

Workforce programme learning event report

10th July 2025

Attendees

- Andrew, Disability Law Service
- Bruna, IRMO
- Luana, IRMO
- Liz, Inclusion London
- Eddie, University House legal advice centre
- Jo, Consultant (ASA)
- Kasia, Citizens Advice Wandsworth
- Liz, AdviceUK
- Simon, Law Centres Network
- Christ, LLST
- Phil, Consultant (ASA)
- Alban, Money A+E
- Keely, Inclusion Barnet
- Jeremy, Citizens Advice Wandsworth
- Muna, Rooted Finance
- Muna's Colleague
- Nick, Money A+E
- Asma, Disability Law Service

1. Introduction

The Advice Workforce Development Fund (AWDF) learning event brought together eight funded partnerships, LLST, and the learning partner (ASA), to reflect on progress and share learning. Discussions focused on persistent workforce issues in London's advice sector—recruitment, retention, training, peer support, and supervision—and considered system-wide opportunities to build a more diverse, resilient and inclusive workforce.

2. Programme updates

London Legal Support Trust (slides appended)

Chris outlined the breadth of the AWDF programme and its multiple workstreams, including:

- **Pay & conditions reports** launched June 2025, developed with Myriad Research, and already generating momentum around implementation.
- **Organisational capacity review** (Org Cap Review), commissioned to ASA, with draft findings due August 2025 and final report in September.

- **Marketing and Skills Academy group**, now engaging with the GLA and skills academies in other sectors and developing the business case for marketing activity and a workforce academy or hub.
- **Pan-London advice strategy roadmap**, initiated and co-chaired with the GLA and London Citizens Advice, with further co-design planned into 2026.
- **Propel long-term grants**: the outcome of expressions of interest have been communicated. For those who got through EOI, stage two applications are now in progress. Three cohorts will be supported, with webinars and support events scheduled.

The Greater London Authority (GLA) was noted as a key strategic ally, particularly due to its devolved adult education responsibilities and willingness to fund new training initiatives for unemployed and in-work learners. GLA is currently consulting on an Inclusive Talent Strategy and is reviewing Skills Academies. ‘Bootcamps’ (a GLA term – better term needed) will be open for new bids in 2026.

There is also a group looking at apprenticeships. It was noted that changes to Level 7 apprenticeships from January 2026 will mean that they are only supported for 18–22-year-olds. This would rule out this option for staff over 22 (most existing apprenticeships supported under AWDF). However, Eddie noted that CILEX Level 6 apprenticeships may be a suitable alternative. Level 3 and 5 paralegal apprenticeships may also be useful.

ASA learning partner and organisational capacity review (slides appended)

Phil shared themes emerging from ASA’s dual role as learning partner and lead for the organisational capacity review. The review has included survey data, interviews, and partnership case studies. Phil’s slides are appended.

Key findings so far include:

- Fragmentation and duplication in recruitment and training.
- Lack of coordination of and shared resources for training, development, recruitment and retention best practice.
- Shortages of qualified supervisors.
- Gaps in CPD-compliant training provision.
- Underused models of cross-agency supervision and peer support.
- Diversity gains from “grow your own” and community-led initiatives.
- Potential for systems change if short-term wins (on-line resources, training) are linked to long-term coordination and investment. There is growing evidence to

support the idea of a workforce hub for London to support London's 650+ advice providers.

3. Partnership activity and learning

Money A+E and Rooted Finance (slides appended)

This Black-led partnership delivered structured training in both debt (regulated) and welfare benefits advice, combining technical training, mentoring, peer learning and observation. Trainees come from marginalised communities, and partnerships with grassroots organisations enabled culturally relevant and accessible support.

Key learning:

- Soft skills and pastoral support are essential.
- Flexibility is needed to accommodate and support trainees.
- Paid roles and progression routes are needed to maintain momentum after training.
- FCA regulation presents additional barriers in debt advice pathways.

Law Centres Network (LCN) (slides appended)

LCN supported eight solicitor apprenticeships across five law centres, with strong peer networks and structured supervision. LCN is also piloting paid internships for Black interns (at 4 London Law Centres) and supporting other law centres nationally to establish similar schemes.

