



CHOICE IN HACKNEY
(Company Limited by guarantee)

TRUSTEES REPORT
AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

COMPANY NO: 03423122
CHARITY NO : 1077287

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
TRUSTEES REPORT
AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024

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CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
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The Trustees present their report and the financial statement for the year ended 31st March 2024.

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Trustees

Malcolm Aickin	Chair
Andrew Price	Vice-Chair
Matthew Baxter (appointed 18 th September 2023)	Treasurer
Thomas Brayford	
Patricia Charlesworth (resigned 26 th January 2024)	
Mary Julian	
Debra Schiman	
Bharat Siyani	

**Company Secretary and
Executive Director**

Caroline Nelson

Company reg. no.

03423122

Charity reg. no.

1077287

Registered Office

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
Defoe Block, Ground Floor
50 Hoxton Street
London
N1 6LP

Independent Examiner

Knox Cropper LLP
65 Leadenhall Street
London
EC3A 2AD

Bankers

Barclays Bank PLC
Leicester LE87 2BB

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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The Trustees, who are also the Directors of the charitable company for the purposes of the Companies Act present their combined directors' report and trustees' report, as required by company law, together with the financial statements of CHOICE IN HACKNEY ("CHOICE" or "the Charity") for the year ended 31st March 2024. The Trustees confirm that the trustees report and the financial statements of the Charity comply with current statutory requirements, the requirements of the Charity's governing document and the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland ("FRS 102").

Administration Details of the Charity, its Trustees and Advisors

Administration details relating to CHOICE are set out under Legal and Administrative Information, on page 1.

Structure, Governance and Management

The Charity is a company limited by guarantee and is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association.

Trustees are recruited from members of the Charity, ex-employees and from the wider community. They are elected and co-opted under the terms of the company's Articles of Association. Users are represented on the Board of Trustees. At the Annual General Meeting, the Board of Trustees is elected by the members of the Charity and serve from the close of that meeting until the close of the succeeding Annual General Meeting. The Board of Trustees consists of not less than 3 members and until otherwise determined by a General Meeting, not more than 12 members.

Trustees were given an induction to the work of CHOICE by the Executive Director and introduced to all staff members. The formal policies and procedures are reviewed annually.

The Management of the Charity is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees. Operational decisions are taken by the Executive Director and staff. Strategic decisions are made by the Board of Trustees in consultation with the Executive Director. The Board of Trustees meets at least 4 times a year and the Executive Director attends all meetings.

The Trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, and in particular, to those related to its operations and finances of the Charity, and are satisfied that systems and procedures are in place to mitigate exposure to the major risks. A review of the risk assessment was carried out by members of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Director during the year.

Public Benefit

In reviewing the Charity's aims and objectives and in planning future activities, the Trustees refer to the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit.

Objectives and Activities

CHOICE has the charitable objectives of working with disabled, Greater London residents by providing Independent Living Services including, but not limited to: Active Lifestyle, Advocacy, Befriending Plus / Volunteering, Disability Hate Crime and Training & Employment.

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The objectives of the Charity are:

- a) To relieve disabled persons in Greater London who require assistance, helping to realise their full potential and lead fulfilling lives. In particular, by the provision of a service that assists such persons obtaining their full rights and privileges they are entitled to as citizens.
- b) To advance the education of the general public as to the needs and interests of disabled people.

The Charity Commission granted CHOICE permission to operate across Greater London, which is reflected in CHOICE' Memorandum.



A selection of CHOICE IN HACKNEY staff members - from left to right

Front: Advocate, **Paula Smith** and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), **Caroline Nelson**
Back: Advocate & Trainer, **Lucia Bellini**; Advocacy Training & Employment Coordinator, **Haq Ismail**;
Administrator and Volunteer Coordinator, **Paul Salt**; Hate Crime Advocate, **Felicia Tay** and
Information Guidance & Advocacy Officer, **Colin Finch**

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance:

In the period under review, CHOICE promoted the following services to disabled Greater London residents aged 18 plus and their networks:

- Advocacy;
- Disability Hate Crime;
- Information Guidance & Advocacy;
- Training & Employment (which includes Choices into Work training, specialist Disability Hate Crime and/or Disability & Domestic Violence training, supplementary coaching, Job Club plus a Mentoring scheme);
- Befriending Plus / Volunteering;
- Active Lifestyle; and
- Relieving the Cost of Living for Disabled People in Hackney.

a) **ADVOCACY:**

CHOICE advocates support our disabled service users to obtain the services needed to live an independent and dignified lifestyle in the community. The Advocate works in partnership with the disabled user to obtain his/her rights.

Community advocacy service:

CHOICE's community advocacy service is in two parts:

- Non-statutory advocacy - CHOICE supports disabled people with issue-based matters that fall outside of statutory advocacy. This includes support to obtain accessible housing, making complaints, carrying out assessments, meeting educational needs and child protection matters for disabled parents.
- Statutory advocacy – Provided when a disabled person is legally entitled to access the support of an advocate under a particular area of legislation for example the Independent Care Act 2014. This includes undertaking Care Act assessments, Care & Support planning, Reviews and Safeguarding issues.

You may recall last year's report contained details of the tender process that London Borough of Hackney undertook for both its statutory and non-statutory advocacy contracts, which saw one lead provider (The Advocacy Project) being replaced by another (Rethink Advocacy) - a separate operating part of the national organisation: Rethink Mental Illness.

CHOICE has been sub-contracted to Rethink to provide community-based Advocacy since Jul 2023. Having discussed the matter with the funder, the Charity is hopeful the contract will be extended for a further year as it is needed and a valuable resource for the disabled Hackney residents it supports. This has been clearly demonstrated through the Charity's quarterly monitoring reports, which have consistently exceeded contracted targets since Jul 2023.

The issue is users have complex needs and (often multiple) issues. For example CHOICE has a service user who is autistic, visually impaired, has mental health and other health issues: her basic needs are not being met because she continues to receive inaccessible information, which frustrate CHOICE's support processes. Also, her multiple issues must be prioritised i.e. her homelessness matter being placed first, which will take some time to satisfactorily resolve.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

a) **ADVOCACY continued:**

Community advocacy service continued:

Often, the charity adapts its services to meet those demands in creative ways to ensure our users do not “fall through gaps”. For example, navigating users through a Child Protection process is very time-intensive (and therefore costly) and can include the Advocate engaging in the following assessments: Parental; Psychiatric; and Psychological.

For parental assessments alone, there can be between 5-10 assessments per user, lasting 2-hours each. In order to meet both our users and funder’s expectations, CHOICE proposed that Advocates attend a maximum of 1-2 parental assessments only to explain the reason and process of the assessment to the user; and meet with the assessors to explain the service user’s needs.

This is not always possible i.e. if the user has learning difficulties / other issues such as visual impairments and could quickly become overwhelmed. The organisation hopes that with patience and a greater understanding of needs, it will be able to continue to offer the right level of support needed by its users. The charity looks forward to working with Rethink in the future to be able to achieve this.

Health Advocacy:

Health Advocacy has formed a vital part of CHOICE’s service provision for over a decade firstly under Service Level Agreements, which were renewed annually until Nov 2021 when we were moved to contracts. CHOICE is now in its third and final year of a three-year contract with Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (the Trust), which has the possibility of a 2-year extension. This funding supports local disabled people in the City of London and Hackney who have physical and/or sensory impairments with their health advocacy needs.

The fundamental emphasis and focus of health advocacy is seeing things from the user’s perspective, aiming to empower users to access and use health services on an informed and equitable basis. Thus shifting the unbalanced relationship between service users (particularly those from different impairment, ethnic and cultural backgrounds).

CHOICE’s health advocacy role is to elicit the views, needs, expectations and concerns of its service users and to actively pursue and act in their best interests. This involves Advocates working with the disabled person to:

- be more involved in important decisions about their health care needs;
- know and use their rights;
- Access the health care services they need;
- Voice their wishes and feelings;
- Receive support to raise concerns or complaints;
- Access and use health services on an equal basis.

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

a) **ADVOCACY continued:**

Health Advocacy continued:

The year under review has been a turbulent and disruptive one for many people who needed to access the health service (especially disabled people who required additional support to do so) due to industrial action. According to NHS England:

- *"...over five days there were 101,977 cancellations of acute inpatient and outpatient appointments. At the peak of the action, there were 20,342 staff not at work due to industrial action. In the previous action by junior doctors over three days, there were 106,120 cancellations. The cumulative total of acute inpatient and outpatient appointments cancelled in eight months of industrial action now stands at 698,813".*

CHOICE's health advocacy service is needed now more than ever as the above demonstrates – disabled people needed support to reschedule cancelled appointments. Also, ancillary support services sourced to prevent health issues worsening in the interim.

An advertising campaign for the Health Advocacy service, which included leafletting key locations (i.e. GP surgeries, community centres etc), had garnered interest supporting us to consistently meet or exceed our monthly monitoring targets. CHOICE Advocates also conducted outreach sessions within St Bartholomew's and St Leonard's Hospitals raising awareness of the health advocacy service, making it more accessible to disabled people.

During the year, CHOICE supported service users using a variety of methods including: telephone, email, face-to-face and online engagements both within the community (i.e. hospitals, local authority offices, community centres, home visits) and from the CHOICE office.

Funding during this period allowed us to support a total of 157 disabled people with their non-statutory, statutory and health advocacy matters; some of whom had multiple issues which included:

- health-related issues including, accessing medical services, communicating with health professionals regarding their treatment, and making complaints;
- housing support, which included adaptations and repairs;
- physical and mental health / emotional wellbeing support;
- support around their domestic, family and personal challenges;
- statutory advocacy issues including Care Act assessments and safeguarding enquiries.

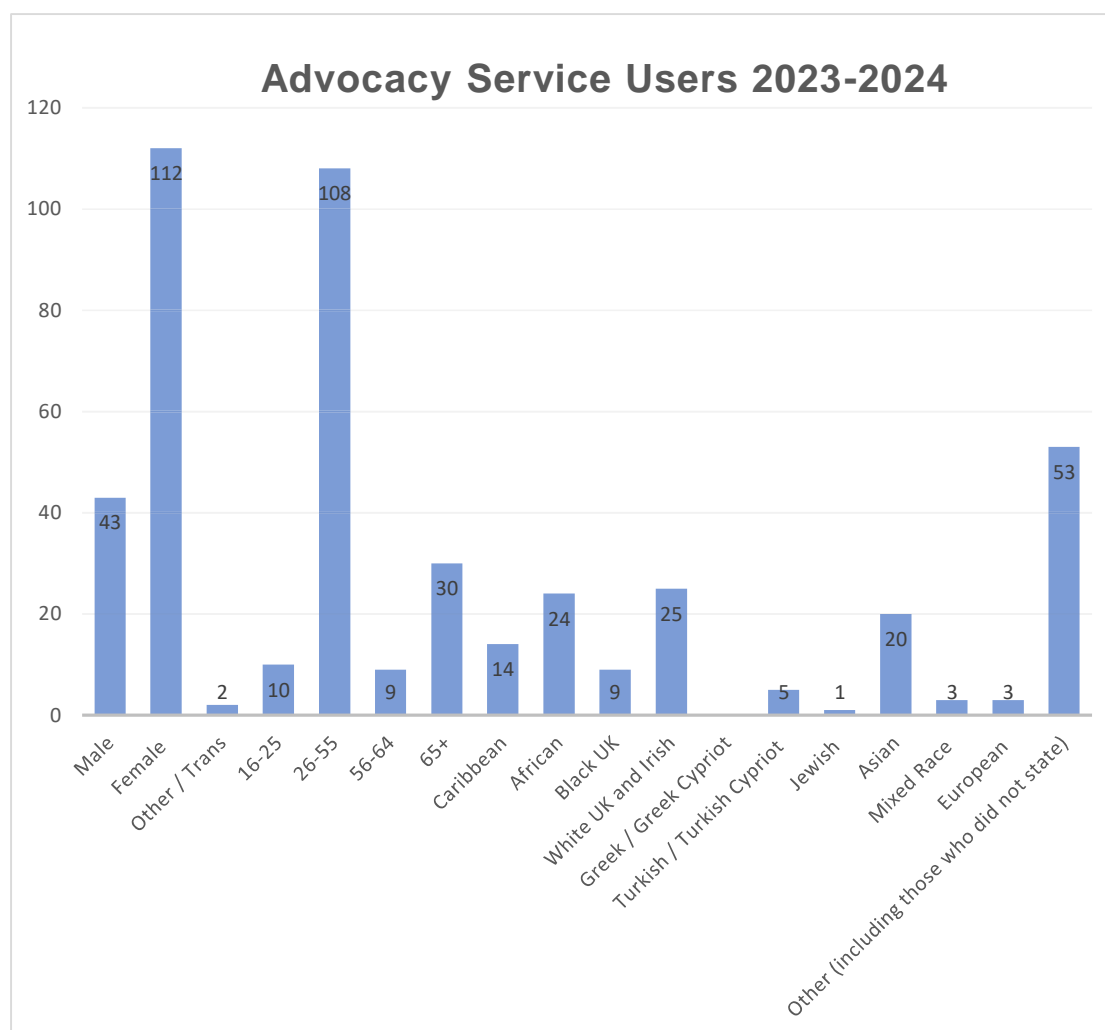
¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/07/nhs-england-publishes-data-on-latest-junior-doctors-strike/>

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

a) **ADVOCACY continued:**

The following bar chart presents statistical data for the 157 disabled people (154 in 2022-2023) who utilised the Advocacy service:



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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

b) DISABILITY HATE CRIME:

The organisation continues its role within a consortium funded by the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC) entitled "Community Alliance to Combat Hate" ("CATCH"), which started its in life 2016-17. The consortium is now in the second of a 2-year contract, which has the potential for an additional 2-year extension (4-years total).

CATCH partners are:

- Galop (lead partner and anti-LGBT+ hate crime specialist);
- Choice in Hackney (Anti-disability hate crime specialist);
- Real (Anti-disability hate crime specialist);
- Stay Safe East (Anti-disability hate crime specialist);
- Community Security Trust (Anti-Semitic hate crime specialist);
- East European Resource Centre (Anti-Central / Eastern European hate crime specialist);
- Tell MAMA (Anti-Muslim hate crime specialist); and
- The Monitoring Group (Anti-racist hate crime specialist).

