



SARC

A local charity for local people

Annual report 2023

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Our work in 2022-2023

Our gains for clients



£1,339,702

won for clients
(12 Months to August 2023)

6000

Client episodes



We helped

10
families

a week with Food Bank
Vouchers

£7.80

for each pound of public
investment

Ethnicity



9%

Asian

8%

Eastern European

6%

Black

1%

Chinese

3%

Other

73%

White

Gender



Our client profile is

60%

female and

40%

male

Tribunals



Over

150

tribunal hearings held

*This is direct income gain for client the overall return to the local economy could be much higher and we are keen to work with the City Council to fully reflect the value of the city's investments in our services



We achieved results for our clients of over £1,339,702 over the period of this report, a return of £7.80.

A local charity for local people

Forward

I hope that what SARC has achieved in 2022-23 will speak for itself in this report.

For a small, local charity rooted in the City of Southampton to achieve gains for our clients of over £1,339,702 over the period of this report, a return of £7.80 for every £1 of public funding we receive, is a fantastic achievement by any measure. But it is not a one off, it's consistent with what we achieve on a regular basis. The return on investment is direct income gain for clients. The overall return to the local economy could be much higher and we are keen to work with the City Council to fully reflect the value of the city's investments in our service.

It's not just about money of course. In the period of this report, we recorded close to 6000 client episodes. Our clients deserve fair treatment and a sense of self-worth when dealing with the benefits system or at work and the feedback we receive shows that having SARC in their corner ensures that happens.

Our impressive results are due of course to the hard work and professionalism of our small SARC team. Thanks, are also due to our funders including the City Council, to charitable funders like the Henry Smith Foundation, Access to Justice and the trade union bodies which continue to support us, including UNITE, GMB, UNISON and the Alex Ferry Foundation and to new supporters like the South Hampshire Junior Lawyers.

Our priorities for 2023-4 are to continue to make the case for SARC's contribution as an independent local advice centre at the heart of our city, to get better at letting people know what we contribute to the city and reminding decision makers about why SARC matters and why its voice needs to be heard.

John Brear
Chair of SARC Board of Trustees

September 2023

Manager's introduction

As a small local charity firmly rooted in Southampton, we continue to provide a quality accessible service. We have incorporated a wider range of delivery methods developed during the Covid pandemic to offer greater choice to clients when accessing our services. Whilst many clients prefer face-to-face appointments adjustments include telephone and video appointments. We also regularly support and represent clients in telephone and video tribunal hearings.

With our skilled advocacy and empathetic support for clients the £171,500 per annum of city public funding that SARC receives turned into an outcome for clients of over £1.3 million in the 12 months to August 2023.

These results have a massive positive impact for our clients and enables better health and well-being outcomes. Every penny we spend is focussed on front line delivery and is focussed on clients' needs.

Our professional and dedicated small SARC team has over 85 years' service between them and are fully committed to delivering a quality service to city residents.

Gary Edwards
SARC Centre Manager



Whilst many clients prefer face-to-face appointments adjustments include telephone and video appointments.

The difference we make

“Year after year, SARC stand out for their professionalism in supporting Southampton residents to navigate the often complex and multi-layered benefits system. Their services are especially important when mistakes have occurred, or when those accessing their services need a lot of support. My continual thanks go to SARC for all they are doing to assist my constituents.”

Royston Smith MP
MP for Southampton Itchen

“This has been an incredibly difficult year for so many people across Southampton. Last Winter in particular saw people struggling to keep their heating on whilst the cost of food went up and up. Without SARC many of these people would not have received the benefits they were entitled to and would have been in a much worse position because of that. I am both proud and grateful to have an organisation like SARC serving the people of Southampton on their darkest days and thank them for all that they have done over the last year.”

Alan Whitehead MP
MP for Southampton Test

“The City Council is proud to support and work in partnership with SARC. As a small local charity SARC makes a big impact helping and being on the side of those most in need in our city.


Against the background of an ongoing cost of living crisis which impacts so many Southampton people SARC has never been more relevant. Its record in winning well over £1million in a year for local people benefits them, boosts the local economy and is a fantastic return on public investment in its service.

As the Leader of the Council, I thank SARC for all the work they do, and our city can indeed count itself fortunate to have such an asset.”

Councillor Satvir Kaur
Southampton Council Leader

“Massive difference. The best benefits service in Soton!”

SARC Client



Without SARC many of these people would not have received the benefits they were entitled to and would have been in a much worse position because of that.

