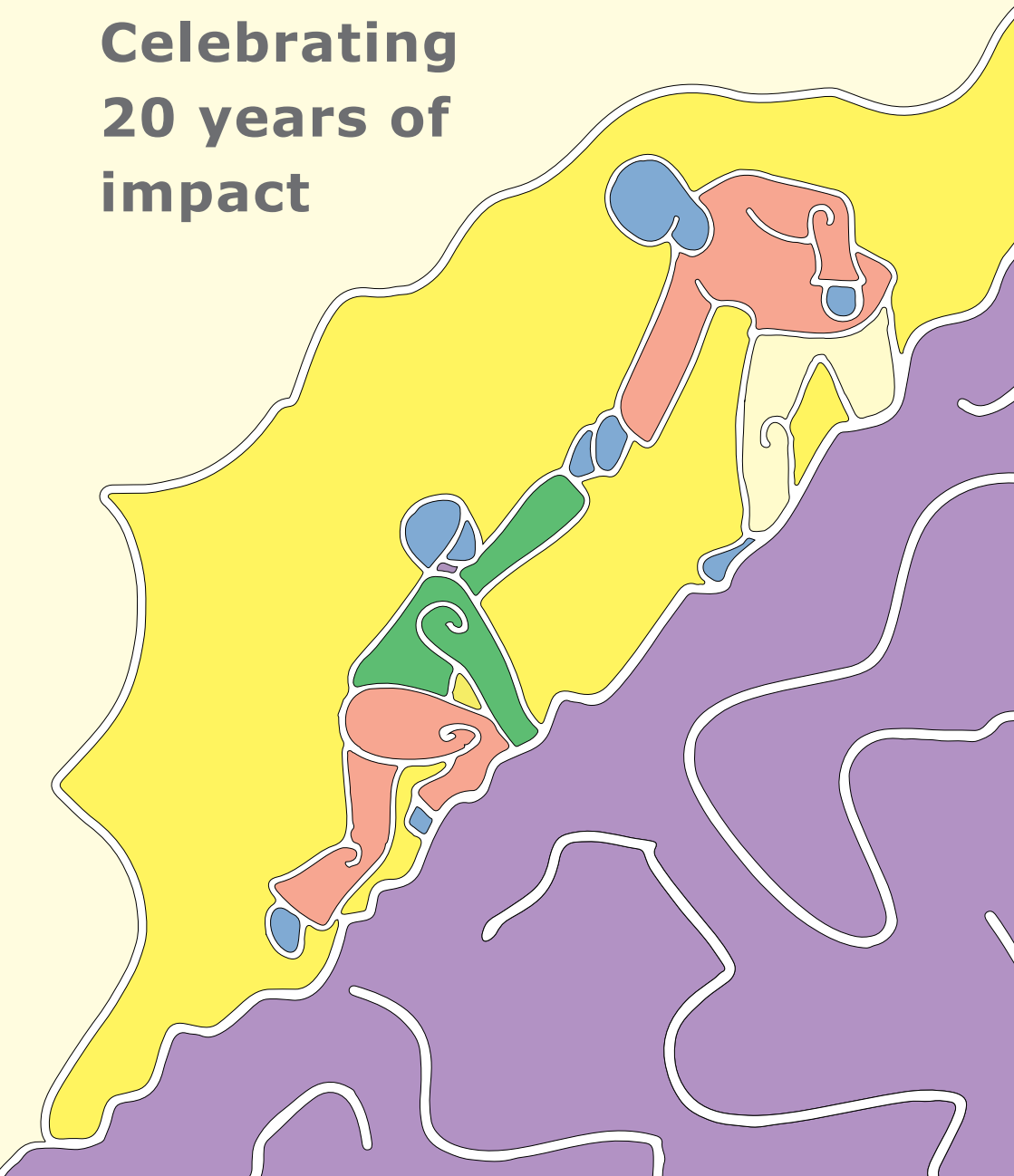
CASS
Community Advice & Support Service

Celebrating 20 years of impact



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Message from the Chair and CEO

This is a momentous year for our charity. In 2005, Mary Anne McFarlane, Devon and Cornwall's Chief Probation Officer, spotted an opportunity. She realised that people could make a fresh start if they were offered a lifeline at court. As a result, the first CASS+ in-court hub was opened in Cornwall, with free, confidential advice for people going through the Justice System.

