



National Lottery Community Fund report 2019-20

This was the third year of our National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF - former Big Lottery) project and continuation of the delivery of our regular services:

- Providing regular English language courses. We hold two ESOL classes per week at various levels.
- Offering Polish and other Eastern European migrants 1-2-1 information/signposting sessions.
- Publishing “East Midlands po Polsku” (EMpP), roughly translated as “The East Midlands in Polish”, in which we continue to inform our readership about issues relevant to the Polish community across the East Midlands. Our readership is approx. 10,000.
- Running www.empp.co.uk which provides our users with instant information as well as running a Facebook page that has over 2,870 followers.
- Providing support in the process of applying for Settled Status, an immigration status EU citizens require after Brexit.
- Organising workshops, meetings, social gatherings, events, developing a sense of community and working towards community cohesion. Our workshops provide comprehensive and useful information on current, topical issues. Our events/social activities contribute to the creation of a sense of community amongst the recently arrived migrants.
- Providing volunteering opportunities for members of New & Emerging Communities which benefit them as well as members of the wider local community.
- Running SPS food bank and clothes bank.

Activities you have undertaken

We became a partner in the consortium led by Nottingham Law Centre which aimed to support EU citizens in applying for settled status, the immigration status European citizens require after Brexit. The consortium was supported by funding from the Home Office. We also undertook and completed the project “Polonia w Nottingham i okolicach w dobie brexitu – warsztaty edukacyjne”, supported by funding from the Polish Government.

We were successful in applying for small grants for our events and activities, receiving funding from Castle Cavendish Ltd (for ESOL and IT courses, Women’s Empowerment Workshop and family events), Polish Consulate in Manchester (family events), Together Today Nottingham and New Art Exchange (both organisations - family events). We completed our participation in the Money Sorted Project led by St Ann’s Advice Centre.

We continued to be a member of FareShare – a scheme where supermarkets such as Tesco donate unwanted food to charities. We regularly collect food from two Tesco Express Stores which enabled us to support people whom we could not refer to the Trussell Trust food banks and who cannot afford to feed themselves and their families. We also started to hold a clothes bank thanks to the clothes donations from Shareware and members of our local community.

We represented the interests and spoke on behalf of members of the Polish and other Eastern European communities at a number of key local public events. We took part in community open events as well as network meetings, forums, training, etc., please read on to find out how.

We developed links with Nottingham University with the view to tap into University staff/volunteers and resources when providing activities for families/children at our events. We connected with local organisations providing information and advice by attending a Revenue, Benefits Networking Event at Loxley House. To ensure we are aware of important issues and challenges, we took part in a conference about Modern Day Slavery and participated in Cyber Crime/Fraud Prevention workshops. We also attended training including a digital skills masterclass and safeguarding. We enabled members of the Advisors Forum to have their meetings at SPS. SPS was visited by representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities, Local Government to discuss concerns of our service users and the community in the light of Brexit preparations and starting the process of applying for settled status. We were invited to take part in meetings held by the Ministry but could not attend due to financial and time constraints of travelling to London.

We liaised with the Home Office (by attending a meeting in Leicester, a conference in London and an event in Nottingham) focusing on the practicalities of the settled status application process. We provided our feedback and suggestions for best practice in working with hard to reach communities. SPS delivered a presentation to inform the attendees about challenges that its service users face when applying for settled status.

SPS was invited to take part in the World Language Day at The Minster School in Southwell. We taught 5 lessons throughout the day to year 8 pupils about Polish language, culture and history, and received very good feedback from pupils and teachers. Taking part in The World Language Day at Minster School was a follow-up to the campaign SPS led after the Brexit referendum result was announced and racist tensions against EU migrants increased. During the campaign we gathered over 1,000 signatures for letters which we sent to local schools, to ask them to include in their teaching activities elements referring to Polish culture and language, and in this way to promote community cohesion and build positive relationships within the local communities.

In February 2020 we took part in the Nottingham Trent University Global Week event in order to develop links with Nottingham Trent University, their students and staff in the hope that we could advertise our volunteer interpreters' opportunities within their establishment/premises.

The manager of SPS continued to be a member of the Advisory Committee to the Polish Consul in Manchester. In this capacity she attended meetings held at the Polish Consulate in Manchester, discussing the settled status application process and other challenges for the Polish communities living across the northern regions of England.

SPS' manager has been accepted on the programme of Future Leaders of Nottingham. Enrolling for this programme was an attempt to explore new ways of securing SPS sustainability, i.e. to equip SPS with proven leadership skills and better understand the way other Nottingham organisations work and co-operate.

We started lending books to the local Polish community from our own library – with 4 users borrowing 16 books.

SPS represented the Polish voice on a number of occasions in local and national media debates.

We also had staff changes and had to undertake recruitment procedures. In February 2020 our chairman Peter Brown very sadly passed away.

We have also organised many community cohesion events, courses and workshops which we will be writing about in the following part of this report.

Something interesting you can tell us about how your work has contributed to our key goals of early action, shared and sustainable spaces and places, and stronger relationships

With our service provision we aim to support vulnerable people to deter a further deterioration of their situation, living conditions, their lives, etc. We help them so their circumstances do not become worse. We also aim to equip them with skills so they become more independent, empowered and can fend for themselves. Through our courses, community cohesion events and volunteering we contribute to the development of positive relationships between individuals, communities and organisations.

This was a year when we promoted information about the need for EU citizens to apply for settled status to ensure that they do not become illegal immigrants in the UK after Brexit. We also supported the more vulnerable ones (who have no language or digital skills or have no modern mobiles/IT equipment) in applying for settled status.

Just before the third year of this project came to its completion we supported our users during the Coronavirus lockdown, mainly by distributing food that we collected from our local Tesco, working hard to maintain all necessary steps to ensure the safety of ourselves and our families and our users.

How people have been involved in developing and delivering your activities?

We are encouraging our volunteers and service users to become actively involved in the SPS project. Some service users become volunteers. They take part in our events, workshops and meetings. They help us to plan, prepare and run our events. We ask them for their feedback when planning further events/activities or directions SPS should take.

We also consult our users to advise us on the best days/hours for the delivery of our activities through informal conversations. For example, we consult people waiting to be seen by a SPS staff member regarding the way/date/time the 1-2-1 Information sessions are delivered or what time would be convenient for people to take part in the ESOL course.

Some members of our management committee were recruited from among our users – as we wanted our user’s voice to be heard when discussing SPS issues, work and future activities.

How you have built on people’s strengths?

At SPS we aim to inform and educate people about their rights – this is delivered via 1-2-1 Information sessions, workshops and our newspaper. Our service users can learn more about rules and regulations prevailing in the UK, learn about topical local and national issues, like the Settled Status scheme, British elections and their results or changes in housing and homelessness regulations.

