

# Welfare advice charity seeks new home after huge rise in demand

**CAROLYN CHURCHILL**

A CHARITY set up 20 years ago to offer help and advice to residents in one of Scotland's most diverse communities is seeking a new home after seeing a massive increase in the number of people seeking its support.

The Well, which is based in Govanhill, Glasgow, was initially set up as a trial project by the Church of Scotland in 1994 and became an independent charity three years ago. Volunteers help members of the community, particularly people from Pakistan, with benefits problems, job searches and personal issues.

It dealt with around 850



**THE WELL:** Charity in Govanhill, Glasgow, needs bigger home.

inquiries in its first year but has grown 10-fold in the past two decades, with a total of 1209 people making 8018 inquiries in 2013 – a rise of more than one-quarter (27%) from the previous year.

Rhoda Gilfillan, manager

of The Well, said one-third of queries were relating to benefit problems and the number of people asking for help had increased significantly in the wake of welfare cuts.

She said: "We are seeing a lot of people under a lot of pressure because of the system. People are being sanctioned or threatened with sanction. There are people with serious mental health issues getting worse because they cannot meet the criteria. It is not that they are not trying but everything is stacked against them.

"We are seeing increasing numbers coming for job searches. People go and sign

on and they are given no help whatsoever. They have to be registered online and have to do job searches online. It is an incredible challenge when they don't speak English.

The charity is concerned the premises in Albert Road are no longer fit for purpose, particularly because of a lack of private space.

It is searching for new premises and hopes to move by summer, although the search has been "challenging" so far, with nothing suitable in the Govanhill area. It is also keen to use the move to expand services, with ideas including cooking classes, parenting sessions and outdoor activities.