

**Stay Safe East**  
**JOB INFORMATION – March 2022**

***Benefits and Entitlements Advocate***

**Salary: £28,004 per annum pro-rata**

***or Trainee Benefits and Entitlements Advocate***

**Salary: £26,900 per annum pro-rata**

**17.5 Hours per week, days by arrangement**

*Funded by Trust for London to 31.3.2023*



Stay Safe East is a Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO) which supports disabled victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence, hate crime and other forms of abuse. We are part of several key partnerships across London supporting victims of domestic abuse, hate crime and other crimes, providing specialist casework as well as advice to our partners.

The Benefits and Entitlements Advocate will work alongside our Domestic Abuse, Hate Crime or General Crime advocates to support our clients in Waltham Forest and Newham. The Benefits and Entitlements Advocate will:

- Assist our clients to access a decent income and entitlements which will improve their quality of life
- Provide budgeting support where needed and refer for debt advice;
- Produce guidance and share specialist knowledge with other Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations
- and run a regular drop-in benefits advice session in the adjacent Disability Resource Centre (frequency to be determined depending on work load with our clients)

**Applicants**

We are looking for someone with a commitment to the human rights of disabled people and other excluded communities, who is a hard worker, organised and self-motivated, with a good knowledge of the benefits system and experience of supporting claimants, particular those on ESA, PIP and Universal Credit. We will consider applications for a Trainee Post from disabled applicants with less experience, for example as a volunteer benefits adviser.

Stay Safe East particularly welcomes applications from disabled women (the majority of our clients are female survivors of domestic abuse). All advocacy posts are only to disabled people as we have a positive policy on recruiting and training disabled people. We are a user-led organisation of disabled people

where peer support and positive role models are essential to building the long term self-confidence and resilience of our clients. We are a diverse organisation which strongly welcomes applications from disabled people. We especially welcome applicants who reflect London's diverse communities of ethnicity, sexuality & faith. If you speak an additional community language, that is a bonus.

## **Background**

Disabled people who have experienced abuse are amongst the most disadvantaged members of our community. The majority of our clients are East London based though we are now working London wide. A high proportion of our clients come to us unaware of their rights, or facing barriers accessing benefits and entitlements. 26% are functionally illiterate; very few can access a computer to complete on-line forms or journals; around 25% have English as a second or third language. A significant number have no paperwork when they first come to us. Clients may experience financial abuse and may never have managed their own money due to coercive control by abusers. All our clients have been badly affected by benefits sanctions, the changeover to Universal Credit and to Personal Independence Payment and by constant re-assessments, may already be in debt and in 2022 are facing escalating costs of fuel and food. A small number of clients have No Recourse to Public Funds and live below subsistence level. For women (and a small number of male clients) who have experienced domestic abuse, having a decent income is the key to being safe and not returning to the abuser, and to enjoying a quality of life, as are obtaining entitlements such as Dial-a-Ride or Freedom Pass, obtaining energy grants, or grants for furniture or children's clothing, and addressing debt.

When clients first approach Stay Safe East, they rarely have the resources or capacity to tackle the benefits system alone, and need us to do this for them; a significant number will continue to need Stay Safe East's on-going help in dealing with benefits and other agencies. Referring people to external agencies is rarely an option as they need ongoing support through all stages of the process. As our case load grows in complexity, Stay Safe East requires a second specialist advocate around welfare benefits, entitlement and budgeting for survivors. The advocate will be expected to maintain contact with our clients by phone, text, WhatsApp, Zoom, e-mail and where possible face-to-face. The worker will also be expected to support clients at remote or face-to-face assessments with the DWP.