We are also working with local communities – our social activities contribute to the creation of a sense of community amongst the recently arrived and settled migrants and other communities.

We encourage volunteering and equip our volunteers with training, confidence building and empowerment so they can become community champions, independent and confidently engaging with the community.

Because of the support from the SPS



Newspaper and social media

Our newspaper 'East Midlands po Polsku', our www.empp.co.uk and a facebook profile 'East Midlands po Polsku' constitute some of the means which we use to empower our community, to equip it with information and knowledge so it is more resilient and able to fend for itself.

We published 10 issues of East Midlands po Polsku, which is also available and administered on our website www.empp.co.uk on a regular basis.

**OVERALL
NEWSPAPER
RATING**



**67% said it was EXCELLENT
20% said it was GOOD**

The majority of Poles read East Midlands po Polsku every month (67%) and most months (20%). Only 13% read it occasionally or rarely. The paper version is preferred (93%) over digital copy available on the SPS website (7%).

We asked our readers whether they agree with particular statements about our newspaper. 100% of the respondents definitely agree that they know more about local and national issues thanks to East Midlands po Polsku. The vast majority of our readers claim to have a better understanding of their rights and to know how to access local services. They also feel empowered to solve their problems, are more

confident about living in the UK and less vulnerable. The understanding of how to report a hate crime incident is also very high.



Our readers stated that the newspaper provides reliable information regarding life in the UK. “Information about changing laws and practical aspects of life in England is very helpful”, one of the respondents wrote. “What’s more, I know what are my rights and responsibilities”. Other respondents praised the range of topics covered, mainly settled status and Brexit: “The newspaper provides news about settled status. While other Polish web pages in the UK are scaremongering and write about deportations, I have reliable information from East Midland po Polsku”, wrote one EMpP reader. Another added comments about other topics covered by EMpP, such as knife crime and British politics: “Some of the articles are really interesting, for example the one about tackling knife crime.” The newspaper remains one of the main channels to inform about “wonderful SPS’ initiatives” (as defined by our readers). It also makes people feel part of Polish society in the UK, at the same time bringing them closer to English lifestyle.

We also remain active on East Midlands po Polsku Facebook profile, informing our followers about our services, volunteering opportunities, activities in the local area

and projects that are beneficial for Poles living in the East Midlands, such as vacancies with local employers. We share our posts with thousands of members of different Polish Facebook groups, such as 'Polonia Nottingham', 'Polacy w Mansfield' and 'Polonia Leicester'.

Our ESOL and IT courses also aim to equip people with skills which will enable them to be more independent and resilient.

ESOL

OVERALL
ESOL CLASSES
RATING



82% said it was **EXCELLENT**

We delivered 3 courses funded by Castle Cavendish Ltd and 2 courses led by Nottingham University students attended by a total of 54 people. They were popular, especially our Autumn and Winter terms. Of 54 learners, 38 completed the questionnaire at the end of the course. All of them said they would recommend our course to somebody else. The ratings of the course and the tutors were split between excellent and good. Attendees of the course led by Nottingham University students liked the fact that we had 3 teachers present during each class. We also received very positive feedback from the students-teachers – they enjoyed the learning and have become very fond of our groups. Many learners expressed interest in having more groups at different levels.

Asked what difference coming to the ESOL class made to their lives, the majority of learners stated that it was having better language skills which gives them confidence - an important step towards becoming independent and making positive changes in their lives (such as better job prospects, being able to communicate with their GPs or teachers at their children's schools).



As in previous years, people coming to ESOL courses became more and more interested in our work. Some of them expressed interest in becoming volunteers and were a great help to SPS staff during very busy family events in June and November 2019 and February 2020.

IT Course

With the support of the Polish Consulate in Manchester and the Castle Cavendish funding, we delivered computer courses and workshops which aimed to equip low skilled EU citizens with basic IT knowledge, which in turn will help them to apply for their own settled status.

27 people attended our computer courses (funded by Castle Cavendish) and 53 were helped to obtain the skills for managing the process of applying for settled status (funded by the Polish government).

OVERALL
IT COURSE
RATING



65% said it was **EXCELLENT**
35% said it was **GOOD**

Some of our students have never used computers before, so they had to learn how to use a mouse and a keyboard first. They also learnt how to use Microsoft Windows and access the internet. Participants of both groups set up their email accounts and learnt how to use them. Computer security, avoiding phishing and scams was discussed.

Attendees gained basic IT skills which are essential in modern day life. Furthermore, our learners had an opportunity to socialise together, spend time in each other's company and make friends. Some of our learners were retired, depressed or leading lonely lives and said that the SPS IT course contributed towards improving their overall wellbeing.

***My IT skills have definitely developed** thanks to the SPS IT course. I don't have to ask my son for help whenever I want to turn on the computer and read news. I can keep in touch with my friend who travels abroad a lot via email. I am very happy that I made new friends during the course.*

*It was fun to come to the SPS IT course. I learned a lot and laughed a lot with other participants. I felt like I belonged. I was so proud of myself when I finally managed to do basic maths in Excel – **it was like sumitting Mount Everest for me.***

In the case of some users, our course contributed towards improving their employability, teaching them more advanced IT skills (such as working on spreadsheets).

All attendees commented that the course made them feel more confident when using computers and technology in general. 93% of participants would recommend our IT course to somebody else.

Settled status

To make sure that Polish/other EU citizens do not become illegal immigrants in the UK after Brexit, we became involved in supporting EU nationals with applying for the Settled Status, a status EU citizens require after Brexit.

OVERALL
SETTLED STATUS
SESSIONS RATING



97% said it was **EXCELLENT**

We supported 206 people through the Home Office funding granted via Nottingham Law Centre. We helped them to apply for the status: for some it was settled status, for others pre-settled status. Many have no IT skills, English language barriers, no modern mobile telephones. Many of them came back to us to check whether they had received the status or not, unable to access their e-mail or online Home Office profile.

The feedback we received from this project has been positive. 57% of our clients said they wouldn't be able to apply for the status on their own and praised SPS advisers' professionalism and efficiency. 28% were not sure if they were able to successfully apply on their own, whereas 15% felt skilled enough to do it, but missed vital equipment, eg. a scanner needed to upload documents.

44% of our service users praised SPS advisers' professionalism and efficiency. Friendly atmosphere was important for 25%. People were also mentioning convenience and the ability to get reliable and current information about the EU Settlement Scheme.

