

**Breakout session:** Grow Your Own Advice – how led-by-and-for partnerships are transforming the advice workforce and wider sector

**Speakers:** **Bruna Boscaini**, CEO of Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation (IRMO), **Kasia Kuczynska**, who leads Citizens Advice Wandsworth's Propel project, **Luke Shoveller** and **Alban Hawksworth**, of Money A+E.

The session begins with speakers defining what grow your own advice means to them. Bruna emphasised that grow your means creating real support structures for individuals often excluded due to barriers such as lacking UK qualifications. These are individuals not without potential and should be supported to grow into advice roles. Luke highlighted the importance of recognising diverse communities. Money A+E's grow your own model keeps cultural context and lived experience at the centre of advice work rather than removing them. Tasha described "grow your own advice" as building long-term relationships, trust, and networks within communities. Training and supporting local people strengthen the advice structure and ensures services are shaped by the voices and needs of service users.

### **Citizen Advice Wandsworth Propel Project GYA**

Kasia outlines the CA Wandsworth worked in partnership with Mushkil Assan, Elays Network, and other local Citizen Advice organisations in Brent and Redbridge, using Propel Funding to recruit individuals who would not otherwise have access to advice sector careers. The focus was on inclusive recruitment and person-centred training.

Kasia highlighted the case study of Mushkil Assan, a community led charity in Wandsworth. CA Wandsworth supported the organisation by jointly recruiting two trainee advisers and providing structured, face to face training. Trainees returned to Mushkil Assan to deliver advice and drop-in sessions with continued support and mentoring from CA Wandsworth. The needs from that communities were much higher, requiring extra support. A collaborative approach was taken, with horizontal relationships between CAW and grassroots partners. This included joint decision-making, capacity-building, and adapting support to fit partner needs.

Trainees brought valuable language skills and local knowledge. A tailored job description and job share model helped recruit those needing flexibility, such as carers. Training was adapted to individual circumstances to support long-term retention.

An example shared was Reshma, a former full-time carer who didn't believe she could return to work. With flexible training and support, she is now a part-time adviser at Citizens Advice Redbridge, balancing work with caring responsibilities. Her journey shows the importance of accessible, inclusive pathways into the advice sector

### **Money A+E and Rooted Finance**

Money A+E and Rooted Finance are two black-led organisations that based in East London. They have a collaborative grassroots approach to delivering advice and training within underserved communities. Their Grow Your Own Advice Incubator programme supports, diverse London-based community groups to develop their own advice provision.

The programme offers a structured training commitment of at least half a day a week for 9 to 12 months. Training includes both debt and welfare advice, delivered through a combination of formal learning, supervision, and observation. A new intake is set to start in September.

The partner organisations they support are not primarily advice organisations, but small community-rooted groups. Through the programme, staff and volunteers at these organisations gain awareness of the advice system, increase their skills and confidence, and build their capacities to better serve their communities.

The programme also led to the development of a consortium, aiming to build long-term relationships and infrastructure that support sustained delivery of grassroots advice. This network helps increase the visibility of financially excluded people while tackling systemic inequalities.

The support received from Propel and the London Legal Support Trust (LLST) has been valuable in enabling experimentation and learning. This cohort's approach differs from previous ones, with greater flexibility, co-design, and adaptation based on trainee feedback and evolving community needs

## **Advice for All Partnership**

Bruna state that IRMO is a community-based charity based in South London assisting Latin Americans and other Portuguese and Spanish speakers in the UK. IRMO is a part of a longstanding partnership with three other organisations, LAWRS, The Baytree Centre, and High Trees Community Development Trust, with Legal Support form Southwark Law Centre. This partnership is called Advice for All. Together they have over 140 years of combined experience working with marginalised or minority communities. Over 80% of people they support are from migrant or ethnically marginalised backgrounds. Bruna emphasised that each organisation brings something unique and shares values of collaboration, community leadership and mutual learning.

The Advice for All model has four key elements:

- Attract – Paid placements and training pathways that bring new advisers into the sector from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Develop – Building the knowledge, soft skills, and wellbeing of staff and volunteers, not only through legal training but also strong supervision and peer support.

- Learn – reflecting on what is and isn't working to stay agile, adapt approaches, and strengthen the model
- Amplify- sharing tools, knowledge, and learning with others to grow collective impact and avoid competition between organisations.

So far, the partnership has recruited 10 trainees across two cohorts, 8 in housing and 2 in immigration. They received a 150 applications across the cohorts. Bruna highlighted that most trainees noted that having a paid opportunity to develop into the sector at their own pace in a safe and supportive space was a great motivator. Alongside trainee development, 23 staff and 5 trainees received training ranging from IAA level 1 to Level 3 IAG. Key training areas included trauma awareness, safeguarding, and rights-based approaches.

Bruna emphasised that a strong focus was placed on wellbeing, recognising that advisers with lived experience may face emotional strain. Wellbeing and trauma-informed practice were embedded into the training, ensuring long-term sustainability and quality of support.

The change being driven includes building a resilient, diverse advice workforce that is community-rooted; strengthening the capacity of community-led organisations; and shifting the wider advice sector toward more equitable, collaborative models that reflect the realities of local communities.

## **Q&A Summary**

### **Retention Challenges:**

Lucas acknowledged that retention and attrition are ongoing challenges. To address this, programmes are designed with built-in flexibility and improved induction processes, including more person-centred support.

Tasha emphasised that retention improves when people see a clear career pathway. Offering paid training that doesn't impact benefits and tailoring opportunities to individual needs has been key. Retention is linked to the ability to build a meaningful, long-term role.

Bruna added that employment support must be embedded in training programmes. Connecting trainees with opportunities is vital, though short-term or restricted funding often limits recruitment and retention in the sector.

### **Supervision and Quality Assurance:**

In response to a question about maintaining standards, speakers highlighted the importance of strong supervision and structured support. Legal supervision and quality assurance are integral to the programmes, ensuring trainees are well-guided and advice delivered is accurate and rights based.