Key learning:

- Peer support and progression pathways increase retention.
- New age limits on Level 7 apprenticeships may exclude diverse candidates.
- A coordinated system for apprenticeship levy donations would strengthen take-up.

University House Legal Advice Centre

University House supports local apprentices and delivers supervision to other agencies via a second-tier national advice portal (Lottery funded). Their model includes direct advice delivery, case support, and remote booking systems for community organisations.

Key learning:

- There is growing demand for legal supervision within London as well as in traditional "advice deserts".

- Remote support models are efficient and scalable.
- Legacy systems of second-tier support need reinvestment.

IRMO-led partnership

This partnership of Latin American and migrant community-led organisations has trained advisers in welfare, housing and immigration law, using paid full-time placements and a human rights-based approach. New handbooks for trainees and supervisors are being developed.

Key learning:

- Community-led, trauma-informed and rights-based approaches support diverse recruitment and strong retention.
- Flexibility in programme structure improves accessibility.
- Being paid to train is essential for many new advisers with lived experience.
- Immigration training pathways are complex and under-resourced.

AdviceUK

AdviceUK worked with a wide range of community and equity-led organisations to deliver NVQs, train-the-trainer programmes, and supervision training. Over 40 people are undertaking qualifications, mostly at Level 3 or 4.

Advice & Guidance National Occupational Standards (NOS): Liz Carboni is to Chair a meeting of the Workforce Development Trust Steering Group. The Workforce Development Trust is leading on a review of A&G NOS (which includes Skills for Justice & Skills for Health). This will involve the Advice Networks. The work is due to be completed by March 2026.

These revisions will impact existing competency frameworks and qualifications including the Money and Pensions Service requirements for debt advice, as these skills-based NOS are part of the legal advice NOS. The need for the legal advice NOS to be revised has been noted by the Trust – they should be revised every 5 years and this is overdue. Any work on an Apprenticeship framework for advice work will need to be aware of this, as will any existing training delivery organisations.

Shortage of trainers: AdviceUK believes that increasing the pool of competent trainers in advice work and social welfare law across London will benefit the sector overall and provide career development opportunities for advisers.

Key learning:

- There is high demand for qualifications and CPD in under-resourced groups.

- Training and supervision capacity are critical for succession planning.
- Short-term contracts disrupt continuity of learning.

Citizens Advice Wandsworth

Citizens Advice Wandsworth (CAW) focused on developing new entry routes and enhancing diversity through local collaboration and integration of lived experience. Work included developing supported placements, supervisory capacity and advocacy to embed local delivery. CAW has worked with two local community organisations and other local Citizens Advice. A trainers' forum is being coordinated by CA Hammersmith & Fulham.

Key learning:

- Recruiting from local communities strengthens service relevance and trust.
- Supported placements must be matched with supervision time and capacity.
- CAW's partnership approach has shown the value of structured progression routes and borough-based advice coordination.

Inclusion Barnet and Inclusion London

These DDPO-led organisations embedded disability inclusion and intersectionality into training delivery and peer support. Project focus areas included recruiting Disabled people with no previous advice workforce experience, providing progression routes for existing caseworkers, comprehensive training for advice staff, support to apply for Access to Work and deal with barriers, developing skills in file review and supervision, taking up policy issues arising from casework where possible and exploring the potential for peer file review.

Key learning:

- Importance of comprehensive training for supervisors and casework trainees including skills and subject based training based on needs analysis with staff. Importance of all trainees attending AdviceUK Learning to Advise training as an introduction to advice.
- Allocating time for training and development is essential.
- Peer support spaces led by and for disabled people offer policy gains and emotional resilience.
- One DDPO described the importance of disclosure of health and disability issues by interview panel members and trauma informed supervision.
- Importance of supporting staff with Access to Work.

- Coordinated policy advocacy (e.g. around transport, housing and access to benefits) is more possible through connected delivery networks.
- Progression routes for trainees are essential – they need somewhere to go after training, this should influence funding applications in future, so progression is built into funding bids and funders are aware why this is important.
- The project has passed the work it has done to date on exploring peer file review to ASA with the hope this is something they can pick up and lead on in future.