## **Advocacy**

You will be expected to support the client through all stages of the process, explain their rights, support them at assessments and reviews and argue on their behalf with the Department of Work and Pensions and other agencies such as Access to Work. In addition, you will be asked to help clients apply for entitlements and for small grants. You will also help a small group of clients with budgeting and refer them for debt advice, and support them with dealing with such agencies if they do not understand the process. The process of helping the client complete forms and meet DWP requirements has become more cumbersome and will require the Benefits Advocate to be self-motivated, prompt and efficient at dealing with paperwork for clients who will otherwise be left without any money. As well as having a good knowledge of the benefits system, you must have emotional resilience, as clients may confide in you about their experiences of abuse. You will also be expected to work with the Senior Benefits Advocate to monitor patterns of discrimination and challenges faced by disabled survivors in relation to welfare benefits and poverty, and report them to the CEO, who will share this with Inclusion London, our funders Trust for London and others working on benefit and poverty policy.

**The Stay Safe East Team:** Our hard-working team is passionate about getting the best for their clients and bringing about change. We currently have 16 staff and one volunteer, all of whom are disabled people. We employ 14 women, one man and one non-binary person. All our staff, volunteers and Board members are disabled people and are from a range of communities across East London and beyond. Amongst us we speak 10 languages. Stay Safe East is a LGBTQ+ positive employer. Flexibility, mutual support and learning from experience are part of our way of working. Most staff work less than 35 hours. Three of our staff also employ their own Personal Assistants.

**The Chief Executive** is responsible for the management of the organisation and its services and is supported by a Finance and Operations Manager and our administrator.

**The VAWG Service** Manager manages 8 staff (6 Disability and Domestic Violence Advocates, this post and the Senior Benefits and Entitlements Advocate) and volunteer.

**The Hate and General Crime Team** Manager manages three part-time Hate Crime Advocates (one of whom is also a secondee who trains other disabled people's organisations to do hate crime advocacy) and a sessional General Advocate/Support Worker.

**The Policy Team** is made up of a Policy Officer (job-share), managed by the Policy and Projects Advisor.

We expect the team to be around 18-20 staff and 4 volunteers by the end of 2022.

**Line Management:** This post will be supervised on a day to day basis by the Senior benefits Advocate, and managed by the VAWG team manager.

**Working arrangements:** The office core hours are 10am to 5.30pm. Days by arrangement. Staff are expected to adhere to these hours when working from home but some flexibility may be required in order to meet client needs.

Since the beginning of the Covid 19 emergency two years ago, our team has been working remotely from home. We are now moving towards a period of hybrid working. The successful candidate will therefore be expected to work partly from home so must have a safe and confidential space to work, and partly from our Covid safe office in Leytonstone, E15 (unless there are overwhelming medical reasons why you should not do so). This is essential to ensuring staff are supported and can support each other.

Staff are normally expected to meet clients either in their own home (subject to risk assessment and access), in a relevant community venue or in the office, but other arrangements may be possible due to outstanding Covid risks.

**Access and inclusion:** Our office and building have a good standard of access, with buses within 100 metres, parking within 10 metres of the entrance and an accessible toilet and meeting rooms on the same floor. There is a rest room on site. We use a Modus database. Dragon and other software can be funded through Access to Work.

We will make reasonable adjustments where possible. Where relevant, we assist our staff to apply for Access to Work support.

For hybrid working, the successful candidate will be provided with appropriate IT and software, seating etc

**Probationary period:** 3 months from start date.

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**To apply, please complete the attached application form, details of your access needs for interview, together with the separate monitoring form, and return them no later than March 28<sup>th</sup> 2022 at 5pm.**

by e-mail to: [recruitment@staysafe-east.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@staysafe-east.org.uk), please mark your application 'Benefits advocate application'  
or you can upload your application on to Charity jobs [\(link\)](#)

**Important: please ensure you return your application as a typed Word document in 16 point, not as a PDF. This is so that all forms are accessible to members of the interview panel.**

***Please do not send CVs or testimonials as these will not be read by the Panel.***

If you have any questions, or require the application form, monitoring form or job details in another format, please contact Emma Irving, VAWG Casework Manager on 07539 468 764 (text and voice) or e-mail [recruitment@staysafe-east.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@staysafe-east.org.uk)

**Interviews for the Benefits and Entitlement Advocate Post will be held on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 either at our offices or by Zoom.**

We look forward to hearing from you.

*Stay Safe East*

*90 Crownfield Road*

*London E15 2BG*

*Registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation number 1153615*

# STAY SAFE EAST

## BENEFITS AND ENTITLEMENTS ADVOCATE

### JOB DESCRIPTION

**Salary:** £28,004 per annum pro-rata

**Hours:** 17.5 hours per week

**Day-to-day support and induction:** Senior Benefits Advocate

**Managed by:** Stay Safe East Violence Against Women and Girls Team  
Manager

*This post is subject to a satisfactory enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check.*

The advocate will work alongside our advocates to support our clients across London who have all experienced abuse and trauma.

#### **Aims of the role**

- To provide benefits and entitlements advice and advocacy to Deaf and disabled clients of Stay Safe East
- To ensure that all clients receive the income and entitlements they need
- To work to ensure the safety of our clients, their children or other dependents
- To share knowledge and evidence gained from advocacy work with a view to influencing policy and practice
- To work within the social model of disability and use non-discriminatory practice, and to work at all times in a way that is sensitive, respectful and accessible to clients and colleagues

#### **Tasks**

##### **Benefits information and advocacy**

1. To provide advice and advocacy to clients on the following:
  - Universal Credit, ESA, JSA, Income Support and Tax Credits
  - Personal Independence Payments (including new applications for clients whose Disability Living Allowance has ended)
  - Domestic violence exemption & concessions
  - Council Tax and Housing Benefit
  - Support for clients with No Recourse to Public Funds
  - Child Benefit

Any other relevant benefits

2. To meet clients' access and communication needs e.g. arrange interpreters for face-to-face meetings with clients, explain to clients in an accessible way what they are entitled to and what they need to do to keep those benefits and avoid sanctions
3. To assist clients to collate required documentation and evidence e.g. letters from consultants and other evidence of impairment
4. To assist clients to complete all relevant forms accurately and in a timely manner, or to complete the form on the client's behalf
5. To accompany clients to assessments, reviews and other meetings regarding their benefits and support them accordingly
6. To challenge decisions and sanctions in writing, and work with the Senior Benefits advocate to prepare evidence for mandatory reconsiderations, appeals and benefits tribunals, and to refer clients for legal advice where necessary

### **Entitlements and financial help applications**

7. To assist clients to apply for:
    - Dial-a-Ride, Taxicard, Freedom Pass, Blue Badge
    - Welfare Fund, Energy Trust, Family Fund and other small grants to help alleviate poverty
    - Access to Work, Disabled Student 's Allowance etc.
    - Any other funds or entitlements which would assist the client
- Applications for social care or mental health support are the responsibility of other advocates but you may be asked to assist where needed, including on assessments for Community Care Charges, depending on your skills.

### **Support around money and budgeting**

8. To support clients who need help with short-term or long-term help with budgeting and understanding money
9. Where the client is deemed not to have the capacity to manage their own funds or is at high risk of financial exploitation, to liaise with colleagues and the Adult Social Care or Mental Health services to put arrangements in place for the management of their money, whilst enabling the client to retain as much control as possible

10. To identify clients who are in debt and draw up a list of those debts, and refer them to an appropriate Debt Advice Charity
11. To support the client where needed at debt advice appointments, including explaining to debt advisers how to make the process accessible to the client, and to support the client where needed to adhere to the debt plan

### **Casework records and monitoring**

12. To ensure all casework records are precise, factual and up-to-date, entered into our database and filed appropriately, and meet required Quality Standards
13. To work with the Senior Benefits Advocate and the VAWG Manager to produce quarterly and annual monitoring records and performance data as required for funding reports, funding bids etc.

