

## **Notes from SEND Conference: RCVS Presentation: A voluntary sector guide to support available for families in Richmond**

As we work to create light in others, we naturally light our own way (Mary Ann Radmacher)

**Purpose:** to equip you with an insight into what is available and how to access it, both for the families you work with, and your own networks. The impact of the pandemic and escalating cost of living crisis, can feel overwhelming. My aim is

- to highlight the range of help that is available for the individual families we serve
- to encourage us all to equip ourselves with the knowledge of local services and resources
- understand better how we can support our beneficiaries to access them.

My role is focussed on support for the voluntary and community sector in Richmond, so many of my examples are focussed on LBRUT provision, but I have included some Kingston sources of information, and some of what I highlight will be universal to both

My name is Heather Mathew and I am the strategic lead for the children and young people's voluntary sector in Richmond. I work for Richmond CVS [www.richmondcsvs.org.uk](http://www.richmondcsvs.org.uk), and we are an infrastructure organisation supporting the voluntary and community sector in Richmond in all aspects of their business including funding advice, governance and safeguarding. We also work closely with the council, Achieving for Children and health services to make sure we all understand the needs of borough residents, and how each part of the partnership can contribute to the response to meet those needs

During the pandemic the ability of the voluntary and community sector to mobilise, to adapt their services, and to reach people at a grassroots level became even more apparent. In recovery the sector has continued to flex in response to the escalating cost of living crisis. During the pandemic I started to collate and distribute two resources which identified advice, guidance and practical help in the borough covering a wide range of topics including food and essentials, finance and debt management, emotional health and well-being, employment, legal and housing. They can be found under Local Information on the RCVS website <https://richmondcsvs.org.uk/richmond-charities/online-resources/> As well as the voluntary sector services, I was struck by how many council commissioned services there are to support adult residents and I realised that many of my colleagues in children's services had no knowledge of them. The services highlighted here will include both and help you to identify resources and support outside of your own services, that can have a significant impact on a family's ability to manage.

### **“Did you know about”**

Borrowing from Martin Lewis, the money saving expert, use the phrase “Did you know about” to connect people to the support that's available. We know many find it hard to ask for help, or are in denial about their situation. By routinely incorporating information about services that support a reduction in household costs in our conversations with families, we can reduce the stigma of asking for help and connect them to help a lot earlier.

### **Ask Early**

The consistent message that advice agencies are giving at the moment is “ Ask early” The earlier help is sought the more control over the situation people have. We know that taking a strength-based approach and supporting the parent to improve their financial situation with the help of local advice services can create its own momentum, and build the persons confidence and belief in their ability to affect change in other areas of their life.

### Context

Issues highlighted by local providers of advice and guidance for families with disabled children

- Parents living with diagnosed mental health conditions, or with mental health conditions they have not addressed for a variety of reasons. Long wait lists, with no recourse to targeted services

- A rise in domestic violence. Some of this is compounded by the pandemic, and being terminally exhausted from their carer role
- Self-harm in their children and young people including siblings who are struggling to cope with the pressures of having a neuro diverse brother or sister and peer pressure at school.
- The impact of the cost of living, and the instability of employment
- Housing – many who live in social housing have issues – mould, house in disrepair, leaky roofs “ Housing associations seem to be disengaged with their customer base, and complaint often disappear into the ether”
- Schools are not meeting the needs of pupils even with an EHCP, especially with children and young people with ADHD. There is a lack of therapeutic and specialist input from CAMHS,OT,SLT,EP until the CYP is at very high level of need/crisis. Even then the interventions are time limited and nothing will improve until this is adequate
- “Schools are not understanding SEN, and there is a lack of willingness and/or ability to recognise or adjust to it, particularly where there are disciplinary issues”

Taken collectively this can feel overwhelming, and I am not naïve to the complexity of issues that some of our family’s experience, or the ability and capacity of the voluntary sector to solve them all, but I do believe that there are both council and voluntary sector services that can help with some of these issues, and it is incumbent on us all to know about them, and to support families to access them.