*SPS helped me in overcoming difficulties I encountered when tried to apply by myself. Later on **I was able to help my friends** with similar issues.*

*The session was conducted in quiet atmosphere. I stressed a lot because I was not able to prove that I lived in the UK, but **SPS team made me feel relaxed** and solved my problems.*

*I have been reading about settled status in the East Midlands po Polsku, so I have decided to use SPS' help in applying. I was sure that I would be in good hands and that **my personal information would be secure**.*

All service users said they would definitely recommend our sessions to others because of friendly service and reliable information, especially facts that they would be able to share with their friends and family (eg. deadline to apply, general rules and obligations for people with pre-settled status or information regarding how long one can go abroad).

Women's Empowerment Workshop

OVERALL
WORKSHOP
RATING



100% said it was **EXCELLENT**

In March 2020 we run a pilot project – Women's Empowerment Workshop – a very successful session for women from the Polish community. We aimed to build their self-esteem, confidence and skills for them to feel more empowered when applying for jobs, talking to the teachers of their children, health practitioners or when dealing with any life difficulties when living in the UK.

*I was able to break out of the house, leave family problems behind for a while. **I feel so much better now.***

*Thank you very much for a fantastic project. I hope to be able to take part in more sessions organised by SPS. It was **great for our bodies, souls and minds.** Pleasant and useful.*

The Women's Empowerment Session was attended by 10 women, who all later completed our session questionnaire. All of them confirmed that the session was excellent (with a score of 10 out of 10) and claimed they felt more confident afterwards. Participants were also asked whether such sessions allow Polish women to feel better in the UK and all of them said yes. They pointed to the importance of being able to make friends and share experiences with other women, learn new things and get the opportunity to support one another.

Thanks to the project, women from low income backgrounds did not feel isolated and excluded. The workshop also contributed towards maintaining their overall wellbeing. A few even felt encouraged to enter or re-enter the job market in order to become financially more independent and support their families.

Asked about their reasons for coming to this session, the women answered (many gave multiple answers):

“I want to feel better about myself “ (x6)

“I would like to meet new friends and feel less isolated” (x6)

“I want to find a better job” (x4)

All participants expressed their interest in taking part in the continuation of this session or similar sessions just for women. Subjects relating to health and well-being seem to be most appealing:

“I want to continue learning about make-up and skin care” (x3)

“I am interested in natural beauty products”

“I would like to see more workout/yoga/dance therapy” (x2)

“I would be interested in a session about healthy eating for me and my family”

“I would like to learn how to be more positive in life”

“Any session just for women will be great”

“I would just like to try something new and different”

How many people benefited from your project

One of our most popular services are the 1-2-1 Information Sessions. In the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 we held at least 592 sessions for 265 people, approx. 49 sessions per month. Unfortunately during the year, we discovered that not all assistance provided by our charity was fully inputted into our new Lamplight Database, for example a person with 3 different issues was helped, but only one of the issues was recorded resulting in an incorrect number of problems that our service users faced; not very precise issue categories were chosen, eg. ‘other’ instead of ‘debt’. Therefore our statistics for the year under-estimate the number of issues we have helped people with. This has already been resolved for the next reporting period.

1-2-1 Information Sessions

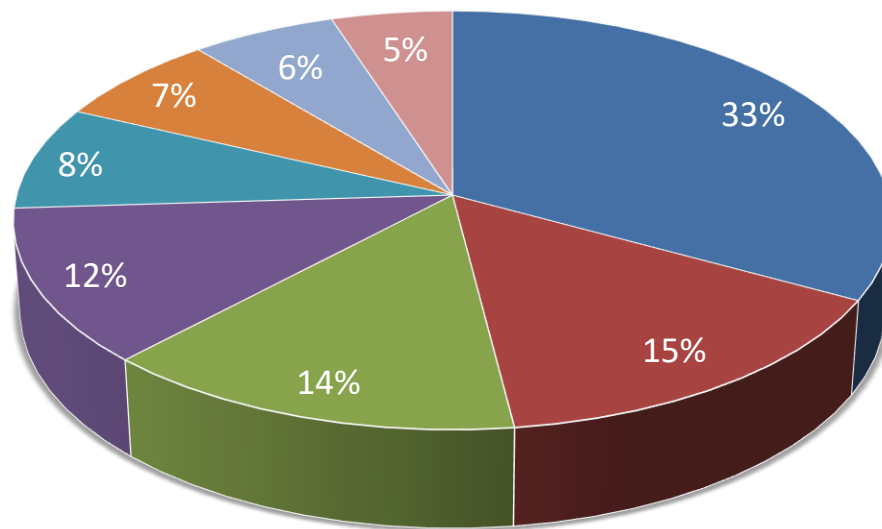
**OVERALL
INFORMATION
SESSIONS RATING**



**71% said it was EXCELLENT
23% said it was GOOD**

The following chart illustrates what percentage of sessions was held for a particular problem:

SPS Information Sessions



- Welfare benefits
- Other
- Health issues
- Housing
- Employment
- Utility bills
- Income Tax
- Debts

Problems of our users that exhibit the fastest growth rate are:

Welfare Benefits

We supported 220 people during 208 sessions. We mainly help with Universal Credit claims (filling forms, changing personal details/circumstances, overpayments, etc.) and tax credits (some of our service users still claim them instead of UC). We helped 28 people with claiming or in regards to ESA. SPS also provided information and helped with applying for Child Benefit and Council Tax reduction.

Food bank

SPS issued 107 food bank vouchers for 93 people to the Trussel Trust food bank network. However, the number of food bank vouchers available is not sufficient (3

vouchers over a 6 month period, although we can request this to be extended in certain circumstances).

We also provided clients with food parcels, mainly bakery products that we brought from local Tesco stores thanks to the FareShare scheme. In the last year we dispensed approx. 400 to 450 food parcels.

Clothes Bank

We helped at least 20 people in need with obtaining second hand clothes from our onsite clothes bank. We also referred our clients who needed furniture or other homeware to The Arches.

Hate Crime

SPS is a hate crime reporting centre. We help victims of hate and report their incidents to the Police. We also work on raising people's awareness about hate crime. We have reported at least 3 hate incidents mentioned to us by our service users.

Housing issues

We supported 88 people during 84 sessions focused on housing issues. Many interventions required sending applications for Council houses, contacting landlords in order to request repairs, searching for new properties to rent, referring cases to the Environmental Health Team, applying for the Warm Home Discount scheme or Big Difference (water) scheme. We also worked on raising people's awareness about their housing rights.

Homelessness

We supported 3 homeless people by signposting to Housing Aid, referring to The Nottingham Law Centre and providing them with a food bank voucher and food parcels. We work closely with the Emmanuel House and Framework outreach teams. We also support people facing homelessness, to prevent this from happening. A brief example is provided below from our database:

“Service user needed her Universal Credit account updated. Also, a letter from the Housing Aid was translated and we've contacted letting agencies that were recommended by the Housing Aid to search for the suitable accommodation. Housing Aid agreed to pay the rent for 6 months.”