The consortium works in partnership with the above network of community organisations specialising in supporting people who have experienced a hate crime due to their protected characteristics i.e.: race / ethnicity, faith / religion, sexual orientation / gender identity and/or disability. Referrals come into CHOICE via CATCH's triage service, which is managed by Galop.

CATCH partners work to tackle hate crime, discrimination and abuse within their protected characteristic equality strands. Whilst we all have our own individual specialisms, network partners often come together to work inter-sectionally or make referrals to network organisations within the partnership. We also work very closely with the Metropolitan Police Service - the source of many referrals during the period.

CHOICE's Hate Crime Advocate identifies the support needs of individuals and enables them to access other services and also:

- Assists with reporting incidents;
- Supports individuals through criminal justice processes;
- Delivers outreach to communities impacted by hate crime to promote the service; and
- Share good practice internally within the partnership.

The majority of the assistance provided throughout the year was to support service users within the Criminal Justice System. Many of these service users are referred to CHOICE after being unsuccessful in having their voices heard.

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

b) **DISABILITY HATE CRIME continued:**

The number of disability hate crimes recorded for 2023-2024 in England will not be available until much later in the year (Oct 2024). It was noted there had been a significant increase in hate crimes last year²³ and the BBC reported in Nov 2023 that hate crime is on the rise in Hackney⁴ with 1,077 hate crimes being reported during the period Nov 2022–Oct 2023 for one strand of hate crime alone. The issue of hate has become so acute that the borough is to recruit a team of Hate Crime Champions in a drive to keep local residents safe.

As we have good local connections, we were invited to take part in Hackney Council's Hate Crime week during the year where publicity material was handed out to passers-by providing knowledge and information on hate crime (what it is and what to do if they were attacked based on a protected characteristic). The week of action resulted in referrals into the CATCH triage. The photo below is featured in Hackney Council's "No Place for Hate: Hate Crime Strategy 2023-2026"⁵ and shows our Hate Crime worker at the stall:



³ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2020-to-2021/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2020-to-2021>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-67569692>

⁵ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/17RCKTjATj2upwDggh0-n2HdcYmBgu5-/view>

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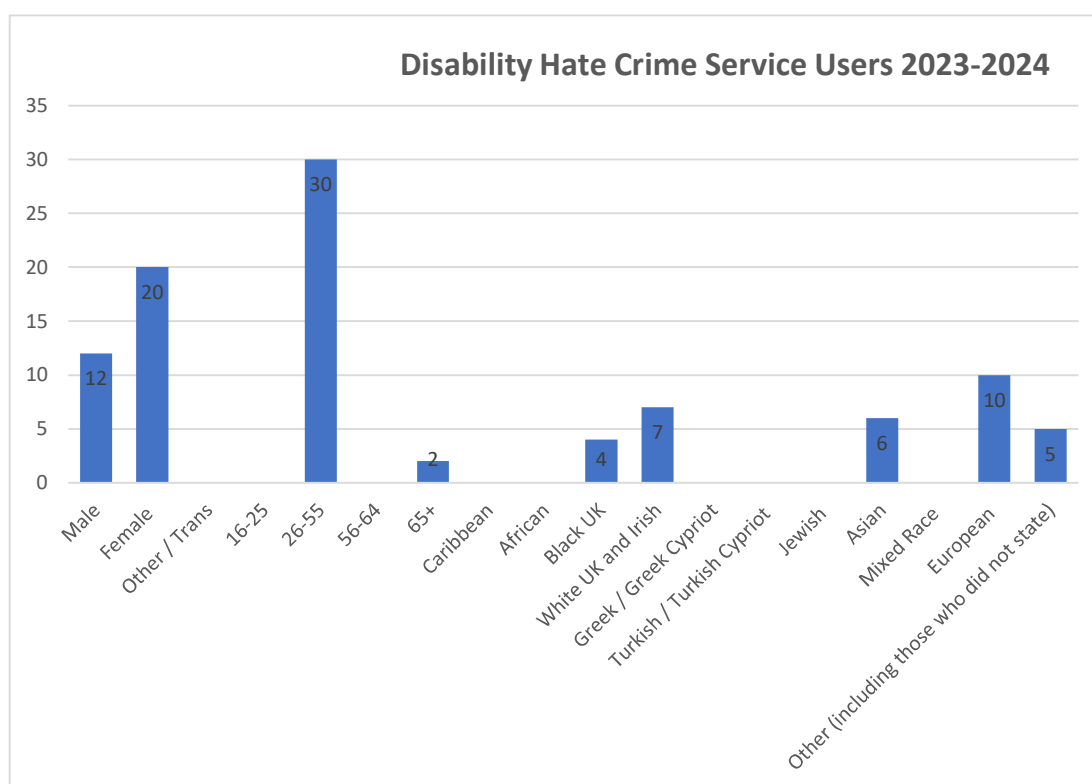
Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

b) DISABILITY HATE CRIME continued:

It appears that anti-social behaviour is on the rise with many CHOICE service users experiencing it for many years. This type of activity engages the Hate Crime Worker in liaising with all the agencies involved. However, sometimes the service users cannot be informed of the specific action that has been taken against the perpetrator due to confidentiality.

During the year, CHOICE met the needs of 32 disabled people with their disability hate crime matters (45 in 2022-2023).

The following bar chart presents data for the Hate Crime Project:



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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

c) INFORMATION GUIDANCE & ADVOCACY (IGA) Project:

Thanks to 5-years funding totalling £294,400 received from City Bridge Trust, the funding arm of The City of London Corporation's charity, Bridge House Estates (1035628), CHOICE established an Information Guidance and Advocacy (IGA) service.

This service raises disabled people's awareness of their rights, co-produces solutions to issues and thereby, allows them to make informed choices, and have control and a voice over how they run their lives.

This new service is headed up by an experienced IGA Officer who mentors disabled volunteers giving them the confidence, knowledge and skills to firstly take on light, followed by more complex cases. The IGA team work jointly to provide the service virtually/in person through partnership working with disabled people supporting with:

- Breaking down information that someone with i.e. learning difficulties has received: explaining/ensuring they understand the content, provide solutions, meet deadlines and support to make informed decisions.
- Form-filling for i.e. Blue Badge applications, welfare benefit applications, essential disability-related items i.e. washing machine for a disabled person who is incontinent/on low income.
- Provision of information via text etc to promote and increase uptake of needed services and to encourage users to make cost-savings from providers with workers negotiating on their behalf for favourable terms.
- Non-statutory advocacy i.e. obtaining care package, resolving complaints, appeals etc.

The service is fully accessible for service users with information broken down into manageable chunks, expanded on, and/or explained in ways that are accessible to service users as many times as is necessary utilising a variety of formats (i.e. Easy Read, Braille). These timely interventions ensure service users play an active role in co-producing solutions to resolve their issues and avoid crisis.

Some of the many benefits of this new service is that: the IGA Officer is not limited by a restrictive eligibility criteria and will be able to discuss all matters so that multiple issues can be dealt with amongst the team as necessary. For example, one volunteer can apply to the landlord to make adaptations or essential repairs to the home, whilst another works alongside the first to apply for grants to furnish it. A third volunteer can apply for free or affordable accessible transport i.e. Freedom Pass. All of the above provides one service user with the ability to reduce social isolation by going out and about in their community, and improved health and wellbeing as their home is being made accessible and more comfortable.

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

c) **INFORMATION GUIDANCE & ADVOCACY (IGA) Project cont'd:**

The above example has allowed other services within the Charity to be able to make referrals into the IGA where they are unable to deal with matters due to restrictive eligibility criteria. This one-stop-shop approach is appealing to both CHOICE – as our service is more holistic but also benefits the service user who doesn't have to repeat themselves to another provider as all their data is stored securely on one central database (Charity Log), which is easily accessible by other teams.

Below are some of the examples of the work carried out by the IGA team during the year:

- **Care Financial Assessments** – this is when a decision is made as to what contribution the service user should be making towards home care. IGA provided a combination of form-filling, e.g., for service users unable to do that themselves, and Advocacy, e.g., utilising the Care Act 2014. This act prevents the Local Authority insisting on the service user increasing their contribution to the extent that the disabled person's income would fall below the Minimum Income Guarantee.
- **Complaints** – these included:
 - a) Arranging with the phone provider to stop sending paper bills to the service user (which negatively impacted the user's mental health);
 - b) Having the Local Authority enforce a Dedicated Parking Bay;
 - c) Challenging colleges to meet a disabled student's access needs; and
 - d) Having the police justify their conduct after children were removed from their home, and having those children being subjected to medical intervention, without their parents' consent.

Other examples of work carried out by the IGA team included:

- **Housing** – this forms a large part of IGA's workload mainly because of the condition the properties are in, which can adversely affect health, e.g., mould and damp particularly for those with Asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) etc. Other issues include the size and layout of the property becoming unsuitable for disabled residents access needs, e.g., flats that are not on the ground floor and have no working lift.

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

c) INFORMATION GUIDANCE & ADVOCACY (IGA) Project cont'd:

- **Housing continued** - the Local Authority had also informed some service users the housing waiting list was closed but after IGA's intervention, which included completing forms – several residents had their applications accepted or re-started. One disabled resident wanted a move to Sheltered Accommodation after feeling harassed by a neighbour. Their landlord failed to respond as they thought the service user was imagining it. Through joint home visits with the landlord, and partnership work with mental health services, this request is now actively progressing.
- **Transport** – IGA team successfully applied for and appealed for Freedom, Bus & Tram passes as well as Blue Badges. The unenforced Dedicated Parking Bay, mentioned above in "Complaints", was granted after the IGA team wrote an appeal. A disabled resident had unsuccessfully attempted for several months to apply for Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) exemption, however IGA was able to obtain it for them within 48 hours.

There were also two successful negotiations with Motability scheme⁶. In one negotiation, Motability granted more time to the disabled service user to explore finance options. In the other, although IGA were unable to overturn the sanction for a vehicle being used by people other than the owner, our support gave the user the confidence to disclose why this was and we subsequently supported them in meetings with solicitors.

- **Benefits** – accounted for over half the IGA caseload as the majority of the referrals under this heading required many sessions over weeks and months. The highest amount of time provided to a single service user was 38 hours - they had multiple issues including a benefit appeal. Their case was prepared and IGA acted as the Representative at Tribunal at two separate hearings. The time and effort paid-off, as the individual received a backdated sum of over £11,000.

Another service user was extremely anxious at the prospect of facing a Tribunal. As a result of IGA's efforts, and despite refusing the claim and appeal, which were both lodged before IGA became involved, the Dept for Work & Pensions (DWP) conceded without going to court, awarding the full benefit plus a backdated payment of over £3,000.

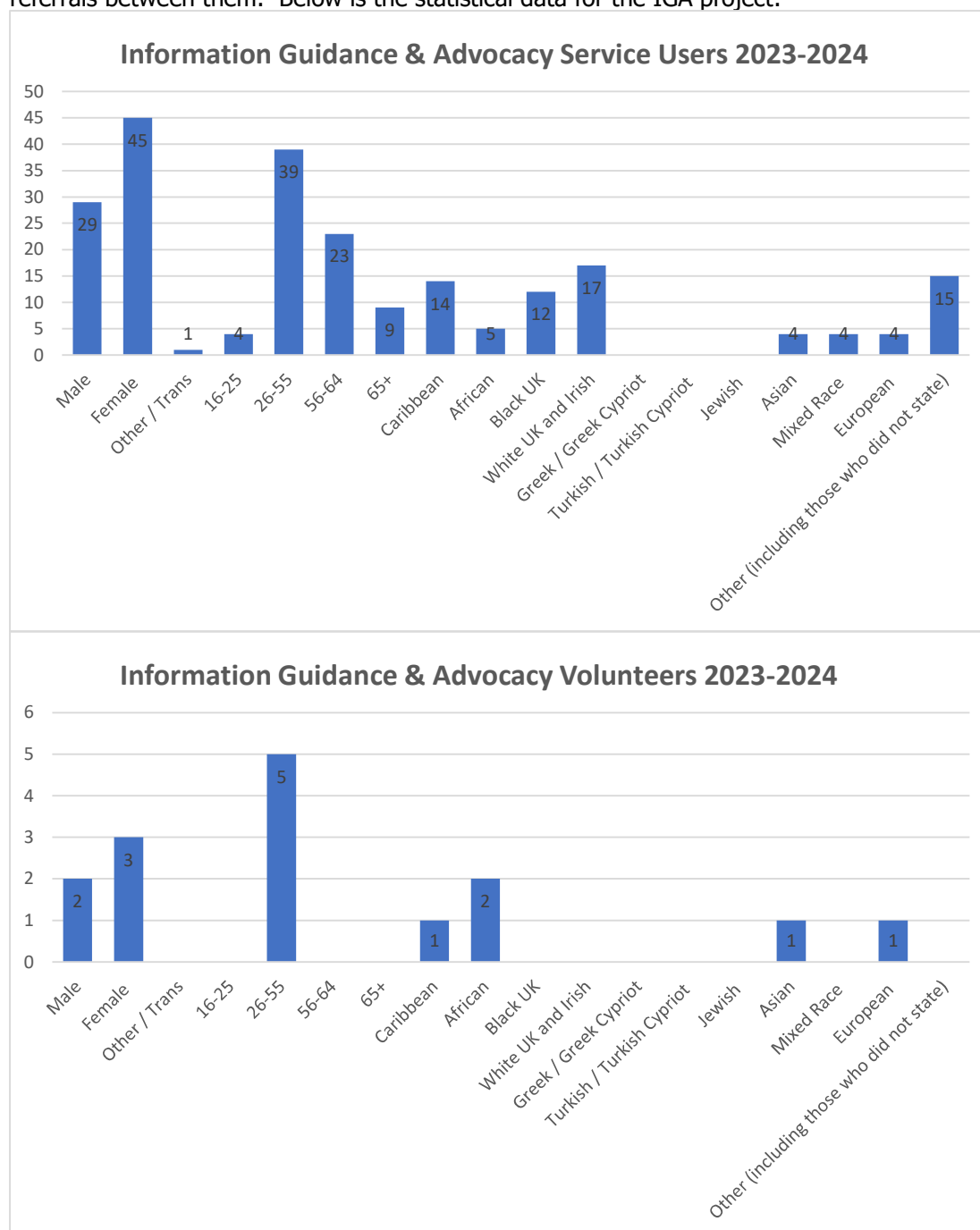
⁶ Motability is a scheme intended to enable disabled people, their families / carers to lease a new car, scooter or powered wheelchair, using their disability benefit. <https://www.motability.org.uk/motability>

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

c) INFORMATION GUIDANCE & ADVOCACY (IGA) Project cont'd:

Some service users had multiple issues and as such, 75 beneficiaries generated 101 cases or referrals between them. Below is the statistical data for the IGA project:



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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

d) TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT DEPT:

The Training & Employment Dept ("TED") provides disabled people with a fully accredited suite of training programmes made up of:

- Choices into Work training – each programme consists of 12-weeks classroom-based generic advocacy training followed by a 13-week work placement at CHOICE or host organisations. Henry Smith Charity – Improving Lives fund two Choices into Work programmes per year over a three-year period;
- Disability Hate Crime specialist training – a 6-week classroom-based training course followed by a 12-week work placement at CHOICE and host organisations will be held each year over a three-year period also funded by Henry Smith Charity–Improving Lives; and
- Disability & Domestic Violence specialist training – 6-weeks classroom-based training followed by 12-weeks work placement at CHOICE and host organisations. Unfortunately, this specialist programme's 3-year funding from Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales expired in February 2023 and as such no programmes are planned until further funding has been sourced.

