

Welfare Benefits Newsletter



Issue 1 – January 2007

New Training Programme for Somerset

The South West Welfare Benefits Training Centre has evolved from the closure of the Somerset Welfare Rights Unit in December 2005. The project is hosted by ViSTA and provides welfare benefits training and consultancy to paid staff and volunteers who are providing welfare benefits advice and support to the public.



Last Spring the first Training Programme was launched, providing a range of courses for all levels of competency from those who are offering basic levels of support and signposting through to caseworker courses for the more experienced advisers.

A new programme for 2007 has now been produced and courses can be booked through ViSTA (www.vistaproject.org.uk). Details of the individual courses and venues are listed in the Training Programme and anyone interested can contact ViSTA for more information. The courses are tutored by Elizabeth Luke (previously Manager of Somerset Welfare Rights Unit) who is a Member of the National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers and has several years' experience as a welfare benefits trainer.

Email Consultancy

As support for the training programme ViSTA is preparing to launch an email consultancy which will, in the first instance, be available to those who attend the training courses so that they will have access to help in respect of welfare benefits issues when they are advising their clients. It is hoped that in the future this service could be extended to agencies across the County on a subscription basis.

News and Information

Updates on important changes in legislation and new initiatives by the Department of Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs and the Appeals Service are currently available on the ViSTA website (www.vistaproject.org.uk – click on Welfare). This service is available free of charge and updated regularly when new information is available.



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House of Commons

The Welfare Reform Bill

You can use the ViSTA website (www.vistaproject.org.uk) to keep up to date with the progress of the Welfare Reform Bill particularly in relation to the national roll out of Local Housing Allowances in 2008, and the introduction of Employment and Support Allowances (ESAs) in the same year. The ESAs will comprise a basic allowance together with a work-related activity component or a support component depending upon the severity of the disability. These allowances will replace Incapacity Benefit and Income Support for those who are sick and unable to work. As currently with Jobseekers Allowance, the new ESAs will have a non-means-tested allowance based on national insurance contributions and a means-tested allowance. The Personal Capability Test will be overhauled and renamed and will determine which claimants can be expected to engage in “work-related activity” and entitlement to benefit will be conditional on participation. It is anticipated that existing claimants will have their benefit levels protected but it is still not clear whether they will be subject to the new PCA test.

Training courses will be available prior to the introduction of the changes to the benefit system in 2008.

Money Matters Training Course

Using funding from the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund, a six week training course has been developed to help vulnerable individuals, who may be at risk of getting into debt, to improve their money management skills. The course was piloted by our team and evaluated last year and is now ready for delivery.

A support resource has been developed for staff or volunteers who will deliver the course to their clients/service users. This resource pack has been produced with funding provided by the RBS Financial Inclusion Innovation Fund.

The clients' course can be delivered in six two-hour lessons and covers subjects such as Maximising Income, Prioritising Spending, Managing Bank Accounts, Shopping Habits, Budgeting, Saving and Borrowing and Dealing with Debt.

The course can be delivered to a wide variety of groups and individuals and is ideal for those working with young people, parents, those with drug or alcohol related problems or anyone on low income who is struggling to manage their finances.

ViSTA is providing two one-day Workshops for professionals (paid or voluntary) interested in delivering this course to their clients/service users – see the ViSTA Training Programme (www.vistaproject.org.uk) for further details and how to book a place. The course can also be delivered to your clients directly with a qualified trainer from ViSTA.



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