About SARC

SARC is a registered charity which has since 1981 provided advice, support, and tribunal representation in the fields of welfare benefits and employment law to a diverse range of clients across the city of Southampton.

We remain the only organisation in the city which offers representation as a core activity, which means that we are uniquely placed, where necessary, to follow through the process of supporting clients from advice to a clear outcome. Our ability to serve the interests of clients facing the complex arrangements which exist to determine entitlement to benefits or the interpretation of employment law at employment tribunals is based on up-to-date knowledge, regular training and decades of practical experience. Based on our benefit tribunal work alone, we are the biggest representing organisation in the South of England outside of London.

From the period July 2022 to August 2023, we attended over 150 Tribunal hearings for clients (a mixture of in person, video, and telephone hearings). We have the Advice Service Alliance Quality mark for Casework and have a bi-annual external audit receiving an exemplary assessment in 2022 and we are due for reassessment in February 2024.

All our work – from the basic information we give to representation at Tribunals and the Upper Tribunal – empowers Southampton residents and aids Southampton City Council's agenda to tackle poverty.

Our specialist areas

Some examples of areas where we currently offer advice and representation are:

Welfare Benefits Advice

- Disability Living Allowance
- Attendance Allowance
- Carers Allowance
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Tax Credits
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit and Discretionary Housing Payments
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Universal Credit
- Personal Independence Payments

Employment Law Advice

- Unfair Dismissal
- Sex Discrimination
- Race Discrimination
- Religion and Belief
- Age Discrimination
- Sexual Orientation Discrimination
- Part Time Working Discrimination
- Pregnancy Discrimination
- Disability Discrimination
- Unpaid Wages
- Furlough scheme cases
- Redundancy
- Minimum Wage
- Holiday entitlement

Our ethos and service aims

We believe that people need non-judgemental help and assistance applying for essential benefits or asserting their employment rights and, if appropriate, representation at hearings. Claiming benefits for example is very complicated and whilst some clients may be able to 'self help', our experience shows expert timely advice maximises income and access for all whilst assisting health and well-being.

SARC directly addresses disadvantage and its impact by ensuring that residents can access all the benefits they are entitled to, and this helps tackle family poverty head on. Our work assists anti-poverty targets by identifying entitlements to benefits, supporting clients through the claims procedure and challenging incorrect decisions.

We assist clients who have had problems at work to enforce their employment rights. This can involve issues such as ensuring minimum wages and statutory payments are made and appealing against unfair dismissals or similar injustices. This can enable clients to receive all monies they are entitled to or to remain in employment contributing towards the economic prosperity of the city and tackling family poverty. We also ensure that groups facing discrimination in the workplace are represented and legal redress obtained if appropriate at the Employment Tribunal or via settlement and mediation.

Case studies illustrating our work*

John, a man with severe mental health challenges, was referred to us from a local GP surgery Social Prescribing team. We identified unclaimed Pension Credit and Attendance Allowance. This extra income will enable him to remain in his home rather than require care from the state.


Peter, a former heavy industry worker, came for advice, and we identified that Attendance Allowance was appropriate. The application was successful, and the higher amount of benefit was awarded. We are now pursuing a claim for Industrial Injury Benefit.

A client Diane, with mental health challenges, was originally turned down for Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related aspect of Universal Credit. The Tribunal agreed that there would be a substantial risk to her mental health if she was not completely left alone by the Job Centre.

We helped Roger, a retail worker, prove that his employer had unlawfully withheld wages and had failed to provide a written statement of terms and conditions of employment. This resulted in the award of four weeks' pay at a Tribunal hearing which is the maximum award a Tribunal can make for this failure. Also, all the wages owed were awarded.

We helped Mira, a client with serious mental health challenges 3 years ago, to get rates of both elements of PIP. Unfortunately, upon review which had been delayed due to the covid pandemic, all the benefit was removed. We mounted a legal challenge with a mandatory reconsideration, provided additional medical evidence and the award was reinstated.

*Names changes to ensure confidentiality



Every £1 invested
in our service, is an
overall £7.80 gain for
our clients.

Comments from our 2023 client survey

“Having the support of people who want to help and know what they are doing.”

“Finding SARC saved my sanity. I was completely alone facing going to DWP Tribunal. Without SARC I may not have gone and would not have been able to make a proper/adequate case.”

“Huge difference.”

“Very beneficial.”