### **Bite sized chunks**

Where the totality is overwhelming, breaking it down into bite size chunks allows for you to apply a strength-based solutions focussed approach, connect them to expertise and help that will make a difference, and have an impact on their family circumstances. I am very confident in relation to the cost of living crisis, and energy and utility costs that there are things we can do to make a difference.

### **Facts and figures**

The focus of this conference is families with children with SEND. The universal rise in costs and the impact of the pandemic on things such as employment, public finance and caring responsibilities disproportionately affect these families. In many cases the options to reduce or be more energy efficient are not open to disabled people as they may rely on a certain level of heating, the operation of equipment, specialist food or accessible transport. Additionally, the impact of the pandemic on parent carers has been significant - many are still affected by their experience of the pandemic – shielding, community care closures, loss of confidence, caring roles intensified leading to exhaustion and burn out, as well as the worry about finances.

**Scopes Disability Price Tag research** gives an annual benchmark for the increased costs for a disabled family. The most recent survey dates from 2019 and indicates an average extra cost of £581 a month. 1 in 4 families with disabled children have extra costs of more than £1000 a month.

**In June 2022 national charity SENSE** surveyed 1002 families with a disabled child, and 1006 people with a disability. The survey found:

- 54% said they were in debt
- 38% skipped meals to save money
- 74% said they are unable to cope if prices continue to rise
- 68% said it was affecting their mental health

**Universally there is a significant concern about what is termed as “the working poor”, those who are in work, but whose earnings do not cover their essential outgoings.** Common problems and drivers are insufficient hours, high and rising living costs and caring responsibilities which leads to higher rates of anxiety and depression and distress. In work poverty is higher in London than any other area of the UK. The fact that someone is in employment can preclude them from some state benefits and other grants, and masques growing debt and the instability of their situation.

Benefits are not keeping up with inflation and energy and fuel costs are continuing to rise at the fastest rate for 40 years. Many of the families we work with will sit under the threshold for benefit payments or are in housing situations where benefit payments are not applicable.

**A 2021 Office of National Statistics Family Resources Survey found** 1 in 7 families in the UK reported having no savings. A further 2 out of 7 reported savings of less than £1500 The group most likely to have no savings are lone parents with children. In this category 75% have no savings at all.

Some are eligible for welfare benefits but there is extensive evidence to suggest many find it difficult to identify what you are entitled to or to navigate the websites and forms necessary to claim, and to understand the eligibility. Add to this the emotional distress and anxiety that many feel as a result of their situation, it can feel entirely hopeless, and they feel powerless to affect any change.

As a London borough, Richmond has to be viewed in the context of the capital. The independent think tank Centre for London has looked at the challenges for London in the context of the governments levelling up agenda which pays little attention to inequalities within London and the difficulties that Londoners face. <https://www.centreforlondon.org/publication/levelling-up-in-london-phase-1-report-challenges-for-london-and-londoners/>

- The proportion of Londoners that live in poverty is the highest in the UK - 27 % compared to 22% for England.
- Child poverty rates are even worse - 38%, well above the national average of 30%.

A significant contributor to this is housing costs:

- Rates in the private rented sector are significantly higher than the rest of the UK - . £1425 compared to £755
- Due to the higher costs of living in London people are more likely to face a cap on the amount of benefits they are eligible for than anywhere else in the UK.
- When money is short and housing hard to find people can be forced into low quality homes, or staying in homes that are poorly maintained:
- 15% of homes in London do not meet the Decent Home Standard rising to 18% in the private rented sector. There is a strong link between poor housing conditions and poor physical and mental health.