Henry Smith Charity – Improving Lives also fund trainees to engage in the following supplementary sessions:

- Coaching;
- Job Club; and
- Mentoring schemes.

Choices into Work training:

This training programme is fully accredited and on successful completion of all components (classroom-based element and work placement), trainees are awarded a nationally recognised qualification (some for the first time) from CHOICE's accrediting body, Open College Network Credit 4 Learning.

The project is stronger than it was a year ago, which is entirely due to the new funding. Two Choices into Work training courses (the 44th and 45th courses) were delivered during the period, which were attended by 26 disabled people, exceeding our goal of 24.

Henry Smith Charity funding has allowed the Choices into Work course to completely transform the work it is doing. For example:

- all of its training slides have been revamped, making them reflective of the current needs of a Disability Advocate;
- the course has been restructured to be more informative but also easier to follow; and
- interactive elements have been added.

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

d) TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT DEPT continued:

Choices into Work training continued:

Other changes to the course include shifting from delivering three generic advocacy courses a year to two generic and one Hate Crime – allowing for more variety. This allows us to focus on fully recruiting for one course at a time. The course has also settled into its mixed approach of combining a hybrid delivery model whereby some training courses are delivered on a face-to-face basis whilst others are online via Zoom Video Conferencing. The online training has allowed us to deliver our services to disabled trainees who would usually be unable to attend the course. Meanwhile, the hybrid method has allowed us to blend approaches and provide the face-to-face experience that some of our trainees find very beneficial.

The Choices into Work course refined its growing services this year, and now offers a more complete and holistically supportive service than ever before. As we begin to scrutinise the longest waiting list we've ever had ahead of our 46th course, it's clear that the service is as in demand as it's ever been and is making a significant difference to its attendees.

During the period a total of 26 disabled people engaged in the 2 Choices into Work generic advocacy training programmes held in the year (34 in 2022-2023).

Coaching:

The coaching sessions are a non-essential part of the Choices into Work programme. Whilst trainee attendance wasn't mandatory, their focus on personal development, confidence building, preparing service users for sourcing and retaining work etc. made them appealing and have been in high demand. Some coaching session themes included:

- confidence building;
- visualisation techniques;
- goal setting;
- skills auditing; and
- role-plays to help with interviews and meetings with employers.

CHOICE is pleased to have supported 20 trainees (13 in 2022-2023) across 120 sessions with a wide-range of employment-related concerns during the period.

Job Club:

As with the coaching sessions, it is not essential for trainees to attend the Job Club in order to receive their accredited award. However, the fervour with which places have been taken up by our trainees is reassuring that this is valuable work as attendance at these sessions are growing.

The group sessions continued to attract trainees in need of support with:

- applying for work;
- networking;
- speaking to employers about access needs; and
- many more topics intended to support our trainees to find and stay in work. These sessions have proven invaluable to our service users who return, session after session.

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

d) **TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT DEPT continued:**

Choices into Work training continued:

Job Club continued:

The Charity is particularly proud of its Job Club, which offers not only an opportunity for trainees to learn about employment skills but also to share experiences and network with each other. 17 disabled people (14 in 2022-2023) took part in the Job Club during the year.

Case history:

Below is a case history of a Trainee who undertook the Choices into Work course and also enjoyed supplementary Coaching and Job Club sessions:

AA is a woman in her 30s who experiences Cerebral Palsy and has never worked. She is a powered wheelchair user who requires carers to help her with most daily living activities. She came to the Choices into Work course in-person and initially struggled to regularly attend. The Trainer encouraged her to continue to attend, as she showed great promise with classroom contributions and homework.

AA decided to move online and attended much more regularly. AA's experience and understanding were invaluable to her fellow trainees, and she performed well in assessments. She passed the Choices into Work course with a Level 3 award: the first qualification earned since leaving school with no GCSEs.

Since passing the course, AA has attended Job Club sessions, where she has been able to envisage a better future for herself and is determined to taking the most important steps to reaching her goals. She had also completed her work placement with our Advocacy Mentor, who noted early on that she had low confidence in communicating with clients. However, by the end of the placement, AA was confident carrying out face-to-face meetings with service users.

Here is a quote from AA about her experience on the Choices into Work course:

"The course has changed my life. I feel like I can do what I want to do now. I can help people instead of just being helped."

The bar chart below shows demographics of:

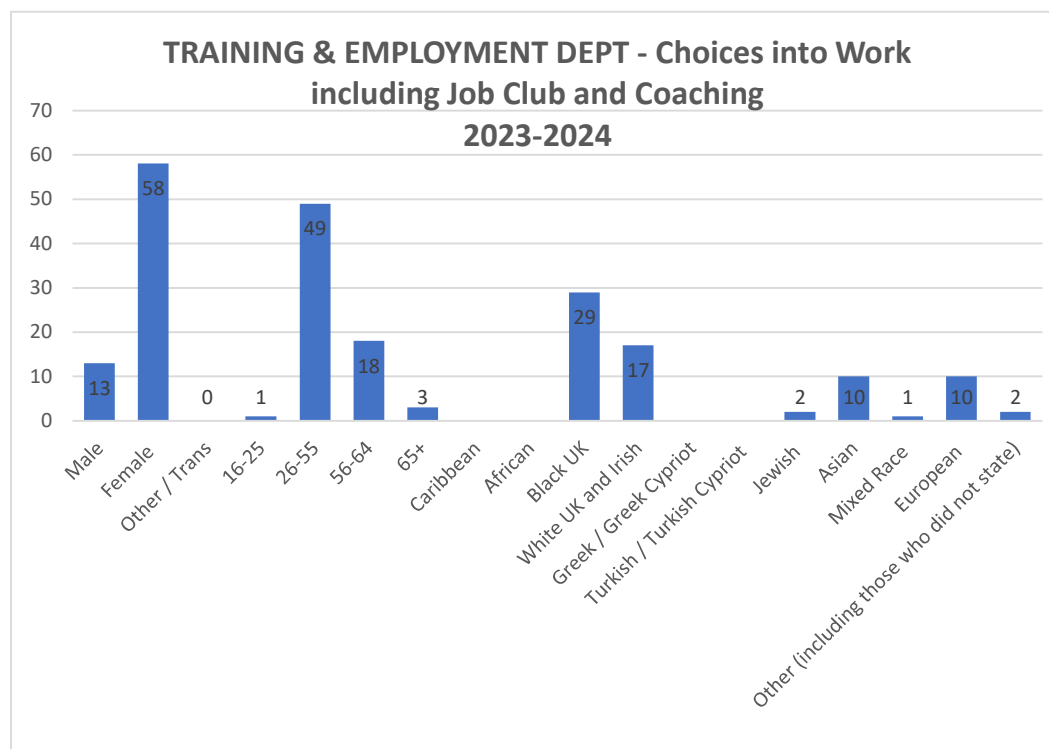
- 26 disabled people (34 in 2022-2023) who attended 2 Choices into Work programmes;
- 20 disabled people (13 in 2022-2023) who took part in the Coaching sessions; and
- 25 disabled people (14 in 2022-2023) who engaged in the Job Club.

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

d) TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT DEPT continued:

Choices into Work training continued:



Disability & Domestic Violence training:

Funding from Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales expired in Feb 2023 and the organisation was therefore unable to continue this specialist training programme during the year. However, in the hope that it will be able to source funding at some stage, a brief overview of the course is given below:

Course content:

Each programme has 6-sessions designed to train a group of disabled people to become professional advocates, specialising in domestic violence. Training topics include: Introduction to domestic violence; Safety planning and risk assessments; Child protection processes; Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC); Housing issues; and the civil and criminal courts.

The disability element is very rarely addressed even within the disabled movement and this course will be able to equip trainees with the skills needed to better manage situations, bridge the gap within domestic violence and disability and examine in detail how the two can be related.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

d) TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT DEPT continued:

Disability & Domestic Violence training continued:

The service is essential due to the increase of incidents of domestic violence and the demand for support services, particularly within mainstream organisations (which are often inaccessible for disabled people).

As the disabled people CHOICE works with continue to face multiple barriers of discrimination in their lives, having these additional skills and knowledge will assist them to grow in confidence and compete for jobs against non-disabled candidates.

12 people undertook the Disability & Domestic Violence course last year over 2-programmes (2022-2023).

Disability Hate Crime training programme:

This specialist training programme was funded by Henry Smith Charity – Improving Lives during the year; allowing us to recruit and engage disabled people to undertake accredited disability-related training not carried out anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

The training is specialist as trainees are expected to come with some relevant experience or academic qualification as the course is intensive. Unlike the generic advocacy focussed Choices into Work training programme, which offers a range of accreditation levels, the Disability Hate Crime training course only offers a Level 4 award, which is at Diploma level.

Training model:

The Disability Hate Crime training course is made up of:

- Classroom-based element - six 6-hour sessions, with work tasks to complete for each session. Trainee numbers per programme were limited to a maximum of 8. A variety of assessment methods were included such as homework; essays; presentations; and the end of term 2500-word essay.
- Work experience through work placement - 12-weeks totalling 72-hours+ at CHOICE or other host organisations, allowing trainees to put what they learnt during the classroom element into practice when they advocated for themselves and disabled survivors of hate crime.

Whilst Hate Crime training is a comparatively new development, CHOICE has been providing Disability Hate Crime Advocacy as part of a consortium (the Community Alliance to Combat Hate), which has been funded by the Mayor of London for just under a decade. This meant that trainees placed at CHOICE could be exposed to relevant casework.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

d) TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT DEPT continued:

Disability Hate Crime training programme continued:

Training and experience in this area has allowed more disabled people to apply for jobs in local government, the police service and universities, as well as voluntary opportunities as representatives on consultative committees in these areas.

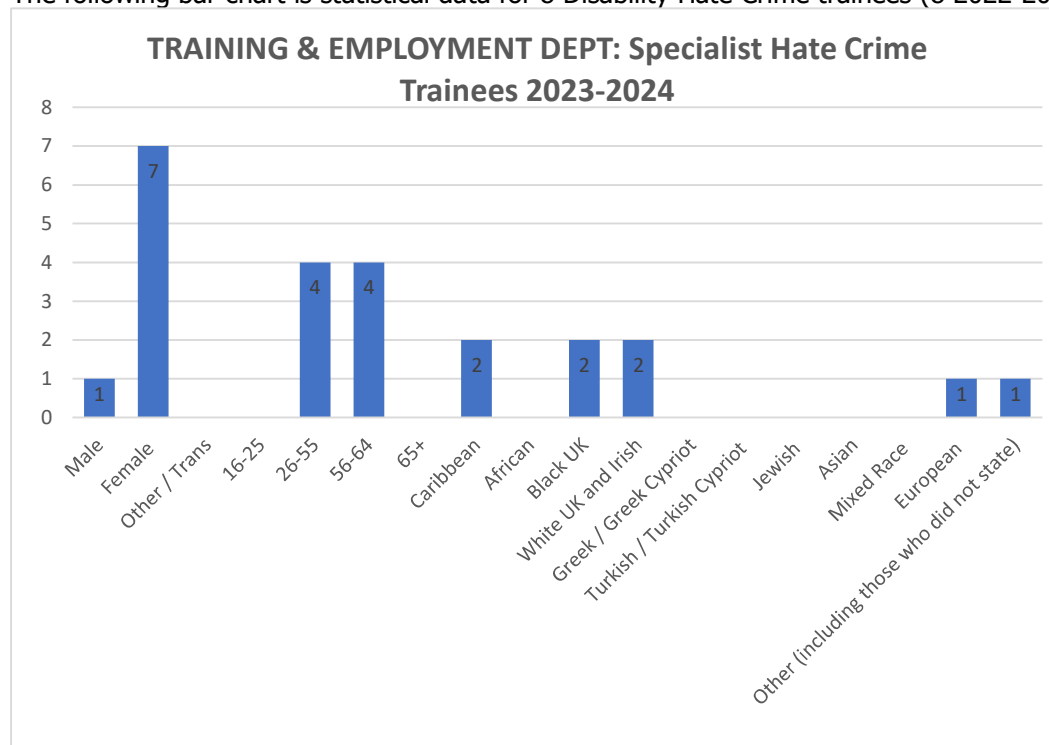
One training programme was held during the year where trainees gained knowledge and experience through 6-virtual classroom-based training sessions (delivered entirely online via Zoom Video Conferencing). This delivery method offered trainees greater flexibility, particularly those who were already employed and could therefore undertake the course (including their work placement, which contained appropriate casework) from their places of work.

Course content:

The following areas, were included in the course:

- Representing clients in multi-agency meetings; carrying out risk assessments; Safeguarding; Care Act assessments; Trauma-based approach; Complaints to agencies such as the police and housing; the roles of the different agencies and bodies i.e. Housing, Anti-Social Behaviour Teams; and supporting people through the criminal justice system – including reporting to the police and going to court.

The following bar chart is statistical data for 8 Disability Hate Crime trainees (8 2022-2023):



CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

d) TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT DEPT continued:

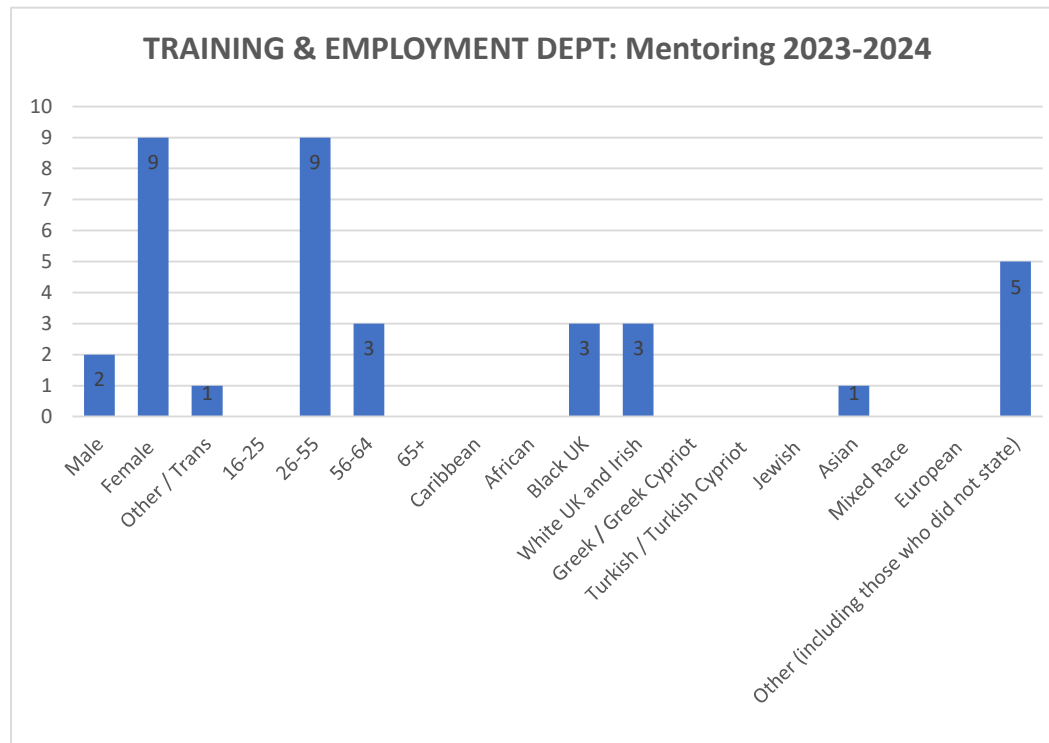
Mentoring:

Thanks to 3-year's funding from Henry Smith Charity – Improving Lives, CHOICE was also able to include a mentoring programme as part of its TED service.

Trainees who successfully completed the classroom-based elements of our training courses had the opportunity to put everything they learnt into practice as they familiarised themselves with the work of an Advocate during their work placement at CHOICE or a host organisation. The work placement is an essential part of the course and in order to receive the OCN award, it is a requirement for both the classroom-based and work placement elements to be completed.

CHOICE trainees shadowed an experienced disabled Advocate where they viewed the Advocate's casework, understood how to apply the classroom-based elements of the course to "live" cases and adopted the many different approaches and disciplines that come with advocacy practice.

During the period 12 trainees benefited from this work placement (7 in 2022-2023) as shown by the bar chart below:



CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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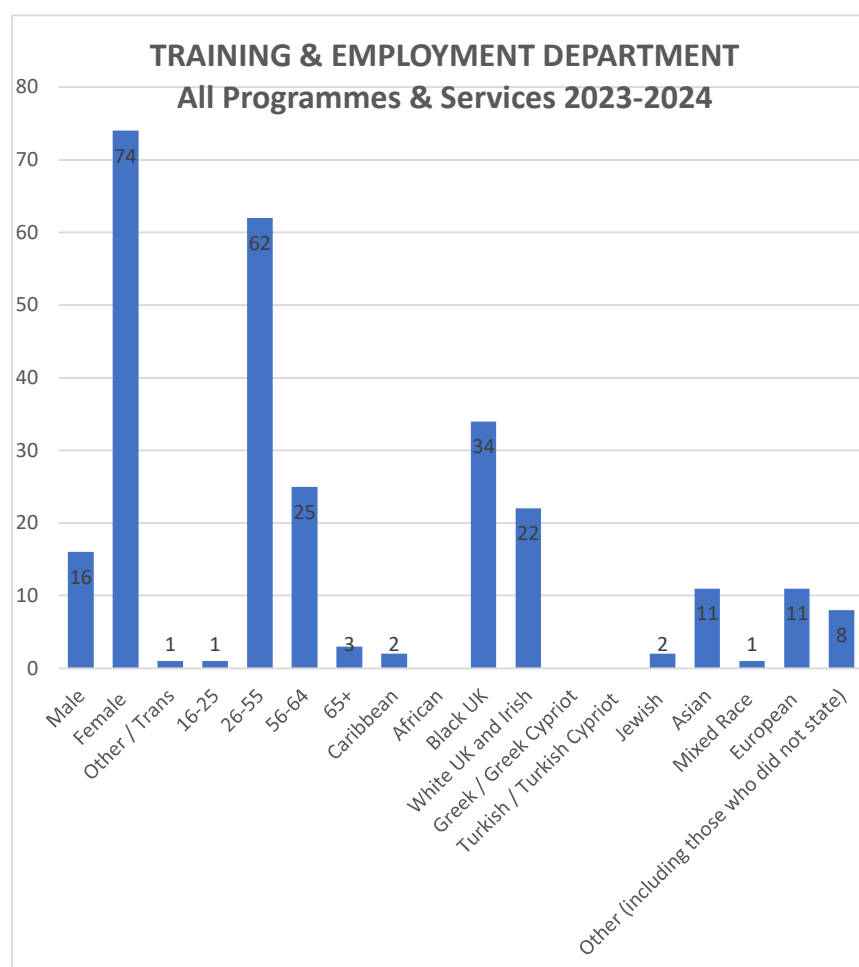
Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

d) TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT DEPT continued:

During the period under review the Training & Employment Dept supported:

- 26 disabled people (34 in 2022-2023) to complete 2 Choices into Work programmes;
- 8 disabled people (8 in 2022-2023) to complete 1 Disability Hate Crime programme;
- 20 disabled people (13 in 2022-2023) to take part in Coaching sessions;
- 25 disabled people (14 in 2022-2023) to engage in the Job Club; and
- 12 disabled people (7 in 2022-2023) benefited from Mentoring.

A total of 91 individuals benefited from the services available within the Training & Employment Dept (87 in 2022-2023). Despite 2 (as opposed to 3) generic advocacy Choices into Work programmes being run and no Disability & Domestic Violence courses being held in the year, the figure has increased overall due to more trainees attending supplementary sessions and the mentoring scheme. Trainees' statistical data is shown below:



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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

e) **BEFRIENDING PLUS / VOLUNTEER PROJECT:**

CHOICE's Befriending Plus / Volunteer project is a long-running service which goes some way to tackle the feelings of loneliness and social isolation that some disabled people experience. It is supported by volunteers in the office or within the community as follows:

- Office volunteers - disabled and non-disabled volunteers gain office experience whilst supporting CHOICE in its core functions including CHOICE's social media platforms, meeting fundraising aims, administration, design and marketing.
- Befriending - volunteers regularly contact service users / escort them to places, reducing social isolation and encouraging community engagement.
- Gardening - transforming inaccessible green spaces into places they can conveniently take in the fresh air, exercise and enjoy time outdoors.

Following the Coronavirus ("COVID-19") pandemic, the project was expanded, enabling disabled people to benefit from the following services:

- Walking friends - volunteers encourage service users to leave their homes, take in some exercise and enjoy the fresh air whilst maintaining social-distancing practices.
- Shopping and medication drop-off - volunteers purchase groceries and medication and deliver them to the door of the disabled service user.
- Website development - volunteers from CodeAid completely redesigned the CHOICE site and added stunning new features such as online donations and referrals facilities.

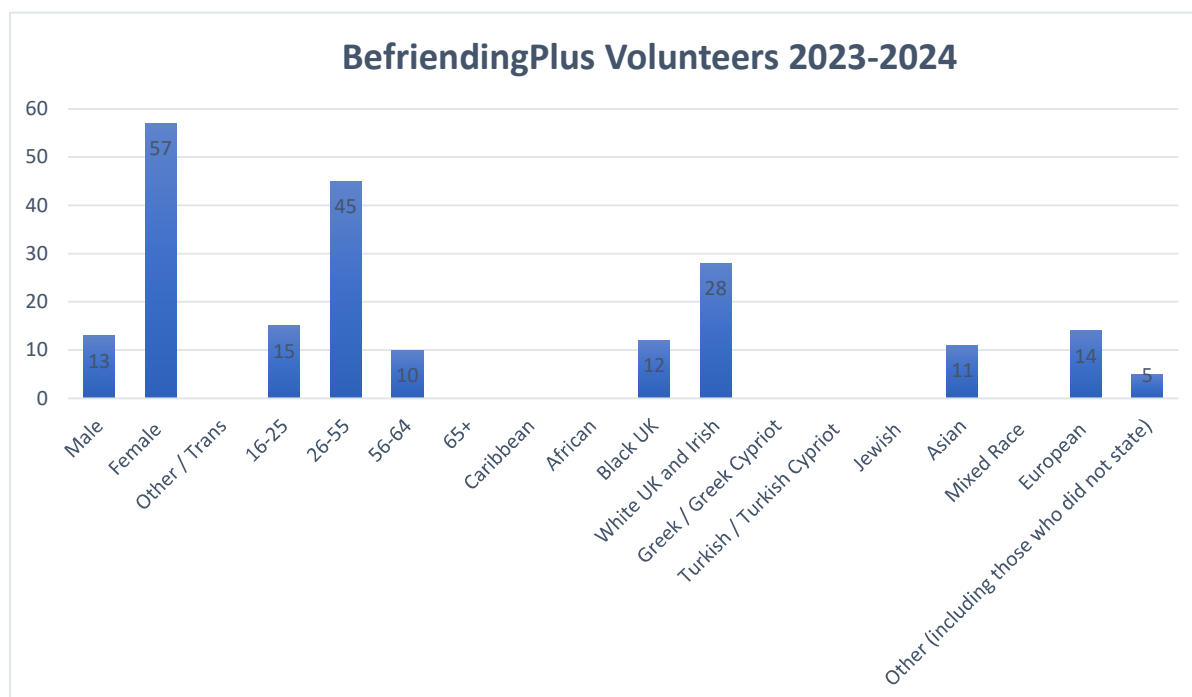
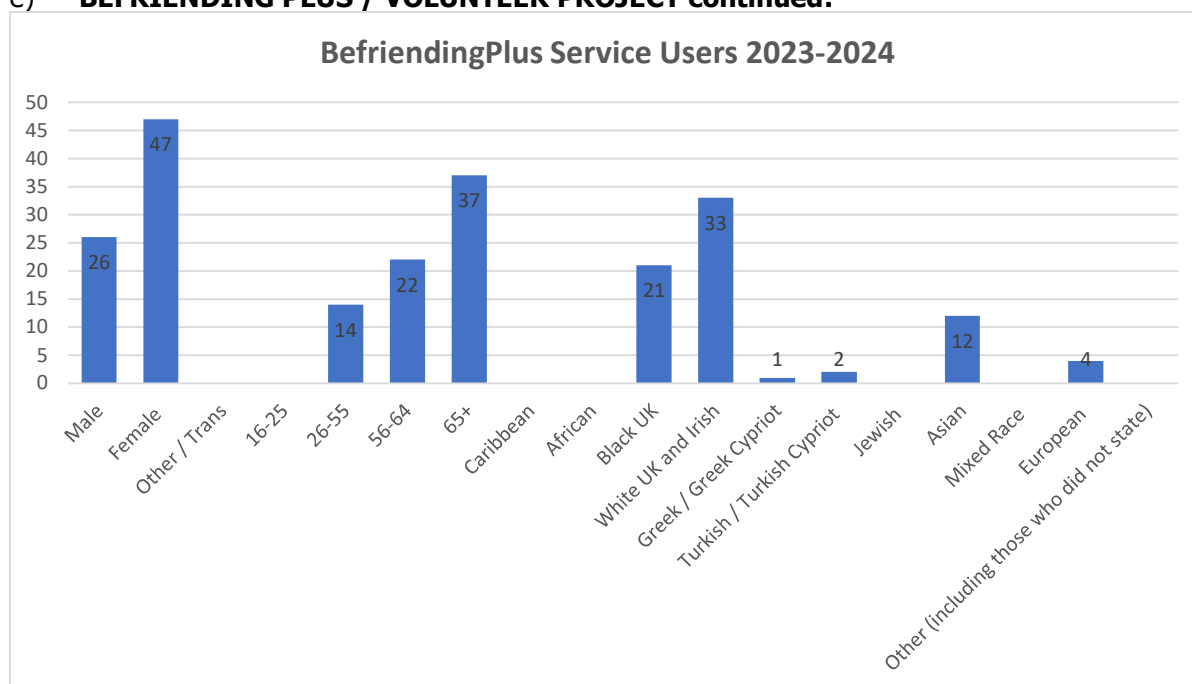
Whilst the project was unfunded as a "stand alone", it benefited immensely from the Government's Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund, which was delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund (the largest community funder in the UK). Part of the funding that went towards CHOICE's project "Relieving the cost of living for disabled people in Hackney" enabled us to substantially increase our volunteer and service user numbers, making substantial impacts on their lives.

The figures below are solely for the Befriending Plus / Volunteer project, which supported 73 service users (91 in 2022-2023); and 70 volunteers (93 in 2022-2023) in the year – demographics are shown below:

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

e) BEFRIENDING PLUS / VOLUNTEER PROJECT continued:



CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

f) **ACTIVE LIFESTYLE:**

CHOICE's Active Lifestyle service supports local disabled people in wellbeing activities to improve their overall physical and mental health whilst also reducing social isolation.

Starting its life in 2012, it has organised a variety of events over the years including:

- Boccia;
- Golf workshops;
- Kayaking at Hackney Reservoir;
- Women's boxing;
- Squash;
- Tennis; and
- Leyton Orient Football Club's Community Day.

The project's main activities include:

- Exercise sessions organised in conjunction with CHOICE's host organisation, Salvation Army Hoxton for face-to-face and/or online sessions, where service users can enjoy keep fit activities from the comfort of their homes;
- Social clubs (also from the Salvation Army or online) where disabled service users can bond over shared interests and experiences;
- Buddies / volunteers are provided to escort disabled people to local accessible gyms / recreational centres to support with navigating their way around the different equipment available.

Unfortunately, the project has been unfunded for the last two years and unable to offer any activities. CHOICE is hopeful that with a concerted fundraising effort and the cooperation of local businesses, the organisation will be able to revive this valuable project.

g) **RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY:**

The Government's Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund is being delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest community funder in the UK. Following an application made to the funder in Sep 2023, CHOICE received an award of £73,004 in Dec 2023 to support the Charity tackle the many issues arising out of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and a new project "Relieving the cost of living for disabled people in Hackney" was born.

You will note the gap between CHOICE completing the funding application (Sep 2023) and receiving news of the award from the funder (Dec 2023), which was a critical period of time for the charity as caseloads across all projects had increased substantially with issues related to the cost of living.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

g) **RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY continued:**

One of the benefits of the award is that it included a retrospective period of funding from mid-Jul 2023 amounting to £22,622. This meant the organisation could recover its increased costs for the (unfunded) work it had already undertaken. The funding window however was short as all work and the remaining funding of £50,382 had to cease and be spent by 31st Mar 2024.

Project statistics are impressive: the following details beneficiaries supported and personnel engaged during both retrospective (24th Jul 2023 - 12th Dec 2023) and ongoing periods (13th Dec 2023 - 31st Mar 2024):

DESCRIPTION	JUL 2023- DEC 2023	DEC 2023- MAR 2024	TOTAL
Beneficiaries supported	127	343	470
Issues dealt with	261	375	636
Volunteers engaged	105	197	302
Volunteer hours	571	1405	1976
Staff engaged <i>(with some carrying out dual roles)</i>	3	8	11
Staff hours	810	1424	2232

NB: These statistics are based on multiple issues with service users, staff and volunteers being counted once for every engagement during the period.

Casework:

This funding allowed CHOICE staff and volunteers to "cherry pick" which project would be most suitable for service users to be referred into. This is because the support offered to service users was wide and varied – spanning our entire services including but especially: Advocacy, Information & Guidance, Befriending / Volunteering. The only proviso being that the work must relate to the service user's ability to better cope within the cost of living crisis. This included the following:

- All service users being offered a financial health check;
- A form-filling service to maximise welfare benefits for new/existing claimants of Personal Independence Payment, Universal Credit, Housing/Council Tax benefits etc.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

g) RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY continued:

Casework continued:

This support extended to reviews, appeals etc enabling disabled people who, according to the Institute for Government (IfG, 2022) are amongst the worst-affected households on low incomes) closely align their income with the rising costs of living;

- Applications to reduce travel costs via Freedom Pass, Blue Badge, Taxi Card etc to facilitate accessible travel, particularly in the cost of living crisis when the price of public transport increased by 5.9% (Metro, Jan 2023);
- Negotiating with landlords/energy providers for affordable repayment plans to clear arrears built-up when housing/household services (electricity, gas, food/drink), made the largest annual contribution to inflation. This reduced the risk of disabled people in low-income households going without essentials to pay for higher-than-average energy bills (IfG, 2022) sometimes through highly-priced pre-payment meters. Disabled people will also avoid evictions and not add to Hackney's 229 rough sleepers. (Trust for London-Poverty / Inequality Indicators);
- Grant applications for cookers, washing machines, new flooring – all of which are too expensive for low income users;
- Obtaining a reasonably priced care agency within the user's budget;
- Informing users via email/text of how to make cost-savings i.e. on energy bills, the location of / eligibility criteria of food banks and other services;
- Liaising with the council to move tenants to more suitable / affordable accommodation.
- Providing volunteers to escort service users to / attend supermarkets on their behalfs, making savings of 9.5% (Which, 2021) when compared to closer but more expensive convenience stores. For low-income households, supermarkets have a greater choice of affordable, nutrient-rich foods, which improved the diet and health/wellbeing of disabled people who also took advantage of special offers;
- Volunteers also provided free gardening, making outside spaces accessible, and a venue for social engagements (to cut back on expensive outings).

The above examples of work carried out attracted multiple outcomes for users to improve their standard of living during the cost of living crisis, which is crucial for the disabled people CHOICE supports as based on the latest forecasts, it will take a long time (2027/28) for household incomes to recover to previous levels. However, living standards will remain below pre-pandemic levels, meaning the effects of the cost of living crisis are likely to be felt for a long time (IfG, 2022).

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

g) RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY continued:

The organisation is very pleased and proud to have been able to support so many disabled people to successfully achieve their outcomes. Working in partnership with the service users, CHOICE offered a seamless / holistic delivery method, which meant issues were dealt with quickly with referrals being made internally and externally to ensure the user gained maximum benefit within the funded period.

Case studies:

Some of the project successes have been highlighted below within in-depth case studies.

Advocacy Case study 1:

Advocacy Service user 1 has dementia and is 80 years old with a long history of mental health issues. A safeguarding alert was raised by an Occupational Therapist (OT) as he told them that he had given his bank card to two of his female friends and they had used it to take money out of the cashpoint for themselves.

The CHOICE Advocate attended a capacity meeting with the service user and he was found to have capacity to manage his finances but that carers would be sent to his home. Different carers were coming into the service user's home at different times and, he refused to let them in. Furthermore, as the service user had substantial savings and was informed he would have to pay for the carers (even though he did not want them). At the same time, the housing association refused to carry out repairs (the property was in poor condition and contractors refused to enter due to health and safety).

The Advocate had to communicate with the service user by text message due to his various impairments - the service user told the Advocate he did not want any carers however, it was clear he needed some assistance. After he spent some time in hospital, he agreed to CHOICE advocating on his behalf. An affordable care agency was sourced and once trust had been established, major deep cleaning was carried out.

Advocacy Case study 2:

Relates to a woman in her late 30s who has multiple physical and mental health issues who was evicted from private rented accommodation. Hackney Housing are helping her to find private accommodation. Unfortunately, those properties are too small and don't accommodate disability-related equipment.

The Advocate discovered the service user was already in receipt of Personal Independence Payments (PIP), however at the low component for daily living and no mobility. A Change of Circumstances Form was submitted, however the DWP refused to provide the outcome. The Advocate rang DWP and was eventually informed a decision would be sent in two weeks. However, four days later she was notified the decision had stayed the same. Information was gathered to submit a Mandatory Reconsideration and the outcome is awaited however, as clear evidence showing the service user utilises a mobility aid was sent in support of the application, the Advocate is confident the decision will change, helping her to secure more accessible housing.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

g) RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY continued:

Case studies continued:

Information Guidance & Advocacy (IGA) Case study 1:

Is a White British male, aged in his late 70's with multiple, long-term health conditions. The presenting issue is debt-related with substantial arrears on Council Tax/Rent. The service user is sole tenant of a Local Authority flat he shares with one of his adult sons.

Various letters notifying the service user of the arrears were not responded to and so the Local Authority escalated to the threat of court action with the possibility of the loss of his Secure Tenancy and Eviction. The resident son is also the DWP Appointee i.e. letters are addressed to him and payment is made into his (not the service user's) Bank Account. The son also receives benefits in his own right and is reluctant to be the father's carer, as Carers Allowance would reduce his Universal Credit.

The service user's other son also uses our service – he revealed the father received respite care in a local hospice. The father also informed us he had not seen correspondence from the Local Authority: a home visit was arranged. The first step was to avoid court action and the Local Authority temporarily lifted the threat of Court action.

The IGA team liaised with his sons resulting in them clearing the rent arrears thereby removing the immediate risk of eviction. However, the family could not clear the Council Tax arrears but they were granted additional time to clear the arrears. In addition, IGA assisted the service user to make applications for (back-dated) Council Tax Reduction (CTR) and Council Tax Exemption.

IGA also supported the service user to open a sole bank account, which was nearby his home to receive his benefits direct. The service user has now asked us to help him explore and possibly apply for Sheltered or Supported Living and has expressed feeling much more confident about his financial situation going forward thanks to the support CHOICE provided.

IGA Case study 2:

Is a Black British / Caribbean male in his mid-40's who is separated from his partner and, although their joint children do visit, he lives alone. The service user has severely impaired mobility and has been diagnosed with experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The presenting issue was benefits – he was previously in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) with one component at Higher rate but nothing for the other components. Following the transition to PIP, he was awarded Standard rate for both however, he believed he should be awarded Enhanced rates.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

g) RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY continued:

Case studies continued:

IGA Case study 2 continued:

IGA made a home visit with the Wellbeing Worker from his GP Practice. This resulted in our request for his medical records being fast-tracked to draft his Appeal, known as a Mandatory Reconsideration (MR). Having the Wellbeing Worker present enabled us to become aware of other professionals i.e. the Psychiatric Therapist who agreed to provide written testimony.

We gathered other medical evidence, composed and submitted the MR. Unfortunately, the DWP could not trace receiving it and the Appeal was out of time however, DWP agreed to us re-sending a copy of the MR. The Appeal was refused and the CHOICE team explained the remaining option was to apply to a Benefits Tribunal and offered to act as Representative. The service user was very anxious: he would find it impossible, physically or emotionally, to attend. IGA explained the option of the phone or video hearing and he agreed so long as IGA would also be present.

We explained that he had the option for both written and oral evidence and his Wellbeing Worker offered to attend as Witness and IGA also undertook to provide guidance on the exact meaning of key words used in Benefit claims e.g, 'Aid or appliance', 'assistance or prompting or supervision' so that they could write a Statement. This gave the service user confidence and he agreed to let us apply for a Hearing. By facilitating a multi-agency approach, we were able to put-together a strong and comprehensive submission to the Tribunals Office. It was so good the DWP, who are sent a copy by the Court and have to disclose the claimants entire file to all parties, took the unusual decision not to contest the application and, despite twice rejecting the service user's claim, agreed to award both components at the Enhanced rate.

The service user received a back-dated sum of £3,396.58, increased monthly payments and is now entitled to apply for other concessions including the Motability Scheme. Together with the Wellbeing worker, we are helping the service user explore the option of a Motability scooter that, along with increased income, will greatly enhance his independence. The whole outcome has led the service use to feel more positive as it is demonstrable proof that good things can happen if you receive the right assistance.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

g) RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY continued:

Case studies continued:

Volunteer Project Case study 1:

Is an older woman living on her own; she has mobility issues, which means she struggles to walk unsupported and is always at risk of falling. She enjoyed her independence throughout her life but had now become dependent on delivery services and her small care package. The Volunteer Coordinator, paired her with an enthusiastic volunteer hoping to find some meaningful work away from her day job. They immediately became firm friends.

The volunteer assisted the service user to leave her home and gave her the confidence to go to the shops and procure food for the week. This also encouraged her to eat healthily so that she could enjoy her walks with the volunteer more. Our volunteer helped the service user to engage with local services and community groups, widening her group of friends. This includes giving her access to a lunch club that pooled resources together to make affordable meals for everyone. Now the service user enjoys a much more robust lifestyle with a great deal of pressure taken off of her and her finances.

Volunteer Project Case study 2:

Lives in council housing and has a large garden but is not well enough to look after it herself. As a result of the state of the garden, her upstairs neighbours often hassle her and threaten to report her to the landlord. The landlord declared the garden is our service user's responsibility and she must look after it or face eviction. Facing either incorporating a gardener in her already strained finances, or facing the stress and expense of a move, she turned to CHOICE. We firstly organised a team of corporate volunteers to clear the excess growth and get her garden under control. We then paired her with a dedicated individual volunteer who regularly visits to keep the garden tidy. Not only has this relieved the tensions between the service user and her neighbours and landlord, but she is also able to enjoy this space now, improving her wellbeing.

Overview of the Volunteer Project:

The service has grown and changed during this period to reflect the pressing needs of people in the community. Hundreds of volunteer hours have been utilised to support our disabled service users, improving lives throughout the borough.

Our shopping service arose from the challenges of the pandemic but has proven to be essential to vulnerable adults in our community. Getting out and procuring shopping has proven extremely challenging, especially for those who have fallen through the gap of our strained care system. Our volunteers meet with service users and accompany them to the shops to procure groceries and daily essentials.

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Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

g) RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY continued:

Overview of the Volunteer Project con't

Not only is this a helpful method of supporting service users to get the essentials, it also helps them to save money. Many of our service users cannot get to the shops and would therefore have to depend upon delivery services to get their shopping. This is very expensive and contributes to a sedentary lifestyle, leading to more care needs, greater health risks, and ultimately, more expense for both the service user and support services. By providing volunteers, we allow the service user to exercise and save money.

For disabled people, the crisis made it especially difficult to stay on top of maintaining their gardens. The cost of hiring gardeners and the decrease in general health have made it difficult to look after their green spaces. This can cause many complex problems. Aside from denying the service user access to an essential source of mental and physical restoration, the growth can cause serious problems to the property and tensions with neighbours. Not being able to manage their gardens causes a major strain on the service users' resources and well-being.

Our gardeners work directly with an individual disabled person to help them manage these precious outdoor spaces. They assist the service user to reduce maintenance costs of their homes and gardens, promoting greater wellbeing, reducing healthcare costs and even lower food costs by helping to plant some fresh produce. Service users have responded very enthusiastically to the service and the demand has never been higher.

In addition to our individual gardening opportunities, we have also accommodated large groups of corporate volunteers. Organisations receive volunteer days to give back to their communities and grow as a team. Volunteering with us has meant that our service users have benefited from large scale efforts such as removing huge amounts of overgrowth from the gardens over a shorter period of time.

With the increasing burden of rising prices, stress levels only compound the issue of social isolation. Our befriending service pairs our isolated and vulnerable service users with volunteers who help them to leave their homes and engage with community services such as parks. Not only does this relieve some of the pressure on care services, it also provides emotional support and important information sharing. Instead of engaging in high-cost outings or entertainment, our service users can enjoy low-cost or free activities with their volunteers within their local community. All service users of the volunteer service have been offered our texting service with bespoke messages providing advice to help save money and find support services. Many service users now engage with community services such as advocacy and advice, resulting in saving money during the crisis.