“Massive difference. The best benefits service in Soton!”

“Help with confidence and reassured.”

“Very helpful. Good to talk to someone.”

“Reassurance, less anxiety and confidence.”

“Reassurance and advice. Amazing.”

“This has given me peace of mind, with help to access your services and for the support I have received.”

“Having a service available to me reinforces a sense of security.”

“I didn’t know what to do when benefit was stopped. It is good to have people who know what needs to be done.”

“It was very helpful and no stress.”

“A big help in understanding and reducing anxiety. Also, to know your rights.”

“Helping me to understand things.”

“A lot of difference can’t do this alone.”

“Information is invaluable I would not have received the correct benefits without SARC’s support.”

“Everything. Stress, pain, fatigue, brain fog and CM poisoning, makes it hard to function let alone think.”

“Support with articulating arguments and understanding appeal process.”

“It is very useful to me to have an Advisor that listens. SARC do that with empathy.”

“Takes stress out of dealing with DWP.”

“I need help with benefit check and help to fill in the forms too .”

“Is a massive help as I would really struggle to complete form without them.”

“Helped to save me stress.”

“Guidance on the form to aid my application. Reassurance.”

“Without SARC I would not have been able to keep my flat years ago. Now hopefully I will be able to get the help needed.”

“It helps to take the pressure off and they have been brilliant.”

“First class. Put my mind at rest. Made things easier to understand and the help was excellent.”

“Gives a better understand of what I need to do.”

“A lot. SARC are extremely helpful and explain everything really well.”

“That I can get stuff sorted the correct way. Helpful and have the knowledge.”

“Made me feel like I’m not in the wrong for applying in the first place (for benefits) and felt relaxed knowing I had support.”

Increasing demand

SARC continues to face the challenges of the radical change to the welfare and benefits system and the introduction of new benefits. A much tougher regime on Employment and Support Allowance, for example, has created uncertainty and increased demand. We have represented clients in volume with tribunal and mandatory reconsideration proceedings with great success.

Despite the Pandemic we remained the biggest provider of representation within the city, and we believe the biggest such service outside of London in the South of England. This did not diminish during the pandemic. We have had great success with both telephone appeals and cloud-based video tribunal hearings where this is suitable for the clients. Regrettably some clients have had to have their hearings postponed as their health challenges are so great, they need an in person hearing with a SARC adviser accompanying them. In person Benefit Tribunal hearings started again in late Summer 2021. Telephone and video hearings are continuing as the Court Service has safe capacity issues and less Covid secure Tribunal facilities.



Despite the Pandemic we remained the biggest provider of representation within the city

Service-related demands and resource pressures

We remain the biggest provider of representation within the city. We constantly have to struggle to match resources against increasing demand. Even without the additional economic and social impact created by the Covid pandemic and then recovery SARC continues to face considerable pressure in matching our resources to the increasing level of demand for our services and indeed the unmet need which we know exists within our city.

People have been facing the cost-of-living crisis and it is vital that as an anti-poverty measure benefit income is maximised. We have helped clients access the Household Support fund which provides supermarket vouchers subject to funding constraints.

We continue to give out a record number of basic food vouchers as everyday price rises have impacted on family income. In particular we have seen a 30% increase in demand for help with Personal Independence Payment reviews. This is in part due to the planned reviews that were delayed during the Covid pandemic. Therefore, the reviews undertaken by the DWP are inevitably creating demand for mandatory reconsideration and then full appeal casework.

SARC continues to face the challenges of the radical change to the welfare and benefits system and the introduction of new benefits. A much tougher regime on Employment and Support Allowance, for example, has created uncertainty and increased demand. We have represented clients in volume with tribunal and mandatory reconsideration proceedings with great success.

We continue to help in volume with PIP appeals for people who have been migrated or who, as sadly is often the case, have not been migrated from the legacy benefit DLA.

Following the local full introduction of Universal Credit (UC) there has been a massive change and increased demand for our help. This will only increase as the DWP attempts to migrate legacy benefits to Universal Credit. In the autumn clients on tax credits will be invited to migrate to UC. This will create huge pressure on our services and is only the first step in a long process.

We have had great success with both telephone appeals and cloud-based video tribunal hearings where this is suitable for the client. Regrettably, some clients did have to have their hearings postponed as their health challenges were so great, they needed an in person hearing with a SARC adviser accompanying them.