It has been suggested that workers in the capital need an uplift of £6500 a year to reflect the extra cost of living typically incurred through being a resident

### **Be open in your approach**

“ All of us at sometime or other need help. Whether we are giving or receiving help, each one of us has something valuable to bring to this world (Fred Rogers)

Richmond is a microcosm of the situation in London. Richmond is often used as shorthand for wealthy privileged leafy green and prosperous, obscuring the challenges people face, and reducing the allocations made by central government. This accentuates the stigma of asking for help. There is a sense that everyone else is doing alright, and people are reluctant or embarrassed to come forward. We need to be as open as possible in our approach. To a degree all of us are affected by the impact of the pandemic, and the escalating financial crisis. Sharing knowledge and resources that can help is vital for us all – tell a client, tell a friend, tell a colleague tell a family member. No-one is alone in this situation

### **Every contact counts**

“Only the development of compassion and understanding for others can bring us the tranquillity and happiness we all seek” (Dalai Lama)

The way we facilitate conversations with our beneficiaries is crucial – every interaction is an opportunity to support family health and well being and engagement with services that can help. The following behaviours may be helpful as a framework:

**Attend** – be present with and pay attention to those you are working with

**Empathise** -normalise conversations about money worries and rising costs. Showing concern and empathy can break down stigma, and help the person feel more comfortable about sharing their own experience

**Understand**- take a positive respectful approach and provide knowledge, guidance and reassurance. This empowers the client and you.

**Help** – incorporate information about cost of living support routinely in your interaction with clients. Explore with them what help they need to access help – simple sign posting, assistance to make the call or send the e-mail, direct referral with their consent

### **Did you know about? A snapshot of what is available**

#### Advice and guidance

**Citizens Advice Richmond ( CAR) – whoever you are, whatever the problem, we are here to help** Citizens Advice Richmond provides advice work for residents across all aspects of family life including money worries, benefit entitlements, employment rights, and housing. The help is available via outreach, online and by telephone, and they accept third party referrals with consent

- Telephone – Freephone 080 82 78 78 73 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday
- Contact them directly for advice, including face to face: <https://www.citizensadvice-richmond.org>
- Direct referrals from organisations on behalf of residents via Citizens Advice Richmond's website: <https://www.citizensadvice-richmond.org/referral-page/>

**South West London Law Centre** is a charity that provides free and independent legal advice on social welfare issues, helping people living in six London boroughs including Richmond, Kingston and Wandsworth access justice. Areas they cover include money advice, issues relating to the cost of living, housing including temporary accommodation, employment rights, immigration and asylum, benefits and crisis navigation. They also provide training on welfare issues which is open to individuals and professionals. [www.swllc.org](http://www.swllc.org)

**The Money and Pensions Advice Service** offers impartial money and pensions guidance, backed by government and free to use 0800 138 7777. Advice available includes family and care finance, pensions and retirement, debt, and finding extra financial support. <https://www.moneyandpensionservice.org.uk/>

**Help for Households.** The government has recently launched a help for house-holds website designed to bring over 40 government schemes under one site. Topics include income support, energy bills, childcare costs, household costs, transport costs and finding work. <https://helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/>

#### Utility Costs

**Richmond Winter Warmth Home Service – Wandsworth and Richmond Assessment Points (WRAP)** Thinking Works has been commissioned by LBRUT to help residents tackle fuel poverty It can help residents to reduce their bills, apply for grants to support them and make home visits to ensure that their appliances are as safe as efficient as possible. The service is open to all residents, including families with children, with some groups such as those 65+ and children and people with disabilities prioritised. There are 2 services available:

#### ***Crisis Support – by phone***

- ✓ Fuel vouchers – for those with a prepay meter
- ✓ Emergency heating repairs (homeowners only)
- ✓ Referrals for insulation and heating grants
- ✓ Support applying to the Household Support Fund (where available)