### **Maintaining client safety and confidentiality**

14. To listen to clients about their experiences, record risks and disclosures from clients relating to abuse and other non- benefits issues, and report concerns about client safety and other relevant information in a timely manner with colleagues and the Line Manager
15. To ensure confidentiality and sensitivity in line with Community Legal Service, GDPR and other guidelines

### **Other**

16. To maintain up to date knowledge of changes in welfare benefits and keep the team up to date with changes in benefits laws and entitlements
17. To monitor patterns of discrimination and challenges faced by disabled survivors in relation to welfare benefits and poverty, and report them to the CEO with a view to influencing policy
18. To attend training as appropriate
19. To share in answering the phone, other office and general tasks
20. To attend regular supervision, team and case review meetings and occasionally evening or weekend meetings or events
21. Any other reasonable tasks as directed by the line manager

## BENEFITS AND ENTITLEMENTS ADVOCATE

### PERSON SPECIFICATION

#### Essential

#### ***Experience and Knowledge***

1. Understanding of the social model of disability and intersectionality, and an ability to apply these models to advocacy work
2. At least one year's experience of providing in-depth benefits advice
3. At least two years' experience of working with disabled people in any capacity, paid or unpaid
4. In-depth knowledge and understanding of the rights and entitlements of disabled people to benefits and other support
5. Proven track record of success with obtaining benefits for clients including of challenging decisions and advocating for clients at assessments, benefits appeals and tribunals
6. Experience of liaising with the DWP and other statutory services
7. Knowledge of safeguarding issues and procedures
8. Strong and demonstrable commitment to diversity including willingness to learn and develop

#### 9. ***Skills & Abilities***

10. Proven ability to manage your own casework, and keep clear and accurate records
11. Ability to work flexibly, sensitively and in partnership with Deaf and disabled people from all backgrounds experiencing difficult situations
12. An ability to apply knowledge of benefits legislation, regulations and case law and use this knowledge effectively to assist our clients
13. Assertiveness and a problem-solving approach when dealing with other professionals and addressing barriers faced by our clients
14. Ability to show empathy but maintain objectivity when faced with people in distress
15. Resilient, hard-working and committed to the welfare of our clients
16. Ability to maintain confidentiality
17. Ability to work cooperatively as a part of a team
18. Ability to manage own workload and use Windows software (reasonable adjustments can be provided)

### **Desirable**

19. Citizens Advice certificate in generalist advice or other equivalent qualification or training
20. Fluency in Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Hindi or other spoken community language
21. Experience of working with survivors of domestic violence, hate crime or other abuse

## Stay Safe East

### Trainee Benefits and Entitlements Advocate

**Salary: £26,900 per annum pro-rata**

**17.5 Hours per week, days by arrangement**

***This post is only open to disabled applicants***

The traineeship is for 6 months. After this, if the postholder is able to work independently and has sufficient in-depth knowledge and understanding of benefits and entitlements, they will become a full Benefits and Entitlements Advocate.

#### **Aims**

- To learn to provide benefits and entitlements advice and advocacy to Deaf and disabled clients of Stay Safe East across London
- To help ensure that all clients receive the income and entitlements they need
- To work to ensure the safety of our clients, their children or other dependents
- To work within the social model of disability and use non-discriminatory practice, and to work at all times in a way that is sensitive, respectful and accessible to clients and colleagues

#### **Tasks**

##### **Benefits information and advocacy**

1. To be trained to provide advice and advocacy to clients on the following:  
ESA, JSA, Income Support and Universal Credit, Tax Credits  
Personal Independence Payments (including new applications for clients whose Disability Living Allowance has ended)  
Domestic violence exemption & concessions  
Council Tax and Housing Benefit  
Support for clients with No Recourse to Public Funds  
Any other relevant benefits
2. To explain to clients in an accessible way what they are entitled to and what they need to do to keep those benefits and avoid sanctions
3. To meet clients access and communication needs and e.g. arrange interpreters for face-to-face meetings with clients or explain what is expected of them by the DWP and other agencies