Debt

Last year we supported 31 clients with debt during 30 sessions. 4 people were referred to the St Ann's Advice Group where legal advisors support our clients with priority debts or court cases. 7 people struggled with Council Tax arrears. We contacted several debt collecting companies in order to set up plans for paying off arrears. A brief example of our support, as recorded in our database, is provided below:

“Service user needed assistance with contacting Tax Credit office. She received a letter with information about an overpayment followed by a letter from debt collector. We've contacted tax credit office to clarify how the overpayment occurred; service user accepted the responsibility. We then contacted the debt collector to arrange a payment plan - we've managed to set it up on the level affordable for the client.”

Health issues

Last year we helped 84 clients with health-related matters (for example claiming for help with paying for health and travel costs, booking an appointment at the hospital or GP, translating medical documents, requesting medical certificates, making referrals to available health services, EHIC card questions etc.) including 9 people claiming Personal Independence Payments (PIP). We also helped with applying for a Blue Badge several times. Our records state:

“Service user wanted to cancel his medical treatment because he became homeless and would not have a place to stay while leaving the hospital. NHS Trust said that they would provide help and he should go there as planned.”

Employment issues

We helped 42 people with employment issues, which included: contacting unfair employers, unfair dismissals, writing CVs, booking NINo appointments, obtaining documents such as SSP1 forms, P45 and pay slips. We referred some service users to ACAS. We also helped self-employed people with their tax declarations, and setting up of new self-employments. We referred our service users to organisations offering employment progress courses.

Other

SPS helped with applying for travel cards, registering children for schools, eligibility for free school meals, referring to AA groups, secure banking and cyber security in general, TV licence, pensions, setting up personal tax accounts, marriage allowance, personal and family insurance issues, parking penalties, searching for accredited

childcare . We also gave information about the Polish Consulate's rules for obtaining passports.

Moreover, SPS contacted broadband providers, landline and mobile phone companies in order to set up or cancel services or explain invoices and letters. We contacted gas and electricity suppliers to book smart meter installations, discuss arrears, energy tariffs and more.

We supported the following number of people through SPS' remaining services:



Volunteers

SPS volunteers also benefit from our projects by learning new skills and gaining experience they can build on. One of the important aspects of being a volunteer is team work. Adaptability, problem solving and leadership it involves can be used later

on in many areas of their lives, especially professional. Planning and prioritising their work, as well as time management, are also crucial skills in today's job market. Many volunteers are recruited from participants of our ESOL and IT courses. Volunteering allows them to practice and develop their language and IT skills which, besides giving them the sense of accomplishment, increases their employability in the UK job market where being bilingual is a sought-after skill.

How many volunteers have been involved in delivering the project

From the beginning of March 2019, SPS recruited 10 new volunteers performing a wide variety of tasks. They have been involved in organising the SPS library, provided administrative support in the office, helped with invigilating exams and settled status applications. They contributed to our "East Midlands po Polsku" newspaper by researching information about local events, places, traditions and writing articles about them, writing up their favourite recipes and their interests. They also proofread for the EMpP newspaper. Most volunteers have been involved in preparing and organising SPS events and workshops. Contributions included preparing materials and decorations, support during events, leading art and craft activities for children, doing face painting, leading family games, reading Polish legends, selling books and staffing stalls with refreshments, baking cakes as well as helping with event set up and clean up. Currently we engage 20 volunteers, most of them involved in multiple activities

The SPS library, started in July 2018, is still work in progress. SPS receives books from the Polish National Library and via donations from our users and volunteers. Cataloguing them takes time, especially when our conference room is often used for other activities. However, hundreds of books are already available for SPS volunteers and service users, as well as the wider community. Volunteers were also involved in setting up a small book stall during family events which proved to be very popular.

A few quotes from our volunteers:

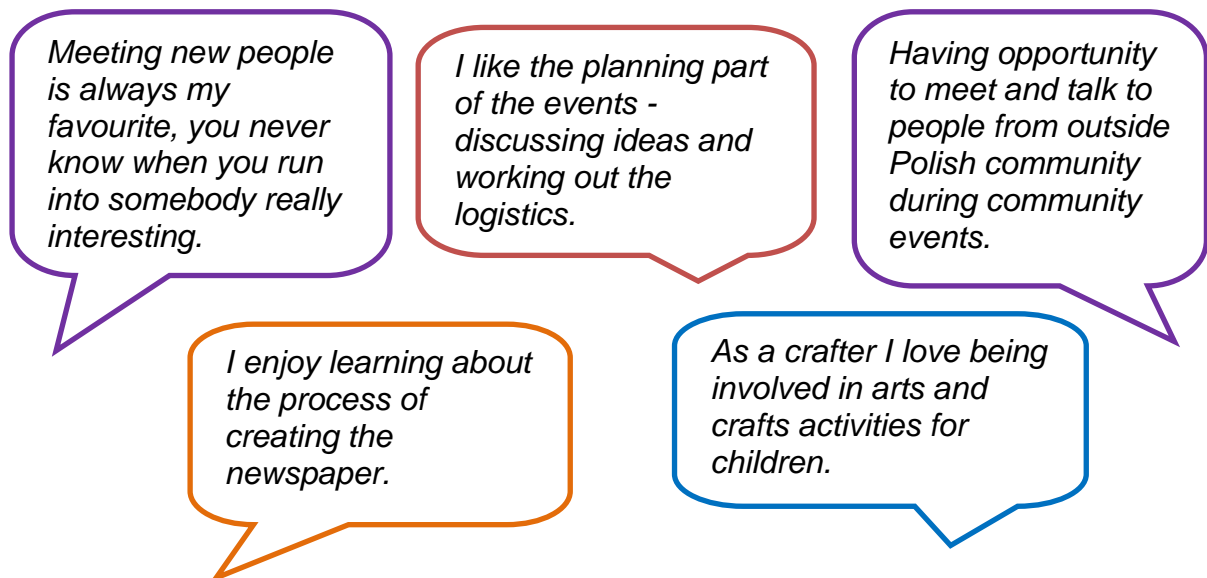
"I am a very energetic person who loves contact with others, especially children. Being a volunteer gives me joy and a sense of fulfilment. I am happy to promote Polish culture in the UK and in return learn about lives of people from other communities. I would highly recommend signing up as SPS volunteer".

"My adventure as a volunteer started years ago here at SPS. Volunteering allows me to develop my personal interests such as photography and accounting. It also gives me the opportunity to meet interesting people and make long lasting friendships. On a personal level, volunteering is the best medicine for my depression".

“The best part of being SPS volunteer is doing interesting things with interesting people, learning from them and gaining experience. I enjoy being useful and helping others. It also makes me feel like part of the community which is so important when you live in another country”.

