

# Advice Services at BHT Sussex



Our advice centres in Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings provide free, specialist advice on a wide range of issues relating to housing, immigration, and welfare benefits.



Advice plays a key role in our work to prevent homelessness.

We are impartial and empathetic and understand the complexity of issues affecting people's lives.



Homelessness can happen to anyone and factors such as the cost of living, unemployment, relationship breakdown, domestic violence and mental health issues can all make homelessness more likely.

People can access our advice services in the way that works best for them, whether via the phone, online, or in person.

The eligibility criteria for accessing our services can be found at [bht.org.uk](http://bht.org.uk).

Our advice services offer advice under our contracts with the Legal Aid Agency, and we hold the Specialist Quality Mark.

Our solicitors are individually regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority, and our barrister is regulated by the Bar Council.

Our Immigration Legal Service is regulated by the Immigration Advice Authority.

We receive funding from the Legal Aid Agency, Eastbourne Borough Council, Brighton and Hove City Council, Lewes District Council and East Sussex County Council.



# What We Do

## WE OFFER SPECIALIST HOUSING ADVICE IN BRIGHTON, HASTINGS AND EASTBOURNE

We provide free, independent housing advice from specialist solicitors and advisers who have years of knowledge and experience in this field. Our focus is on preventing homelessness; we aim to help people to remain in their own home or ensure they are rehoused. For example, we might advise people on the duties the Local Authority has to help them, advise people who are facing eviction on the possession process and defences available, intervene in landlord disputes, or help someone who is renting a home in serious disrepair.

In Brighton, we also have an Information, Advice and Guidance worker who helps people to access welfare benefits and support grants, and supports people with money management, employability and digital inclusion.



Last year our welfare benefit advisers raised **£4,063,042** in income for **519** clients.



## WE RUN IN COURT DUTY SCHEMES IN BRIGHTON, HASTINGS AND LEWES COUNTY COURTS

Our In Court Duty Schemes provide free last-minute advice and assistance for people facing eviction who have a court hearing.

When possession cases are being heard in Brighton, Lewes or Hastings courts, one of our specialist Housing Advisers can step in and provide advice and assistance on the day or help to get hearings delayed, enabling people to get full legal advice. Often alternatives to eviction can be worked out, debt payments can be renegotiated, and people can stay in their homes.

Last year, our advisers who help people facing eviction in Court were able to prevent possession being granted on the day of the hearing in **76%** of the cases they assisted with.

## WE RUN AN IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICE IN BRIGHTON

This service provides free legal advice and representation delivered by specialist solicitors, and has helped hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers with legal support. We are one of the only Legal Aid providers of these services in Sussex.

Many of those we work with are 'unaccompanied minors'; young people and children arriving in the UK who have often endured unimaginable suffering, and who have no adults to look after their welfare. We provide a crucial service for some of the most vulnerable people in our community, including victims of trafficking and domestic violence.

Last year, our Immigration Legal Service helped **98** clients gain permission to enter or remain in the UK.



**“**In these challenging times, services like ours are in demand and under pressure. Our Advice Centres across Sussex work to ensure that people can stay in their homes, feel supported and have access to justice regardless of their circumstances.**”** Sue Hennell, Senior Manager Advice Services, BHT Sussex



## WE PROVIDE WELFARE BENEFITS ADVICE ACROSS EAST SUSSEX FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH CANCER

The Macmillan Welfare Benefits Advice Service provides free and confidential welfare benefits advice for people living with cancer, their families and carers.

Many people find a cancer diagnosis can bring money worries, with costs they hadn't considered and the possibility of being unable to work whilst receiving treatment. Our Macmillan Benefits Adviser can offer specialist advice to help ease these concerns. This service is run by a partnership between BHT Sussex and Money Advice Plus Services, and is funded by Macmillan.

Last year, we supported **711** people living with cancer with welfare benefits advice.

# Our client's stories



## Louis, an elderly Mauritian man, had lived lawfully in the UK since the 1970s.

Sadly, he lost his job and became homeless in the 2020s, and his immigration documents were stolen in a burglary at his homeless shelter.

Louis came to us when he was refused social housing and benefits as he could not prove his immigration status. After many weeks of trying to get his immigration history confirmed with the Home Office, we were told they could not trace his decades-old records.

We then decided to apply under the Home Office's Windrush Scheme, given that this had been established to help those who had come to the UK decades earlier, but had no proof of their status. Happily, the application was successful, and Louis finally received formal recognition of his right to live in the UK.



## At just 14, Linh lost her parents in Vietnam. She was trafficked abroad and sold into prostitution to repay their debts – a horrifying ordeal for a child.

