



# Specialist Advice Service

Personalised and practical housing, debt and welfare advice delivered by Shelter experts that helps people keep their home and live independently.

Above all, our services prevent and tackle homelessness.

## Enquiries

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Shelter



## Rachel's story

Rachel\*, a single woman with no dependants, struggles with a mental health condition and agoraphobia.

She only receives income benefits and had paid a rental deposit of £900 to the local authority. However, the property had significant disrepair issues, mainly damp problems, and Rachel needed alternative accommodation. In addition, she had lost most of her white goods due to the damp.

With a shortfall between the new rent and her housing benefit provision, we advised Rachel about her rent liability and then helped her apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment as well as a Local Welfare Assistance award to replace her white goods.

By working closely with the Local Authority's Housing Options Service, we managed to get Rachel back on track.

Today, Rachel is living in an affordable property with ongoing support in place.

\*Real name changed to protect our client's identity

# Why specialist advice is so important

There's little doubt that homelessness is on the rise. In the first quarter of 2016, it rose by 9% on the same period the previous year<sup>1</sup>.

The links between housing, poverty and poor health are well proven but also complex. That's why we expertly identify and address the wider issues people face – offering the guidance needed to access, keep and improve a home.

Specialist advice is crucial because housing and homelessness issues are often legally complex. Our expert advisers can accurately interpret the law to recommend the best course of action for clients. Sometimes, we also help them follow this up – for instance, by advocating on their behalf with a landlord.

**71,540**

households were living in temporary accommodation within Local Authorities in England at the end of March in 2016. (2)



# What our Specialist Advice Service does

Our vast experience of working with people with housing problems means we can offer expert advice and support to anyone facing homelessness. Whether face-to-face or by telephone, email or web-chat, we're there to give individuals the knowledge and know-how to improve their situation.

The service involves:

- Prevention and early intervention to address a housing need before it turns into a genuine threat of homelessness
- Working with other agencies to ensure an integrated approach to service delivery
- Locating our advisers where clients are likely to visit (such as town centre offices or the offices of partner agencies like the Local Authority or Job Centre Plus)

## Delivery of our Specialist Advice Services

### Face to face

We have advice centres up and down the country, where people can go to get advice and help in person from one of our housing experts.

Our services are embedded in local communities, working in partnership with other agencies to offer innovative solutions to address local housing need.



### Helpline

Shelter's Helpline is open 365 days a year, providing free initial housing advice to anyone in England, Wales or Scotland with a housing problem, regardless of income.

Our Helpline delivers advice to clients by telephone, email and webchat.



### Helpline Plus

Shelter's Helpline Plus service provides telephone casework on housing and debt issues.

