



HARC

Annual Review

2025



RELIEVING POVERTY

ADDRESSING INEQUALITY

IMPROVING WELLBEING

FIGHTING INJUSTICE



HARC

Hastings Advice and
Representation Centre

HARC – Hastings Advice and Representation Centre

HARC is a registered charity providing Specialist Quality Mark accredited welfare benefit advice and representation to people of all ages in East Sussex and beyond.

With our **free** and **confidential service**, we aim to address inequalities, relieve poverty, and improve the quality of life for vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

HARC's team of **specialist welfare benefit advisors** offer an end-to-end confidential and impartial support service covering all stages of application up to and including appeal tribunal. Responding to the needs of individuals and tailoring our service, we meet their requirements with face to face, telephone and remote support at a range of community venues and home visits.

HARC is strongly rooted in the community and plays an integral role in the **local support network**. This includes running two high street charity shops which provide valuable volunteering and work experience opportunities for local people.

It is our aim to help bring about a **welfare system which is fair**, accountable and recognises the issues of the individual. In doing so, we actively campaign toward positive policy change and provide specialist welfare benefits training to ensure everyone working with and for the most vulnerable in our society have the tools they need to provide the right support.

“My advisor was amazing, helping me to appeal my PIP claim. Receiving the help financially means I can take better care of myself”

HARC CLIENT 2025



WE ARE HARC



Jacky Everard
Chief Executive



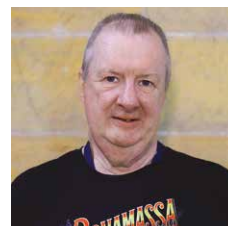
Becky Polain
Advice Manager



Wendy Knowles
Development
Manager



Teresa Andrews
Training &
Outreach Manager



Mark Webb
Quality Manager &
Specialist Advisor



Carina Brown
SQM Supervisor &
Specialist Advisor



Claire Guy-Smith
Specialist Advisor



Clive Edwards
Specialist Advisor



Karen Brooker
Specialist Advisor



Kim Pittman
Specialist Advisor



Lorraine Guy
Specialist Advisor



Sarah Darker
Specialist Advisor



Andrea Brown
Welfare, Budgeting &
Benefits Advisor



Phoebe Relf
Welfare Benefits
Advisor



Sarah Smithers
Welfare Benefits
Advisor



Karen Pope
Finance
Administrator



Astrid Gray
Senior Receptionist
& Administrator



Natalie Ripley
Reception &
Admin



Michael Gray
Reception &
Admin Apprentice



Jackie Workman
Charity Shop
Manager



Steve Elledge
Charity Shop
Manager



Adam Reade
Charity Shop
Relief Manager



HARC

Hastings Advice and
Representation Centre



- Cordelia Woollard,**
Chair
- Michael Gratton LLB,**
Vice Chair
- Stephen Lewis,**
CEng Treasurer
- Andrew Burnett,**
Director
- Dawn Poole,**
Director
- Frances Mapstone,**
Director
- Rachael Roser,**
Director
- Shelley Feldman,**
Director
- CLr Sam Coleman,**
Rother District Council
Representative

Chair's Introduction



CORDELIA WOOLLARD - CHAIR

It is an honour to be able to introduce myself as the new Chair of HARC in this year's annual review. Taking on this role is both a privilege and a responsibility I embrace wholeheartedly, especially at such a critical time with the challenges ahead including the Welfare Reforms. Having worked in both the public and charity sector for over 15 years, I bring a strong commitment to social justice, strategic leadership, and operational excellence to this role.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to my predecessor, **Mike Gratton**, for his years of committed service and strong leadership. I also want to express my gratitude to the Board of Trustees for their warm welcome to the role, and to the staff, volunteers, and supporters whose dedication and passion continue to shape the heart of this organisation.

A Year of Purpose and Progress

Over the past year, HARC has continued to make a real and lasting difference in the lives of those we serve. Despite a challenging environment – marked by rising costs, increasing need, and uncertainty across the benefit landscape. We remained resilient and focused on our mission to *“support the people of East Sussex and the South Coast of England living in poverty”*.

