for ‘furloughed workers’

The Self-employment Income Support Scheme

The relaxed criteria for ‘a limited capability for work’ under the Employment and Support Allowance

Universal Credit: the basic qualifying conditions, increased allowances and elements, the‘minimum income floor’, the relaxation of work search requirements and other administrative easements

Consequential changes to Job Seekers Allowance, Housing Benefit, Carer’s Allowance, Working Tax Credit, and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The interrelation between the means of support.

* **Employment advice**.  Advisors would like a training session on basics of ‘employment’ rights.  We have seen increases in referrals to get employment advice (employers refusing furlough, redundancies, etc). We have agencies to refer clients to (LAC, THLC, CAB, Toynbee) but would like some basic training so we can identify appropriate referrals

Legal Advice Centre have offered to do this session on Zoom on 28th July – email me if you’re interested and I’ll put you on list (haven’t confirmed time/set up meeting yet)

1. **Advice Services**

* Tower Hamlets Advice services available during lockdown are on ‘advice services deliver1’ document attached updated versions available <http://thcan.org.uk/covid-19-emergency-advice-provision/> some updates from previous one
* The **specialist** advice services are also listed on the attached (and below) – few updates from previous

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| **Organisation** | **E-mail** | **Tel Advice** |
| Citizens Advice Bureau | [advice@eastendcab.org.uk](mailto:advice@eastendcab.org.uk) | 0203 855 4472 |
| Island Advice Centre | [admin@island-advice.org.uk](mailto:admin@island-advice.org.uk) | 0207 987 9379 Mon to Fri 10am to 4pm |
| Legal Advice Centre | [admin@legaladvicecentre.london](mailto:admin@legaladvicecentre.london) | 0203 606 0372 |
| Tower Hamlets Law Centre | [info@thlc.co.uk](mailto:info@thlc.co.uk) | 0207 538 4909  9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri |