



# Citizens Advice warns of service closures due to funding shortfall

By David Melsome

**Citizens Advice Barnet has warned that if it does not receive adequate funding over the next few months, vital advice services for residents in the borough will have to close or be drastically cut.**

Funding shortfalls for the charity will affect immigration, employment and welfare benefits casework, all of which serve as a lifeline for many residents in the borough.

Daniel Bamford, CEO of Citizens Advice Barnet, said: "This is a very difficult time for the advice sector as traditional funders face dwindling endowments, competing pressures and more demands. We are also seeing an ever-growing need for our advice but with ever more limited means to solve people's problems.

"In that context we will need to close some projects where replacement funding has not been found despite our best efforts. We have made dozens of applications to replace lost funding but success, in the challenging environment I have described, remains difficult."

Citizens Advice Barnet effectively operates as the law centre in Barnet following the closure of Barnet Law Service in 2014. After its closure, the charity took on some of its staff and functions. This includes free end-to-end casework on welfare benefits, immigration at the highest level: Immigration

Advice Authority (IAA) level 3, and employment rights.

There is no other free provision in the borough for such complex, in-depth casework. The charity has been fully funding employment casework and part-funding immigration casework from its own reserves since funding came to an end last summer, but it cannot continue doing so beyond March 2026.

This means that Citizens Advice Barnet's employment litigation project, which enables workers to uphold their employment rights in cases such as unfair dismissal and discrimination, will close on 1 April. Immigration casework will be reduced from 31 March. Funding for welfare benefits casework also ends this month.

Daniel Bamford added: "There is still very high demand for these services despite the cuts that we are being forced to make and we expect that demand to continue to rise in 2026."

He appealed for anyone who can help fund any of these vital services to contact Citizens Advice Barnet at [fundraising@barnetcab.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@barnetcab.org.uk).



*In harmony: Music makers at the Dovetail DaCapo concert. Photo Finn Paul Photography*

## Music making for asylum seekers and refugees

By Gail Norcliffe

**East Finchley residents Helen Halpern and Sarah Manson have been instrumental in driving forward an exciting new project to provide free access to music making for asylum seekers and refugees.**

Dovetail DaCapo brings together two charities: the Dovetail Orchestra in Bristol for refugees and asylum seekers, and the DaCapo Music Foundation, a music school based at the Wren Academy in North Finchley.

As a teacher of English to refugees and asylum seekers, Helen was aware that weekends can be a particularly difficult time for them. Dovetail DaCapo's founding principle was a means to improve participants' mental health by alleviating isolation, boredom and social exclusion.

Alongside fellow committee members, Jane Cutler and Michelle Groves, Helen and Sarah worked with others to initiate and implement the project. Funding has come from a range of sources, including Barnet Council, some small trusts and the National Lottery. Local councillor Anne Clarke and MP Sarah Sackman have also been very supportive. Saturday afternoons at Dovetail DaCapo are spent making music with a range of instruments from around the world. Everyone is welcome, whether or not they have prior musical knowledge or are skilled musicians. DaCapo music teachers Will Dollard, Alice Purton, Sally Russell and Liz Menezes are

crucial in guiding the music, helped by the partnership with Bristol's Dovetail Orchestra and its organisers. Free refreshments are offered at the end of sessions, shared food helping to cultivate the sense of belonging. Forty two people of numerous nationalities have attended to date and 19 are now regular participants. Feedback is encouraging: "I and my friends enjoyed the groups. Thank you for your love towards us always."

The project's 12-week pilot stage ended on 5 December, culminating in a well-attended concert at the Wren Academy, celebrating the musical diversity of participants.

Concert highlights included the 'dovetailing' of an Iranian folk song with a South African lullaby, and a similar blending of Liberian folk and Kenyan pop songs. A former music teacher from Iran played solo pieces on a tar and setar, a stringed instrument used in traditional Persian music. "Ya Yammah", a song from Iraq, was also a solo performance, and audience members movingly joined in with the chorus.

Given the pilot stage's success, Dovetail DaCapo will be continuing in January, with all involved contributing to building a valuable musical community.

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