Some of our key achievements this year include:

- Over **£6.6 million** secured for our clients in the year to the end of March 2025.
- **19,688** client contacts handled over the same period.
- Conducted **245** community based outreach sessions across Hastings and Rother.

People at the Heart

These accomplishments are testament to the power of collective effort – from our funders, partnership working, staff, volunteers and service users all working together to create a lasting impact.

We remain deeply grateful to the people who make our work possible. Our staff have shown incredible resilience and compassion, while our volunteers continue to go above and beyond, giving generously of their time and energy.

Looking Forward

As I step into this role, my vision is to help lead HARC into a new chapter of stability, growth and innovation. The Board and I are committed to strengthening our governance, deepening community partnerships, and ensuring our services are sustainable in the long term.

We know the road ahead is not without its challenges, but I believe firmly in the strength of our mission and the power of our community to enable us to address the cycle of poverty and improve our clients' circumstances for today and for the future.

“HARC makes [my situation] more bearable and protects my wellbeing”

HARC CLIENT 2025

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

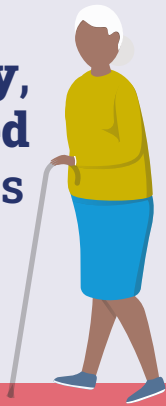


Hastings Advice and
Representation Centre

In the year to 31st March 2025

1,373

client contacts
were made with
**vulnerable, elderly,
disabled or isolated**
clients at surgeries
or home visits



19,668

CLIENT CONTACTS



676

clients were represented
at review and tribunal



THAT IS A

95.1%

SUCCESS
RATE



£6,667,066

was secured in previously unclaimed,
enhanced or reinstated benefits and
associated payments, of which

£6,191,248

was secured for clients with disabilities
and long term health issues



86.2%

of clients who
approached HARC
received support
– those we
couldn't support
were referred to
more appropriate
agencies

IN COMPARISON IT COST JUST

£744,076

for HARC to provide an extensive range of advice and representation services comprising **face to face** advice, **telephone** and **email** advice, secondary advice to professional colleagues, outreach surgeries, home visits, complex caseloads, advocacy and tribunal work.



“HARC have made a vast difference to me. The impact of their patient, careful work has been immeasurable and hard to put into words. 20 years since fleeing domestic violence, apart from Solace they are the first organisation to treat me with dignity and respect. I don't know how I survived Austerity 1, but I know I would not have survived the Pandemic and Austerity 2 without Rebecca's calm, patient and diligent work not only just to claim and appeal for correct disability benefits but to actually make me feel I deserve the money and that I was worth it.”

JULIE
HARC CLIENT
2025



Since I have taken on management of the HARC Outreach Programme, we are undergoing a period of reflection, monitoring and data collation.

Currently we are running sessions across Hastings, St Leonards and Rother. These vary from **drop-in sessions** to **fixed appointments** or a **mixture of both**, dependent on client need. This year we are pleased to have started a new drop-in session from Renaissance House which is proving very popular.

Our long-standing surgeries including The Links Project and Rye Foodbank see a continuous stream of clients with queries ranging from help with disability forms to housing benefit calculations and an increasing number of overpayment decisions. Our **weekly surgery** at The Pelham in Sidley also continues to be popular especially with Bexhill residents who are struggling to live with major health conditions and who would find it very difficult to access our St Leonards office.

In addition to our regular programme of **community** based outreach sessions we continue to collaborate with other organisations such as Reed in Partnership and the Salvation Army to provide one off events. These have proved extremely popular with residents and colleagues.

We are constantly reviewing our outreach offering with new venues in Hastings town centre, Hollington, Ore and Broomgrove also under investigation. Our outreach team continues to impress both myself and clients alike, they are a joy to work with and keen to learn new areas of law to improve the breadth of services provided, as well as being proactive and flexible in trying out new venues.