Disability Law Service

DLS supported trainee progression through supervision and legal training. Activity included embedding inclusive practices and supporting progression into specialist roles in disability rights and social security law. DLS worked with Real in Tower Hamlets in year one and with Choice in Hackney in year two. DLS noted the difference between the two boroughs, with Tower Hamlets having coordinated advice infrastructure.

Key learning:

- Specialist routes (e.g. in disability advice) must be resourced with adequate supervision and post-qualification pathways.
- DLS has highlighted the risk that trainees drop out post-training without funded roles or career planning.
- More structured sector support is needed to help smaller providers grow supervisors and retain specialist talent.

4. Opportunities and solutions

A London advice workforce hub

There was general support for a pan-London workforce hub to:

- Coordinate recruitment campaigns and job boards.
- Signpost and pool training provision.
- Share templates, models and case studies.
- Convene supervisors and offer shared capacity (especially for smaller providers).
- Support apprenticeships, qualifications, and succession planning.
- Show career, training and qualification pathways.

The hub would support the 650+ advice agencies that are all trying to do this often individually.

As a hub will take time to set up and get funded, short-term work to share resources is important.

Training

- Making training accessible and relevant (time, pace, method, location, topic) is essential.
- Safeguarding is a common training need.
- Reflective practice training is widely needed – AdviceUK’s course is popular.
- Need to continue to fund trainee posts.
- The lack for a clear training and qualification structure for advice makes it difficult to navigate/see a career path. Keely contrasted her experience as an Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA).
- Need for National Occupational Standards for advice to be updated.
- Advice First Aid (AFA) training for community organisations to enable them to provide first tier/triage advice (and recognise their limitations) is now being provided across London (Advising Londoners Partnership). A spin-off from this is that it is interesting people in advice work – at least one AFA trainee is now a trainee adviser.

Recruitment and retention

- Local recruitment makes a difference.
- Need to recruit more people than immediately needed (could create a ‘locum’ pool as recommended in the Myriad conditions report). A workforce hub could act as a recruitment agency to create a pool.
- People are often not in a position to volunteer – they need paid jobs.
- Clear progression routes are needed – beyond traineeships. Funders need to understand this.
- Share good practice resources.
- Facilitate swaps of personnel between agencies to give people experience, share ideas, help with retention.

GLA and adult education funding

The GLA is currently reviewing its Skills Academy hubs and will tender for Skills Bootcamps in May 2026. The advice sector is recognised under the “professional services” priority and could:

- Design multi-provider tender bids (not one-size-fits-all).
- Align training pathways with devolved skills budgets.
- Promote inclusive adult education linked to advice delivery.

Apprenticeship levy opportunities

Commercial law firms have unused apprenticeship levy funds. A sector-wide brokerage function or matchmaking system could:

- Connect community organisations to funders.
- Overcome time/resource barriers for individual law centres or charities.
- Build long-term partnerships between private firms and advice providers.

Rebuilding second-tier support

As historic second-tier bodies have disappeared, initiatives like University House’s advice portal show that second-tier legal support:

- Can be digital and appointment-based.
- Reduces isolation for small providers.
- Strengthens quality, safeguarding and resilience.

Borough advice forums and networks can provide vital structures to support training and development (e.g. THCAN). A pan-London advice forum could provide a platform for sharing best practice in recruitment, retention and training. Forums like the LLST facilitated specialist advice forum may provide such a platform.

Embedding equity and inclusion

Lived experience, trauma-informed support, human rights frameworks and culturally competent training are more than “nice to haves”. The programme has shown:

- These practices improve access, trust and impact.
- Inclusion cannot be achieved without funding, flexibility and coordination.
- They must be embedded across training, supervision, leadership, and infrastructure.

Policy alignment and systemic influence

Cross-partnership collaboration has already enabled:

- Strategic input to national debates (e.g. Access to Work).
- Borough-based forums to improve housing and transport access.

- Shared policy responses led by disabled and migrant-led organisations.
- Future workforce infrastructure must include mechanisms to capture and amplify this system-level impact.

Funders

- Guidance needed for funders relating to advice workforce issues:
 - Funding the full cost of employing, training, support and supervising staff.
 - Funding progression beyond traineeships.
 - Supporting pan-London and local advice infrastructure.