“Volunteering gives me a chance to meet new people, also from outside Polish community. I really enjoy being part of the family events. It allows me to share this experience with my own family – whilst I help as a volunteer, they can enjoy all the activities”.

What did the volunteers particularly enjoy?



Also, some of our service users engage in volunteering. Quite often clients waiting to be seen by the adviser are happy to give a hand with folding, counting and preparing newspapers for distribution or preparing materials for arts and crafts activities. This way they can secure their own copy of the freshly printed newspaper and learn about upcoming events. They also get involved in distribution of leaflets and posters about events, workshops and courses, helping us spread the word about SPS and our work. We have 5 regular helpers among our service users and approx. 10 other people supporting us with the tasks mentioned above.

Are you working with the people you have planned to?

Yes. We are working with Eastern European migrants, mostly Polish but also other ethnicities.

We support the most vulnerable people in our community, working towards the prevention or relief of poverty (food bank provision, advisory sessions, establishing what support can be provided) and the relief of those in need by reason of age, ethnicity, ill health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage (for example

by attending city forums, network meetings, but also advocating when necessary to different institutions on behalf of our clients).

We have helped some other EU national (other than Polish, Eastern European) to apply for Settled Status.

How we have engaged with diverse groups of people

We aim every year to organise community events which are open to all communities and people willing to attend. Our Fat Thursday on a Saturday has become a regular and popular event which attracts a very diverse range of people. We organise it at a local gallery – New Art Exchange – which is a venue popular among all communities. We also promote it via our own means, using the gallery’s marketing strategies as well as using local schools and libraries, reaching a large number of different people.

Last year we created and organised Women’s Empowerment Sessions for the first time. Although the sessions were designed for women only, we managed to invite ladies from different age groups and therefore build a multi-generational bridge for them which was very much appreciated. Some of our participants are stay-home mums, some work full time and some are retired – and all were willing to share their experience with others.

Our ESOL courses have been attended by members of many ethnically diverse local communities.

When helping with the Settled Status application process, we supported representatives of many European nationalities.

What connections have you made with other organisations, how are your partnerships going

We have a limited capacity to develop partnerships and to link in with other organisations, however, last year we had a Nottingham Law Centre Welfare Adviser supporting our service users with welfare advice. We also became a partner of the Nottingham Law Centre in the delivery of the Home Office project to help EU citizens to apply for Settled Status. We developed links with the University of Nottingham which have enabled us to use their resources and volunteers when delivering Family Events. We enabled the meetings of the Nottingham based Advisers’ Forum to take place at our premises.

We aim to work closely with organisations like Advice Nottingham, St Ann’s Advice Centre, DWP, Emmanuel House, Nottingham City Council, NCVS, Polish Saturday

Schools in Nottingham, Polish Parish, Polish Consulate in Manchester and many more.

Have you been running events, talking about your project on social media, have you featured in your local press or been working with your local MP?

We have organized or took part in a number of events.

International Children's Day (30.05.19) - an event with a range of activities for children (Fire Engine and Crew, Ignite's science experiments, arts and crafts, face painting, gifts for children thanks to Tesco Canning Circus store). This was a great opportunity for children to play together and make new friends and for their parents or guardians to learn more about SPS and our services. Approx. 105 people attended.

Together with the Polish Saturday School of St Kazimierz, we organised and staffed in June 2019 a Polish stall at the Bulwell Forest Festival. There were other stalls representing other ethnic communities living in Nottingham. People attending had the chance to try worldwide cuisine, talk to representatives of different communities and learn more about each other.

We held a Fat Thursday on a Saturday on 15.02.20 in co-operation with New Art Exchange. Fat Thursdays on a Saturday has become very popular, attracting between 100 and 200 attendees. We promote them to local schools, organisations and communities (leaving leaflets in the libraries, at GP practices, in the Jobcentre Plus and local businesses). Their idea is to showcase the tradition of Fat Thursday (an equivalent to Shrove Tuesday) and positively promote the culture of the local Polish community. We offer free doughnuts and refreshments. In 2020 we explored the legend of Poznan's goats which became the symbol of the Polish city. There were various art and craft activities, a reading of the legend in both Polish and English, a slide show of the Fat Thursday traditions as well as a presentation of the art work of pupils of the Polish Saturday School of St Kazimierz.

A Family Event on the 23rd of November in Hyson Green Youth Club was attended by over 400 people. SPS involved many organisations and partners including both Polish Saturday Schools in Nottingham, the University of Nottingham, Nottingham Law Centre and local businesses. Activities consisted of a theatre workshop with animations (entitled 'Dragons and Dinosaurs'), art and craft stalls, face painting, raffle, book stalls, cakes and refreshments stalls. At this event we tried a way of generating future income for SPS. Looking for ways to generate income is our National Lottery Community Fund project requirement. We worked very hard to ensure that we could make a surplus.

We took part in the Polish Heritage Day organised on the 4th and the 5th of May 2019 by the Polish Saturday School of St Kazimierz and the Polish Community in Melton Mowbray. Polish Heritage Days are an initiative by the Polish government that aims to promote Polish culture in the UK to create positive relations and contribute to the building of community cohesion.

We are a part of the Nottingham Playhouse scheme where we can purchase 50 community tickets at a reduced price. Last financial year we organised three theatre trips to see Skellig and a pantomime Sleeping Beauty. Not only did we enable families whose income tends to be on a lower scale to attend high quality and expensive cultural events but we also helped migrant communities learn about British traditions and culture, in this way making them feel more at home in Nottingham and integrate with the local community.

We represented SPS and our community at a number of events, including the Warsaw Airbridge Remembrance Service, All Saints ceremony at the Newark War Cemetery, Independence Day celebrations in Manchester, and the 70th Anniversary of the Polish Scouts in Nottingham.

All our events were featured on Facebook. We organised live video streaming to attract more people to visit our events and to enable those, who were not able to attend, to catch up. This new form of connection was warmly received. We placed articles accompanied by event photographs in our newspaper EMpP

The difference the project is making

We remain the most established organisation in the region which supports Polish and other Eastern European communities, and the only one for Polish immigrants.

We have informed thousands of people about their rights and responsibilities in the UK: people are better informed and know much more about local and national issues, their entitlements and responsibilities. Giving reliable information in an understandable way, we raise awareness of the EU Settlement Scheme and its general rules and deadline to apply.