Well done team. I look forward to seeing what we can achieve this year and beyond.

*Teresa Andrews,
Training and Outreach Manager*

Fred

HARC CLIENT 2025

“I was born in Hastings Old Town, now I am 85 years old. The Magdalen and Lasher Charity arranged for Karen from HARC to come and visit me to help me with my pensions and benefits. I had been turned down twice for Attendance Allowance before.

Karen was easy and comfortable to talk to. She helped me with a new Attendance Allowance claim. She came to my house to do the form and blow me down I got a letter through the post okaying it!

It has certainly improved my life. Before, I was struggling to pay the bills each month. I had to think about where every penny was going, and I couldn't do the things I wanted to do. This money means I can afford to pay for my car which gives me some freedom.

I can honestly say I feel good about things.”



Jess

HARC CLIENT 2025

“HARC changed everything for me. I have suffered for years with Fibromyalgia, Polycystic Ovaries, Adenomyosis Migraines, and Endometriosis. I had a full Hysterectomy at age 37, leaving me with Lipedema/Lymphoedema. Complications with the Covid jab and then contracting the virus anyway left me with Long Covid and my health deteriorated further. It exacerbated my illnesses which massively restricts my mobility and left me with Post Viral Autonomic Dysfunction which is extremely debilitating.

I didn't know where to start with claiming PIP. I felt overwhelmed by the forms because of extreme brain fog, so I was left unable to access financial support.

The Long Covid Clinic first signposted me to HARC. It was psychologically very difficult asking for help, but Teresa was extremely knowledgeable. She made it easy - less frightening.

I was awarded PIP, and with the money I was able to buy a motorised wheelchair and get some of the mobility equipment I need. I got a car that suits my needs and gives me a little bit of independence - my daughter provides care/help at home so any independence I can retain means a lot.

HARC's support also opened other doors to me including Occupational Therapy and other services.

I will be forever thankful to HARC for making it possible for me to navigate the benefits system. Most recently they helped me with a PIP review. I am still awaiting the results. I am still scared, but having HARC on my side makes me less so because I know I am not alone.”

Sarah

Welfare
Benefits Advisor



After five years working in the DWP, I often felt like just another cog in the machine—detached from the people I truly wanted to help. Becoming a Welfare Benefits Advisor for HARC has changed that. Now, I'm able to make a real difference in people's lives, offering support when they need it most.

I work directly with individuals, not files or numbers, and that **human connection** is what I was missing before.

Every day brings new challenges, but also real impact—helping someone access the support they need and knowing I've played a part in easing their stress. Whether that is offering one off advice, helping to complete lengthy benefit forms or answering queries on the helpline.

I finally feel like part of a team that shares the same values: **compassion, fairness, and advocacy**. This role has not only given me a sense of purpose but has reminded me why I entered public service in the first place—to stand alongside those who need a voice and connect with my community.

I have enjoyed my first year with HARC and I am proud to be working as part of this **amazing team**.

*Sarah,
Welfare Benefits Advisor*

Sarah was so lovely! I had been in a right state, and she helped me so much. When I first visited, I felt embarrassed and ashamed. I was in a dark place. It was a huge step for me to ask for help. Sarah was professional. She put me at ease and listened in a non-judgemental way.

She is an asset to HARC!

The service provided is **exemplary** and you have to have such sensitivity to do the job well. Not many people realise how hard it is to set foot inside the building. But when I did everyone was so helpful. Sarah just seemed to know the right words to say to put me at ease.

I have praised your service with all of my [statutory] support services. I could cry when I think about it.

It was just perfect!



“My depression has improved as I feel more positive following all the support I got”

HARC CLIENT 2025



Hello! I'd like to introduce myself as the new Advice Manager here at HARC. I officially stepped into the role on April 1st, 2025, following the retirement of Robyn Cleverley. Robyn left behind some rather big shoes to fill, having been one of HARC's longest serving and most experienced staff members. I thank Robyn for all the support, insight, and wisdom he shared with me over the years, and I wish him all the best for a happy retirement.