Update from LLST

AWDF Programme update | 10 July 2025



Recent and upcoming work

April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	2026>>
		Pay & Conditions reports launched (25 June)	Research project debrief			Prioritisation and implementation of P&C key recommends – potential production of more bite-sized recommends for each stakeholder group (funder/LA, umbrella, sector boards/leaders, et al.)			
Organisational Capacity project began (April) - call for evidence Apr-Jun				Draft report	T&F group meeting	OrgCap project completed - recommends for best practice in training, supervision, peer-support, general approaches (recruit/retention) - Oct; implementation >>			
		Strategy - Roadmap project and ToC completed (25 June) - awaiting sign-off		Next phase begins - developed by Strategy Action Group - consultation but wider than stakeholders in Roadmap phase - also question of resourcing and where strategy project is hosted				Deliverable expected Sept 2026	
Marketing sector/skills academy T&F launched	Recent discussions w/ GLA focussed on skills academy hubs and skills boot camps (both possibly out to tender in next year)				T&F group - fine-tuning ToR and scope; resourcing strategy, i.e. GLA tenders?			Skills boot camp tender?	
Propel LTG EOIs	Propel EOI assessments/decisions (Jun); communication of (early-July); LTG stage 2 applications open for cohort 1 (8 July); info webinar on Weds 16 July, 11am		Propel LTG stage 2 applications across three cohorts: cohort 1 (application window 8 July-5 Sept); cohort 2 (Nov-Jan 2026); cohort 3 (April-May 2026) ; also AWDF wider programme design, development for longer-term				L/t projects begin / wind-down		

Update from Learning Partner (ASA)



- ASA is the learning partner for AWDF and has also been commissioned to conduct a review of organisational capacity issues ('Org Cap Review') – focused on training, recruitment, retention, peer support and supervision.
- Learning work on-going: ASA involved in Steering Group, Pay & Conditions and Marketing/Academy Task & Finish Groups
- Org cap review: report by end of September to Org Cap Task & Finish Group
- Two pieces of work intertwined – but org cap review gathering evidence and learning from wider group of stakeholders.
- Learning Partner and Org Cap Review team now primarily Phil Jew and Jo Chimes – Rita Chadha has left ASA.

Learning Questions



- What are the most effective ways to recruit and retain staff?
- What are the main factors contributing to staff development and progression?
- How can the lessons learnt from this work contribute to developing further solutions?

Plus:

- Does the intervention enhance diversity, representation and lived experience in the workforce?
- Has the intervention led to equity-led agencies having an increased influence on workforce systems?
- Has the intervention enhanced capacity and capability within delivery and beneficiary organisations?
- Has the intervention enhanced the capability of individual participants?
- How have Londoners benefited from the intervention – in terms of advice service accessibility and quality?

Org Cap Review Deliverables



- **A report that:**
 - **Identifies and analyses existing workforce and capacity related issues** which impact on the ability to deliver, sustain and grow advice provision and the advice workforce.
 - **Contains recommended models and solutions** that can be used by social welfare advice providers and partnerships of all sizes and types, including the impact of regulatory and training requirements; a focus on equity; being a small advice provider; resource implications and costs
 - **Contains case studies** to complement the recommendations, drawn from across the advice sector organisations;
 - **Can be used by grant funders and commissioning bodies** to inform their funding decisions and amounts;
 - **Can be shared via a user-friendly online platform.**

Emerging learning

- **Recruitment:** best practice, reasonable adjustments, access to work, costs, inequalities, pipeline of new entrants, marketing, pathways, GYO works – increasing diversity
- **Retention:** pay and conditions, wellbeing, burn-out, culture, lack of progression and development opportunities
- **Training and development:** lots of courses but gaps: debt, immigration, CPD, leadership. Lack of coordination, unclear pathways, variable quality, self-led modular disliked, shortage of trainers, cost, time to train (culture), flexibility
- **Supervision:** shortages, cross-agency offers, culture and approach
- **Peer support:** it works! A struggle for smaller organisations. Ad hoc. Culture and output constraints.
- **Solutions:** better coordination/support for recruitment, marketing, training, peer support – an Advice Workforce Hub for London? Short-term gains by sharing best practice, know-how and resources. Pay & conditions recommendations.
- **Opportunities:** GLA Inclusive Talent Strategy, Skills Academies and Bootcamps, apprenticeships, commercial sector collaboration