Volume In person telephone and video hearings are continuing as both the Employment and Benefit Tribunals are trying to manage the backlog. We are attending in person hearings most weeks now as the system recovers and tackles the backlog of hearings required.

SARC is a charity which relies on, and is grateful for, the support it receives from the City Council, trade unions, businesses, and other charitable and community organisations. We recognise that these organisations are not immune from financial pressures in the wider economy, but we hope we can continue to make the case that what we do is effective and makes a real contribution to a better society by helping those who are in most need and is deserving of continued support and resourcing.

We continue to explore ways to expand our welfare benefit training service, delivering bespoke training for voluntary and public sector agencies and health professionals.

Please contact the Centre Manager Gary Edwards for more information or visit the training tab at www.sarc.org.uk



Adapting our service during and after the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic proved very challenging for SARC, but we are proud that we were able to continue a full service by flexibly adapting services wherever possible to ensure client safety and continue to help local people as the only local organisation which offers advice and representation to clients on welfare and employment as a core activity.

We immediately created home offices in March 2020 as the first lockdown took place. We were the last local advice centre to close our doors when we moved to operating a full service remotely. We were, and still are, able to offer telephone, email, video, and face to face appointments tailored to the needs of our clients.

This was seamless for clients, and we had great success in accessing funds to facilitate the move to safe and effective home working. Many of the benefits of the use of technology are being incorporated into our permanent service model.

New ways of working have improved access for the more remote parts of the city without the need for clients to visit face to face. Clients are offered a choice on how they can access our services. We have also developed an Accessibility Charter outlining our commitment to making access to our services as open as possible.

If needed, we can use a secure interview suite which allows safe face to face contact where there is no other suitable and safe means of delivering our service. This has also facilitated access for British Sign Language (BSL) users and lip readers.



Many of the benefits of the use of technology are being incorporated into our permanent service model

Social prescribing

SARC recognises that ‘social prescribing’ – the ability of health services to refer patients to advice and support services – can play a vital role in addressing the wider determinants of health such as poverty, social isolation and in addressing unmet patient needs. Since 2021 we have been pleased to develop links with and provide training to social prescribers based around St Mary’s surgery. They regularly refer clients to us for expert advice and representation.

Our services offering both advice and advocacy over a range of welfare and employment issues can contribute to better health and well-being outcomes to health service users and also reduce demand pressures on frontline NHS services. In addition, we can also link into a range of other areas of advice which support a holistic approach to meeting clients’ needs. Like many cities Southampton has a shortage of GPs and there is considerable evidence that effective deployment of social prescribing can both benefit clients and reduce demand on GP services, freeing up clinical time and resolving client issues before they cause serious health problems.

While recognising that there is a range of organisations attempting to deliver social prescribing, this is often un-coordinated across our city and there is a need for a full assessment of what advice provision offers the best support and outcomes and needs further investment. SARC has links with a range of health professionals in Southampton who are working well in ensuring patients can access timely advice and support.

We are seeking to build on the dialogue with the NHS (and in particular primary care and mental health services) and stakeholders to publicise what we have achieved so far, what we can offer–subject to capacity and to develop proposals for a pilot scheme to better embed social prescribing in our local communities. With additional funding we could have dedicated support for social prescribing. Our record in terms of what we win for clients shows what we could contribute.

‘SARC offer an excellent service to our patients who otherwise would be lost in a complicated system. We appreciate and value the professional relationship we have with SARC who offer us excellent advice and respond to queries quickly. Our patients we refer to SARC, often provide us with positive feedback of their experience. Thank you for your support!’

“I think SARC have been amazingly helpful for our team, and they are so fast at responding. It’s almost like the light at the end of a tunnel for some patients.”

“SARC have been a fantastic organisation to work with, they offer excellent advice and support and respond to queries quickly. The training we received gave an excellent insight into the very complicated welfare benefits system.”

“The team at SARC provide an invaluable service for the many people we refer to them. They have been great at helping us as Social Prescribing Link Workers understand and navigate the complex benefits system and have taught us a lot. I really appreciate the professional relationship we have with them and the respect that they offer to our referrals. We couldn’t do without SARC!”

Social Prescribing Link Workers
Southampton Central PCN 2022



Contract delivery

We continue to meet the funded capacity for our SCC contract to provide specialist advice and representation on disability benefits, but the level of additional demand for these services in the order of a further 20% of cases has to be met from other limited funding sources.