My own HARC journey began back in July 2009, when I joined as a Welfare Benefits Advisor, after 12 years at the DWP working in Incapacity Benefit and ESA administration. Truth be told, I had my eye on HARC for a while – I was just waiting for the right role to come up. From day one, I've felt incredibly **proud to be part of this organisation**.

Over time, I moved into a Specialist Advisor role, getting involved in appeals and representing clients at Tribunal. In 2022, I dipped my toes into the world of management as an SQM (Specialist Quality Mark) Supervisor, which turned out to be both a challenging and rewarding experience. So, when the Advice Manager position came up, I felt ready to take the plunge into deeper waters – and **I haven't looked back** (well, not too often)!



It's been quite the learning curve – and yes, there have been a few bumps in the road – but I genuinely enjoy working with our brilliant team. Together, we're always striving to deliver a service that meets our clients' needs as effectively as possible. I hope the experience I bring, from various corners of the advice world, adds value to the way I approach this role.

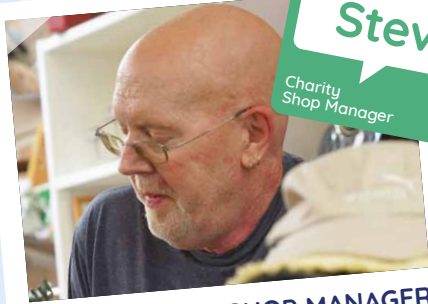
Our **clients' situations remain complex**, with many facing multiple issues all at once. I'm still very much involved in specialist advice work too – partly because of my SQM responsibilities, and partly to keep myself sharp and up-to-date.

I feel incredibly fortunate to manage such a **hardworking, compassionate team**. Their dedication amazes me daily, and the results we achieve together speak volumes. It's not always easy, but the impact we make is huge – and **there's nowhere else I'd rather work**.

*Becky,
HARC Advice Manager*



OUR COMMUNITY



Steve
Charity Shop Manager
HARC

HARC CHARITY SHOP MANAGER

“I don’t think I had ever been in a charity shop before I arrived at the London Road shop to complete the last month of a government “back to work” scheme. I was made to feel welcome straight away. On the completion of the scheme, I was offered a part time paid position which I accepted thinking I would do it for 6 months before moving on to something else. It is 17 years later, and I am still here! I found a role I really enjoy, and I love working with the team of volunteers I have recruited. HARC has always been a very supportive employer, and I am very happy to work for and raise funds for an organisation that does such vital work for some of the most vulnerable members of our local community.”



LONDON ROAD



QUEENS ROAD



“For another year Sarah & Teresa from the HARC team have faithfully and skilfully served our community in Sidley at The Pelham. We really are so grateful and hope the partnership continues for many years to come.”

OLLIE, The Pelham

“I love working in the shop. The managers are great. Keeps me busy and I like seeing all the customers.”

HELEN, HARC volunteer



“The service is paramount to the clients who access the wellbeing centre. The clients really value the support Phoebe and HARC provide, it takes the pressure off the staff knowing there will be an advisor coming in to support clients with their concerns and the follow up support”

EMMA, Hastings and St Leonards Wellbeing Centre



“We value being a referring pathway into HARC, the service has helped many of our clients to navigate financial support and seek advice on benefit claims and develop a better understanding of processes. Advisors are very knowledgeable and supportive and work well in partnership with East Sussex Floating Support Service (ESFSS)”

TANYA, ESFSS

“The work HARC does at Rye Foodbank is **invaluable** in supporting clients in accessing a range of benefits and organisations that make a huge difference to their **quality of life**. Without HARC’s support, so many elderly, disabled or economically disadvantaged local people would be living in dire poverty.”

