



Armed Services Advice Project Evaluation

Poppyscotland

Final Report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Poppyscotland commissioned an independent evaluation of the Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) in order to make an informed decision about the impact and merits of the service. An Interim Report in March 2011 focused on the establishment of the project and highlighted the emerging issues at that time. This Final Report will enable Poppyscotland and the project funders to consider the merits of extending the project.

1.2 Poppyscotland and Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) outlined ASAP as follows:

a national service, able to provide holistic information, advice and support services for veterans, serving personnel and their families throughout Scotland. Such a service will help and support this client group through the particular issues that they face, to the high standard they deserve.

From a client perspective, this will mean that serving personnel, veterans or their dependents should be able to approach CAB or a national telephone line, and be certain that the bureau network can:

- *provide general advice (predominantly on benefits and money advice) relevant to veterans; and*
- *act as a signpost to more specific support, advice, and information as appropriate for the veterans community.*

1.3 The total budget for the project was £600,000 over a three year period (July 2010 to June 2013). Funding was guaranteed for the first two years of the project, with the potential to be continued for a third year, subject to the findings of our evaluation and the financial position of funders. The project funders are:

- Poppyscotland;
- Maritime Charities Funding Group;
- ABF The Soldiers' Charity;
- The Robertson Trust;
- Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund;
- Turn2us; and
- Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) Forces Help.

- 1.4 ASAP adopted a broad target group including current and past members of the armed forces and their dependents. The target group - collectively referred to as the 'armed forces community' - was specifically defined as:

those who are currently serving in the Armed Forces and their dependants, those who have served in the Armed Forces and their dependants both Regular or Reserve, and members of the Merchant Navy who served in a commercial vessel in support of legally defined UK military operations.

- 1.5 The project is delivered by CAS on behalf of Poppyscotland and the project funders – a Service Level Agreement is in place between CAS and Poppyscotland. As described above, ASAP has adopted a dual approach to deliver services to the armed forces community. One element of the service has been face-to-face advice provided in Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) supported by the second element of advice provided via a national telephone helpline operated by Citizens Advice Direct (CAD). In-person advice has been developed in five pilot areas covering the following CABx:

- Fife and Dundee;
- Inverness, Nairn and Moray;
- Lanarkshire,
- Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde; and
- Stirling.

- 1.6 A Service Level Agreement is in place between the lead CAB in each area and CAS. Each area was allocated equal funding of £28,500 per year.

- 1.7 An ASAP pilot was originally planned for Glasgow. However, the concurrent development of Glasgow's Helping Heroes service by Glasgow City Council and SSAFA Forces Help, resulted in an alternative ASAP pilot area being identified.

- 1.8 The ASAP plan estimated that the project would support 8,250 individuals over the three year lifetime of the project. This was based on a projected annual average caseload of:

- 150 clients in each of the five regions (750 per year in total); and
- 2,000 enquiries to the telephone helpline each year.

Evaluation methods

1.9 This evaluation has involved:

- a review of relevant documents and data relating to the project including the Service Level Agreements, the project plan, quarterly monitoring reports and marketing material;
- a survey completed by 47 ASAP service users;
- a review of the Benefits and Money Advice Service, an armed forces advice project in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and
- in-depth discussions with 11 stakeholders (see Appendix 1).

Report Structure

1.10 This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 focuses on project delivery;
- Chapter 3 focuses on project impact; and
- Chapter 4 draws together conclusions and recommendations.

2 Project Delivery

- 2.1 This chapter summarises the delivery of the Armed Services Advice Project. We highlight differences in the approach adopted across the five pilot areas, discuss services users, their support issues, and awareness of the project, consider CAS' role, and review the implementation of the telephone helpline. We also briefly consider the support available to members of the armed forces community in areas not participating in the ASAP pilot.

Delivery

- 2.2 One of the defining features of the CAB network is that each Bureau is an autonomous organisation with a local Board, management, services, and terms and conditions that reflect local circumstances. This autonomy has been evident with the delivery of ASAP which has varied across the five areas in terms of the number of Regional Support Officers (RSO) employed, the hours they work, the Bureaux covered and the respective roles of RSOs and other CAB advisors. These issues are discussed below.

RSO numbers, hours and Bureaux covered

- 2.3 There are currently six RSOs delivering face-to-face advice in the five pilot areas. In four of the five areas, a single RSO covers the whole operating area with the exception being the Fife and Dundee pilot which has separate RSOs for each area. One RSO currently delivers ASAP in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire although there were previously two RSOs doing so.
- 2.4 RSO hours vary from 35 hours in Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire to 21 in Fife and Dundee (split 14 for the Fife RSO and 7 for the Dundee RSO).
- 2.5 The number of CABx covered by the RSOs also varies significantly. Stirling is the only ASAP area containing a single Bureau, the other areas contain more than one Bureau with Lanarkshire covering the most (nine). Although Fife is covered by only one Bureau – Citizens Advice and Rights Fife (CARF) – services including ASAP are delivered from a number of centres across Fife.

Table 2.1: RSO numbers, hours and Bureaux covered

Region	RSOs	RSO hours	Number of Bureaux covered
Fife & Dundee	2 part-time RSOs 1 in Fife and 1 in Dundee	21 14 in Fife and 7 in Dundee	2 Dundee and Fife although ASAP has been delivered from many venues in Fife: Cowdenbeath, Cupar, Dunfermline, 3 venues in Glenrothes, Kirkcaldy, Levenmouth and St Andrews. The CARF call centre has also provided ASAP support.
Lanarkshire	1 full-time	35	9 Airdrie, Bellshill, Clydesdale, Coatbridge, Cumbernauld, East Kilbride, Hamilton, Motherwell, and Rutherglen
Renfrewshire	1 full-time Previously 1 part-time in Renfrewshire and 1 part-time in East Renfrewshire	35	2 East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire. In addition outreach services are being developed in Inverclyde.
Inverness, Moray & Nairn	1 part-time	24	3 Inverness, Moray and Nairn.
Stirling	1 part-time	28	1

- 2.6 We are also aware that RSO salaries and expenses reflect local terms and conditions at each CAB and national or standard ASAP terms and conditions are not in operation. We understand from CAS that similar local variations exist in other specialised CAS projects such as the Independent Advice and Support Service (IASS) and that the ASAP situation is not unusual.

RSO role

- 2.7 In all areas, the RSO's role has involved:

- internal and external awareness raising;
- marketing;

- establishing links with local referral agencies;
 - delivering advice to the armed forces community; and
 - monitoring and reporting on service delivery.
- 2.8 The majority of the ASAP areas – Fife and Dundee, Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, and Inverness – have adopted a broadly similar model where generalist CAB advisors tend to see members of the armed forces community first and deal with their cases wherever possible; more complex cases are referred to RSOs. When the RSO is in a Bureau when a client is identified as a member of the armed forces community the RSO may take the case if they are available or would in most cases, at least introduce themselves to the client. This approach has allowed the RSOs in these areas to concentrate on more complex cases and these clients seen on an appointment basis. In these areas the managers, RSOs and training staff have endeavoured to build awareness and understanding of the ASAP project with generalist advisors – this has involved the RSOs providing information on the project to advisors at staff meetings, distributing information to advisors and contributing to new advisors’ training.
- 2.9 The main drivers in implementing this generalist CAB advisor-led approach have been the ability to provide immediate support to ASAP clients and the need to cover a number of bureaux/delivery points some of which are some distance apart particularly in Inverness, Moray and Nairn, and Lanarkshire. These drivers make this **a very practical and efficient approach, in our opinion.**
- 2.10 We note that the RSO in Lanarkshire originally had set days for the nine CABx over a three week rolling period to ensure coverage of the CABx and the delivery of an equitable service. As the RSO has built good relationships with the CABx managers **the Lanarkshire service has evolved into a flexible demand-led arrangement** where the RSO delivers advice where and when required. The fact that the Lanarkshire service has been successfully implemented is particularly noteworthy as nine separate Bureaux have been involved which has meant the RSO has had to build awareness, relationships with the managers and advisors, and develop referrals in each Bureau. **RSOs operating across CABx boundaries should seek to replicate the flexibility of the Lanarkshire model rather than being tied to specific days in specific locations when demand does not merit it.**
- 2.11 **The approach in Stirling is different.** In Stirling, the RSO tends to see all cases where the client is identified as a member of the armed forces community. If the RSO is available when a client visits Stirling CAB they will be seen at that time or an appointment will be made with the RSO if that is not possible. **Stirling RSO and CAB chief executive officer felt that the approach worked in Stirling which is the only ASAP area containing a single Bureau. The approach has the advantage of providing clients with a continuity of service** provided by the RSO throughout and this can be important for some clients; it also has the advantage that **all advice is provided by the armed forces community specialist.**

- 2.12 **RSOs in all areas undertake home visits and this is a noteworthy element of the project.** Although these visits are time consuming they allow the project to reach clients with mental or physical health problems that prevent them travelling to the Bureaux.
- 2.13 It is important to note that **in all areas ASAP clients have access to all levels of support.** The Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers¹ classifies the types of services offered by advice providers into three categories:
- Type I: active information, signposting and explanation – this involves providing information either orally or in writing, signposting the user to other available resources or services and the explanation of technical terms or clarifying an official document such as a tenancy agreement or a possession order.
 - Type II: casework – this includes interviewing a client to identify the problem and other relevant issues before helping the client by, for example:
 - setting out an individual’s options or courses of action;
 - encouraging the user to take action on their own behalf;
 - providing practical aid with letters or forms;
 - negotiating with third parties on the user’s behalf;
 - introducing the user by referral to another source of help; and
 - supporting users in making their own case.
 - Type III: advocacy, representation and mediation at tribunal or court action level – this involves a range of further actions arising from type II casework including advocacy and representation (where an adviser may prepare a case for the user and represent or speak on their behalf at a tribunal or court) and mediation (where an adviser may act on the user’s behalf to mediate between the user and a third party. Type III work includes some activities that can only be undertaken by lawyers.
- 2.14 Our consultation with the RSOs established that all are capable of dealing with all types of cases but, as far as we are aware, **only the Stirling RSO has worked directly with clients on Type III work to date. In the other areas, although RSOs could in theory support Type III work, the set-up of the CABx is such that these cases are led by specialists within the Bureaux with the RSO taking a supporting role.** Interestingly, the opposite situation exists in Stirling where non-armed forces community clients cannot access Type III support as the Bureau does not provide this service – due to funding arrangements – whereas, as highlighted above, the Stirling

¹ Scottish Government (2009), *Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers: A Quality Assurance Framework*, Scottish Government, Edinburgh

RSO has directly supported a small number of ASAP clients with appeals and Tribunal work.

- 2.15 In some ASAP areas, **complex cases are also passed to specialist advisors within the CAB**, for example for complex cases related to money advice.
- 2.16 **Lanarkshire's approach is worthy of further comment as a volunteer is currently being trained to assist with ASAP.** CABx use trained volunteers extensively to deliver advice at a ratio of approximately one paid advisor to four volunteer advisors. When the Lanarkshire volunteer is fully trained they will be able to increase the specialist advice available to the local armed forces community. **We raise the possibility that ASAP's reach and impact could be expanded by the adoption of the CABx's standard delivery approach of utilising volunteers** – an approach that is being developed in Lanarkshire. We have reviewed CAB volunteer training for other studies and are aware of how thorough it is; we are also aware that CAS audits and accreditation to the National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (where applicable) ensures that advice is quality assured. If this model was applied, even partly, it has the potential to significantly increase the number of advisors, access points and impact of ASAP. Our preliminary discussions with the CABx involved in this project about the use of volunteers were generally favourable.

ASAP helpline

- 2.17 The CAD-operated helpline provides national access to ASAP support between 9am and 5pm from Monday to Friday. It is staffed by a specialist ASAP advisor between 10am and 2pm each day, and outwith these hours, the helpline service is covered by other CAD staff.
- 2.18 The original concept was that the helpline would take calls from the armed forces community and signpost callers to their nearest RSO, ASAP champions in other CABx across the country or their local CAB – the helpline was intended as the primary route in to the RSOs. In reality, the helpline advisor has signposted some clients as planned (and this is evidenced in the referral figures) and has also dealt directly with cases where the client has been happy to receive telephone support or does not want to be signposted on to someone else, where cases have not required a face-to-face service or where the client cannot access one of the RSOs. **While undertaking casework was not originally envisaged it has proven to be an effective service that clients have welcomed and should be continued, in our opinion. However, we recommend that the specific role of the telephone advisor should be clarified by CAS.**
- 2.19 We are aware that CAD statistics highlight the areas where calls are made from. **CAD caller information may be useful in the roll out of ASAP in identifying possible locations for future RSOs.** The CAD advisor highlighted a number of calls from Perth & Kinross, Aberdeen, Scottish Borders and Falkirk.