We remain the only organisation in the city which offers representation. Based on our analysis 81% of our clients have a health challenge that would qualify as a disability under the Equality Act 2010: of this population 13% have mental health challenges only, 18% have physical health challenges only and 69% have both physical and mental health challenges which comes as no surprise particularly given the frequency with which clients with long term physical health issues develop additional mental health issues.

We would expect that demands in this area will only increase. This funding contract will be reviewed in 2025.

Our second largest contract is with Citizens Advice Southampton (CAS), where we hold a sub-contract to deliver specialist advice and representation in employment and benefits commissioned under the Council's Advice Information and Guidance (AIG) contract. We have undertaken all the specialist work referred to us, and we anticipate an increase in demand and seek to work closely with CAS to ensure access and referral for all presenting clients they receive.

In addition to contractual arrangements, we have a significant number of new and legacy cases. Without a specific funding stream to support our work in these areas we are grateful for the donations and support from a range of organisations and individuals which allow us to help a wider range of clients and reduce pressure on our always limited resources. This year we would like to record our thanks to South Hampshire Junior Lawyers who adopted us as their chosen charity for a successful social event. We hope to strengthen links and there are opportunities for developing training and pro-bono roles for their membership.

The existing contracts which SARC holds with the City Council run until January 2025. In the lead up to this date we are advised that the City Council will wish to review the contract architecture for advice within the city in consultation with the advice sector, a process which SARC is committed to.

SARC believes that the needs of the city are best served by a mixed economy of provision of advice - and crucially representation - which is based on a realistic assessment of advice needs and which recognises what constitutes specialist advice and the essential contribution that such advice from a small, independent, and local organisation like SARC makes.

Our people

We have only been able to cope with the increasing workload and pressure on our resources because of the commitment and dedication of our hardworking staff and volunteers. Many of our staff have long service which is itself an indication of their dedication to SARC and its clients and thanks are also due to all our volunteers who make a significant contribution of skills and enthusiasm.

It is a testament to those who work for us in every capacity that once again we have traditionally received excellent external audits of our services which means that we continue to be accredited with the Advice Quality Standard for casework.

SARC's business model means that we have a very high percentage of our resources invested at the front line in a small team of high skilled advisers who specialise solely in welfare and employment advice and representation. We are clearly focussed on providing the kind of specialist support which only we can offer to clients and are thus not subject to 'mission drift'.

We have developed an organisation which has a set of skills which we believe cannot be replicated elsewhere, or easily reassembled from scratch as both knowledge and experience in our specialisms are difficult to find and take time to acquire.

Our staff has the formal knowledge of the complexities of benefits and employment law, regulations, and precedents (a body of knowledge which is not static and which they constantly update and develop), combined with a depth of practical experience of working with the legal and benefits agencies and of representing clients in formal and informal settings, which is necessary to do our job properly.

Our governance

Overall control of SARC as a charity is vested in its Board who are responsible for how the organisation is run and are responsible for making sure it's doing what it was set up to do. They are responsible for ensuring that the charity acts in accordance with its governing document the Memorandum of Association, and all legal requirements.

Members of our Board of Directors are elected to post having been selected from suitable candidates to ensure that the board contains an appropriate balance of expertise. Our Board Skills Audit has demonstrated the range of skills and life experience which the Board brings to SARC whilst identifying opportunities for further training. The directors meet regularly to oversee the governance of the charity and to review and set the policy and long-term strategies of SARC. The Board work closely with the Centre Manager who has day to day operational responsibility for SARC and its services. There is one subcommittee: Personnel and Development, which is charged with developing and monitoring delivery of the strategic plan and policy and personnel matters.

Our Advice Quality Standard audit in 2022 recognised the contribution that the voluntary members of the SARC Board have made to providing professional guidance and strategic direction to the organisation. Our policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure they meet best practice: for example, we have completely revised our safeguarding policy this year.

Risk Management

SARC recognises that it is important to the successful functioning of the organisation to have in place processes which will allow us to identify, quantify and mitigate any risk.

A number of internal processes will help equip the organisation to respond to risk which may develop including: -

1. Financial planning and control.
2. Strategic planning and objective setting.
3. Service planning and delivery.
4. Reporting and decision making.
5. Policy making and review.

The Board maintains, and regularly reviews at each meeting, a risk register which seeks to capture the principal risks the organisation faces, their level of severity and impact and what mitigating action the organisation must take to remove or reduce the level of risk.