PENNY, Rye Foodbank Manager



“HARC are a **valuable resource** to people in our community needing Hastings Foodbank. Having the support to look at your benefits and ensure you are getting the amount you are entitled to is so valuable. People are treated with **dignity and respect.**”

CHERYL, Hastings Foodbank Co-Manager

“Energise Sussex Coast has enjoyed the fifth year of our successful partnership working with HARC providing benefits and energy advice to residents in East Sussex. We think the service that HARC offers is **invaluable** for our clients and the team offers a really high **quality, caring and helpful specialist welfare benefits advice service**”

KATE, Director Energise Sussex Coast



“I have worked as a volunteer at HARC for nearly 2 years now and I love it. It gives me a great sense of doing something worthwhile and helping in the community. I enjoy the company and banter of the staff and my fellow volunteers. Long may it continue.”

KEITH, HARC volunteer

“When I needed help HARC’s advisors were there for me. When I found out that HARC had a charity shop I decided to give back and volunteer alongside my career.”

VICTORIA, HARC volunteer



VICTORIA



KEITH

“[HARC] made a positive difference to [my] mental health someone supporting and understanding / listening”

HARC CLIENT 2025

“For almost 20 years, The Links Project and HARC have worked closely together to support some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in Hastings and St Leonards. Our partnership has helped prevent destitution, improve access to welfare support, and support individuals in moving out of poverty and towards greater stability. Together, we continue to promote inclusion and integration, guided by a shared commitment to fairness and dignity”

MARC, Links Project Coordinator. Hastings Voluntary Action

HARC
Director



Rachael



Hello. I grew up in Hastings, above my family's bookshop in Robertson Street. From an early age, I got to know our town and the people who live here. Now, decades later, I still call Hastings home. My husband and I have raised our four children here, and I've watched our town change - sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. But one issue has remained constant: the struggle to access suitable and affordable housing.

Over the years, I've seen friends and neighbours forced to move because of rising rents or landlords selling up. I've also seen how mental ill health, benefits delays and insecure work can tip people into crisis. That's why the work HARC does is so vital - **supporting people when they are most in need**, when systems feel impossible to navigate, and when no one else seems to be listening.

I've worked in the charity sector for over 20 years as a fundraiser, a Trustee, and someone who's helped small charities grow. When I was invited to join the Board of HARC, I was genuinely honoured. I've long admired their calm and supportive expertise. HARC helps people access what they are rightly entitled to. That's a simple mission but one that makes a **life-changing difference**, every single day.

I hope I can bring my experience to support HARC's brilliant staff and volunteers. I'm proud to be a small part of this organisation, and I look forward to helping this vital work to continue in the years ahead.

Rachael,
HARC Director

LAUREN
HARC CLIENT
2025

"The support I have received over the years from HARC with benefit advice and forms has been second to none. The Advisors make you **feel at ease**, and they are comfortable to talk to. I wasn't getting what I should, and I didn't realise. Teresa went through everything and made sure I received the support I needed.

They are a godsend. When I didn't know what I was doing the HARC Advisors **have always been there**, and not just for benefits; they have put me in touch with a social prescriber, made sure I got help with my mental health and pointed me towards other help when appropriate. I don't know how I would have survived over the years without HARC.

Their help has taken the **weight off my shoulders**, and I cannot express how much less stressed I feel."

2025 has to some extent been a year of transition for HARC. After a combined 45 years of distinguished service on the HARC Board, Richard Lynch and Dawn Poole have officially stepped down. We extend our heartfelt thanks for their constant support and invaluable contributions, and we wish them all the very best in their next chapter.

In addition, our Advice Manager, Robyn Cleverley, retired after 24 years of dedicated service. We extend our sincere thanks to Robyn for his many years of commitment and impact. Following his retirement, a management restructure was implemented. We now have **a new team in place who will drive us forward** ensuring we continue to make a positive difference for the individuals and local communities we serve.

There continues to be a real need for our services as evidenced by the **19,668 client contacts** made to HARC advisors over the past year.

Earlier this year, an audit undertaken by Recognising Excellence resulted in us retaining our Specialist Quality Mark for a further three years. This success is attributed to the hard work and dedication of our entire staff team.

