

ASK THE ADVISER

25) THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT - The latest in a series of articles by Iain Gregory of Caithness CAB

Today we start with thanks. Thanks to all of you who supported us and signed the "Save Caithness CAB" petition. The cuts have been cancelled. [It seems that money has been found](#). We are going to stay open. Yes, we will have to continue to keep a very careful eye on things. Yes, there may be moves to reduce our budget in the future. Yes, I rather think that our Midwifery and Mental Health Outreach Funding may not continue and we will have to ask our ever-willing Volunteers to help with this. And yes, Jill Smith and I and all our staff and volunteers will need to produce even more on an inflation-depleted budget but the disastrous planned cut to our core funding will not now go ahead and we are able to present a very powerful mandate indeed should anybody suggest any similar cuts in the future. The messages we received from you were not just touching – they were humbling. I said in my last piece that the people of Caithness had the power to make a difference and that it was time to take a stand against one cut too many - and you responded in astonishing numbers. Just to give you an idea we have at time of writing no less than 782 supporters on [change.org](#) and a further 921 hard copy signatures – a total of 1703 We only launched the petition on 20th January. Newcastle CAB (a city with a population touching a third of a million) were threatened with closure last year and their online petition – launched 8 months ago – has only attracted 1287 signatures. I rest my case. Yes we can make our voices heard and we can do it again when other issues arise.

It also needs to be said that the Groat and Courier publicity helped immensely & for this we are very grateful – and when I say "we" I include all those who cannot speak for themselves. Also, it is only correct to thank those elected members who stood for us – and therefore the people. I think the sheer strength of public feeling came as a surprise all the way to Holyrood. It is worth mentioning that the morning after the closure story broke I had two people in CAB in tears because they did not know what on earth they would do. And that is a lesson for the future I think – no more cuts aimed at those least able to fight back. Real people – often those with no voice – get badly hurt. Well they have a voice now – yours.

I think that this week, now that the battle is over, it would be a good idea to remind people of what your local Caithness CAB can do for you. As you know, we have CAB offices in Wick and Thurso. Wick is open for "walk-in" inquiries every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 1000 to 1400, and Thurso is open five days a week during the same times. Up to 1000 and after 1400 we have appointment slots with Specialist Advisers and Staff and we also carry out case recording and research into complex issues. Some of our caseload now is getting extremely technical and a 30 minute interview with a client can require several hours of backroom work to sort out, but we never, ever put a limit on the level of effort needed to resolve a case. Also, remember that we are free. Totally free. We are beholden to nobody, we are utterly confidential, non-judgemental and we will fight absolutely [anybody](#) if you

have a case.

So what subjects do we cover? Well, the short answer is anything and everything, but the most common advice requests relate to:-

Benefits – not just unemployment and sickness entitlements, but the whole spectrum of needs which all of us will have one day. We provide expert advice on everything from Income Support for young people who find themselves on their own, to Personal Independence Payment for those who are less able, all the way through life's journey to State Retirement Pension, Attendance Allowance and Carer's Allowance.

Work and Employment – we will guide you through all the issues that can arise, whether you are an employee or an employer, working with our colleagues at Peninsula and ACAS.

Debt and Money – we have highly qualified staff to assist with everything you need to know – including Pensions – and will act swiftly and effectively to help.

Consumer Law – working with Trading Standards and Industry bodies we can assist you with all your issues.

Family and relationship problems are, sadly, a common area where CCAB are needed and we are always ready to provide support and referral to free counselling services and, if you wish, expert input from our colleagues over at CASWA can be arranged on the spot.

Tax and Law issues crop up more and more regularly and we now have a tax specialist on board if we get a really technical case. We can also call on our own legal advisers if we have a complex matter of law to address, or we can refer you to any of the excellent local solicitors, or further afield if you prefer.

There are countless other topics we can help with, but I would mention Discrimination and Immigration issues – we seem to be seeing a lot of these recently and have formed an excellent relationship with a Glasgow-based legal charity who provide pro-bono advice, so if you are having a difficulty then please let us know. And last, but certainly not least, remember that, working with our valued partners at Ormlie Community Association, we have supported Internet access facilities – free to all – in both Wick and Thurso.

So there we have a summary of what we can do for you – and we consider it a privilege that so many of you trust us and rely upon us. We never make promises we cannot keep, but we do promise to do the very best we can for you in the same way that you did your very best for us in the recent (latest) crisis. And my next articles will concentrate on particular topics which you have told us you would like to know about.

And now I am going to reapply a number of bandages to my somewhat battered person. No, whilst I do enjoy a good battle on your behalf, I tend to stop short of actual physical conflict. The injuries have arisen because our two kittens expressed a certain degree of displeasure at being politely asked to enter the cat-carrier in order to pay a visit to the vets and I am not quite as fast moving as I once was. Liz, I notice, is completely unscarred.