ASAP service users

- 2.20 **CAS estimates that 1,100 individual clients have been supported by ASAP over the first 18 months of the project.**
- 2.21 Not all CABx are able to count individual clients separately as some count clients once in each quarter – a case that runs over more than one quarter would therefore be double counted. A definitive breakdown of ASAP clients per CAB is not therefore possible unfortunately. We **recommend that the recording of client information is reviewed by CAS and improved if at all possible.** Data supplied by CABx under these circumstances shows that 1,408 clients were counted across the six quarters during the first 18 months of the project. A breakdown of these figures is shown below.

Table 2.2: ASAP service users

Region	Yr 1 Q1	Yr 1 Q2	Yr 1 Q3	Yr1 Q4	Yr 2 Q1	Yr 2 Q2	Total clients by adding 6 quarters
Lanarkshire	19	35	67	66	85	64	336
CAD	31	43	71	73	37	66	321
Fife & Dundee	20	29	71	69	55	55	299
Renfrewshire	10	31	27	28	28	37	161
Inverness, Moray & Nairn	3	9	20	31	35	49	147
Stirling	20	24	23	27	25	25	144
Total	103	171	279	294	265	296	1,408

- 2.22 The Project Plan indicated that CAD would support 2,000 enquiries per year which would equate to 3,000 enquiries over the first 18 months of the project. The above statistics show that the CAD helpline has supported 321 clients over the first year 18 months which is only 11% of the projected caseload. We highlight however that the CAD target was the best estimate made at the outset of the study based on the maximum capacity of calls that the service could theoretically deal with. **We are not therefore overly critical of the helpline service in terms of performance against its target. We do however recommend that the helpline is regularly reviewed by CAS and that concerted effort is made to significantly increase calls.** We also highlight throughout this report that the helpline has contributed to the overall success of the project.
- 2.23 We understand that the number of calls has increased recently and it is hoped this trend continues. Our stakeholder discussions suggest that the relatively low use of the helpline compared to its target is due to **low awareness among the armed forces community rather than a reluctance to use it.** It is possible that some veterans do not know whether the 0845 number involves a cost, have no phone or credit on their mobile, are not willing to call or preferred face-to-face support. However, stakeholders felt that most members of the armed forces community

probably did not know about the helpline. We therefore **recommend that awareness of the helpline is raised.**

- 2.24 The recent addition of an option to e-mail requests for assistance to CAD is welcomed. Uptake has been slow but it is another option and has no real additional cost as the e-mails are received by the CAD advisor.
- 2.25 The number of face-to-face clients supported across these six quarters ranges from 336 throughout Lanarkshire to 144 in Stirling. The project Plan indicated that each area would support 150 clients per year which equates to 225 over the 18 months covered by the above figures. Comparison against this target shows that Lanarkshire and Fife/Dundee have exceeded the target while Renfrewshire, Inverness, Moray & Nairn and Stirling have not. The following points are however relevant to the debate about progress against targets:
- The targets were best estimates based on the projected level of demand at the outset.
 - As with most projects, there was a period early on in ASAP where the project was still being established and this has impacted on the figures to date – particularly in Renfrewshire and Inverness, Moray and Nairn.
 - The population covered by the ASAP areas varies significantly from 637,250 in Lanarkshire to 88,740 in Stirling.
 - Service delivery also varies across the areas, as discussed above.
- 2.26 Variation in the population covered and service delivery model implemented are particularly important to the debate about the possible roll out of the project and we consider these issues in further detail.
- 2.27 Table 2.3 shows the variation in ASAP clients taking population into account across the pilot areas using information supplied by CAS. The table shows marked variation from 10.8 ASAP clients per 10,000 population per annum in Stirling to 3.2 ASAP clients per 10,000 population per annum in Renfrewshire. The average across the five pilot areas was 4.0 ASAP clients per 10,000 population per annum.

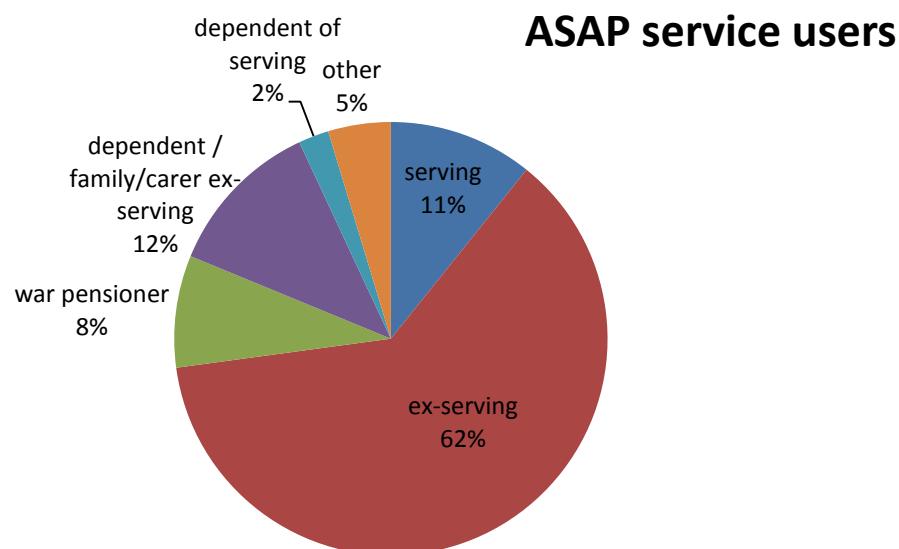
Table 2.3: ASAP service users per 10,000 population

Region	Total clients by adding 6 quarters	Total estimated clients per annum	Population	Estimated ASAP clients per 10,000 population per annum
Lanarkshire	336	224	637,250	3.5
Fife & Dundee	299	199	506,850	3.9
Renfrewshire	161	107	259,150	4.1
Inverness, Moray & Nairn	147	98	308,150	3.2
Stirling	144	96	88,740	10.8
Total	1,087	725	1,800,140	4.0

- 2.28 The above figures are significant to the debate on the relative effectiveness of the different approaches and the possible roll out of the project as it shows that **Stirling has been very effective in engaging members of the local armed forces community**. Stirling does not stand out in terms of the total number of clients with the second lowest total. It is also noteworthy that the other areas are relatively close in terms of the clients per 10,000 population per annum figure. In terms of total number of clients ranging from 3.2 to 4.1. We are not suggesting that these figures prove that the Stirling model is superior to the model broadly adopted elsewhere but we do believe that there are lessons to be learnt from Stirling in effectively engaging the local armed forces community.
- 2.29 **Following a relatively quiet start, ASAP has averaged around 280 clients per quarter (face-to-face and helpline) and we can assume that this is the level of demand for the service given the population, geography of the areas covered, service delivery approaches and the promotion undertaken. This information on client number per quarter may be useful in setting realistic targets in the future.**
- 2.30 Information from CAS shows that **the majority of service users have been veterans with smaller numbers of dependents and current service personnel**. In total 7 out of 10 ASAP clients have been veterans (including war pensioners), approximately 1 in 10 have been dependents/family/carers of veterans, with a similar proportion being serving armed forces personnel and only 2% being dependents of serving personnel. These are very similar figures to the Benefits and Money Advice Service - the English, Welsh and Northern Irish armed forces advice project – where 9% were ex-armed forces or dependents².

² www.citizensadvice.org.uk/english_cab_ben_mon_v6.pdf

Figure 2.1: ASAP Service Users



- 2.31 Our discussions with the ASAP CABx highlighted some barriers in gaining access to serving personnel. Although most of the ASAP CABx established links with local military which led to a presence on military bases the process has not been easy. Our sense is that **high-level negotiations would be necessary for ASAP to gain more universal access to military bases and serving personnel**. The potential positive impacts that could result would make these negotiations worthwhile, in our opinion.

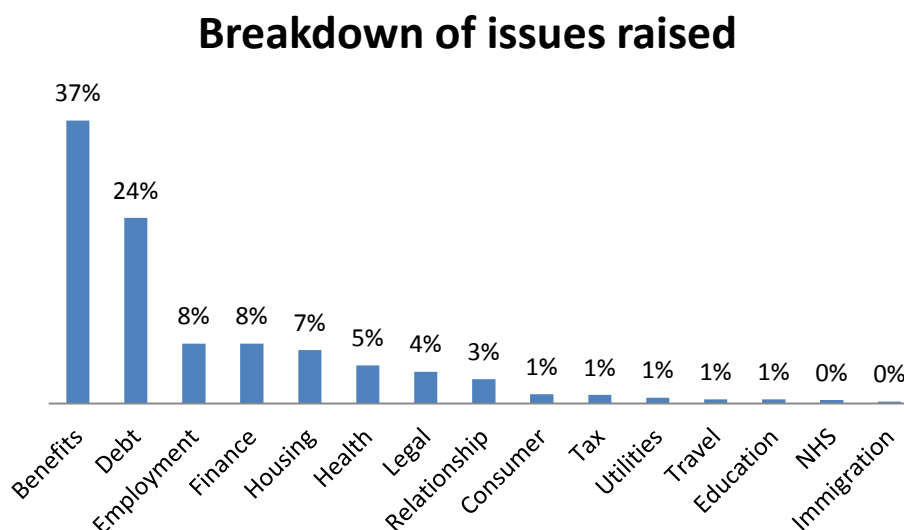
Awareness

- 2.32 CAS statistics are incomplete on referrals in and out of ASAP as referring organisations are recorded but self-referrals are not. We **recommend that the recording of referral information is reviewed by CAS and improved if at all possible**. Although limited, the statistics show that veterans' organisations are the main source of referrals (36% - mostly SSAFA and VWS) and that 19% of referrals to the RSOs came via the helpline.
- 2.33 The statistics also show that only 2% of referrals come from statutory organisations and we identify this as a potential area for improvement. We therefore **recommend that CAS seeks to build awareness among statutory organisation such as the NHS and local authorities and develops much stronger referral links with them**.
- 2.34 Our snapshot of survey respondents reported that the most common way they found out about the project was word of mouth and from staff at the CABx. Approximately a third of ASAP clients cited word of mouth and the CAB as the place they first heard about the service.

Support issues

- 2.35 **ASAP has dealt with a very wide range of issues.** Information collated by CAS shows that the main issues have been advice and support on **benefits** (37%) and **debt** (24%). The following figure demonstrates the breadth of issues covered by ASAP.

Figure 2.2: Issues raised



- 2.36 Our discussions with the ASAP advisors – RSOs and the CAD advisor – established the **type of issues faced by ASAP clients are not generally speaking different from non-ASAP clients**. While there are some specific armed forces community issues, such as war pensions and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – discussed in more detail below - the *issues* are not markedly different from mainstream CAB work. However, our discussions and CAS data have established that **the complexity of ASAP cases is different from non-ASAP clients**.
- 2.37 CAS data shows that ASAP clients have been assisted with 3.8 issues per client compared to an average of 2.1 for non-ASAP clients. Our discussions with ASAP advisors confirmed this and highlighted just how complex some of the ASAP cases can be. A recurring theme in our consultation was the fact that ASAP clients may present with one or two issues but other issues tend to come out during the course of their contact with the RSO. One of the main reasons for the increase in issues over time was the feeling that **ASAP clients need to build up trust before they open up to RSOs**. The CAD helpline has dealt with an average of 1.3 issues per client demonstrating how, until recently, most cases were relatively straightforward or were signposted to RSOs.
- 2.38 Although mental health issues do arise with non-ASAP CAB clients, **the number of mental health cases and added complexity of dealing with PTSD is a distinguishing**

feature of ASAP. The RSOs reported that they have had to develop their knowledge and understanding of PTSD as the project has progressed. CAS has assisted in the process, for example, by arranging an information session for the RSOs with Combat Stress; the ASAP advisors reported that they have added to their knowledge with their own research. The RSOs generally felt there had been a significant learning curve and **we recommend that any roll out of ASAP includes induction training and ongoing support on PTSD and dealing with clients with the condition.**