Validating what we do

SARC is proud of its reputation as a provider of quality advice and representation. We believe that we offer an excellent standard of service in a totally cost-effective way.

Our services are regularly reviewed and evaluated by funders to ensure they are getting value for money and that we meet agreed service standards and outcomes, by professional auditors to ensure we meet exacting standards for the Advice Quality Standard where we score highly, having achieved the Industry Quality Mark, by our Board to ensure we are innovative and cost effective but most importantly of all by those who use our services and rely on us to give them a voice - we are extremely proud of the positive feedback we receive from our clients year after year. This strengthens our commitment to provide essential advice, representation, and support for those who need it most in our city.

We are proud of the level of donations made by SARC clients who appreciate our support.

Our people 2023

Directors

John Brear, Chair
Robert Stokes, Vice Chair
David Wrighton, Secretary
Derrick Murray, Treasurer
Cathie McEwing
David Goodall
Robert Stokes

Staff

Gary Edwards, Manager
Suman Hothi, Administrator
Lisa Morris, Receptionist
Kate Coppinger, Advisor
Emma Stodart, Advisor (until April 2023)
Dave Thompson, Advisor
Joel Nicholson, Deputy Manager
Mary Siddall, Advisor

Main funders 2022-23



Plus client donations

Where we operate

Our office is based in Woolston (Tel 023 8043 1435) and runs an appointment service presently five days a week, Monday to Friday.

Please contact us for full details as you may need to make an appointment and visit www.sarc.org.uk for more details. This includes an enquiry form for the initial case enquiry.

We offer face to face or remote appointments by telephone, email and video tailored to the client's needs and preference.

We continue to update and revise our website www.sarc.org.uk.

How does SARC fit with other advice agencies?

We work with other advice agencies in the city and because we have such a clear mission statement, we can quickly identify and refer clients who have particular advice needs outside our core specialisms, for example debt advice and counselling, to other appropriate agencies.

We occupy a discrete and clearly defined area of specialist advice provision. No other organisation does what we do or, indeed, seeks to do so; nor in our view is there an as yet untapped alternative source which can do what we do on the basis we do it. Putting it plainly, if we did not exist, we would have to be reinvented.



Does Southampton need what SARC offers?

The answer is yes. We can defend the value of what we do in terms of client satisfaction and cost effectiveness, we have received support from the City Council under various administrations and the value of our work has been acknowledged.

We believe that the economic realities of Southampton and the implications of these for Southampton citizens mean that we are addressing real and pressing needs in the local population and making a real contribution to tackling poverty, which is at the root of many of the city's social problems.

Southampton is the largest city in Hampshire. It is a diverse city with a resident population of 248,922 (2021 census) comprising approximately 102,000 households. Over 9000 households are workless.

Results from the 2021 Census recorded over 2,090 different ethnic groups nationally. In Southampton, 68.1% of usual residents are white British, a decrease of -7.9% since Census 2011, compared with a decrease of -1.7% in England. This means that the population of Southampton is getting more culturally diverse.

In Southampton, 12.6% of residents consider themselves white other than white British, compared with 8.3% in 2011 - an increase of 66.9% or just over 11,900 people.

As at Summer 2023, 10500 of Southampton's working age resident population are estimated to be looking for work.

Using information from the Southampton Observatory website as of June 2023 it is evident that while in some aspects of economic growth pre-pandemic Southampton was in line with the other parts of the affluent South of England, this is not the full picture.

Data relating to poverty and deprivation in the city suggest that it has more in common with other urban areas in the UK with high levels of deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019) shows that Southampton continues to be a relatively deprived city. Based on average deprivation rank of its neighbourhoods (LSOAs), Southampton is now ranked 55th (where 1 is the most deprived) out of 317 local authorities: more deprived than the comparator cities of Bristol (82nd), Leeds (92nd) and Sheffield (93rd).

Southampton has 19 Lower Super Output Areas within the 10% most deprived in England and one in the 10% least deprived.

We would agree with the judgement of the Southampton Observatory that "the 2008 economic recession and welfare reforms including the introduction of Universal Credit had a marked impact on Southampton and its residents. In practice, the direct impact of the welfare reforms is not shared equally; they impact hardest on some of our most deprived households, with some households affected by several changes." SARC's experience is that the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, high inflation and the 'cost of living' crises are worsening levels of poverty.