### **Standard Support – by home visit**

- ✓ FREE carbon monoxide detector (CO alarm)
- ✓ FREE LED bulb x2
- ✓ FREE radiator reflector panels for 3 radiators on external walls
- ✓ Specialist advice on lowering your heating bills whilst keeping warm
- ✓ Advice on energy and water bill tariff discounts including the 50% Water Help discount and the Warm Home Discount (where available)
- ✓ Assessments for grants for insulation and heating works
- ✓ Referrals for benefit checks
- ✓ Advice on health and wellbeing services in the borough
- ✓ Referrals for FREE smoke alarm

Professionals can make a referral (with the client's consent) or residents can self-refer. For more information <https://www.thinkingworks.co.uk/richmond-winter-warmth>

**The Scope Disability Energy Support Service** helpline offers free energy and water advice to disabled people, helping them to manage their utility needs. The service is open to any disabled person or households where one or more disabled person lives (England and Wales) The support includes:

- Managing water and energy debt
- Accessing benefits, grants and trusts
- Free fuel vouchers (conditions apply)
- Support registering with the Priority Services Register

The service is provided via e-mail or by telephone. [www.scope.org.uk/disability-energy-support](http://www.scope.org.uk/disability-energy-support)

### Family support and advice

**RUILS** <https://www.ruils.co.uk/> is a local charity based in Teddington that supports disabled children, adults and the elderly to live independent lives by providing information advice, advocacy, practical support activities and befriending. Their range of services for families includes:

- Family Matters, a parent support service for families with children with additional needs who are feeling under pressure or experiencing difficulties. It offers practical advice and information, and a confidential independent space to talk about issues that are impacting on them, and connecting them to help. <https://www.ruils.co.uk/services/family-matters/>
- Bright Futures supports disabled young people and their families with transitions – social health, education and work. <https://www.ruils.co.uk/services/bright-futures/>

**ADHD Embrace** ADHD Embrace is a local charity offering support, advice, peer networks and training for parent and professionals. Their family support worker provides 1:1 sessions for parents to offer advice and support across a range of issues affecting families with children with ADHD such as managing behaviour and emotions, family dynamic, and organisation and executive function. The 1.1 sessions are for Richmond and Kingston families <https://adhdembrace.org/>

### Domestic Violence

**Richmond One Stop Shop for domestic abuse advice and support.** The weekly drop in is for anyone experiencing domestic abuse from a partner, ex-partner or family member. It offers free legal advice and assistance, and professionals are available to provide information about injunction and other orders, child contact arrangements, issues with housing and debt, and drug and alcohol addiction. No appointment is necessary. The service is available every Friday 10-12pm at Hampton Hill Citizens Advice, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 94-102 High Street, Hampton Hill. More information and help available from the Hestia Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA) 0203 879 3544 [Support available for people experiencing domestic abuse in Richmond](#)

## Food

**The Real Junk Food Project** based in the ETNA centre St Margaret's uses surplus food to prepare a hot meal available at their community café three times a week. They also operate weekly food tables in Hampton and Hampton Hill. It is a safe and supportive place, operates a pay what you can, or nothing at all system and every session has tables of donated and surplus food to take away. The only thing you need to bring is a bag! <https://www.trjftwickenham.com/>

**Food for Thought** is a community project based on Heathfield Recreation Ground in Whitton TW2 6EG, near to Heathfield School, and Heathfield Children's Centre . It distributes surplus food that otherwise would have gone to landfill from supermarkets, independent food outlets and restaurants. It is open to anyone. No charge is made, although you can make a donation. The stall operates on Thursday 14.30 to 16.30pm and Saturday 11.30 – 13.30. Bring a carrier bag. [www.food-for-thought-heathfield-webnode.com](http://www.food-for-thought-heathfield-webnode.com)

## Housing

**Cllr Paulina Vassileva** is the LBRUT Tenant Champion whose role it is to support tenants and leaseholders who rent or lease property from a housing association in the borough. The first port of call is to address the issue with the housing association, but if the situation is not resolved you can escalate it to the tenant's champion [https://www.richmond.gov.uk/tenants\\_champion](https://www.richmond.gov.uk/tenants_champion)