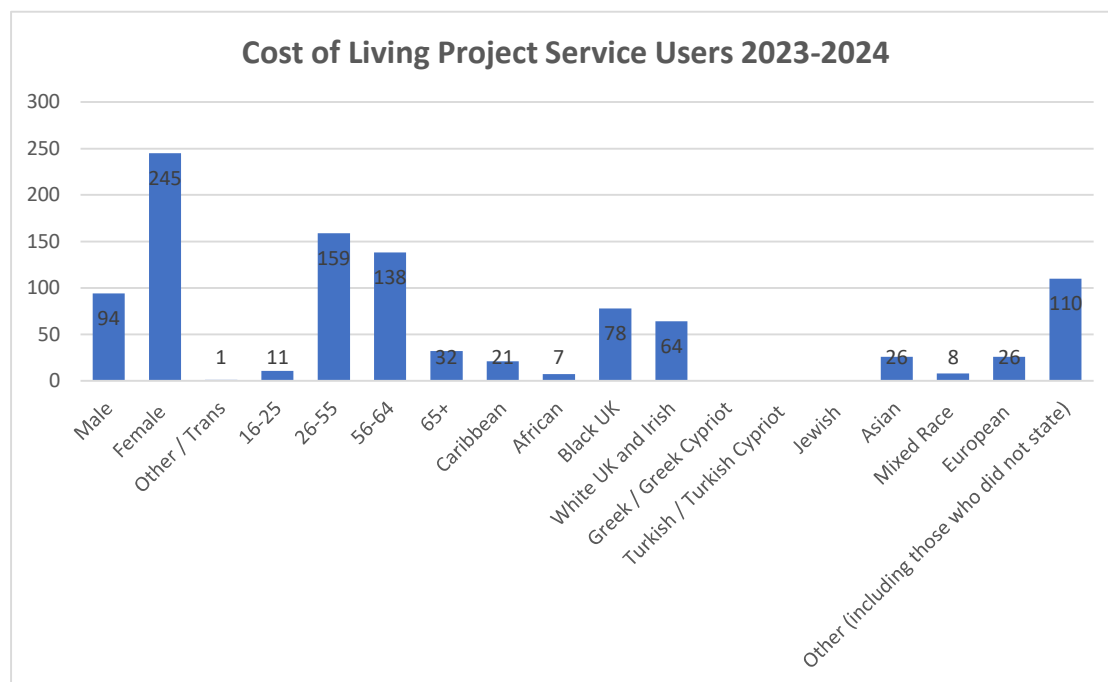
Everyone reported a great increase in wellbeing / financial security as a result of CHOICE's Volunteering services, which has always prioritised the wellbeing of its disabled service users – the funding allowed us to consider our services as part of an holistic approach to improving their circumstances.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

g) RELIEVING THE COST OF LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, HACKNEY continued:

The bar chart below provides statistical data for the project:



CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

h) **NEW DEVELOPMENTS:**

Trustees can provide an update on some of the innovative and exciting developments that have allowed CHOICE to enhance its service offer during the year as follows:

1. Effective data capture:

CHOICE has streamlined all of its data into one Client Relationship Management (CRM) system, Charity Log. Having utilised the CRM for over a year, the CHOICE team are now very familiar with its functions and are using it to effectively record and recall service users data, mapping their journeys from referral stage to successful completion. As streamlined data relating to each beneficiary can be saved in one location, information is not missed and next steps / appointments are actioned with pop-up reminders each time a team member logs in.



Regular training sessions have been conducted to ensure all team members are proficient in using the CRM. This has significantly improved the efficiency of data management and communication within the organisation, allowing for more effective tracking of service user, trainee and volunteer activities plus better service delivery to the community. Everyone within the organisation has benefited from the many improvements the CRM has brought with it. At the click of a button data can be organised according to the team member with their service users listed in alphabetical order – each with the latest actions carried out, a full case history and/or the next steps.

Externally, the CRM also supports CHOICE to present ourselves as a professional organisation to those who call, wanting an update on their case. Whether the actual assigned team member is available or not – any member of the team can undertake the all-important security checks before updating the caller on the up-to-date position of their case.

The enhanced use of the CRM has also facilitated more accurate reporting and analysis, enabling the charity to make informed decisions and strategise for future growth and impact.

2. Monitoring & Evaluation of services:

The CHOICE team continued its work with consultant, Jason Pollard of Community Impact CIC throughout this financial year. The CRM allowed the Charity to develop a set of working impact outcomes and measurement indicators that capture the aims and objectives of each service.

CHOICE's evaluation strategy for 2023-24 is almost ready to be published and will be available to download from the CHOICE website soon. This work will include reporting the difference CHOICE's services make through case studies, which are developed from multiple, and anonymised cases the CHOICE team have worked on. Each one is an example of how CHOICE's work impacts on our client group in each area we measure work against. Reporting through case studies in this way allows the organisation to show how i.e. advocacy and employment services make a practical difference to the lives of disabled people.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
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FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

h) **NEW DEVELOPMENTS continued:**

3. Business Planning:

Funder, Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales allowed us to engage facilitator and consultant, Hilary Barnard to complete this piece of work. Everyone within the organisation (including Trustees, staff, volunteers and service users) were engaged in finalising CHOICE's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, which is available upon request.

4. New premises:

Following years of talks and negotiations, Trustees are pleased to announce CHOICE has joined other voluntary and community sector organisations within newly refurbished accessible premises of the Marie Lloyd Centre on Queensbridge Road. As well as providing a base for CHOICE to operate from (which includes modern training facilities) it is also an opportunity to expand our partnership working capabilities with organisations based at the centre who share our values and client group (i.e. disabled / older people).

CHOICE's new partners are: Age UK East London, City & Hackney Carers Centre, Holly Street Luncheon Club, the Huddleston Centre and MRS Independent Living. Their names and logos are prominently displayed outside the Marie Lloyd Centre:



The venue facilitates better access for staff and volunteers, a smoother "internal" referral process and the opportunity for our trainees to undertake work placements with partner organisations acting as hosts.

5. New Project:

City Bridge Foundation, the funding arm of The City of London Corporation's charity, Bridge House Estates (1035628), funds CHOICE's **Information, Guidance & Advocacy (IGA) service**. This is where the IGA Officer trains a team of volunteers to support disabled residents of the City of London and Hackney. The IGA project complements CHOICE's existing provision by filling gaps to allow us to provide a more holistic service to disabled people.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

h) NEW DEVELOPMENTS continued:

5. New Project continued:

Thanks to an early publicity drive, the IGA service attracted referrals from a wide range of sources (i.e. through both individuals and local organisations); below is some feedback from one such organisation – Carers First:

"CHOICE have proved to be a vital service to which we signpost carers for additional support. Many of our carers have shared positive feedback about the support that they have received from CHOICE. Their service complements ours, as they meet an essential and consistent need for both advocacy and support with form filling".

It has also been very encouraging to have received feedback about the support received by the Charity's disabled service users – here is just one example of many:

"I would like to provide my written support to CHOICE, as I believe this service has been particularly beneficial and supportive to me at a time when I was experiencing a great deal of despair, as I had nowhere to turn to for help. This project has been reassuring in assisting me in dealing with my case, in a proficient manner".

Details of the project's other achievements and successes are noted elsewhere in the report.

Others areas of interest that have benefited the organisation throughout the year include:

6. Restructuring:

CHOICE is no stranger to restructuring processes as our Training & Employment Dept was borne out of such a process in 2018-19 with high quality accredited training courses (Choices into Work, Disability & Domestic Violence and Disability Hate Crime) and a staff team being organised and managed by the Advocacy Training & Employment Coordinator. Not only did this provide a coherent and well-defined training structure but also released the CEO from the need to manage and supervise the workloads of 5 team members that included: three Trainers, an Advocacy Mentor, and a Work Experience Coach.

Thanks to three-year's core funding (2023-2026) from Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales and the foundation's Enhance package, CHOICE underwent phase two of this restructuring process with support from consultancy firm, Roots HR. Work already undertaken included:

- A consultant meeting with the CEO / 2 Trustees to discuss i.e. the CEO's workload; and
- Once clarification had been provided as to where particular tasks that were no longer to be carried out by the CEO were to be allocated - an up-to-date CEO job description was produced.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

h) NEW DEVELOPMENTS continued:

6. Restructuring continued:

All parties (CHOICE / Roots HR) had agreed there was a need to create a new Deputy CEO role, which will, amongst other tasks include the line management of the Advocacy team and deputising for the CHOICE CEO during i.e. periods of annual leave.

The post was advertised internally amongst CHOICE staff and volunteers and applications have been received from interested team members. This is a very exciting phase of our restructuring journey and Trustees are looking forward to informing the reader of its successful outcome in next year's report.

7. Fundraising and income diversification:

Consultant, Alex Buckmire who was introduced to the Charity via Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales' Enhance package, provided invaluable support to CHOICE on how to meet its fundraising and income diversification goals.

After meeting with the CEO and Fundraising Sub-Group (FSG) of the Charity⁷, Alex supported CHOICE to develop a Fundraising Strategy which defines the objectives, methods and specific tasks related to diversifying CHOICE's fundraising portfolio. In particular, to develop a stable and growing base of financial support that will cover the Charity's annual operational expenses, transactional project costs, and future aims through fiscal years 2023-2028. A copy of the fundraising plan, which was approved by the Board of Trustees on 18th Sept 2023 is available on request.

Alex worked tirelessly to support CHOICE and often went above and beyond what was expected of him. For example, as well as completing the above Fundraising Plan, he also:

- Introduced a grant and activity timeline document, which includes sources of potential funders so CHOICE is continually aware of which of its projects are funded and for how long;
- Produced an outcomes statement, allowing CHOICE to consider possible outcomes its projects make to help inform the Charity of possible funding to explore. By relating the outcomes to the funding it becomes a gateway to explore service provision in line with CHOICE's strategic aims;
- The terms of reference for CHOICE's sub-groups (which includes Personnel/Human Resources, Fundraising and Finance) who act on behalf of the wider Board of Trustees during sub-group meetings, carry out specific functions, oversee organisational planning and make recommendations to the wider Board of Trustees; and
- Hosted two online fundraising workshops for Trustees, staff and volunteers – complete with slides.

⁷ FSG includes Trustee(s), the CEO, a Volunteer and a staff member.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

h) NEW DEVELOPMENTS continued:

8. The Cost of Living crisis:

The impact of the cost of living crisis has been felt globally over the last few years. CHOICE is located in the London Borough of Hackney, which is one of the most deprived areas of England (Index of Deprivation, 2019). Not surprisingly, the CHOICE team had noted an increased demand for its services. Already disproportionately affected by austerity measures and the pandemic (due to i.e. reductions in benefits / care packages), disabled people are now struggling to maintain a decent standard of living within the cost of living crisis. This is due to hikes in inflation and food / utilities costs. Often this results in our client-group going without essentials to meet escalating energy costs, which is inappropriate and risky for continued health and wellbeing.

These challenges were two-fold: not only were they having a detrimental effect on the disabled people we support (only 27% of whom are economically active compared to 78% of non-disabled people in Hackney) but CHOICE was also struggling to meet their needs. Something had to be done, and quickly, as CHOICE's existing services could not cope with the increased levels of demand.

After a lot of hard work over the autumn, the CEO completed a funding application for a new project entitled: "Relieving the cost of living for disabled people in Hackney". In mid-Dec 2023 the Government's Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund, which is being delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund, informed us we were awarded £73,000 towards our project.

Unusually, the funding included a retrospective period, allowing CHOICE to backdate the project's costs to Jul–mid-Dec 2023. This was a great help for the Charity as it would not have been able to recover the additional costs made during that period without that funding. The funding expired on 31st Mar 2024 although the needs of disabled people during the ongoing cost of living crisis continues. CHOICE is actively seeking funding from elsewhere to carry on with the very needed work undertaken.

9. CHOICE website:

Trustees would like to extend a very special "thank you" to Kevin Dunphy, Associate Product Manager of the global digital transformation consulting company, Publicis Sapient and the wider CodeAid Digital team who supported CHOICE to voluntarily revamp the CHOICE website. As a registered charity, CHOICE has little or no funding set aside to update its website and so having Kevin's team on board to redesign it has been amazing.

An organisation's website is the most important public-facing platform available in today's modern age and it was really important that CHOICE's underwent this refresh. It is much more dynamic, brighter and even more accessible, which is central to CHOICE's work of supporting disabled adults aged 18+. Please follow this link to access the new-look site:

<https://choiceinhackney.org/>

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

h) **NEW DEVELOPMENTS continued:**

10. Strategic Communications:

CHOICE joined a consortium made up of Deaf & Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) to improve the Charity's communications strategies by reframing the disability-related narratives.

This work was funded by City Bridge Trust Cornerstone Fund and included workshops to understand what and *how* people currently think about disability, and to transform the way we talk about it. The pan-London disability-organisation Inclusion London, together with Inclusion Barnet, Equally Ours and the partnership of seven DDPOs undertook an innovative research project, called 'Talking about Disability'.

The project's aim was to build greater public understanding of the equal worth of disabled people, the causes of disability inequality, and the essential role of DDPOs in creating positive change. The Talking About Disability Practical guide are available upon request.

11. Goodbye:

At the time of writing, the wider CHOICE team bids farewell to Lucia Bellini – CHOICE's Advocate, Mentor and Trainer as she goes on to pastures new. We wish her well in her ventures (and are pleased that she will remain with CHOICE on a part-time basis to fulfil her role as Disability Hate Crime Trainer).

12. Team (Christmas?) spirit:

It is always nice to be given the opportunity for the wider CHOICE team to 'down tools' and enjoy each other's company over some good food and that is exactly what we were able to do in Jan 2024. Trustees, volunteers and staff gathered together at the Open Kitchen N1 (OKN1) in Hoxton Street for a slightly delayed end of year evening meal.