Brought to the UK and again exploited, she eventually escaped and claimed asylum. She was suffering from PTSD, depression and anxiety, and our solicitor took time to build her trust.

They gathered medical evidence and testimony from a Vietnam Country Expert and her carers to show she would be in danger if she returned, and that her mental health would further deteriorate.

Their perseverance paid off and she was awarded refugee status and is now settled and studying at college, with hope for a better future.



## Jane found herself in court and faced with losing her home after falling behind on mortgage payments.

Her life had changed overnight when her husband suffered a devastating head injury, and she had given up her job to care for him, using all their savings to stay afloat.

When Jane met with our adviser in court, she confided that she was terrified that her husband would be taken into residential care. Our adviser used her knowledge of case law to get the possession suspended and arrange an affordable repayment plan for the mortgage arrears.

She also identified benefits that Jane was entitled to that she was unaware of. Thanks to this, Jane and her husband could stay together and did not lose their home.



## FEEDBACK FROM OUR CLIENTS AND PARTNERS

**"I would recommend you as BHT have done more for me than anyone has... My tenancy was saved in a day before the eviction because of the effort everybody used to fight for me, quite simply unbelievable."**

Court Duty Service Client

**"[BHT Sussex Adviser] is the best person I could've asked for to help me in the most challenging time of my life. The care and time she gave me really gave me hope and it paid off. We now have a beautiful forever home and my family is smiling again. I couldn't have asked for more."**

Housing Advice client

**"Despite extremely busy workloads, BHT has always shown compassion and given time and attention to provide well-considered, clear supporting advice to Sanctuary volunteers and staff, as we address many complex legal issues, often with mentally troubled and traumatised individuals, desperate for legal support."**

Mike Mansergh, Trustee at Sanctuary in Chichester

**"I can confidently say that all the BHT solicitors I've encountered have been outstanding advocates for the vulnerable children they represent... Young people are able to open up to their BHT solicitors about the events that have led them to claim asylum in the UK, largely due to the thoughtful and sensitive way in which appointments are conducted."**

Lauren Sturges, Children Services Brighton & Hove City Council Social Worker

**"To me BHT is the best service I ever came across, the time I felt hopeless with my life BHT service brought back life into me. I'm very grateful, a service that does the work with passion and honest[y]."**

Immigration Legal Service client

**"Many thanks for your excellent work on our behalf. You were so thorough, persistent, fair and transparent. We shall always say we had the best solicitor to fight our case."**

Immigration Legal Service client

**"Polite, caring, no nonsense. Keep up the great work"**

Housing Advice client

In our most recent surveys, **100%** of our Immigration Legal Service clients and **97%** of our Housing Advice clients said they were satisfied with the service they had received from us. **100%** of clients said they had been treated fairly and with respect.

# How to access the service and find out more

Eligibility criteria for all of our advice services can be found at: [bht.org.uk](https://www.bht.org.uk).

Reach our different advice services via the contacts below:

## Brighton Advice Centre and In Court Duty scheme

✉ [advice@bht.org.uk](mailto:advice@bht.org.uk)

📍 01273 645455

## Eastbourne Advice Centre and In Court Duty scheme

✉ [eastbourneadvice@bht.org.uk](mailto:eastbourneadvice@bht.org.uk)

📞 01323 642615

## Immigration Legal Service

✉ [ImmigrationLegalServices@bht.org.uk](mailto:ImmigrationLegalServices@bht.org.uk)

📍 144 London Road, Brighton

(for drop-in enquiries)

## Hastings Advice Centre and In Court Duty scheme

✉ [hastingsadvice@bht.org.uk](mailto:hastingsadvice@bht.org.uk)

📍 01424 452618

## Macmillan Welfare Benefits Advice Service

✉ [macmillan@moneyadviceplus.com](mailto:macmillan@moneyadviceplus.com)

📍 01323 635989

## Support our work

With rising rates of homelessness and record numbers of people living in unsuitable temporary accommodation, our services are needed more than ever.

Our advice centres are some of the few still operating locally that provide Legal Aid services, and as such we support some of Sussex's most vulnerable residents to access the legal advice they are entitled to.

Many advice centres and solicitors have stopped this work as the funding received from the Legal Aid Agency does not fully cover the costs of delivering the service; our services' survival is only possible because we fundraise to cover the deficit. This is a challenge, but we are determined to keep our doors open, as we firmly believe that everyone should have access to justice.



If you would like to support our work, simply scan this QR code to donate, or visit our website at [bht.org.uk](https://www.bht.org.uk) and click on Donate.

**Thank you!**