4. To assist clients to collate required documentation and evidence
5. To learn how to support clients at assessments, reviews and other meetings regarding their benefits and support them accordingly
6. To learn how to challenge decisions and sanctions, and prepare evidence for mandatory reconsiderations, appeals and benefits tribunals

### **Entitlements and financial help applications**

7. To assist clients to apply for:
  - Dial-a-Ride, Taxicard, Freedom Pass, Blue Badge
  - Welfare Fund, Energy Trust, Family Fund and other small grants to help alleviate poverty
  - Access to Work, Disabled Student's Allowance etc.
  - Any other funds or entitlements which would assist the client

### **Support around money and budgeting**

8. To learn how to support clients who need help with short-term or long-term help with budgeting and understanding money
9. To identify clients who are in debt and draw up a list of those debts, and refer them to an appropriate Debt Advice Charity
10. To support the client where needed at debt advice appointments, including explaining to debt advisers how to make the process accessible to the client
11. To support the client where needed to adhere to the debt plan

### **Casework records and monitoring**

12. To ensure all casework records are accurate and up to date, entered into our database and filed appropriately, and meet required Quality Standards

### **Maintaining client safety and confidentiality**

13. To listen to clients about their experiences, and share concerns about client safety and other relevant information in a timely manner with the Senior benefits Advocate and the Line Manager
14. To ensure confidentiality and sensitivity in line with Community Legal Service, GDPR and other guidelines

## **Other tasks**

15. To maintain up to date knowledge of changes in welfare benefits
16. To monitor patterns of discrimination and challenges faced by disabled survivors in relation to welfare benefits and poverty, and report them to the Line Manager with a view to influencing policy
17. To attend training as appropriate
18. To share in answering the phone, other office and general tasks
19. To attend regular supervision, team and case review meetings and occasionally evening or weekend meetings or events
20. Any other reasonable tasks as directed by the line manager

## **Trainee Benefits and Entitlements Advocate**

### **Person specification**

#### **Experience and knowledge**

1. Personal experience of disability
2. Experience, paid or unpaid of completing ESA, PIP, Universal Credit or other benefits forms for yourself, friends or family or as a volunteer
3. Experience of attending a benefits assessment either for yourself or with others
4. Some experience of liaising with the DWP or other statutory services
5. At least one year's experience of supporting disabled people, in a paid or unpaid capacity
6. Basic knowledge of the different entitlements disabled people might have to other support, and of the benefits system and its impact on disabled people
7. An understanding of the social model of disability and of intersectionality
8. An understanding of the needs of disabled people from diverse communities across London, and an understanding of the access, communication and support needs of different disabled people
9. Good literacy skills and an ability to fill in forms accurately
10. A practical approach to problem solving, and a high level of common sense
11. The ability to work sensitively with our clients, including to show empathy but maintain objectivity when faced with clients in distress

12. Assertiveness and problem solving approach when dealing with other professionals and when arguing for the rights of our clients
13. An ability to learn about benefits legislation, regulations and case law and use them effectively in your work
14. Strong and demonstrable commitment to diversity including willingness to learn and develop
15. Experience of organising your own work and of keeping clear records
16. Ability to work flexibly, sensitively but objectively with Deaf and disabled people from all backgrounds experiencing difficult situations
17. An understanding of how to maintain confidentiality
18. Ability to work cooperatively as a part of a team
19. Ability to manage own workload and use Windows software (reasonable adjustments can be provided)

**Desirable**

Fluency in Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Hindi, other spoken community language

## About Stay Safe East

For more details of our work, please see our website [www.staysafe-east.org.uk](http://www.staysafe-east.org.uk)

Stay Safe East is a leading agency working with Deaf and disabled survivors of hate crime, domestic violence and other abuses. We are a Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO) staffed and led by disabled people. All our practice is inclusive and aimed at getting the best for our clients and promoting their human rights.

