**Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) is a partnership of local advice centres that work together to ensure Tower Hamlets residents have access to free, high quality advice and representation in social welfare law  (welfare benefits, debt, housing , employment, immigration, etc) Our website**[**www.thcan.org.uk**](http://www.thcan.org.uk/)**has information on advice providers services, factsheets and contact details**

**Items in this months information exchange**

1.                  Welfare rights advisors meeting info

2.                  FREE  Training sessions December  (Benefits for claimants with Limited Capability for Work, Housing Costs, Universal Credit)

3.                  Information and resources

4.                  Vacancies

5.                 Advice service provision including specialist benefit advice workers contacts

**1.        Welfare Rights Advisors Forum**

Date of next meeting **THURSDAY    3/12/20   2pm**

Please email me to request the zoom meeting id/password – if you have attended past meetings an invite will automatically be sent but if not received the link by Tuesday please email

* Tower Hamlets Housing benefit team will be sending representatives to provide details of – any specific issues you want to ask about please send questions?

**2.       Free** **Training**

 Please email me to arrange a place – all courses are delivered on Zoom and are free to anyone working/volunteering in Tower Hamlets – places are limited

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Course name, date and time** | **Course details** | **Trainer** |
| **Benefits for claimants with Limited Capability for Work**  8th December  10am to 1pm | * **Suitable for** – basic course for advice workers/support workers with some knowledge of the benefit system.   The session will cover the work capability assessment , how the ‘points’ system works and information on completing UC50 forms.  The WCA is the assessment is the test that DWP use to assess Universal Credit (and legacy / new style Employment Support Allowance)  claimants ability to work or look for work. | Jo Ellis |
| **Housing Costs help for benefit claimants**  15th December  10am  to 1pm | * **Suitable for**  - basic course for advice workers and anyone advising or dealing with tenants/claimants who need information on their eligibility for help with their housing costs   The session will cover eligibility for housing benefit and universal credit housing element, when and how benefit cap, bedroom tax, non-dependent deductions effect housing cost.  Discretionary housing payments | Jo Ellis |
| **Universal Credit**  14th December  11am to 1pm | General information about Universal Credit  including: claims, conditionality, sanctions   •        **Suitable for** basic session but suitable for anyone including benefit advisors | Fatima Begum |

**3.**   **Information and Resources**

* **Benefit changes/Information**

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/already-claiming-benefits/>

Sorry but there are too many changes and everything is changing so rapidly its becoming too challenging to summarise everything at moment so please use the above link which is a simple summary of the current situation (gov website) outlining effects on benefits due to covid legacy/UC/self isolating/Sick/Furlough/etc

* **Campaign to support the £20 a week increase for Universal Credit being extended to legacy benefit** If you would like to back Z2K’s claimants too use this link to email your MP

[Increase Legacy Benefits – Z2K (Zacchaeus 2000 Trust)](https://www.z2k.org/increase-legacy-benefits/)

* **Tower Hamlets Financial Support Team** two dedicated officers to support residents with their rent arrears as well as carrying out a financial review. Our primary aim is to reach out to residents who are struggling to pay their rent and those who are at risk of becoming homeless due to rental arrears. We are looking to increase the rate of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) applications to proactively help prevent homelessness.  London Borough of Tower Hamlets Financial Support Team / LBTH Financial Support Team Officer Name and contact details below: Shahida Begum and Charlotte Maguire 0207 364 3680  [lbthfinacialsupport@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:lbthfinacialsupport@towerhamlets.gov.uk)
* **PopLaw Free Legal Advice Clinics** provide free initial legal advice covering many areas of law, for example on matters relating to debt, housing, employment, consumer and welfare benefits.  We do not advise on family, criminal or immigration law.  **Contact details:** Telephone:  07920 288269 (Monday to Friday) Email: [poplawadvisor@poplaw.org.uk](mailto:poplawadvisor@poplaw.org.uk)
* **Also see THCAN website ‘legal advice’ tile for other free legal advice sessions in Tower Hamlets**[www.thcan.org.uk/legal-advice/](http://www.thcan.org.uk/legal-advice/)

#### **EU Benefit Claimants** If [EU citizens](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/eu-citizens-urged-to-take-action-during-eu-transition) are living in the UK by 31 December 2020 they can continue to receive benefits on the same terms as they do now. People need evidence they were living in the UK by 31 December 2020, and need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme in order to be covered by these provisions.

* **The Food Store** is a new food support service based on Food Pantry model, which is a membership-based service accessed only via referrals, located on ground floor flat on the Burdett Estate –

5a Limborough House, Thomas Road, London E14 7AW  Would you like to be included as one of the referral agenciesto get support with food and essential household items, whilst they get support.  This will ease pressures on their budget giving them time to deal with the underlying issues such as debt. For further details about the scheme and or to join as a referral partner, please contact: Masoom Ahmed E: [thefoodstoreburdett@outlook.com](mailto:thefoodstoreburdett@outlook.com)

* **Legal Advice Centre  advice portal** for Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham. The portal is principally aimed at supporting generalist advice agencies to undertake specialist legal casework. Users must register to access the portal. ‘advice portal’ includes an electronic booking system Advice workers can book an appointment to seek support from us to progress a case themselves, or they can make a referral by appointment for us to advise someone directly. Register your agency via [www.lac-advice.co.uk](http://www.lac-advice.co.uk)

**4.       Vacancies**

* Experienced Debt Advisor vacancy with Fair Money Advice  contact Jahanara Khanom [jahanara@fairfinance.org.uk](mailto:jahanara@fairfinance.org.uk)  18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL  T 0203 475 8811
* Legal Advice Centre scheme to support existing advice staff who wish to take the non-law graduate 6-year apprenticeship pathway to becoming a solicitor. We are doing this in partnership with BPP.  The training course/assessment/exam fees will be paid by Apprenticeship Levy transfer of funds from corporate partners. You continue to pay their wages but you will have to provide them with 20% time-off for study with BPP.  BPP are now taking on a new cohort of 6-year apprentices.  Contact [eddie@legaladvicecentre.org.uk](mailto:eddie@legaladvicecentre.org.uk)

**5.        Advice Services**

 Tower Hamlets Advice benefit advice services details  <http://thcan.org.uk/covid-19-emergency-advice-provision/>  - please check this list and let me know if it is correct – also would like to know about Christmas Closures and can add these

THCAN steering group meeting feedback on current advice agencies services capacity and other information  process of updating this)

* Agencies report an increase of referrals from other support services (ie foodbank, social prescribers, etc) also clients ringing and thinking we are part of council tax - phoning to make CT payment offers

(Island Advice Centre and Toynbee telephone numbers are on bottom of council tax recovery letters)

* Citzens Advice, Toynbee, Limehouse Project are setting up ‘video booths’ for advising clients
* Although most agencies were getting ready to go back to face to face after first lockdown this has now all gone back to telephone/digital
* Some very limited face to face advice is available in exceptional circumstances (Law Centre, Toynbee, LHP, IAC, Bromley by Bow Centre)
* Telephone, Whatsap, zoom, text messaging is being delivered and mostly staff are working from home with small number of staff in offices, services are well used but capacity OK
* CA has implemented a QR code system for clients to get call backs
* Praxis – 2 telephone advice sessions pw
* BBBC Empower Energy Training Project, partnership project dealing with fuel poverty, offering training for ‘local fuel champions’ to do 6 week course with a view to offering help/support to their local

community

**Specialist** advice providers

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **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 12 and 2 - 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 |