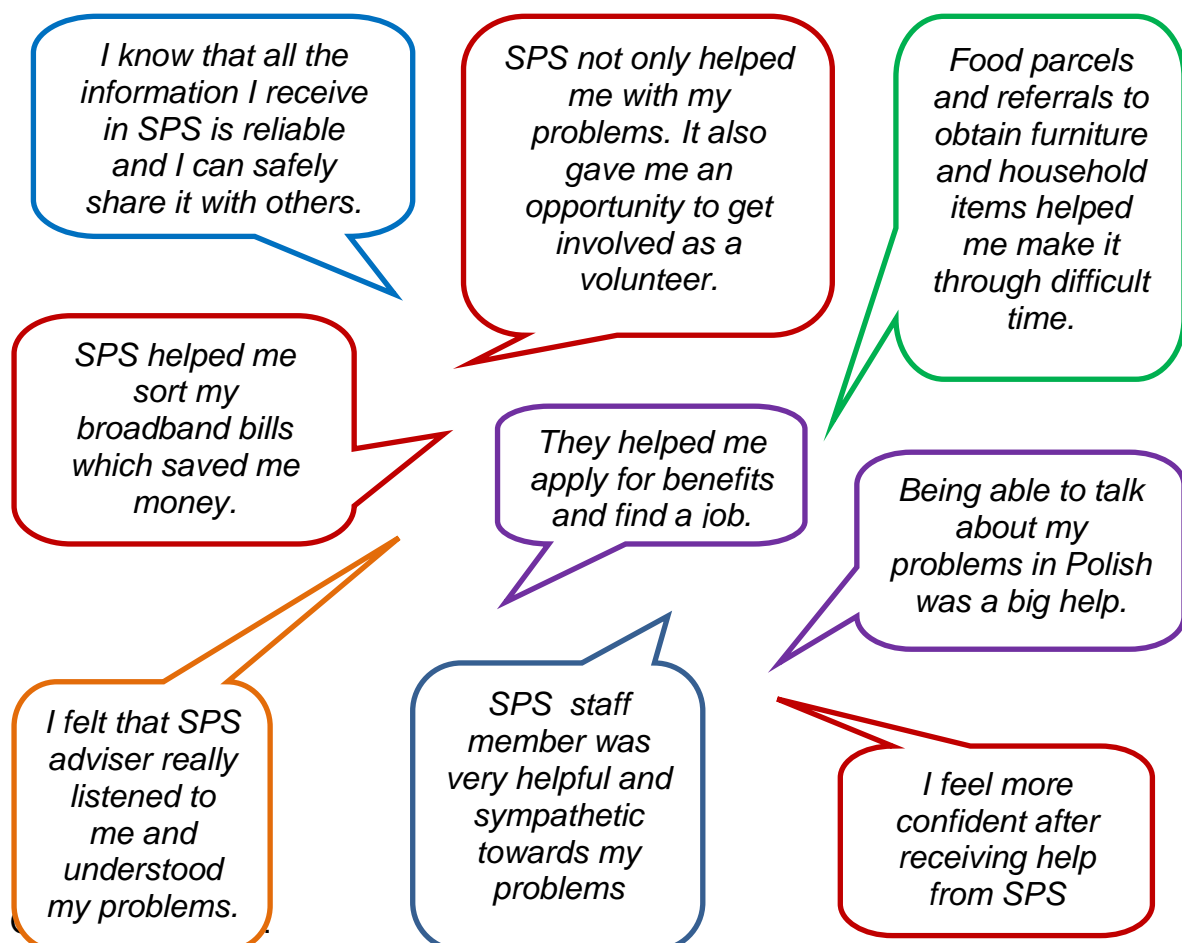
Thanks to the project people are able to access local services with more confidence, they feel less vulnerable and more empowered to solve their everyday problems, they understand what is a hate crime incident and how to report it online or with our help, their financial situation does not deteriorate, they stop their debts from growing,

they find employment or maintain their current jobs, they are not taken advantage off, receive their welfare support, their health does not deteriorate or improves, they feel more confident when speaking English, their communication skills improve as does their employability. SPS enables them to feel more confident in different life situations, contributing to increasing their self-esteem.

Thanks to our actions they are more able to recognise false news and internet scam practices. They engage with local communities, become part of British society, speak better English. They learn to use modern technology in their day-to-day life, become able to communicate with others digitally and access a wider range of different services, also online.

We give the opportunity to socialise which is very important for people who often feel alienated in a foreign community: friendships are made and multigenerational social support networks are created. We contribute significantly to building a sense of community cohesion and maintaining people's overall wellbeing.

We've asked people about what difference the support of SPS has made to their lives, and here are some of the answers:



“I am less stressed as I don’t need to worry about my bills any more”.

“Food parcels are helping me feed my family”.

“I feel better knowing that I can ask SPS for support when I need it”.

“I know more about other local services”

“SPS advisers are knowledgeable”.

The service users appreciated being able to speak their own language - 94% definitely agreed with this statement.

They also favourably rated SPS staff members’ ability to understand their problems: 96% definitely agreed.

86% of clients thought SPS staff members were knowledgeable and explained things well.

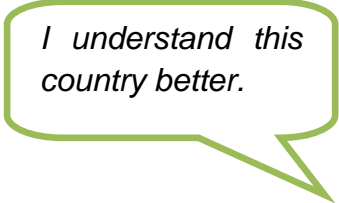
We supported people with applying for settled status. We received from them positive feedback. Of 134 people who filled out our questionnaires, 100% would recommend our settled status sessions to others. They mostly appreciated the friendly service and reliable information provided by our adviser. They feel confident sharing what they learn from us with their families and friends. Being able to discuss their application in Polish was also very helpful to many clients.

Majority of clients – 57% - said they would not be able to deal with the application on their own and 28% were not sure.


They also quoted:

- friendly and efficient service (x29)
- professionalism of the adviser (x14)
- reliable and well explained information (x2)
- it will be useful in the future (x3)
- helpful and friendly staff (“amazing” according to 1 client) (x6)
- convenience of getting everything done in one place (x3)
- sessions are not rushed and conducted in a quiet atmosphere (x1)
- have been using many SPS services from the beginning (x1)

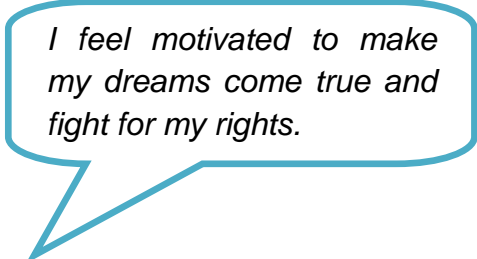
Newspaper readers said:



I understand this country better.