Left: Volunteer, **Edna** sits next to Hate Crime Trainer, **David Landau**, CEO, **Caroline Nelson**) & Trustees: **Bharat Siyani**, **Thomas Brayford** and **Malcolm Aickin**
Right from the front: Hate Crime Advocate, **Felicia Tay** sits next to Advocacy Training & Employment Coordinator, **Haq Ismail**, Trustees: **Debra Schiman**, **Mary Julian** and **Andrew Price**, Volunteers: **Waruna** and **Jacek** and Information Guidance & Advocacy Officer, **Colin Finch**.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

h) NEW DEVELOPMENTS continued:

12. Team (Christmas?) spirit con't:

Here are some more pictures of the evening meal:



Left: Information Guidance & Advocacy Officer, **Colin Finch**, Volunteers: **Jacek and Waruna**; Trustees: **Andrew Price, Mary Julian & Debra Schiman**, sit next to Advocacy Training & Employment Coordinator, **Haq Ismail** and Hate Crime Advocate, **Felicia Tay**
Right from the front: Trustees: **Malcolm Aickin, Thomas Brayford** and **Bharat Siyani**, CEO, **Caroline Nelson**, Hate Crime Trainer, **David Landau** and Volunteer, Edna.



Trustee, **Mary Julian** presenting CEO **Caroline Nelson** with a bouquet of flowers

13. Ruth Bashall obituary:

Last year, Trustees informed you of the sad passing of CHOICE's former Chair and Trustee, Ruth Bashall who was very active in the disability-related movement and her obituary appeared in the Guardian in Feb 2024. Below an extract of the obituary by Kirsten Hearn



Ruth's fierce intellect, attention to detail, persuasive tone and persistence grabbed the attention of those with the power to make changes.

She was a huge-hearted woman who put enormous amounts of time, effort and determination into supporting individuals in desperate situations. For her, people mattered, and, above all, everyone had a right to be safe.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

i) **FUNDERS:**

In the year under review, CHOICE received funding from:

1. **Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust** – to provide health advocacy to disabled residents of the City of London and Hackney who have physical and/or sensory impairments.
2. **London Borough of Hackney via Rethink Mental Illness** - to provide a non-statutory advocacy service to disabled and vulnerable Hackney adults who are known to Adult Social Care teams, un-befriended, unable to speak up for themselves and require support with a specific advocacy issue.
3. **Henry Smith Charity - Improving Lives** – towards the Choices into Work and Disability Hate Crime training courses (both part of the Training & Employment Dept), which provides classroom-based advocacy/disability hate crime training, work placements and mentoring. Additional coaching support and a Job Club is also funded.
4. **South Hackney Parochial Charity** – towards the Choices into Work project which provides classroom-based advocacy training, work placements, job search skills and coaching for disabled people within the funder's catchment area.
5. **Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales** – a three-year unrestricted grant to support CHOICE's charitable activities / costs.
6. **Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime** – to provide disability hate crime advocacy to disabled people who live or work in Hackney and surrounding boroughs as part of the Community Alliance to Combat Hate (CATCH) consortium.
7. **The Government's Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund, which was delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund** – towards a new project "Relieving the cost of living for disabled people in Hackney" – for the continuation and expansion of existing services to help meet the increased levels of demand within the cost of living crisis.
8. **City Bridge Foundation** (the funding arm of The City of London Corporation's charity, Bridge House Estates) – five-year's funding towards the provision of information, guidance and advocacy to disabled residents of Hackney and the City, allowing independence, choice and control over their lives and reducing inequality.

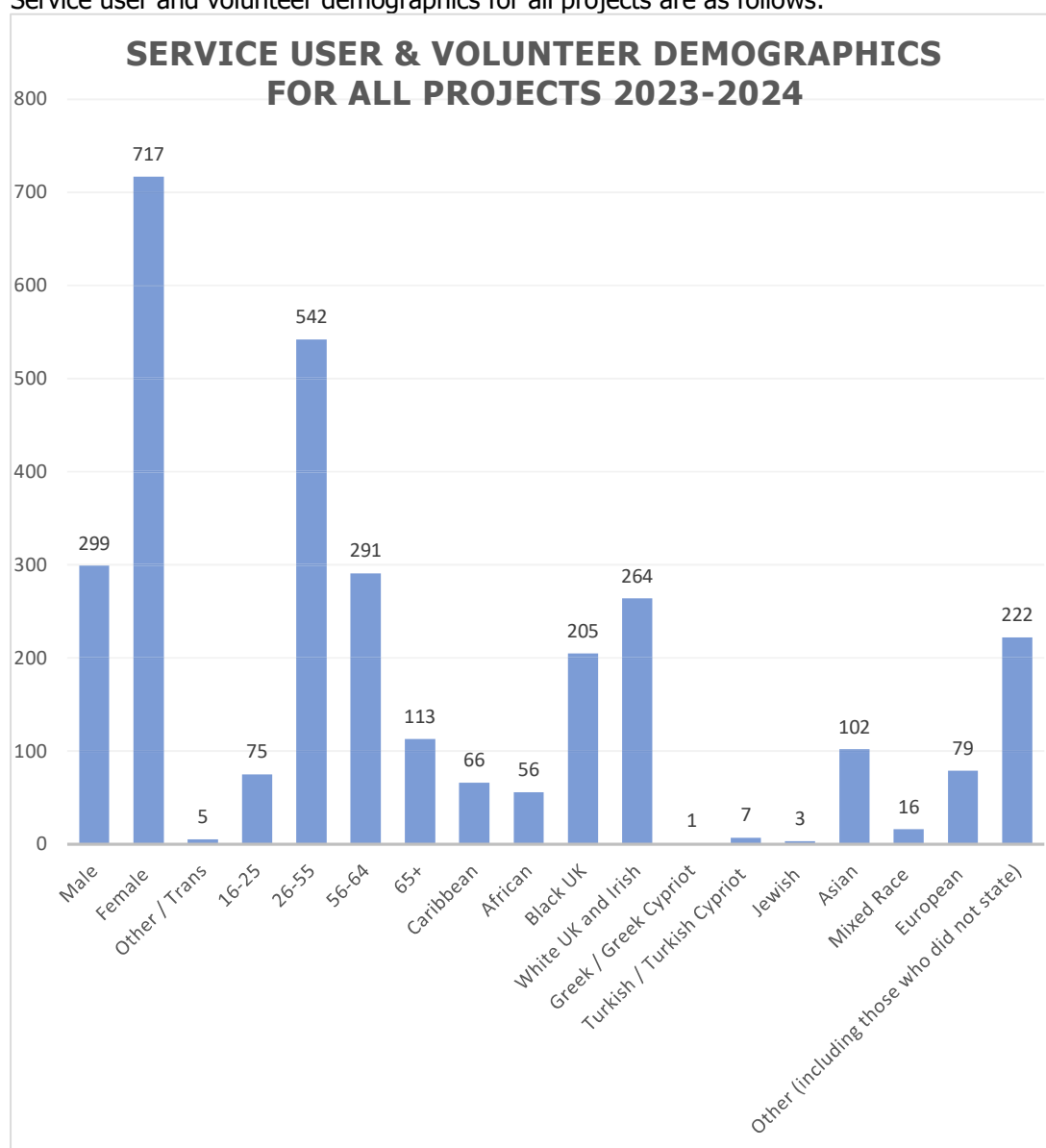
CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

i) **FUNDERS continued:**

The level of funding in the year allowed CHOICE to work with a total of 1,021 people (470 in 2022-2023). The organisation has noted there is a low take-up of service users from amongst the Turkish / Turkish Cypriot and Jewish communities. However, it is also noted both groups have strong community welfare organisations that support them within the borough.

Service user and volunteer demographics for all projects are as follows:



CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance continued:

k) **PARTNERSHIP WORKING:**

Partnership working allows us to reach out to more disabled people. CHOICE aims to raise awareness of the services it provides within an expanded community. This will secure the rights of disabled people as full citizens, improve their quality of life and promote an inclusive society where disabled people can participate fully and equally.

CHOICE is pleased to continually expand and strengthen the network of organisations who are open to reciprocal working, which encourages sharing a lived experience of disability, knowledge, training opportunities, services, a loyal customer base as well as joining together to strengthen consortium-based funding applications.

CHOICE's network of organisations includes, but is not limited to:

- a) Alliance for Inclusive Education ("ALLFIE") – we are working jointly with ALLFIE to increase the number of younger disabled people we support with our services in particular CHOICE's Training & Employment Dept's activities;
- b) Community Alliance to Combat Hate ("CATCH") – this consortium led by the Gay London Police Monitoring Group ("GALOP") regularly make referrals into CHOICE's Disability Hate Crime service. CHOICE also carries out joint-working with partner organisations Real based in Tower Hamlets and Stay Safe East;
- c) Disability Action in Haringey and Islington – their staff were invited to undertake the Choices into Work training course and they reciprocated by inviting us to join partnership bids;
- d) Hackney Opportunity Hub – this organisation has provided us with both accessible training venues in the past for the classroom-based element of the Choices into Work project and trainees wanting to upskill and improve their employment prospects by undertaking the course;
- e) Inclusion London – this pan-London disability-related organisation provides CHOICE with a range of training programmes to build our skills, knowledge and sustainability. CHOICE responds to requests for support in their policy work. More recently, CHOICE joined a consortium made up of disabled people's organisations to improve CHOICE's communications strategies by reframing disability-related narratives;
- f) Marie Lloyd Centre – CHOICE's new location within the centre is a shared space with other voluntary and third sector organisations where there are opportunities for closer joint-working. Our partners include: Age UK East London (landlord), City & Hackney Carers Centre, Holly Street Luncheon Club, the Huddleston Centre and MRS Independent Living.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Financial Review:

At the end of the previous year Restricted Funds held amounted to £196,899. The majority of these were expended on the projects for which they were intended as set out in Note 12 of the financial statements. Further funds been raised for ongoing activities and Restricted Funds of £136,101 are carried forward. In consequence there was a deficit in the Restricted Funds on the year of £60,798 (2023: surplus £157,706).

There was a surplus for the year on the unrestricted funds of £92,988 (2023: deficit £46,042).

Total incoming resources amounted to £319,482 (2023: £341,417) and total resources expended were £287,292 (2023: £229,753). This resulted in a surplus on the year of £32,190 (2023: £111,664).

Risk:

Last year, CHOICE reported it was looking to reduce the over-reliance on the Chief Executive (CEO) to allow the CEO to concentrate on the management of the whole organisation. The Trustees are pleased to report that a Deputy CEO has now been appointed. We continue to develop and recruit staff to take on the management of specific day-to-day operations.

In past years CHOICE also noted the dependence on securing income for the short-term support of activities was a significant challenge. In the year under review CHOICE, as noted above, secured further multi-year funding for projects. Thus, there has been successful mitigation of these two risks.

The Board of Trustees are continuing to implement structural changes to increase the capacity for organisational and service growth, identified by grant-funded consultants, so the charity can maintain sufficient funding to provide for the needs of its service users.

The charity's continued success is in part through the increased use of Information Communications Technology. CHOICE has dispensed with paper records with a consequent reduction in storage space. But the risks of cyber-attack and the need for electronic data security have increased. The Trustees believe that reasonable data security measures are in place but continue to examine further steps to enhance protections.

CHOICE remains committed to the ideals of a Disabled People's User-Led Organisation ("DPULO"). As noted previously, this presents its own risks in a period of financial austerity. CHOICE continues to adapt business models and funding bids to articulate the added value created by employment of disabled staff. CHOICE will work with others such as Inclusion London, to campaign for Access to Work to cover full costs.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

Reserves Policy:

The Charity sets aside funds, as unrestricted reserves, to meet future anticipated or contingent expenditure, in particular to cover costs such as staff sickness or redundancy, to develop new activities and to ensure the continuity of services through difficult financial periods. The Board of Trustees, after review, decided that the Charity should aim for a level of the "free reserves", of between 3 and 9 months recurrent expenditure, which equates to approximately £72,500 - £217,500.

CHOICE has made less use of Reserves to maintain existing and to develop new services. As a result, the tangible assets ("free reserves") have increased and at the year-end amounted to £140,603 (2023: £47,615) and are in the middle of the desired range.

GOING CONCERN

The Trustees actively foster relations with existing funders and seek additional funding sources emphasising the value for money in terms of historic costs per service user outcome. Further multi-year funding has been secured and although as noted above Restricted Funds are less than at the end of the previous year they remain at a healthy level. Also as noted above Unrestricted Funds have increased significantly.

In consequence, the Trustees are of the opinion that the Charity will be able to continue as a going concern into 2028 and beyond.

**CHOICE IN HACKNEY
REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024**

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees (who are also the directors of Choice in Hackney for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice), including Financial Reporting Standard 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland".

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently
- observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the trustees are aware:

- there is no relevant information of which the charitable company's examiners are unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant information and to establish that the examiners are aware of that information.

The independent examiner, Knox Cropper LLP, will be proposed for re-appointment at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

APPROVAL

This report was approved by the Board of Directors and Trustees on 26 September 2024 and signed on their behalf by:



Malcolm Aickin

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT

TO THE MEMBERS OF CHOICE IN HACKNEY

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the Choice in Hackney for the period ended 31 March 2024.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the trustees of the charitable company (and also its directors for the purposes of company law) you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act'). You are satisfied that the accounts of the Company are not required by charity or company law to be audited and have chosen instead to have an independent examination.

Having satisfied myself that the accounts of the Company are not required to be audited under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of the Company's accounts carried out under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act'). In carrying out my examination I have followed the Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

Independent examiner's statement

Since the Company's gross income exceeded £250,000 your examiner must be a member of a body listed in section 145 of the 2011 Act. I can confirm that I am qualified to undertake the examination because I am a registered member of ICAEW which is one of the listed bodies.