**The LBRUT Private Sector Housing Team** investigates complaints relating to private rented housing conditions and repairs and sub- standard housing, and will pursue in court landlords failing to act responsibly towards their tenants. The team is a shared service with Merton and can be contacted at 0208 545 3025 [privatehousing@merton.gov.uk](mailto:privatehousing@merton.gov.uk)

**South West London Law Centre** – as above

## Work Skills and Pathways into Employment

**Choice Support Richmond and Wandsworth**- support residents with disabilities 18+ to find work including people with learning difficulties, those affected by mental ill health, sensory impairment, physical disability and autism. They provide pre-employment support and support when you get a job. 0203 697 7134 [randwemployment@choicesupport.org.uk](mailto:randwemployment@choicesupport.org.uk) [Choice Support | Richmond and Wandsworth supported employment](#)

**Room for Work** is a local charity that specialises in helping mature job seekers 40+ with previous work experience ranging from administrative to professional and managerial roles. Their free 12 week course supports learners to understand current job searching methods, write an effective CV, practice competency based interviews, develop their speaking skills and much more. Interested participants can register for the next course at <https://roomforwork.org/>

## Parent Carers/ Young Carers/ Young Carers with disabilities

**The Richmond Carers Centre** provides free and confidential information, advice and emotional support to unpaid carers living in or caring for someone in the borough. They provide support for adult carers including parent carers, and run the young carers service. Carers registered with them can access a range of support including activities and events, counselling for carers, and support to navigate the system. [www.richmondcarers.org.uk](http://www.richmondcarers.org.uk) 0208 867 2380

**Crossroads Care Richmond and Kingston** provide bespoke, high quality community respite for carers in both Richmond and Kingston. Their Richmond Saturday club for young carers is inclusive of children and young people with disabilities who are also young carers, and they have expertise in supporting parent carers with respite services and emotional support. <https://www.crossroadscareruk.org/>

**TAG** is a youth club for disabled young people providing a weekly junior and senior youth club, a young adults group and a range of sports and leisure opportunities including weekend breaks. For

siblings of young people that attend TAG, they provide regular young carer activities including trips to the theatre and places of interest, and school holiday days out <https://www.tagyouthclub.org/>

**The Richmond and Hillcroft Adult College (RHACC) Carers Hub** provides a range of affordable, and accessible activities and services for carers. Membership of the carers hub is free and entitles you to a range of benefits including one free leisure/wellbeing course per term from a list of courses including Ceramics for Well Being, Movement and Meditation with Alexander techniques, and Walk and Discover West London. You can either register in person at RHACC (Richmond) or Hillcroft (Surbition) or complete a registration online <https://www.rhacc.ac.uk/carers-hub>

### Information hubs

**Richmond Council** has recently launched a Richmond Cost of Living Hub which includes information and support available on a range of topics including household bills, family and child care, food, and health and care costs. [https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/cost\\_of\\_living\\_hub](https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/cost_of_living_hub)

**Cost of Living Support** Kingston Council have collated a range of support, advice and signposting information to support Kingston residents affected by the costs of living crisis. Resources include a “Worrying About Money” leaflet which signposts to a range of support including help for migrants with no recourse to public funds. Much of the information is universal, regardless of whether you are a Kingston resident or not, and may be helpful to explore options for people you are working with from either borough. <https://www.kingston.gov.uk/costoflivingsupport>

**The Mayor of London’s Cost of Living Hub** brings together a range of information, advice and signposting across all aspects of the costs of living crisis such as help with paying your bills and help in a crisis. The information is clear and accessible and links to both regional and national charities. [The Mayors Cost of Living Hub](#)

### **Three take-aways**

- Did you know about?
- Ask early
- Look after yourselves – this is exhausting and difficult work. Share how you are feeling with your colleagues and ask for help. If you are an employer or manager build in regular opportunities for your staff/ volunteers to talk about cases, to share knowledge of what has helped, and to look after their own welfare

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