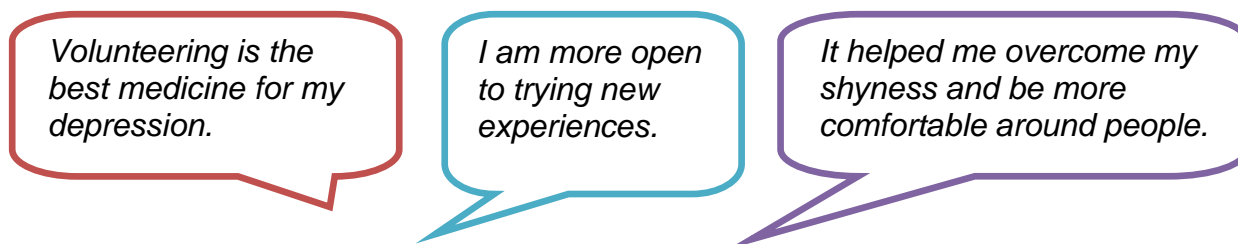


I feel like I belong.



I feel motivated to make my dreams come true and fight for my rights.

Volunteers said:



Our Women's Empowerment Sessions were designed to help women from low income backgrounds with their self-esteem and self-confidence. It is often the first step towards gaining independence, getting a better job and improving their lives. Before the session participants were asked to indicate levels of their self-confidence, on a scale from 1 (none) to 10 (high). For 70% it was average (score 6 – 7). Asked after the session if they felt more confident, 50% of participants said "definitely yes" and another 50% said "yes". We were happy to see women after the session making plans to stay in touch. Meeting people and making new friends will help them feel less isolated and motivate them to make positive changes in their lives. Some of the participants contacted us later to tell us they had decided to re-enter the job market.

Examples of case studies from people who have been involved in or benefitted from your work

The project has helped us to provide services to some of the most vulnerable people in the community. Our support helped them to overcome language, IT and other barriers and to access mainstream support.

Adam

Background information

This Service User (SU) is a vulnerable person having mental health problems and therefore has limited capability to work. His brother used to support him – they lived together and shared the household costs. Currently the brother stays in London. When SU started visiting SPS, all his benefits had already stopped. It was impossible to continue housing benefit because it should have been taken over by Universal Credit. An application for this benefit was, however, rejected on the basis of a habitual residency test failure. It shouldn't have been rejected because of previous benefits being granted.

Support / How this has helped

In order to prove residency, the SPS Information Officer helped SU to apply for Settled Status. Another advice bureau had started his application but his application had been suspended. After contacting the Home Office, SPS managed to reapply

and now SU is awaiting a decision. SU ceased to pay his rent because of housing benefit was no longer available for him. This resulted in Section 8 – cancellation of the tenancy agreement and the immediate prospect of eviction. SPS managed to get in touch with the housing association and negotiate that they freeze the decision. In the meantime SU, after a long period of waiting, received Personal Independence Payment benefit. SPS arranged for him to obtain HC2 certificate which allows free dental treatment and free medicines on prescription.

SU was failing to receive or respond to correspondence being sent to him. The SPS Information Officer set up a mobile phone mail application so that he can now receive emails and see them on his mobile.

When SU receives Universal Credit, he will be able to pay the rent. The Housing Association confirmed they can still wait and they suspended the eviction.

SPS referred SU to Nottingham Housing Aid and arranged an appointment for him.

SPS also arranged an appointment at a mental health centre and encouraged SU to attend, we haven't received any feedback from him to date.

Janusz

Background information

SU is a vulnerable person, having considerable health problems. He does not work. His housing benefit was suspended when he applied for Universal Credit. This automatically triggered a letter from the DWP demanding the payback of allegedly overpaid Housing Benefit. The Universal Credit application was rejected on the basis of habitual residency test failure.

SU has a debt with Severn Trent Water company of almost £1000.

The gentleman additionally has an outstanding debt in relation to a loan of about £300 from 2013 and demands from a recovery agency to pay it back.

Support

Our Information Officer helped SU to apply for Settled Status – he has already received the status, which proves residency.

SPS helped him to complete a mandatory reconsideration in relation to his Universal Credit.

SU received UC and the rent began to be paid for him. Some amount is taken to cover debts that developed but still SU receives in hand about £222. Now he is able to buy food and other necessities.

SPS arranged another health assessment to be made to decide upon SU's inability to start employment.

SPS got in touch with the water company. SPS applied for a Big Difference Scheme – currently SU has his water subsidised and pays approximately £5 to cover previous debts.

We submitted an application to Severn Trent Trust Fund to write off part of his water debt.

We negotiated on behalf of SU with debt collectors and SU started paying back an old loan debt at £20 per month.

How this has helped

Currently SU receives benefits, his housing situation has stabilised. His debts have been sorted out, and it is possible that they can be slowly paid back and possibly written off in part.

SU is no longer in distress, he can manage his living arrangements now. He feels secure and much less vulnerable.

Marek

Background information

SU had a long lasting issue about Council Tax payments. He was misled by the owner of a house where he rented accommodation. Council Tax was supposed to be included in his rent. He reported this to the council, yet he was still chased for unpaid tax and finally a case in court was initiated against him.

In the meantime SU changed his accommodation and informed the DWP about a change of circumstances in relation to housing benefit he received. Housing benefit was unfairly cancelled and SU began to accrue debt in relation to his rent at his new place. SU was advised to apply for UC, which replaces housing benefit.

SU was also being overcharged by his mobile phone provider.

Support

After several phone calls to the Housing Benefit Centre and several emails SPS managed to prove that the housing benefit for SU was unlawfully stopped because he is a pensioner and as such does not need to apply for UC. HB should not have been stopped at first because the information about his new accommodation was only a change of circumstances which should not trigger a need for a new claim. The decision of the DWP was wrong. SPS managed to reinstitute HB for the SU. SPS also applied for SU to be paid back the benefit since the time it had been stopped. We still await the answer.

SPS gave advice about what to do in relation to the court session regarding Council Tax debt and arranged a Polish interpreter. The Information Officer suggested, though, that it would be advisable to be represented by a solicitor. Unfortunately SU cannot afford one. That is why SPS provided comprehensive advice about the case. SPS also suggested he tries to find legal advice in Citizens Advice, although we realise they usually cannot provide much help in this respect.

In relation to his phone bills, we renegotiated a deal with the provider. The SPS Information Officer also discovered that SU was paying for unwanted phone insurance which he managed to cancel.

How this has helped

SPS managed to provide help and solve the problem for the SU who was treated in an unjust way by DWP due to mistakes made by their staff leaving him without financial support. SPS secured his housing and prevented debts being accrued. SPS reduced his mobile operator payments and helped to question his Council Tax demands.

Ewelina and Pawel

Background information

A married couple came to us requesting information about their annual tax calculation and future pension.

Support / How this has helped

SPS suggested they create a Personal Tax Account. After our help they are able to track their employment, NI contributions and see their future pension predictions. SPS advised them to apply for Marriage Allowance – in this way they will pay less tax as a couple. They were very happy about the solution we provided. They did not know before about such possibilities. Because of marriage allowance they have already received a tax refund.