Deprivation and inequalities between residents and neighbourhoods in Southampton are significant and in the view of the Observatory continue to be a driver for crime and poor health outcomes in Southampton. Of the 317 Local Authorities in England, Southampton is ranked 55th (previously 54th) most deprived based on average rank of LSOAs and 61st (previously 67th) most deprived based on average score of LSOAs

- Around 12% of Southampton's population live in neighbourhoods within the 10% most deprived nationally; this rises to 18% for the under 18 population. Over 45% of Southampton's population live in neighbourhoods within the 30% most deprived nationally (around 117,000 people)
- At neighbourhood level, approximately half of the LSOAs in Southampton have become more deprived (77/148; 52%) since 2015, whilst half have become less deprived.
- The five most deprived neighbourhoods in Southampton are in Bargate (Golden Grove), Weston (International Way), Weston (Kingsclere Avenue), Thornhill (Lydgate Road) and Millbrook (Lockerley Crescent)
- Southampton is ranked 3rd worst in the country for crime deprivation and is in the worst 20% of local authorities for 5 other deprivation domains.

Department for Work and Pensions figures for children living in low-income families show that in 2020/21, 22.2% of children in Southampton aged under 16 were living in relative low-income families, significantly higher than the national average (18.5%).

The IMD (2019) includes a supplementary index of Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI). The IDACI measures the proportion of children in each neighbourhood (LSOA) that live in families that are income deprived (i.e., in receipt of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit (Guarantee) or Child Tax Credit below a given threshold). The proportion of children who are income deprived ranges from less than 5% (LSOAs in Portswood, Shirley and Bassett) to over 45% (LSOAs in Redbridge and Woolston).

The latest data on those pupils who are eligible for free school meals from the Department for Education (DfE) school census (2021/22), shows that 33% of all pupils, in state funded schools in Southampton, were known to be eligible for free school meals, which is significantly higher than the national average (22.5%).

Children living in poverty and deprivation are more likely to have poorer outcomes in adulthood, particularly those relating to health, education, employment, and crime. It has also been found that children and families from the poorest 20% of household incomes are three times more likely to have common mental health problems than those in the richest 20%.

In 2020, figures showed that 13.2% of households in England (3.16 million households) were living in fuel poverty. The proportion living in fuel poverty in Southampton is slightly lower at 12.5%, equating to about 13,400 households in the city. However, in comparison, the proportion in Hampshire is just 7.4%.

There has been an increase in the number of households in fuel poverty between 2019 and 2020. In Southampton, the increase is approximately 1,400 households or 1.0 percentage points.

The local NHS document Transforming Health and Care Outcomes for the people of Southampton 2019-2023 has highlighted some worrying statistics on social deprivation in Southampton.

In Southampton, often seen as a wealthy thriving city with enormous growth potential associated with the affluent South, health outcomes are poorer than other areas in the southeast and the city's characteristics relating to poverty and deprivation present serious challenges.

People who live in the poorest (most deprived) areas will die earlier than those living in the most affluent (least deprived) areas. Males living in the poorest areas are likely to die 6.7 years earlier than males in the least deprived areas. Women living in the poorest areas are likely to die 3.1 years earlier than those in the less deprived areas of our city.

One statistic which is particularly striking for us is that a comparison of those working age adults (16-24) in the least deprived neighbourhoods in the city with those in the most deprived shows that the latter are 5.6% more likely to be claimants of out of work benefits. Other figures show a 2.0 higher incidence of premature deaths from all causes and a 1.5x higher incidence of premature deaths from cancer when comparing these neighbourhoods.

There is a clear link between deprivation and rates of urgent health care usage: for example, the rates of emergency hospital admissions for the 148 neighborhoods in Southampton show that the most deprived areas of the city have higher rates of admissions than the least deprived.

In Southampton, 17.7% of all usual residents are disabled under the Equality Act, significantly higher than England (17.3%).

SARC has always been aware of the links between poverty and ill health and has worked with health professionals for many years to secure better outcomes for their patients and our clients.



Resident population of
248,922



102,000
households



9,000+
working age residents claiming
Jobseeker's Allowance

SARC outcomes

We can demonstrate that the work we do makes a significant and valued contribution to addressing the inequalities identified above; indeed, it is our central purpose. There is for example an extremely close correlation between the eleven Southampton priority neighbourhoods based on markers of deprivation where 50% of the City's population live and the areas from which our clients come.

This is perhaps not surprising, but figures suggest that we are working with the grain of City priorities with the people we are helping.