The Bodmin hub was swiftly followed by Plymouth, and then Truro (2012), Newton Abbot (2018) and Exeter (2023). Everyone came on board to address re-offending by dealing with the underlying reasons for people being in court.

Fast forward to 2025 and more than 31,000 people have had on-the-spot advice in the court waiting areas. Plus, a further 13,000 people have received in-depth, one-to-one support at court and into life beyond.

Much of this success is down to the 446 volunteers who have given their time and skills to the charity, recognised with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2017.

In 2023, we were invited by the Ministry of Justice to support people who are unable to access Legal Aid or legal

representation in the family courts. Since then, over 400 people in Devon and Cornwall have received tailored help at one of the most stressful times of their lives.

By working together with all court staff as well as hundreds of third sector organisations, we can divert away from crime, reduce the risk of re-offending and guide people towards a positive future. Ultimately, this results in stronger communities and safer neighbourhoods.

We want to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to all our current and past employees, trustees, volunteers, funders and supporters who have made this achievement possible.

> It has truly been an honour and a privilege to support the development of this charity over these past two decades. It has become an indispensable part of both the Criminal Justice and Family Justice systems in these counties. Its reputation throughout Devon and Cornwall is remarkable.

Dr Tim Auburn, Chair of the Board

> This just shows what commitment, compassion and dedication can achieve. It's a real honour to be trusted to help so many people improve the direction of their lives. We're looking forward to supporting more people through court over the next 20 years.

Steve Parker, CEO

Photography: Malcolm Maciver

About us

Our values drive us

- People first
- Supportive
- Helpful
- Determined
- Creative problem-solving

Anyone can end up at court alone, feeling powerless, trapped and terrified. CASS+ is independent of the system, perfectly-placed inside the Magistrates' Courts in Devon and Cornwall. We listen and give free, confidential, practical advice; emotional support; and ongoing help for as long as people want.

We reduce the risk of re-offending by working with our partners to find solutions to complicated situations, especially when it comes to:

- Debt and money worries
- Homelessness and accommodation
- General wellbeing
- Domestic abuse
- Substance use
- Mental health, especially depression and anxiety
- Understanding and filling in forms and paperwork
- Support at court
- Education, training and employment

Since 2023, we have also supported over 400 people who face family court alone, unable to access legal representation within a complex environment.

The people we serve

We meet people from all walks of life. Sometimes they are from the town or the city and, others, the countryside. Frequently, they are caught in the system, unable to get help. They can't see a way out. Trauma, poverty and deprivation often play their part. Things escalate and become complicated. By the time they realise how bad it's become, they're at court, in front of the bench, at risk of losing everything.

This is where CASS+ steps in, to help with the underlying reasons for people being at court.

Someone driving under the influence is signposted for specialist counselling; a struggling mother is helped with her benefit forms; a man in debt gets a repayment plan before the bailiff steps in; and then, there are the lone fathers and mothers struggling through the family courts.

We are the connector in a huge chain, getting people the help they need and working hard to reduce demand on the Justice System and other services. We work alongside magistrates, solicitors, probation, police, district judges, the Crown Prosecution Service, ushers, court cells, social services, the statutory and voluntary sector, charities and other agencies across Devon and Cornwall, to divert away from crime, reduce the risk of re-offending and guide people towards more stable lives.

Client story

Anyone can end up at court. Whatever their story or background, we're here for them, ready to help them understand what happens at court, discover solutions, connect with the right organisations and move forward with confidence.