Their financial situation has improved. They now better understand their rights and they feel more confident to solve their problems.

Tomasz

Background information

SU was released from prison. Previously he had PIP but after his release it did not resume. His English is very poor and he did not know where to ask for help. Somebody gave him our address and that is why he visited us.

Support / How this has helped

SU was reassured by the fact that he could speak in Polish and had a person to listen to him. We contacted DWP on his behalf and managed to reactivate his PIP. After several long phone calls our Information Officer managed to have his PIP backdated from the date he was released.

He had a long conversation with SU, listening actively to him and providing support and empathy. He gave him the options of finding part time employment which would be possible for him despite his health issues. He gave advice on other possible benefits like council tax benefit.

Now SU has the means on which to live, and feels more confident and less vulnerable.

Emilia

Background information

SU had problems after separating from her partner. SU was still controlled by him, did not have her own accommodation and needed to leave the property she stayed in.

Support / How this has helped

SPS helped her to look for small properties to rent by using Zoopla and Rightmove online services. Our Information Officer changed her passwords on emails and helped to change her bank account. He also arranged for her a mobile number which is in her name and helped to choose an appropriate tariff. SPS provided info on how to compare electricity and gas providers' offers. SPS helped SU to set up applications and email on her new mobile.

SPS supported SU during a difficult time for her and enabled her to become more independent and less under the control of her ex-partner.

Andrzej

Background information

SU is self-employed. He became unexpectedly ill and would stay out of work for a long time. He was not aware that while self employed a person cannot receive SSP. He became distressed about the situation and got in touch with our charity by phone.

Support / How this has helped

Our Information Officer had a long conversation with him suggesting possible solutions. He helped him to apply for Universal Credit and submit an application for PIP. Our worker visited him providing a food parcel from us. We also issued him, on two occasions, with food vouchers explaining where it is possible to use them in his area. We also informed him, of other possible help like applying for council tax benefit. SU received Universal Credit. He felt less vulnerable due to receiving help from us and expressed his appreciation of the services we provide. Because of our action he did not slide into debt and received long-lasting support which gave him time to recover. Currently he is slowly recovering and has already started working part-time.

Henryk

Background information

SU has registered his own economic activity (self – employment) but does not have any contracts. Additionally, he has had some mental health issues which prevent him from being organised and catering to his own needs. The problem is that he has no recourse to public funds, neither can he prove his residency. The house is rented in his brother's name.

When SU contacted us, we helped him to apply for Universal Credit and started his Settled Status application. An additional problem is that he only has a Polish ID, and not a valid passport.

Unfortunately, his Universal Credit application was rejected on the basis of habitual residency test failure.

Support

SU seems to have support from his brother therefore he is not in immediate risk of either homelessness or poverty. SPS tried to organise medical support for him. Upon our suggestion he received a referral to hospital from his GP. Our Officer translated a document for the SU and explained everything in relation to his examination. Apart from mental health, there appeared to be other health issues and SU was referred for a colonoscopy – the Officer explained to him the procedure in preparation for this examination.

Later on we contacted him with STEPS (Support Towards Empowering People Service). SPS found there is a Polish person working there which is a big help because SU can barely speak any English.

We arranged appointment for SU in STEPS.

We also put SU in touch with Insight Healthcare Centre.

We arranged an NH2 certificate which enables SU to receive free medicines on prescription and free dental care.

How this has helped

It was not possible to help in relation to employment or benefits but SPS managed to support the Service User's mental health by arranging for him specialists appointments, translating documents and explaining medical procedures.

What needs to be done is verify whether he has received settled status and to try again at a later date to apply for Benefits – Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment.

Tell us about the successes and what you're the most proud of

The fact that we can continue providing our services – that is the greatest success. We are very happy that we can continue helping people in need, helping them in their vulnerability, help them to overcome some of the barriers they face: due to their poor English, IT skills, general lack of awareness of the way British institutions function, poor health, low self-esteem, low perception of one's own abilities and skills.

We are also happy with the fact that during the third year of this project we continued to be at the forefront of informing EU citizens, mostly Polish migrants, about the requirements of the process of applying for Settled Status and helping them to apply.

We are also proud of our partnership work. Together with the Nottingham Law Centre, New Art Exchange, the University of Nottingham and the Polish Saturday School of St Kazimierz in Nottingham we delivered important and inspiring services and activities.

Challenges we've faced, changes you've made

Due to the requirement that we start generating funds ourselves to cover our own expenses, some permanent staff left us to find security of employment elsewhere. Hence we had to undertake three recruitment procedures.

We found the requirement to generate funds in order to provide income for SPS extremely challenging. During our November Family Event in 2019 we organised a number of stalls (selling cakes/refreshments, books ordered from Poland, toys gifted to us, with raffle, etc.). We found undertaking such initiatives exciting – with the involvement of our staff and volunteers – however, we have to admit that our profit

was not commensurate to the work we put in. We generated income but it was not value for money and would not provide a reliable source of income for SPS long term. We earned only £488.20.

Funding insecurity is always a challenge. We have been quite safe in this project to date but we will have to be far more proactive in the following years and for the time when this project comes to its end.

According to our financial accounts (please see the PDF document attached) we have approx. £10K of National Lottery Community Fund left unspent at the end of the third year of this project. We were planning to spend our NLCF for the third year in its entirety, but due to staff leaving us and being unable to recruit immediately (as we could not confirm the overall funding for the Information Officer post – NLCF covers half of this post – we applied to the Home Office for the other half and it took them more 6 months to give us their approval), we underspent on staff salaries. We also had other issues with our staff before the coronavirus pandemic started. **Therefore, we are asking you for permission to carry over this amount into our fourth year, for which our budget from NLCF is lower, which means that this year we have a greater funding gap to cover.** We have applied to several funding sources and had some positive confirmations of grants. However, we could use the unspent £10K towards the costs of running SPS (as you are mostly covering our salaries in year 4, not contributing much towards our other costs). Our running costs for 2020-21 will be higher as we need to spend more money on disinfectants and protective measures (more sanitising gels, facemasks, more cleaning, disinfections, etc.)

Tell us about your next steps

At the moment we are providing services during the coronavirus lockdown. Therefore, right now the most important service is our food bank provision. We issue our own food parcels with the food we collect from Canning Circus Tesco or Radford Tesco and refer our service users to Trussell Trust food banks. We also support our clients by providing information, guidance and support over the phone or through emails.

Due to our food bank provision one of our most immediate concerns is that we stay safe and do not infect our families and service users.

After the lockdown we think that we may be overwhelmed by the impoverishment of our service users. We will see an increased demand for our services. We may see a growth of unemployment, domestic violence, mental health issues, neglect and generally poor health.

We will have to need on fundraising (which is very time consuming) to maintain our service provision.