SARC is not the whole solution to the problems caused by poverty and inequality within our city, but we are an important part of any solution.

We can provide support for those who have no other voice and relatively little power in society and act to secure the legal and welfare benefits to which they are entitled. Our resources place some practical limits on the number of people we are able to help but this is an issue of capacity, not capability.

In relation to our welfare benefits caseload, most people we represent find the complexity of the regulations and the welfare system daunting. In employment matters we will not represent clients who are members of trade unions as they have access to the support and advice of those organisations. However, it is important to remember that in 2022 only 22.3% of the UK workforce belonged to a trade union. TUC Figures also show that 54% of trade union members worked in the public sector as opposed to 14% in the private sector. In Southampton the people we represent do not have access to the kind of support that a trade union can provide and do not usually work in sectors where the good employment practice that characterises many of the City's employers is usual.

There is no other agency or resource in the city whether, a private enterprise or one in receipt of public funding, which does/can do what we do. We offer a standard of representation which is as good if not better than a specialist lawyer could provide. We advise on complex matters in relation to employment and welfare benefits and we follow this through when required and we do not charge our clients. We should emphasise here that there are no national services either currently or in development which can do what we do.

If we cast the net wider and look at the position in relation to employment matters, the major source of expertise for representation for employees comes from a few large solicitors' firms who work exclusively for trade unions. Even on a "no win, no fee" basis (which is not a free service if the case succeeds) other law firms have not wanted to take on employment tribunal work as they are unable to recover costs.

Our clients and our work reflect the city which we serve. The gender split amongst clients is 60% female and 40% male. Our clients come from a wide range of ethnic groups as the table below covering the calendar year 2023 shows.

Through partnership working with EU Welcome, we can provide a service to Eastern European clients with translators attending every Wednesday afternoon.

During the 12 months to August 2023, we recorded close to 6000 client episodes.

We achieved a financial outcome of over £1,339,702 for clients. Benefits issues £1,298,784 Employment £40,918

Money which is spent in the local economy helping alleviate the effects of poverty and assist with health issues.



9%

Asian

8%

Eastern European

6%

Black

1%

Chinese

3%

Other

73%

White



This represents a return of £7.80 for every £ of local public money invested in our service.

We only specialise in Welfare and Employment law; in some cases, we will deal with an employment case which may lead us to offer additional benefits advice and assistance and vice versa.

In particular we have been very busy assisting clients in managing the migration from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment – delivering quality advocacy when the client most needs support. Incredibly we have had a success rate of over 80% even when attending telephone and video COVID amended hearings. This illustrates the problems with PIP, and we have delivered submissions and oral evidence to the Works and Pensions Parliament Select Committee. It is worth pausing for a moment to consider each of these clients who have serious health conditions and have to have the courage to challenge the DWP decisions. We can only wonder at how they would have coped or worse simply given up without our support to obtain justice.

We believe that the positive outcomes for our clients and the city are as follows.

- Our service helps tackle poverty.
- Our service creates income to be spent in the local economy.
- We are seen, and respected, as an independent agency
- We have a real presence as an organisation supported by the City Council in the priority neighbourhoods. Our client base reflects those sections of the population who are in real need and without a voice.
- We support better health outcomes, for example mental health.
- We promote an ethos of fairness and social cohesion within the city.
- We provide a cost-effective service which is free to Southampton residents.
- Feedback indicates that our service is valued which enhances our reputation and that of the City Council.
- We fully comply with the Council Ethical Procurement Policy in relation to Employee Relations.

Our finances

Key Extracts from Accounts to 31st March 2023

Sources of Funds

Southampton City Council	100,000
Southampton Citizens Advice	67,668
SVS SO18	13,004
Henry Smith Charity	52,725
Alex Ferry Foundation	9,397
The Access to Justice Foundation	6,727
Other small grants	400
Donations	6562

Investment income/bank interes	1,221
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Total income	257,704
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Total expenditure	265,186
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N.B. The above figures for illustration are based on the draft accounts as at time of publication of this report. Our full financial accounts will be available on the Charity Commission's website.

Our Auditors are Knight Goodhead Limited, 7 Bournemouth Road, Chandler's Ford, S053 3DA





Southampton Advice & Representation Centre Ltd

11 Porchester Road
Woolston
Southampton
SO19 2JB

**Email admin@sarc.org.uk
or call 023 8043 1435**



Registered Charity No: 1112999
Registered Company No: 55826

A local charity for local people

sarc.org.uk