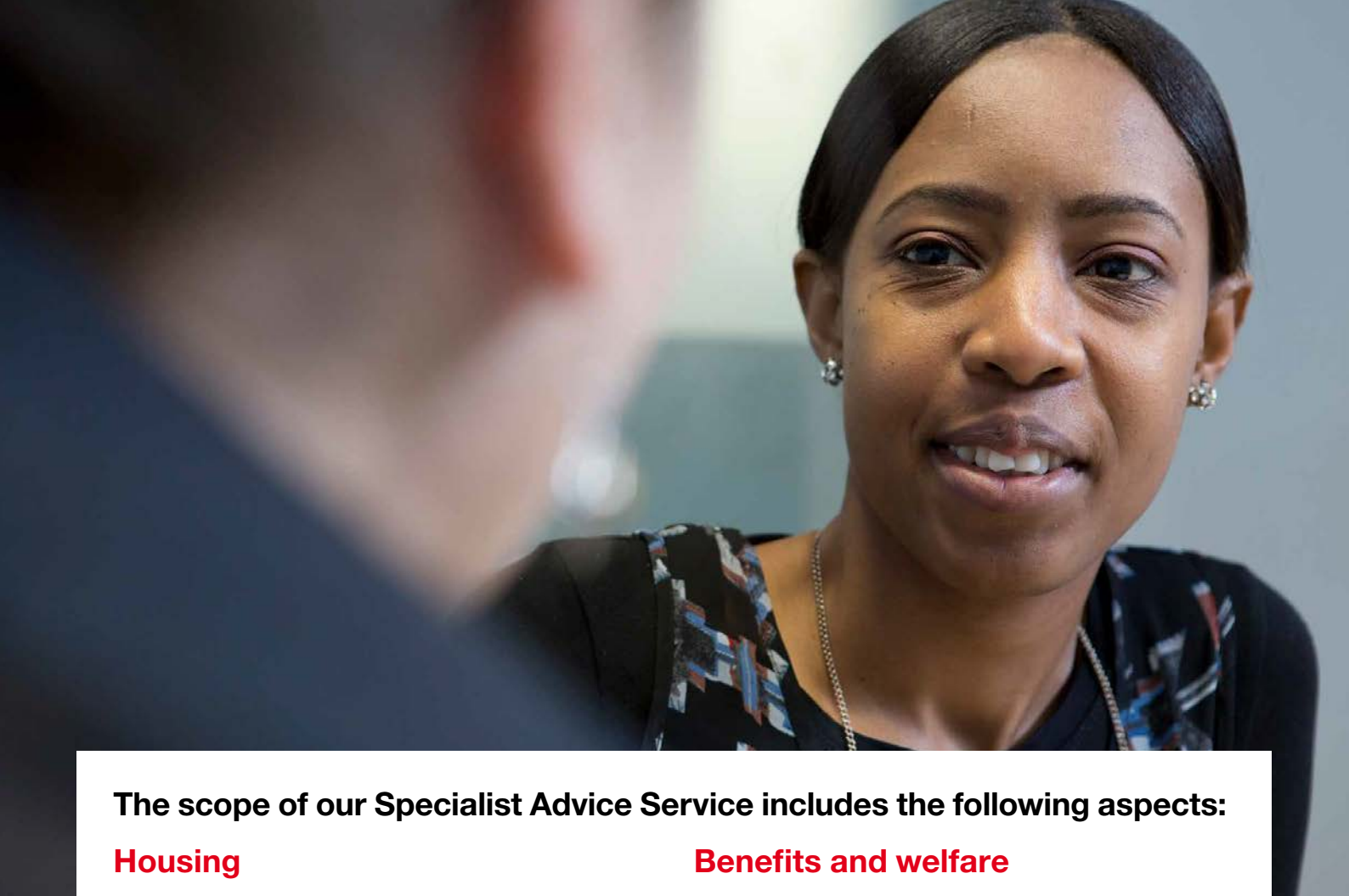
It advises clients who are not eligible for Legal Aid, but who need more in depth help than the Helpline can provide through initial advice.



### Referral to Shelter and wider community services

We address the underlying issues of clients through referral to other Shelter Services, e.g. Legal Advice or Housing Support, and through working in partnership with other community services.





**The scope of our Specialist Advice Service includes the following aspects:**

**Housing**

- Identifying and securing suitable accommodation
- Dealing with rent or mortgage arrears and possession action across all tenures
- Helping with Landlord issues (e.g. disrepair, harassment)
- Advising on housing rights following relationship breakdown

**Debt**

- Negotiating payment plans, dealing with debt collectors or bailiffs
- Dealing with bankruptcy, debt relief orders, voluntary arrangements or administration orders
- Budgeting and maximising income

**Benefits and welfare**

- Identifying entitlement to benefits and tax credits
- Securing Discretionary Housing Payments
- Helping with repayments, underpayments and sanctions
- Advising on reviews and appeals, including advice on tribunals

**Specialist Legal Advice**

- Legal advice is available by telephone, email or face-to-face
- Legal aid and free legal advice, including representation in court
- Making a disrepair claim on behalf of clients against landlords and disputes over tenancy deposits
- Making a claim for unlawful eviction by or harassment against landlords

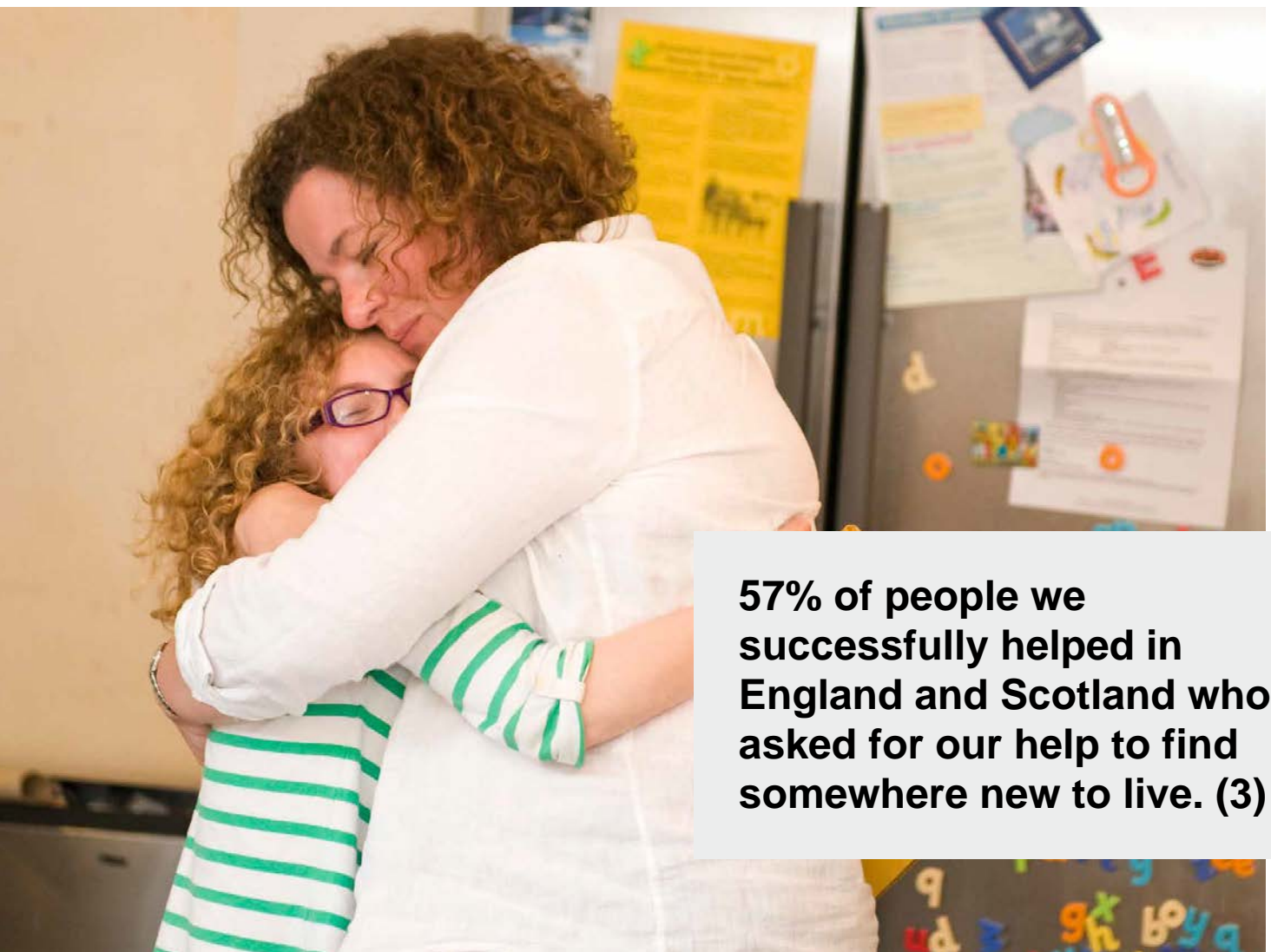
## How we achieve **change**

We're committed to helping our clients enjoy settled accommodation that delivers all the benefits of independent living, economic wellbeing and better health.

Our Specialist Advice Service enables us to work with individuals on specific issues. By helping people achieve sustainable outcomes which promote independent living, it reduces their need for statutory services.

### **Our key service aims:**

- Securing and maintaining settled accommodation
- Financial wellbeing
- Improved health
- Prevention of eviction and compliance with statutory orders
- Greater community involvement



**57% of people we successfully helped in England and Scotland who asked for our help to find somewhere new to live. (3)**

**61% of people in England and Scotland who approached us for help with their financial situation saw an improvement. (4)**

**41% of clients saw their mental health improve and 25% saw their physical health improve since coming to Shelter. (5)**



“Shelter have proved to be an excellent partner. They have been clear about what they can deliver and have delivered consistently throughout our relationship. They communicate well and offer great insight.”

(Mark McPherson, Director of Strategy, Partnership and Innovation at Homeless Link – partnered Shelter on the London Plus project)

Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

**Please support us at [shelter.org.uk](https://shelter.org.uk)**

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<sup>1</sup> DCLG, Homelessness Statistics, Table 770, Jan to Mar 16, published 30 June 2016.

<sup>2</sup> DCLG, Homelessness Statistics, Table 775, Jan to Mar 16, published 30 June 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Shelter, 2016, Outcomes survey, Unpublished dataset

<sup>4</sup> Shelter, 2016, Outcomes survey, Unpublished dataset

<sup>5</sup> Shelter, 2016, Outcomes survey, Unpublished dataset