



Tel: 0207 391 4583
Email: unaf@cccs.co.uk
Website: www.cccs.co.uk

March 4 2010

Press Release

Shadow Business Secretary urges debtors to seek benefits help

Many people in debt are only claiming a third of the welfare benefits to which they are entitled, according to a review published today by the CCCS Centre for Welfare Benefits.

The Consumer Credit Counselling Service (CCCS) is Britain's leading debt charity and its Centre for Welfare Benefits annual report was presented to Kenneth Clarke MP, during his visit to the Nottingham site last week (February 26).

The Centre has helped 15,000 clients with an apparent benefits shortfall since its creation in 2007. For most clients, their shortfall was quickly identified and remedied. For one in five, a full session of benefits counselling was needed, covering the twenty major benefits available. The report said the Centre found the Department of Work and Pensions friendly and efficient in dealing with the claims, but clients needed help with applications for Disability Living Allowance.

For clients who received a full session in 2009, the Centre found an average of £100 per week of unclaimed benefit. Extrapolated figures show an average family on benefits could have increased household income by £5,000. These sums help people to tackle their finances and keep their lives on an even keel.

Nationally, there is £16 billion of annualised unclaimed welfare benefits.

Shadow Business Secretary, Ken Clarke MP, commended the work of the Centre in ensuring benefits reached the people for whom they were intended, saying:

"I was very impressed by the work of the CCCS during my visit to the Nottingham Centre last week. They carry out an important service for the growing number of people who sadly face personal financial crises. Many have come upon hard times, some because of the credit crunch, some due to changes in personal circumstances, and they all need clear advice and the confidence to face their financial problems and actually begin to deal with them. The centre in Nottingham is helping on both counts and I commend their energy and dedication for this important cause."

CCCS chairman Malcolm Hurlston said:

"This is the tip of the iceberg. There is billions of pounds worth of benefits waiting to be claimed and to be put to good use in reviving the economy. We must increase our efforts and encourage government to make sure that benefits are properly advertised and explained.

"Many people do not claim what they are entitled to, and the often sizeable amount they miss out on can make all the difference in their fight for financial survival."

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For further information, please contact:

Media enquiries:

All media enquiries should be directed to:

- Una Farrell - unaf@cccs.co.uk
- Tel: - 0207 391 4583

Notes to editors:

1. Photograph attached
2. CCCS is contactable via its free-phone helpline, open 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday, on 0800 138 1111. Alternatively, its anonymous online counselling tool *Debt Remedy* is available 24 hours a day at www.cccs.co.uk
3. Only clients of CCCS can currently access the charity's welfare benefits team. Clients are largely referred to the centre for specialist advice following an initial assessment by CCCS helpline staff
4. A survey of 898 clients counselled between January and September 2009 found 92 percent of clients were satisfied with the service offered by CCCS. Eighty percent of clients counselled went on to claim, with over 70 receiving as much or more than the amount identified by CCCS
5. Those who didn't claim were largely discouraged by long-winded application processes. Some were kept waiting longer than normal before receiving their entitlements
6. A copy of the report is available on request