Grow your own advice

Partnership

Who we are: overview

- We are both Black-led and East London based organisations working closely together through practical, grassroots collaboration to support people from diverse ethnic communities to avoid financial crisis through specialist debt and welfare advice.
- We both play a strategic role in increasing the visibility of financially excluded people, working with cross-sector partners to achieve this.
- Seeking to amplify the voices of marginalised communities and tackle structural and systemic inequalities
- We collaborated to design and deliver the 'Grow Your Own Advice' Incubator programme. It aims to support diverse London-based community organisations to 'grow their own' advice workers – while addressing the gap in provision of community-based debt and welfare advice, particularly for Londoners from diverse ethnic communities.



Debt training programme overview

TRAINEE PROFILE

9 trainees started the Debt advice learning pathway, with 6 completing the learning programme across 7 months of training. *Three trainees left due to employment opportunities and health reasons.



The trainees are from diverse communities including, Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian British Bangladeshi and White mixed communities.



They are based in North, South and East London and have a mix of lived and professional experience in areas that include counselling, education, community engagement and faith leadership.

TRAINING

- Training consisted of 1 -day a week training sessions (either online or in - person) with the debt training supervisor, as well as formal 1 -2-1 catchups with trainees completed by -weekly training progression and additional support needs.
- The training covered crucial soft skills, theory and mandatory CMA level 1 - 3 in generalist debt advice training sessions.
- In April learning moved to the observation phase, bridging the theory with advice appointment observations. At this time the trainees volunteered additional 0.5 or 1 day to support this process

WHAT HAS BEEN IMPORTANT

- The need for flexibility and adaptations to support individual time commitments
- All trainees were looking for and aspire to secure employment as quickly as possible
- Getting trainee feedback through the learning journey has been vital

IMPACT

"This was a fantastic opportunity to learn as well as be able to help people, particularly as the need for debt advice continues to grow."

Trainee – Cohort 1

Welfare training programme overview

TRAINING UPDATE

16 trainees have completed the core Welfare Benefits pathway in cohort 1, with 8 trainees are continuing on the Money Mentors programme and 6 fully completed the training.

Since April, the focus of training has shifted to observing and engaging in Money A+E's casework, which covers both money guidance/budgeting and benefits advice. Trainees complete regular scenario-based activities alongside reflections on their observations and opportunities to participate in delivering welfare benefits advice

MONEY MENTORS

Money Mentors is an OCN-accredited course that all continuing candidates have been enrolled on. The programme supports candidates to provide mentoring on money management skills within their communities, helping to build community economic resilience. The programme is formally assessed through coursework

TRAINING STRUCTURE

- Much like the Debt training pathway, training initially consisted of a 1-day a week of training (online or in person) with the specialist Welfare Benefits training supervisor, scheduled at various different points in the week to suit the needs of candidates.
- This was supplemented by 1-2-1 catch ups and occasional external training delivered online covering core aspects of welfare benefits advice.
- Knowledge-focused sessions have been delivered alongside training on soft skills, data handling and client support



WHAT HAS BEEN IMPORTANT

- Fully recognising and valuing the lived experience individuals and organisations bring to the training programme – and the diversity of expertise
- The need for flexibility and adaptations to support individual time commitments and pressures.
- Candidates being supported to develop knowledge and skills that will directly enhance employability and employment into roles where advice skills are utilised for the benefit of communities.

AWDF PROGRESS



Peer support

- > WhatsApp group
- > Quarterly in-person
- > National Conference

National conference

- > Fast track to practice
- > Junior Lawyers Network

Level 7 Apprenticeships

- > Two new solicitor apprentices enrolled
- > At least 5 More Law Centres enrolling prior to funding changes

Increased Capacity

- > Top-up funding
- > Workforce Development Coordinator

Continuation

- > Stage 2 application for long-term funding



AWDF LEARNING



- > **New age limits on Level 7 solicitor apprenticeships risk excluding talent and undoing progress in social mobility and community representation.**
- > **More work is needed to promote roles as aspirational with the opportunity to make a real difference.**
- > **Importance of peer-to-peer support for apprentices (and others), particularly to connect newer apprentices with those farther along.**
- > **Need to coordinate offers of apprenticeship levy donations to non-profits.**
- > **Opportunities to develop 'returnships', Network-wide secondments, and Sector-wide solutions to the supervision capacity gap.**