Kimberley

We have walked alongside Kimberley* since 2007 when she went to prison for 18 months. Since that moment, our team has supported both her and her family. Whilst inside, Kimberley took every opportunity to grow and learn. As soon as she got out of prison, she decided to volunteer to support others through court. Everyone could see the change whilst she worked hard to develop her skills and employability. After 10 years of work experience as a volunteer, she no longer needed to declare her offence. Her brilliant work meant that we were able to give her a good reference. We're delighted to say, she has been a trusted civil servant in a responsible job since 2018.

> I wouldn't have coped without CASS+. They have shown me that I am a good person and I've got something to contribute. They have enabled me to believe in myself.

*Name changed to protect identity.

Key milestones

2005 — Bodmin hub established

2006 — Plymouth hub established

2012 — Truro hub established

2015 — CASS+ established as independent charity

2015-23 — Victim Care funding from Devon & Cornwall Police & Crime Commissioner

2017 — Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

2018 — Newton Abbot hub established

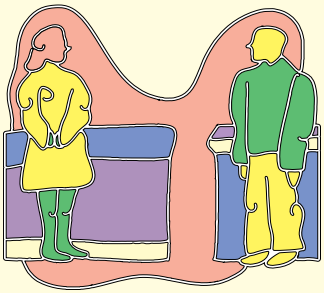
2023 — Funding from Ministry of Justice to extend to Family Courts

2023 — Exeter hub established

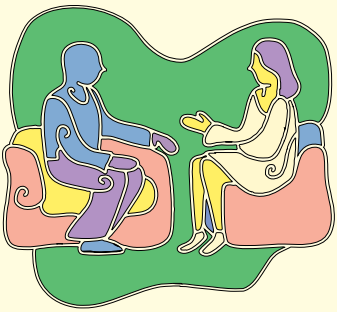
2025 — 20th anniversary

Our impact

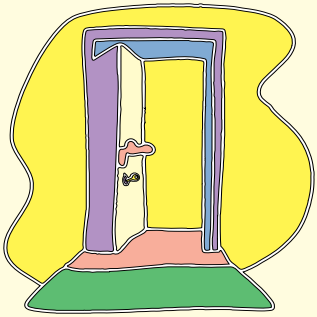
Some historic figures are based on mean average and informed estimates



31,120
People received on-the-spot advice in court waiting areas



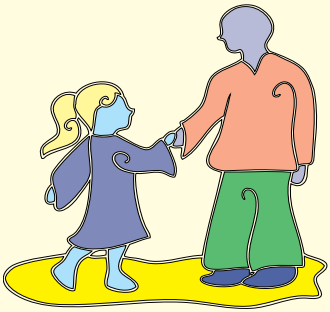
13,130
People received free 1:1 help through court & into life beyond



446
Volunteers given life-changing opportunities

11,357
Referrals made to 593 specialist services

593
Partners & links with specialist services in Devon & Cornwall



429
People supported in family courts, 2023-25

Illustrations: Yousef Dalit

Our volunteers

Our volunteers come from all walks of life and bring enormous breadth of knowledge and experience. We are pleased to host social work, criminology and law students, training and enabling them to learn new skills for future roles. We are particularly proud of the work we do to support volunteers with lived experience of the Justice System.

Volunteer story
Derrick

Derrick was street homeless and in and out of prison for 40 years. But his life changed in 2014 when he met our team inside Plymouth Magistrates' Court. We spoke up for him, sorted out his benefits, and organised daily support for recovery at a community hub at Hamoaze House. After 18 months, Derrick was able to put his past behind. And now, he uses his life experience to help others. He is living proof that, given the right support at the right time, it really is possible to break the cycle of re-offending.

We are so thankful for Derrick's incredible work as a volunteer, now recognised by BBC Radio Devon as winner of the Volunteer Category of the Make it Happen Awards 2025. Each day, he demonstrates that it really is possible to change your future for the better.

> I know I would have died if I had gone back to prison in 2014. Now my life has purpose.