- 2.39 These mental health issues have meant that **some ASAP clients can be difficult to engage.** The ASAP advisors have experienced clients who put up barriers, at least to start with, and reported that some can be rude or aggressive at times which the advisors felt tends to be borne out of their experiences and frustration in dealing with service providers.
- 2.40 It was also noteworthy that the ASAP advisors reported that some ASAP clients can be more talkative and even 'needy' as they have limited social interaction and they welcome the opportunity to talk about their issues to someone who will listen to them.
- 2.41 ASAP appears to differ from the Benefits and Money Advice Service - the English, Welsh and Northern Irish armed forces advice project - which appears to focus more specifically on financial matters. The Benefits and Money Advice Service aims to ensure all benefits to which the client is entitled are being claimed and provide advice on options available to deal with different types of debt. Support on other issues appears to be more limited than ASAP with non-financial issues referred to other support or to online information on housing and healthcare for the armed forces community. In 2007/08, 46% of issues recorded by the Benefits and Money Advice Service related to debt and 39% related to benefits³. This compares to 24% and 37% respectively for the first 18 months of **ASAP which appears therefore to be a more holistic service.**

Citizens Advice Scotland's role

- 2.42 CAS' role was outlined as:
- marketing and promotion;
 - providing information to all bureaux about the advice needs of veterans;
 - providing training support for all bureaux through e-learning;
 - providing a training programme for all bureaux acting as regional outreach posts;

³ www.citizensadvice.org.uk/english_cab_ben_mon_v6.pdf

- project co-ordination; and
 - reporting to project funders.
- 2.43 An ASAP co-ordinator has been in post since May 2010. The original proposal was that the co-ordinator's hours would reduce over time from 21 hours in year one, to seven in year two and to zero in year three as the project established itself. In practice the co-ordinator started on 21 hours but the demands of the role meant the hours reduced by less than planned to 14 in year two and are likely to increase to 26 in year three.
- 2.44 The co-ordinator's main role has been as a link between Poppyscotland and the CABx and **our discussions with all relevant parties has established that they value the input of the co-ordinator very highly and believe the project would not function as effectively without it.**
- 2.45 The internal role has included co-ordinating networking and training days for the RSOs, part of which involved a training needs analysis and developing the impressive e-learning tool⁴ (in conjunction with CAS training colleagues and Poppyscotland). This tool provides very useful information on veterans and their issues and has been distributed to CABx and external stakeholders – CAS data shows that it has been 'viewed' by 461 unique users from June 2011 to January 2012 which we regard as a satisfactory output given the level of promotion. **We recommend that CAS increase the promotion of the e-learning tool particularly to external stakeholders who represent a relatively untapped source of referrals.**
- 2.46 The role also involves sourcing and disseminating relevant information on the armed forces community to the RSOs, and collating the quarterly stats for reporting to Poppyscotland and the funders – both of which were welcomed by the ASAP advisors.
- 2.47 Marketing and promotion have also been a key part of the job which has resulted in a host of material including a TV advert, a website, a leaflet and posters. The RSOs have also undertaken significant marketing locally.
- 2.48 The co-ordinator has had a very important role in liaising with other stakeholders such as the Veterans Welfare Service (VWS) which provides "support that will enable the seamless transition from Service to Civilian life, assist bereaved families or respond to key life events that present welfare needs". **A protocol was agreed with VWS outlining the relative responsibilities of the services and this was a significant achievement which was welcomed by all stakeholders.** Having a single point of contact to lead these discussions would appear to be more effective than RSOs entering into separate discussions.

⁴ www.asaplearning.co.uk

Non-RSO areas

- 2.49 The original ASAP concept was that intensive services would be provided by RSOs operating in a small number of pilot areas and outwith these areas, CABx would identify an ASAP champion. The role of the champion was to act as a focal point for the project in the local Bureaux to raise awareness of the armed forces community, the specific issues they face and the sources of support available to them. We understand from CAS that champions have been identified in seven other CABx:
- Dumfries and Galloway;
 - Edinburgh;
 - Harris;
 - Skye;
 - East Sutherland;
 - North Ayrshire; and
 - Argyll and Bute.
- 2.50 The involvement of these CABx is commended. In Edinburgh and Argyll and Bute good links between the CABx and the armed forces community have been established via outreach at Veterans First Point and Faslane naval base respectively. In Dumfries and Galloway we understand that the involvement of a Welfare Rights Officer who is ex military has aided the process.
- 2.51 **We recommend that in ASAP's year 3 and any subsequent extension of the project that further work is undertaken to establish ASAP champions in all CABx to ensure a local focal point for support to members of the armed forces community. Consideration should be given to setting targets such as 50% of CABx to have an ASAP champion by end of Year 3, 75% by end of Year 4 and 100% by the end of Year 5.**
- 2.52 CAS statistics show that CABx outwith the ASAP areas supported 209 clients who were identified as members of the armed forces community. This is undoubtedly an underestimate of the number of members of the armed forces community supported by CABx as this information is not routinely asked or recorded by CABx. **We recommend that CAS positively encourages CABx to record this information as it would be a useful tool in assessing demand for the roll out of ASAP and possible locations.**

3 Project Impact

- 3.1 In this chapter we highlight the impact of the Armed Services Advice Project in terms of client financial gain, improvements in mental health and wellbeing, and other benefits. We highlight the project's success in engaging a hard to reach client group, and achieving a high level of client satisfaction. We also consider the factors that have been important in delivering these impacts such as an understanding of the armed forces community's needs and knowledge of the support available to the community. Short case studies of ASAP clients are used to illustrate our findings.

Client financial gain

- 3.2 Information from CAS shows that **ASAP clients gained financially by £795,518 over the first 18 months of the project**. This is the result of benefits awarded, grants received and reductions in debts. CAS statistics also show that this level of financial gain far outweighs the cost of the project to the extent that **for every £1 in the cost of delivering the service a total of £2.65 has been generated for clients**.
- 3.3 While this figure is impressive enough **we are confident that it is an under-representation of the true value of client financial gain**. Some ASAP support has not yet resulted in financial gain as decisions are still pending, not all financial gain is known to the ASAP advisors (despite their efforts to gather the information, not all clients respond) and some RSOs reported that they do not include certain elements of financial gain such as SSAFA awards. It is impossible to estimate the true value of client financial gain however we are confident that it exceeds the reported value.
- 3.4 The ASAP total client financial gain figure of £795,518 relates to financial outcomes for 186 of the estimated 1,100 clients. The average client financial gain for all ASAP clients is £723. However, as described in this report, ASAP is a holistic service and a number of clients did not seek assistance with any money related issue, and if we focus on the 186 clients who had a financial outcome the average financial gain was £4,277 per client. The English, Welsh and Northern Irish armed forces advice project – Benefits and Money Advice Service - reports that £57.6 million in financial outcomes has been achieved by 18,394 people at an average client financial gain of £3,131 per client.

