

**Law students volunteer for Stevenage welfare benefits appeals project**

A new pilot initiative from the University of Hertfordshire’s Law School and Citizens Advice Stevenage will offer students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience under the supervision of experienced welfare benefit specialists.

Running for an initial six-month period, the service will provide advice, casework and advocacy support to people wishing to appeal the refusal of welfare benefits to the First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support).

The project was set up in response to a huge demand for welfare benefits advice in Stevenage. It will enable Citizens Advice Stevenage to expand their existing service and help many more people who would otherwise struggle to get access to justice.

Under supervision from specialists, University of Hertfordshire students will interview clients by phone or video conferencing, complete appeal forms, prepare cases for appeal and, where appropriate, undertake advocacy at the First-tier Tribunal. Student volunteers will receive comprehensive online training from Citizens Advice Stevenage and will work on cases remotely.

The pilot is funded by the Community Justice Fund and the National Lottery and will run until April 2021.

Charlotte Blizzard-Welch Chief Executive Officer of Citizens Advice Stevenage said: “I am so proud to see the launch of this fantastic project which will not only enhance the resource available to support the most vulnerable in our community but provide a fantastic opportunity for the students to develop specialist experience.”

Diana Kirsch, Associate Dean for Enterprise, University of Hertfordshire, said: “We are delighted to be working with Citizens’ Advice Stevenage on this project. The project will provide a much-needed service as there is huge unmet demand for welfare benefits advice since legal aid was cut for this area of work. The project will also provide our law students with a fantastic opportunity to put their legal knowledge into practice and gain new skills including interviewing clients and advocacy at the tribunal’

The 10 students have successfully completed their training and are due to start seeing clients during the week beginning 7 December 2020.