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept as required by section 386 of the 2006 Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of section 396 of the 2006 Act other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination; or
4. the accounts have not been prepared in accordance with the methods and principles of the Statement of Recommended Practice for accounting and reporting by charities applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Richard Billinghamurst
Knox Cropper LLP
Chartered Accountants
65-68 Leadenhall Street, London, EC3A 2AD

Date: 01/10/2024

CHOICE IN HACKNEY

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
(INCORPORATING THE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024

	Notes	Restricted Funds £	Unrestricted Funds £	Total 2024 £	Restricted Funds £	Unrestricted Funds £	Total 2023 £
INCOME FROM:							
Grants and donations	2(a)	153,157	84,042	237,199	266,313	10,806	277,119
Charitable activities	2(b)	-	81,743	81,743	-	64,165	64,165
Investments		-	540	540	-	118	118
Other income		-	-	-	-	15	15
Total		153,157	166,325	319,482	266,313	75,104	341,417
EXPENDITURE ON:							
Raising funds	3	-	6,590	6,590	-	9,581	9,581
Charitable activities	3	213,955	66,747	280,702	106,607	113,565	220,172
Total		213,955	73,337	287,292	106,607	123,146	229,753
Net income/(expenditure)		(60,798)	92,988	32,190	159,706	(48,042)	111,664
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	(2,000)	2,000	-
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS		(60,798)	92,988	32,190	157,706	(46,042)	111,664
Balances brought forward at 1 April		196,899	47,615	244,514	39,193	93,657	132,850
BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 MARCH		136,101	140,603	276,704	196,899	47,615	244,514

All income and expenditure has arisen from continuing activities.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**BALANCE SHEET****AS AT 31st MARCH 2024**

	Notes	2024		2023	
		£	£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible Assets	7		-		-
Intangible Assets	8		3,208		4,170
			<u>3,208</u>		<u>4,170</u>
CURRENT ASSETS					
Debtors	9	194,633		188,548	
Cash at Bank and in hand		<u>105,528</u>		<u>62,512</u>	
		300,161		251,060	
CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within one year	10	<u>(26,665)</u>		<u>(10,716)</u>	
NET CURRENT ASSETS			273,496		240,344
NET ASSETS			<u>276,704</u>		<u>244,514</u>
FUNDS					
Restricted Funds	12		136,101		196,899
Unrestricted Funds					
Designated Funds			-		-
General Fund	11		<u>140,603</u>		<u>47,615</u>
			<u>276,704</u>		<u>244,514</u>

The Company is exempt from the requirements relating to preparing audited accounts in accordance with Section 477 of the Companies Act 2006. The members have not required the Company to obtain an audit of its accounts for the year in question in accordance with section 476 of the Companies Act 2006.

The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for:

- ensuring that the company keeps accounting records which comply with sections 386 and 387 of the Companies Act 2006 and;
- preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company as at the end of each financial year and of its profit or loss for each financial year in accordance with the requirements of sections 394 and 395 and which otherwise comply with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 relating to financial statements, so far as applicable to the company.

The financial statements were approved by the Trustees on 26 September 2024 and signed on behalf of the board

Chair: Malcolm Aickin



Treasurer: Matthew Baxter



Registered Company Number: 03423122

Registered Charity Number: 1077287

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024****1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES****a. Basis of Preparation of Accounts**

The financial statements of the charitable company, which is a public benefit entity under FRS 102, have been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS 102) 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), Financial Reporting Standard 102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland' and the Companies Act 2006. The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

The presentation currency of the financial statements is Pound Sterling (£).

b. Company Status

CHOICE IN HACKNEY is a company limited by guarantee. In the event of the Charity being wound up, the liability in respect of the guarantee is limited to £1 per member of the Charity.

c. Fund Accounting

General funds are unrestricted funds which are available for use at the discretion of the Trustees in furtherance of the objects of the Charity and which have not been designated for other purposes.

Restricted funds are funds which are to be used in accordance with specific restrictions imposed by donors which have been raised by the Charity for particular purposes. The aim and use of each restricted fund is set out in the notes to the financial statements. Statutory grants which are given as contributions towards the Charity's core services are treated as unrestricted.

d. Incoming resources

All income is recognised in the Statement of Financial Activities once the charity has entitlement to the funds, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

e. Resources expended

All expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and has been included under expenses categories that aggregate all costs for allocation to activities. Governance costs include the costs of servicing meetings of the Board of Trustees, audit and strategic planning.

f. Tangible and Intangible Fixed Assets and Depreciation

All assets costing more than £1,000 are capitalised.

Tangible fixed assets are stated at cost less depreciation. Depreciation is provided at rates calculated to write off the costs of fixed assets, less their estimated residual value, over their expected useful lives on:

Furniture/Fittings: 25% straight line basis

Office Equipment: 25% straight line basis

Intangible assets are stated at cost less amortisation. Assets are amortised once brought into use. Amortisation is provided at rates calculated to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its expected useful life, as follows:

CRM system: 20% straight line basis

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (Continued)****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024****g. Allocation of Overhead and Support Costs**

Overhead and support costs have been allocated between charitable activities and other expenditure on the basis of staff time. The allocation of overhead and support costs is analysed in note 3.

h. Operating Leases

Rentals payable under operating leases are charged to the statement of financial activities as they fall due over the term of the lease.

2(a). INCOMING RESOURCES FROM GENERATED FUNDS**- Grants received**

	Restricted Funds	Unrestricted Funds	2024 Total	2023 Total
	£	£	£	£
City Bridge Trust	57,315	-	57,315	-
The Henry Smith Charity	-	-	-	209,900
Lloyds Bank Foundation	-	75,000	75,000	27,050
CATCH Mobilisation	22,838	-	22,838	22,500
South Hackney Parochial	-	-	-	9,113
The National Lottery	73,004	-	73,004	-
Inclusion London	-	7,375	7,375	2,875
Hackney Council FO	-	166	166	225
Alliance for Inclusive Education	-	300	300	300
Other income and Donations	-	1,201	1,201	5,156
DWP Resource Management	-	-	-	-
	<u>153,157</u>	<u>84,042</u>	<u>237,199</u>	<u>277,119</u>

2(b). INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES**- Contracts for services and performance related grants**

	Restricted Funds	Unrestricted Funds	2024 Total	2023 Total
	£	£	£	£
Homerton University Hospital – Advocacy	-	47,431	47,431	47,431
The Advocacy Project – Advocacy	-	4,380	4,380	16,734
Rethink Mental Illness	-	29,932	29,932	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>81,743</u>	<u>81,743</u>	<u>64,165</u>

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (Continued)****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024****3. ANALYSIS OF RESOURCES EXPENDED**

	Raising Funds	Charitable Activities	Total 2024	Total 2023
<u>Unrestricted</u>	£	£	£	£
Staff costs	6,590	59,306	65,896	95,814
Staff training	-	50	50	269
Accountancy	-	662	662	926
Independent examination fee	-	850	850	1,220
Rent	-	1,150	1,150	7,193
Other Costs	-	4,479	4,479	15,979
Legal & Professional Fees	-	250	250	1,745
	6,590	66,747	73,337	123,146
<u>Restricted</u>				
Staff costs	-	152,161	152,161	82,860
Staff training	-	150	150	150
Accountancy	-	2,628	2,628	1,630
Independent examination fee	-	2,400	2,400	1,630
Rent	-	21,200	21,200	13,550
Other Costs	-	32,990	32,990	5,442
Legal & Professional Fees	-	2,426	2,426	1,345
	-	213,955	213,955	106,607
	6,590	280,702	287,292	229,753

Staff costs have been allocated to the above expenditure heads on the basis of estimated staff time spent on the activities. Support costs and governance costs are included in the above analysis. Governance costs amounted to £18,000 (2023: £18,000).

4. STAFF NUMBERS AND COSTS

	2024	2023
	£	£
Salaries	203,475	167,578
Social security costs	10,538	7,786
Employer pension	4,044	3,310
Redundancy costs	-	-
	<u>218,057</u>	<u>178,674</u>

The average number of employees during the year was 10 (2023:10).
 No employee earned more than £60,000 during the year under review (2023: none).
 The remuneration of senior management amounted to £51,117 (2023: £51,379).

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (Continued)****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024****5. TRUSTEES REMUNERATION**

During the year, one Trustee received reimbursement of expenses amounting to £13 (2022: NIL).

No trustee received any remuneration other than disclosed in these accounts.

6. TAXATION

CHOICE is a registered charity and is potentially exempt from taxation in respect of income and capital gains received to the extent that such income or gains are applied exclusively to charitable purposes.

7. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Furniture £	Office Equipment £	Total £
Cost			
At 1 st April 2023	2,316	23,964	26,280
Additions	-	-	-
At 31 st March 2024	<u>2,316</u>	<u>23,964</u>	<u>26,280</u>
Depreciation			
At 1 st April 2023	2,316	23,964	26,280
Charged for the year	-	-	-
At 31 st March 2024	<u>2,316</u>	<u>23,964</u>	<u>26,280</u>
Net Book Value			
At 31 st March 2024	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
At 31 st March 2023	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>

8. INTANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	CRM System £
Cost	
At 1 st April 2023	4,812
Additions	-
At 31 st March 2024	<u>4,812</u>
Depreciation	
At 1 st April 2023	642
Charged for the year	962
At 31 st March 2024	<u>1,604</u>
Net Book Value	
At 31 st March 2024	<u>3,208</u>
At 31 st March 2023	<u>4,170</u>

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (Continued)****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024****9. DEBTORS**

	2024	2023
	£	£
Grant debtors	34,679	10,168
Prepayments and other debtors	5,054	3,480
Accrued income	154,900	174,900
	<u>194,633</u>	<u>188,548</u>

10. CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within this year

PAYE	7,024	3,160
Accruals and other creditors	19,641	7,556
	<u>26,665</u>	<u>10,716</u>

11. UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

	Brought Forward	Incoming Resources	Resources Expended	Transfers	Carried Forward
	£	£	£	£	£
General Fund	47,615	166,325	(73,337)	-	140,603
Total Unrestricted Funds	<u>47,615</u>	<u>166,325</u>	<u>(73,337)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>140,603</u>

PRIOR YEAR

	Brought Forward	Incoming Resources	Resources Expended	Transfers	Carried Forward
	£	£	£	£	£
General Fund	93,657	75,104	(123,146)	2,000	47,615
Total Unrestricted Funds	<u>93,657</u>	<u>75,104</u>	<u>(123,146)</u>	<u>2,000</u>	<u>47,615</u>

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (Continued)****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024****12. RESTRICTED FUNDS**

	Brought Forward	Incoming Resources	Resources Expended	Transfers	Carried Forward
	£	£	£	£	£
Disability LIB	499	22,838	(22,838)	-	499
Advocacy, Training and Employment	196,400	-	(69,690)	-	126,710
Information Guidance & Advocacy	-	57,315	(48,423)	-	8,892
Cost of Living Fund	-	73,004	(73,004)	-	-
Active Lifestyle	-	-	-	-	-
Total Restricted Funds	196,899	153,157	(213,955)	-	136,101

PRIOR YEAR	Brought Forward	Incoming Resources	Resources Expended	Transfers	Carried Forward
	£	£	£	£	£
Disability LIB	499	-	-	-	499
Advocacy, Training and Employment	36,694	243,813	(84,107)	-	196,400
Hate Crime	-	22,500	(22,500)	-	-
CRM System Project	2,000	-	-	(2,000)	-
Active Lifestyle	-	-	-	-	-
Total Restricted Funds	39,193	266,313	(106,607)	(2,000)	196,899

Transfer – the prior year transfer to unrestricted fund represents restricted costs capitalised during the financial year.

Disability LIB – this was a one-off grant from Disability LIB towards disabled people's communication support, such as translation and interpretation costs.

Advocacy, Training and Employment (now known as the Choices into Work) - this represents amounts received towards the Choices into Work Project to train disabled people to enable them to find meaningful employment in advocacy or other related fields. This project also offers coaching, confidence building and mentoring.

Disability Hate Crime Project – this represents funding received from the Mayor's Office for Policing & Crime (MOPAC). CHOICE operates within the "Community Alliance To Combat Hate" (CATCH) consortium to support disabled survivors of hate crime that take place within London and surrounding boroughs.

Information Guidance & Advocacy – funding received from City Bridge Trust (the funding arm of The City of London Corporation's charity, Bridge House Estate) – for the provision of information, guidance and advocacy to disabled residents of Hackney and the City, allowing independence, choice and control over their lives and reducing inequality.

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (Continued)****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024**

Cost of Living Fund – The Government’s Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund, delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund supported a new project “Relieving the cost of living for disabled people of Hackney”. This went towards the continuation and expansion of existing services to help meet the increased levels of demand within the cost of living crisis.

Client Relationship Management (CRM) system project – part-funding from The Sylvia Waddilove Foundation UK via Potheary Witham Weld Solicitors allowed us to purchase the CRM system, Charity Log to efficiently streamline data across all projects and services.

Active Lifestyle – this is funding towards our Active Lifestyle project, which included low-impact exercise sessions as well as group activities all taken out online from the comfort of the service users homes via Zoom Video Conferencing to improve health and wellbeing.

13. FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS

At the 31st March 2024 the Charity had commitments under non-cancellable operating leases as follows:

	2024	2023
	£	£
Amounts payable:		
Within one year	23,713	1,053
Between two and five years	12,402	-
After five years	-	-
	<u>36,115</u>	<u>1,053</u>

In addition to the above, the Charity has a licence agreement for its office premises for an annual rent of £21,000. The licence is reviewed every September.

14. CAPITAL COMMITMENTS

There were no capital commitments at 31st March 2024 (2023: Nil).

15. CONTINGENT LIABILITIES

There were no contingent liabilities at 31st March 2024 (2023: Nil).

16. NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

	Fixed Assets	Cash at Bank		Current	
	£	and in Hand	Debtors	Liabilities	Total
	£	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted	3,208	40,663	123,397	(26,665)	140,603
Restricted	-	64,865	71,236	-	136,101
Total	<u>3,208</u>	<u>105,528</u>	<u>194,633</u>	<u>(26,665)</u>	<u>276,704</u>

CHOICE IN HACKNEY**NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS (Continued)****FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2024**

<i>PRIOR YEAR</i>	Fixed Assets	Cash at Bank and in Hand	Debtors	Current Liabilities	Total
	£	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted	4,170	51,689	2,472	(10,716)	47,615
Restricted	-	10,823	186,076	-	196,899
Total	4,170	62,512	188,548	(10,716)	244,514

16. GOING CONCERN

The Trustees actively foster relations with existing funders and seek additional funding sources emphasising the value for money in terms of historic costs per service user outcome. Further multi-year funding has been secured and although as noted above Restricted Funds are less than at the end of the previous year they remain at a healthy level. Also as noted above Unrestricted Funds have increased significantly.

In consequence, the Trustees are of the opinion that the Charity will be able to continue as a going concern into 2028 and beyond.

17. RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS

There were no related party transaction during the year.