Improvements in mental health and wellbeing

- 3.5 ASAP's impact is far greater than can be measured in financial value alone. **ASAP advisors reported that a number of clients had benefited from improvements in their mental health and wellbeing and we highlight this as a notable outcome.**
- 3.6 As highlighted earlier some of the ASAP clients have mental health issues including PTSD which tend to co-exist with other problems including debt, relationships, housing and employment. Support from ASAP advisors can lead to improvements in mental health and wellbeing both **directly** – where the client is signposted to specialist health support including Combat Stress – and **indirectly** where ASAP clients are supported to address some of the issues such as debt and relationship problems that contribute to their stress and depression.
- 3.7 Improvements in mental health and wellbeing is a feature of ASAP that helps to distinguish it from the Benefits and Money Advice Service which appears to have a narrower focus on money advice.
- 3.8 It would however be useful, in our opinion, if ASAP could provide more robust evidence of health improvement outcomes in the future as currently the evidence is anecdotal. We **therefore recommend that RSOs consider the use of health improvement monitoring tools, such as the mental health recovery outcome star⁵, in relevant cases.**

A male veteran in his 30s from Bellshill sought advice from the Lanarkshire RSO about a housing issue. The client was very satisfied with the advice he received "because they done their very best for me as I was in real need of help at the time". As a result of ASAP support, the veteran reported that he had improved his health, addressed family/relationship issues and learned about housing issues. He also reduced his debts by about £500. He welcomed "the general way I was treated as a normal person just in need of service help and advice".

Other benefits

- 3.9 The wide range of issues that ASAP clients were supported with was highlighted in chapter 2. The impact of the wide ranging support is demonstrated by evidence from our snapshot survey such as improvements in health and relationships, and learning more about housing options and employment opportunities.

⁵ <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/star-versions>

Table 3.1: Benefits

What has happened since you first contacted ASAP? (n=47)	
Able to maximise benefits	23%
Able to reduce debt	19%
Learned about housing/accommodation options	19%
Able to manage money better	15%
Learned more about health issue	15%
Addressed family/relationship issues	13%
Improved health	11%
Able to increase income	9%
Learned about employment opportunities	6%
Learned about training/education courses	2%
Gained employment	0%
Enrolled on training/education course	0%

Engaging a hard to reach client group

- 3.10 Our survey of ASAP beneficiaries showed that the service has succeeded in engaging a hard to reach client group. **Approximately a third of respondents stated that they would not have looked for advice elsewhere and a further third said they would only have ‘possibly’ looked for advice elsewhere.** Our discussion with the ASAP advisors confirmed the survey findings that a large proportion of service users would in all probability not have sought assistance with their issues if it had not been for ASAP. This is a positive finding on the project’s ability to engage members of the armed forces community who are generally regarded as hard to reach.

A male veteran and his wife – both in their 50s - accessed advice on debt and benefits via the Citizens Advice Direct helpline and in person at Stirling CAB. They reported reducing their debts by 50%, increasing their income by £200 per month through maximised benefits and improving their health. One of the couple reported that “without ASAP I would not be where I am now” and “If it wasn’t for (the ASAP adviser’s) knowledge and advice, I don’t know where we’d be”. The couple felt that ASAP fills an important gap because it is difficult for veterans to get help: “the ASAP project is the best thing for veterans as no-one else is interested”.

- 3.11 A third of ASAP clients said they would definitely have looked elsewhere for advice. This element is what economists refer to as ‘deadweight’ – the proportion of project impact that would have occurred without the intervention. Survey respondents highlighted that the most common sources of alternative advice *would* have been the CAB, SSAFA, the local authority, financial advisor, lawyer and service personnel.

- 3.12 It is also interesting to note that **some ASAP clients had quite long-standing issues**. Although most ASAP service users had not been experiencing the issues they sought help with for any more than six months, **a third of clients had issues that they had been experiencing for more than a year** including 12% who had been experiencing the issues for more than four years.

Table 3.2: ASAP service users issues

How long did you experience the issue(s) before you went to ASAP for support? (n=33)	
6 months or less	58%
7-12 months	9%
More than 1 year, less than 2	6%
More than 2 years, less than 3	12%
More than 3 years, less than 4	3%
More than 4 years	12%

Client satisfaction

- 3.13 Feedback on both the RSO and CAD services was very positive. Overall 94% of the CAD telephone helpline service users were satisfied with the service and those that were not said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied rather than being dissatisfied. An even higher high level of satisfaction (98%) was evident for the face-to-face support delivered by the RSOs and again non-satisfaction related to neither satisfied nor dissatisfied rather than dissatisfaction.

A male veteran aged in his 40s sought advice on housing benefit and council tax rebate via the Citizens Advice Direct helpline and in person at one of the Lanarkshire CABx. Although his applications for housing benefit and council tax rebate were unsuccessful, he felt that ASAP's advice was very helpful and he learned more about housing and accommodation issues. The client appreciated the thorough advice his advisor gave him and felt the advisor "spent time going through the proper channels and went out of his way to do his best". He also commented that the advisor was "especially approachable" and he never felt rushed. The client feels that ASAP is a valuable service because "information is in short supply for armed and ex armed forces" and he welcomed being able to ask for advice over the phone because "sometimes I can't go out or sit in strange places before becoming too anxious and needing to leave".

- 3.14 Survey respondents rated various aspects of the service highly as shown below. Generally speaking calls were answered quickly, CAD staff were friendly, understood clients' needs, were able to address their needs, dealt with issue confidentially and were able to direct clients to relevant services.