Our funders

Huge thanks to all current and past individuals, trusts, foundations and grant-giving bodies supporting our cause:

29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
AB Charitable Trust
Albert Gubay Foundation
Association for Mental Health Providers
Centre for Justice Innovation
The Claire Milne Trust
CLINKS
The Clothworkers' Foundation
Cornwall Community Foundation
Cornwall VCSE Health Improvement Fund
Devon Community Foundation
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
Forte Charitable Foundation
The Hadley Trust
HM Prison and Probation Service
Konnect Communities
The Leigh Trust
Lloyds Bank Foundation
The Matrix Causes Fund
The Ministry of Justice through the Access to Justice Foundation
The National Lottery
The Norman Family Trust
The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall
People's Post Code Lottery
Safer Stronger Communities Victim Care
Social Enterprise Support Fund
Tudor Trust

Where to find us

Exeter

T: 01392 415335

Newton Abbot

T: 01626 337214

Plymouth

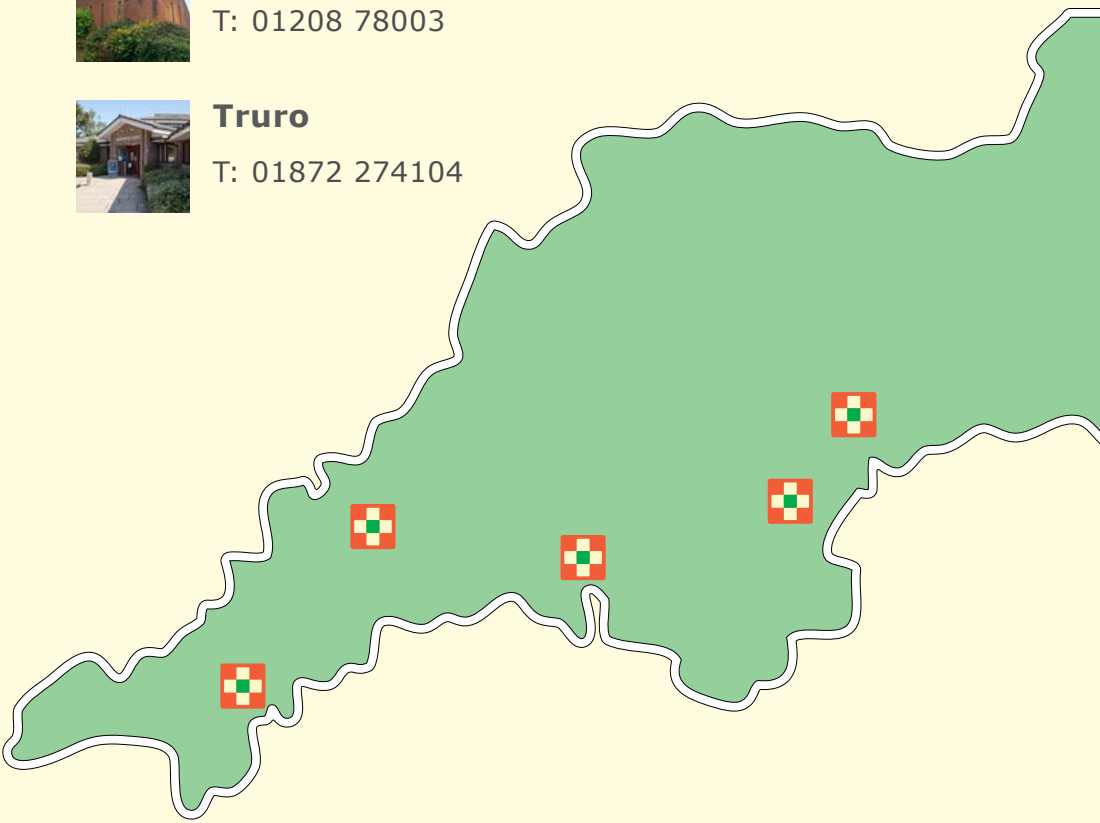
T: 01752 601153 / 01752 206187

Bodmin

T: 01208 78003

Truro

T: 01872 274104



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Celebrating
20 Years
2005-2025

Visit our website here

www.cassplus.org
117 North Hill, Plymouth, PL4 8JY
charity no: 116051