Our services are constantly evolving as we respond to ever increasing need. With an emphasis on accessibility and inclusion we tailor our service to meet the needs of the individual with face to face, telephone and remote support at a range of community venues and home visits. Client questionnaires, independent surveys along with the views of other stakeholders inform us where and how we undertake our services.

“[It is a] very good service with well trained, kind, helpful and generous staff. I highly recommend it”

HARC CLIENT 2025



Despite another challenging year, the quality of the service and advice we offer remains outstanding. Feedback from our clients has been overwhelmingly positive, with **98% indicating they would recommend HARC** to others, 80% stating that the outcome of their case was successful and 80% expressing that the advice received from HARC had a positive impact on their wellbeing. Furthermore, a **staggering £6,667,066.81** was secured in previously unclaimed, enhanced or reinstated benefits.

However, the ongoing rise in the cost-of-living continues to place a significant strain on local people, making our work more vital than ever, we are therefore extremely grateful to our funders and supporters whose contributions allow us to continue providing this essential end-to-end welfare benefits service.

I would like to finish by thanking all those who are involved with HARC, whether that be paid staff, volunteers or the Board of Directors for their unwavering commitment which is fundamental to the continued development and sustainability of this incredible organisation, which I am very proud to be part of!

Jacky,
HARC CEO

Summarised Accounts

“[HARC’s support] has enabled me to stay in work part-time because I can pay for help in the house now. Getting a disabled badge has given me more independence”

HARC CLIENT 2025

For the year to the 31st of March 2025.
Taken from the Annual Report

MONEY IN	
Magdalen and Lasher Charities	£57,939
British Gas Energy Trust	£58,349
Independent Age	£18,651
Local Authority Grants	£69,022
Charity Shops	£133,160
ESCC – Benefits Advice Project	£306,225
National Lottery Community Fund	£20,000
Henry Smith Charity	£22,150
Other Income	£90,029
Total	£775,525

MONEY OUT	
Advice Centre Services	£628,606
Charity Shops	£110,185
Governance	£5,285
Total	£744,076

THANK YOU!

HARC staff, volunteers, clients and the wider community would like to extend our sincerest thanks to our supporters this year including:

Allen & Overy
Shearman Foundation

Blagrave Trust

British Gas Energy
Trust

Catherine Cirket
Discretionary Trust

Chalk Cliff Trust

David Woolf

East Sussex County
Council

Foreshore Trust

Hastings Voluntary
Action

Jim Jackson
Foundation

Kenward Pullen (KP
Computers)

London Legal Support
Trust

Magdalen & Lasher
Charities

Multiple Sclerosis
Society

Rother District Council

Silver Lady Fund

Sussex Community
Development
Association

Sussex Community
Foundation

The Henry Smith
Foundation

The Isabel Blackman
Foundation

The National Lottery
Community Fund –
Awards for All

“I just wanted to say a really big thank you to you for treating me with respect and dignity. I am very grateful to everybody at HARC”

HARC CLIENT 2025





HARC

Hastings Advice and
Representation Centre

“[HARC] took the worry
and stress away and I felt listened
to and supported - good for
mental wellbeing”

HARC CLIENT 2025

Contact us

**Please contact us if you would like to
learn more about HARC and our services,
or want to support the work we do:**

Email: enquiries@harcuk.com

HARC advice line: 01424 428375

Website: www.harcuk.com

There are a variety of ways you can support our work:

- » Volunteering in the shops or office
- » Supporting our campaigns
- » Donating at Just Giving: www.justgiving.com/hastingsarc

Hastings Advice and Representation Centre

The Advice and Community Hub
Renaissance House
London Road
St Leonards on Sea
East Sussex
TN37 6AN

Benefit Helpline: 03333440681

 **Hastings Advice & Representation Centre**

 **info_harc**

Registered Charity Number 1083566

Private Limited Company Number 04048683