Table 3.3: Client satisfaction – receiving support

What was your experience like of receiving support from the CAB office?			
	<i>I agree</i>	<i>I disagree</i>	<i>No comment</i>
My call was answered quickly (n=23)	91%	4%	4%
The staff on the telephone were friendly (n=22)	96%	0%	5%
The staff on the telephone understood my needs (n=22)	91%	0%	9%
The staff on the telephone were able to address my needs (n=22)	91%	0%	9%
My issues were dealt with confidentially (n=22)	96%	0%	5%
The staff on the telephone were able to direct me to other relevant services (n=20)	85%	0%	15%
<i>Rows may not sum to 100% due to rounding.</i>			

- 3.15 ASAP services delivered from the CABx were generally accessible and staff were friendly, understood clients' needs, were able to address their needs, dealt with issue confidentially and were able to direct clients to relevant services.

Table 3.4: Client satisfaction – accessibility

What was your experience like of receiving support from the CAB office?			
	<i>I agree</i>	<i>I disagree</i>	<i>No comment</i>
I was able to find/access the CAB easily (n=38)	97%	0%	3%
It was an easy way to access advice services (n=37)	95%	3%	3%
The staff were friendly (n=37)	97%	3%	0%
The staff understood my needs (n=37)	97%	3%	0%
The staff were able to address my issue(s) (n=35)	97%	0%	3%
My issues were dealt with confidentially (n=37)	97%	3%	0%
The staff were able to direct me to other relevant services (n=35)	89%	0%	11%
<i>Rows may not sum to 100% due to rounding.</i>			

- 3.16 Feedback from the survey suggests that ASAP's on-line presence could be improved and **we recommend that ASAP's on-line presence is reviewed.**

An understanding of the armed forces community's needs

- 3.17 A number of survey respondents commented that it was beneficial to be able to talk to people who understand the specific needs of armed forces personnel and veterans because other services do not have this understanding. Half of the survey respondents stated that they really liked the understanding, knowledge and empathy with armed forces issues. **We highlight this understanding as a key element in the project's success.**

A male veteran in his 50s from Fife, sought assistance from the RSO based at Citizens Advice and Rights Fife (CARF) initially about an employment related issue that he had been experiencing for about a year. During their discussions the RSO suggested that the veteran may be able to claim his war pension and he was duly supported to make a claim which was successful. As a result, the client has been able to increase his income by £700 per month. He commented that the RSO “understood my pension problems” and was “much more understanding of ex service needs”.

- 3.18 Based on our discussions with the ASAP CABx we have established that clients are not routinely asked whether they are a member of the armed forces community. We appreciate that some advisors are reluctant to do so as they may not see the need for it. We recommend however that **CAS positively encourage CABx to routinely ask whether clients are a member of the armed forces community in the ASAP areas and outwith these areas to enable tailored support to be provided.**

Knowledge of veterans' issues and support

- 3.19 Linked to the above, we also highlight **the knowledge that the ASAP advisors have of the support available for veterans** as one of the most important features of the project. This knowledge covers public sector organisations such as the NHS and Jobcentre Plus and the wide range of armed forces community-specific organisations that exist nationally and locally. The RSOs reported that good relationships have been built up with the external organisations including the Veterans Welfare Service, SSAFA and local Job Centre Plus offices.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

- 4.1 This report has summarised the key elements of the development of the Armed Services Advice Project and highlighted its impact.
- 4.2 The project has achieved a great deal in a relatively short space of time starting with Poppyscotland's success in securing substantial funds from a number of charitable organisations, without which the project would not have been possible. Poppyscotland is commended on the leadership shown, their desire to apply the lessons from the Veterans' Advice Service Pilot in Glasgow and the excellent relationship they have established with Citizens Advice Scotland and the project funders. The decision not to develop an ASAP pilot in Glasgow where Glasgow's Helping Heroes project is operating was appropriate and we note that excellent relationships have been established with this project at a strategic and operational level. The impact of ASAP has been extended by the decision not to develop a pilot in Glasgow.
- 4.3 CAS is commended for their role in co-ordinating the development of the local services and telephone helpline. The co-ordinator has achieved the difficult balancing act of being valued by the ASAP advisors, CABx, Poppyscotland and other stakeholders and has been an integral part of the project's success. Agreeing a protocol with VWS was a significant achievement that clarified the roles and responsibilities of VWS and ASAP. The local CABx are commended for their successful delivery of the project and the RSOs have clearly been crucial in this regard, amply supported by CAB managers, staff and volunteers. The success of the project is demonstrated by its use by over 1,110 members of the armed forces community across Scotland who have benefitted in a number of ways as described in chapter 3. ASAP allows clients from the armed forces community to be seen quickly by the CABx, it allows the RSO time to address clients often complex cases and deliver the wide ranging impacts described in this report.
- 4.4 We understand that Poppyscotland and CAS have already started discussions about the possible extension of ASAP beyond its initial three years which would include extending RSO hours and providing admin support in the existing areas and a roll out to other parts of Scotland. We welcome these developments. This evaluation has described the different approaches adopted by the CABx participating in the pilot with most adopting a broadly similar model where trained generalist advisors see clients as a part of their duties and where the clients identify themselves as members of the armed forces community these advisors support the client if possible or make an appointment with the RSO for complex cases that relate strongly to armed service issues from which point on the RSO would support them. Stirling CAB's approach has been different as the RSO has tended to deal with all clients that identify themselves as a member of the armed forces community; Stirling is unique among the ASAP pilot areas as it is the only single Bureau area. This evaluation has shown that both approaches engage the local armed forces

community, lead to positive impacts for clients, and fit with the local CAB structures. Based on the information collated during this evaluation, the more common approach in areas other than Stirling would appear to be a more cost-effective option to roll out ASAP to other parts of Scotland. If the model was replicated as it has been applied in these areas to date ASAP clients in the new areas should be able to access Type I, II and III support from well trained and knowledgeable generalist advisors, RSOs and specialist advisors. We therefore recommend this approach as the basis for the roll out of ASAP across Scotland subject to local discussion. We also recommend that ASAP clients are referred to specialist provision such as money advisors or Tribunal specialists at the participating CABx – with support from the RSO – wherever possible to avoid the RSOs becoming embroiled in a small number of cases so they can remain available to provide specialist armed forces community support.