We are a user-led organisation of disabled people. We work to the social model of disability, and support our clients to address the barriers they face. We take a feminist approach to gender-based violence against disabled women and girls, whilst recognising that disabled men may also be at risk. We currently work with disabled people from East London's diverse communities and respect and understand their life choices. We are a LGBTQ positive organisation.

We have been successfully providing advocacy and support to disabled victims/survivors for the past 11 years. This includes:

- An accessible place of safety to report all forms of targeted harassment and violence, and to get support
- Long-term, holistic advocacy and support for disabled and Deaf victims
- Help with getting action from the police, housing, the local authority and other agencies
- Ongoing help with practical issues e.g. accessing benefits, housing, social care, health, etc.
- Signposting to other services such as counselling (or our own service which supports a few clients who cannot access other services)
- Helping our clients to develop a positive self-regard and confidence as Deaf or disabled people
- Peer support for disabled women through our women's group
- Training for disabled women survivors of abuse

Our casework informs our policy and partnership work with the police, Mayor's Office on policing, government departments and other agencies.

We are members of two London-wide partnerships working to ensure a coordinated response to victims of hate crime and of a London wide partnership to support victims of crime. We are the only specialist domestic violence service in the UK run by disabled women working with disabled women (and a small number of men and non-binary people) across all communities and impairment groups. We have become established as an authority on addressing violence against disabled women and girls.

## **The Stay Safe East casework model**

Stay Safe has developed a casework model that aims to meet the needs of our Deaf and disabled clients.

- We offer an accessible service, with voice, SMS and e-mail contact, Easy Read and large print information, accessible premises and facilities. We offer home visits to all but a few of our clients (i.e. where there is a safety issues for staff) and will pay for transport for someone to come to the office. We arrange BSL and spoken community language interpreters. The team has a strong awareness of Deaf culture. We respond to clients' individual needs and ways of thinking and understanding, and work at their pace and as much as possible on their terms.
- We respect the life choices and culture of our clients. We are an LGBT inclusive organisation.
- We work in partnership with our clients and help them make their own decisions. We help clients understand their rights to be free from abuse and to live independently in the community of their choice.
- We work holistically, offering emotional support, regular contact, advocacy and other support as required.
- Promote the client's right to independent living and the resources to live independently in the community of their choice.
- Work to ensure that other agencies understand the emotional, practical and cultural needs of our Deaf and disabled clients.
- We focus on addressing barriers for our clients, rather than on impairment, and on rights rather than on 'vulnerability'. We spend a lot of our time fighting for our clients' access and communication needs to be met, and for their human rights as e.g. people with learning difficulties to be respected. This sometimes brings us into conflict with statutory providers and requires persistence and determination.
- We also recognise that our clients may have suffered abuse directly linked to their impairment and have a very negative experience of impairment and disability. Many of our clients have had a lifetime of institutional abuse, hate crime and domestic abuse. We try to promote Disability Pride and self-respect as well as Deaf Pride through advocacy and peer support, including by encouraging female clients to join our women's group.
- As active citizens who are also disabled people, our staff, volunteers and Board can be positive role models for our clients.

- Stay Safe East support may involve intensive one-to-one work with new clients until they feel able to do things for themselves, or only need more 'light touch' support. We have found that at first many of our clients need us to 'hold' them emotionally and sometimes practically until they are strong enough to do this with less support. We do our best to provide a holistic service – for example we will help a client get a care package or mental health support, and rather than referring people to another service, we help some clients with benefit applications, or get Dial-a-Ride membership, or will ring utility companies on their behalf, or attend appointments with them.
  - We keep extensive case records for all our clients. We gather evidence for hate crime and harassment cases, for example where there are other victims of the same perpetrators – disabled people and others in the community are more likely to speak to us as an independent grassroots organisation than to the police or their landlord.
  - We work in partnership with the Police, local authorities, housing landlords, Social Services and other agencies, but are not afraid to act as 'critical friends' and to push for action where none is forthcoming. We have learnt to be persistent and persuasive.
-