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Advice Workforce Development Programme



Who we are

- Our partnership:
 - Four frontline organisations led by and for their communities:
 - Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation (IRMO)
 - Latin American Women's Rights Services (LAWRS)
 - The Baytree Centre
 - High Trees Community Development Trust
 - A specialist legal organisation: Southwark Law Centre
- Each partner brings unique strengths and specialist expertise
- Shared values and a culture of learning and mutual support
- Deep roots in the communities we serve – over 80% of our beneficiaries are from minoritised ethnic, migrant or refugee backgrounds



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Our model

- **Attract:** We bring in new advisers from underrepresented communities – offering paid placements, training and support to help them build skills and confidence and move into advice roles
- **Develop:** We invest in our existing staff and volunteers – growing knowledge, soft skills and wellbeing to deliver high-quality, rights-based advice
- **Learn:** We make space to reflect, adapt and learn together – capturing what works and using it to strengthen the model
- **Amplify:** We share what we've built – supporting other community-led organisations to adapt the model and grow their own advice workforce
 - Key resources we're working on:
 - Adviser Handbook
 - Supervisor Handbook



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What we've achieved so far

- **Recruiting and developing new advisers:**
 - 8 Welfare and Housing Trainee Advisers and 2 Immigration Trainee Advisers
 - 5 trainees recruited in Cohort 1 – all women from communities we serve
 - 3 moved into advice roles, 2 into other full-time work
 - 151 applications for 10 positions received across two cohorts – strong demand
 - An increase of 83% between our welfare and housing cohort recruitment rounds
 - And 145% between our immigration cohorts
 - Trainees valued being paid to train and learning at their own pace
 - Placements now redesigned to improve retention and support (based on learning and thanks to funding uplift)
 - From 21 to 35 hrs/week with the option to work 28 hrs/week
 - From 10 to 12 months
 - Programme structure:
 - Part 1 – Foundation Stage: Group-based learning focused on core knowledge and sector-wide themes
 - Part 2 – Development Stage: Individual learning plans tailored to specific interests and training needs



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What we've achieved so far

- **Developing our workforce:**
 - 23 staff and 5 trainees trained in 18 months
 - 8 gained Level 3 IAG qualifications
 - 2 advisers progressing to IAA Level 2
 - 5 volunteers trained in IAA Level 1
 - Key training areas included safeguarding, trauma awareness, human rights, and specialist legal topics



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What we've learned

- **Community-led, non-extractive models work**
 - Peer learning, shared ownership and collective recruitment strengthen trust and collaboration
 - Horizontal partnerships help avoid power imbalances and support mutual growth
 - Tailored resources and joint delivery build shared capacity across organisations
 - Accessible routes matter – many trainees don't have formal qualifications
 - Paid training, flexibility and soft skills support build confidence and commitment
- **Supporting progression to higher levels**
 - Developing immigration advisers to Level 2 is complex but critical
 - Supervision beyond accreditation is essential, especially in immigration work
 - We've built systems to improve supervision and expert support
 - We're embedding sustainability by growing our internal capacity to train and supervise



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What we've learned

- **Embedding wellbeing and rights-based practice**
 - Lived experience is powerful but can be draining – support is essential
 - Trauma-informed approaches and wellbeing support are central to our model
 - Human rights-based training strengthens both advice delivery and self-advocacy



The change we're creating

- **Advice workforce:** Building a skilled, resilient and diverse workforce rooted in communities experiencing disadvantage – through a model that removes traditional barriers to entry and progression.
- **Community-led organisations:** Strengthening community-led organisations by investing in their workforce and increasing their ability to adapt, learn and influence wider systems.
- **Advice sector:** Shifting the sector away from top-down models – towards collaborative, community-led approaches that are more equitable, effective and sustainable.
- **Local communities:** Creating lasting impact for the most excluded communities – by improving access to trusted, high-quality advice delivered by people who understand their experiences.



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