- 4.5 We also recommend that future targets relate to the population size covered by the RSO and more generally which are informed by the experience of the pilots outlined in this report.
- 4.6 We raise the possibility that ASAP's reach and impact could be expanded by the adoption of the CAB's usual delivery approach of utilising volunteers – an approach that we have reported is currently being developed in Lanarkshire. This model has the potential to significantly increase the number of advisors, access points, clients supported and impact. We therefore recommend that CAS develop a model that involves volunteers as well as paid advisors for the ASAP roll out.
- 4.7 We recommend that the links between the ASAP advisors – the RSOs and the CAD advisor - are strengthened further with greater sharing of experience and knowledge. We acknowledge that CAS has done a good job in this regard so far however more networking and sharing of experiences would be beneficial, in our opinion. We believe an 'ASAP team' that cuts across CABx boundaries could be developed with advisors' specialisms being developed and shared across the 'team'. This could possibly be developed to the point where a specialist team was in place nationally or regionally to handle complex armed forces community cases including Tribunals.
- 4.8 In previous work for Poppyscotland on advice-related projects the relevance of advisors having direct military experience has been raised – both as a positive and a negative. We note that one of the RSOs has a military background as do two of the RSO line managers. While all the RSOs felt that in some cases such experience could provide greater understanding and empathy, none felt a lack of military experience was a hindrance to the job. In some cases RSOs felt the absence of links to the military was an advantage where clients felt let down by the military in some way. All the RSOs had previously worked with the CAB as an advisor. We therefore conclude that advisors skills and experience as advice providers is more important than a military background, as has been the case to date.

- 4.9 The holistic nature of the advice is significant and in our view should be retained in favour of the predominantly financial focus of the Benefits and Money Advice Service. ASAP's approach is, in our view, a more sustainable one as it addresses all the clients issues whereas a focus on financial matters alone does not address the underlying causes of financial issues such as substance misuse, mental health issues, relationship, employment or housing problems.
- 4.10 We conclude that ASAP would benefit in the future from greater promotion. We include within this significantly greater and targeted promotion of the national helpline and e-learning tool, and promotion and stronger links with organisations such as the NHS, local authorities and third sector organisations such as Samaritans and homeless charities. We also recommend that Poppyscotland and CAS consider how the project could be fully integrated into the formal MOD process when people are leaving the armed forces regardless of the reasons for their leaving or the rank. Clearly ASAP should continue to complement and not duplicate the Veterans Welfare Service.
- 4.11 Although the number of users of the national helpline has been significantly lower than the targets we believe it is a valuable part of the project because it gives ASAP a national presence, validity and it has provided good advice to users who may not have otherwise been assisted. We recommend that the helpline is better promoted and the role of the advisor is clarified in terms of their involvement in casework. If the helpline caseload increases the ability of the advisor to take on casework may diminish and this will need to be carefully monitored by CAS. As the number of RSOs increase it is possible that they could alleviate some of the increasing telephone caseload particularly if a regional ASAP approach is adopted.
- 4.12 In summary, we conclude that ASAP project is meeting its aim of delivering 'a national service, able to provide holistic information, advice and support services for veterans, serving personnel and their families throughout Scotland'. We recommend that the project is continued, enhanced and rolled out across.

Recommendations

- 4.13 A number of specific recommendations are made throughout this report and they are drawn together below for ease of reference.
1. RSOs operating across CABx boundaries should seek to replicate the flexibility of the Lanarkshire model rather than being tied to specific days in specific locations when demand does not merit it.
 2. Poppyscotland and CAS consider the use of CAB volunteers to expand ASAP's reach and impact.
 3. CAS clarifies the specific role of the CAD advisor, including their involvement in casework.

4. Poppyscotland and CAS use CAD caller information in the roll out of ASAP to identify possible locations for future RSOs.
5. CAS reviews the recording of client information to avoid double counting clients with cases that span more than one quarter.
6. CAS also reviews the recording of referral information in and out of ASAP.
7. Poppyscotland and CAS raise awareness of the telephone helpline with the armed forces community, and CAS regularly reviews the helpline, to significantly increase calls.
8. Poppyscotland and CAS use client numbers achieved to date and population size to set realistic targets in the future.
9. Poppyscotland and CAS consider high-level negotiations with the MOD to enable ASAP to gain more universal access to military bases and serving personnel.
10. CAS seeks to build awareness of ASAP among statutory organisation such as the NHS and local authorities and develops much stronger referral links with them.
11. CAS promotes the ASAP e-learning tool particularly to external stakeholders who represent a relatively untapped source of referrals.
12. Any roll out of ASAP includes induction training and ongoing support for advisors on PTSD and dealing with clients with mental health issues.
13. CAS undertakes further work to establish ASAP champions in all CABx to ensure a local focal point for support to members of the armed forces community. Consideration should be given to setting targets for coverage of the CABx.
14. CAS positively encourages CABx to identify and record members of the armed forces community as it would be a useful tool in assessing demand for the roll out of ASAP and possible locations, and will enable tailored support to be provided.
15. RSOs consider the use of health improvement monitoring tools, such as the mental health recovery outcome star, in relevant cases.
16. Poppyscotland and CAS review ASAP's on-line presence.
17. Poppyscotland and CAS encourage the adoption of the CAB generalist advisor-led approach with onward referral to RSOs for specialist support as the basis for the roll out of ASAP across Scotland, subject to local discussion.

18. Poppyscotland and CAS also encourage the adoption of an approach whereby ASAP clients are referred to specialist provision such as money advisors or Tribunal specialists at the participating CABx – with support from the RSO – to maximise RSO support to the armed forces community, subject to local CAB practices.
19. CAS strengthens links and networking between the ASAP advisors – the RSOs and the CAD advisor - with greater sharing of experience and knowledge, and promotion of an ‘ASAP team’.
20. Poppyscotland ensures that the holistic nature of ASAP’s advice is retained in the roll out of the project across Scotland.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder interviews

Name	Organisation
Gary Gray	Poppyscotland
Claire Williams	Citizens Advice Scotland
Nicole Pirie	Citizens Advice Direct
Ally Gemmell	Stirling District Citizens Advice Bureau
Craig Anderson	Stirling District Citizens Advice Bureau
Jacqueline Brodie	Inverness Badenoch & Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau
Paul Hayes	East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau
Donald Robertson	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife (CARF)
Andy	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife (CARF)
Richard Lord	Motherwell and Wishaw Citizens Advice Bureau
Audrey Cuthbertson	Motherwell and Wishaw Citizens Advice Bureau