

ASAP Annual Report

1 October 2020 – 30 September 2021



Key Achievements

The Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) delivers information, advice and support to members of the Armed Forces community through face to face casework in 11 regions. The service is made possible by the funding partnership, led by Poppyscotland, with whom we work closely to develop the service and ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the clients we support.

Key statistics for the period 1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

- > Advisers supported 2,046 individuals over the year and gave advice over 11,400 times. This resulted in an average of 5.6 issues per client, compared with a bureau average of 3.8 issues per client.
- > 54 % of issues raised were about benefits and 9 % concerned debts. Financial issues, including charitable grant applications, accounted for 9 % of issues raised, and housing 6 %.
- > Clients may gain financially as a result of the support they have received, for example through receiving benefits to which they are entitled, debt written off or rescheduled or charitable grants received. Client financial gain recorded over the year was £2,197,488, which amounts to £4.42 for every £1 of funding for the 2020/21 year.
- > A total of 1,507 clients benefited from a gain. Of this number, 498 gained financially, resulting with an average financial gain per client of £4,413.
- > From the start of the service on 1 July 2010 to 30 September 2021, ASAP has supported a total of 19,149 individual clients with around 105,600 pieces of advice. The client financial gain since the start of ASAP is £20.7 million.

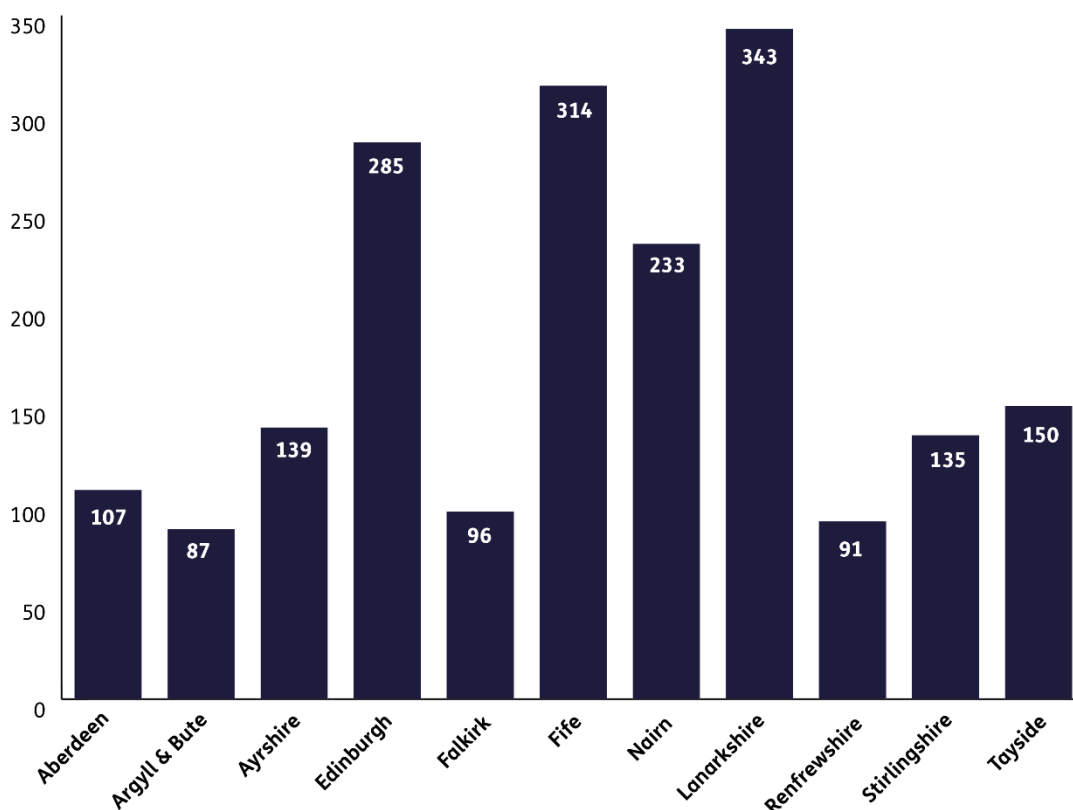


Face to face ASAP area performance

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the vast majority of the Citizens Advice network advice is being provided by telephone and email, however, around a quarter of bureaux are open for normal services. To continue to support their clients, ASAP advisers are working from home, providing support to fewer clients but with more complex queries by telephone and email.

As mentioned in the previous annual report, CAS has gradually standardised the way in which clients and issues are counted and reported to ensure statistics are comparable across all CAB services. For ASAP, this has meant a slight alteration in statistics. However, this has resulted in a more accurate representation of the work carried out by the project.

Figure 1: Individual clients supported in face to face ASAP areas over the 12-month period



Face to face ASAP area performance continued

It should be noted that the geographic areas are dissimilar in nature, covering different numbers of bureaux. The ease of access for clients to the bureau is a large factor, with a wider population spread in more rural areas making access to bureaux, outreach and home visits more challenging. Typically, ASAP client numbers are lower in more rural areas.

Table 1: Quarterly number of clients in each face to face ASAP area

Region	Oct– Dec 2020	Jan – Mar 2021	Apr – Jun 2021	Jul – Sep 2021	Total across 4 quarters
Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire	46	35	49	41	171
Argyll and Bute	39	24	31	32	126
Ayrshire	50	49	51	43	193
Edinburgh and Lothians	90	100	92	90	372
Falkirk	51	39	36	39	165
Fife	120	130	130	156	536
Inverness, Moray and Nairn	92	86	109	86	373
Lanarkshire	132	148	176	195	651
Renfrewshire	25	41	26	39	131
Stirlingshire and Clackmannanshire	58	57	63	50	228
Tayside (Dundee, Angus, Perth)	76	58	59	77	270
Total	779	767	822	848	3216

Notes:

- > The service in the Falkirk area is jointly funded by Falkirk Council and the ASAP funding partnership.
- > The figures are for the number of clients seen in each quarter, counting each client once no matter how many times they are seen in the quarter.
- > As our clients have complex support needs, advisers tend to see them for multiple appointments which can be spread out over many months. This means that a client may be seen in more than one quarter. If this is the case, they will be counted in each quarter and added into the total figure.

Helpline performance

As the ASAP is fully integrated within the CAB network, clients are recorded on their local CAB site. Where the helpline supports a client in an ASAP area, the statistics are included in the total for the region, while clients supported by the helpline outside ASAP areas are shown as separate helpline clients. From the 1st of October 2021, the helpline has ceased taking calls and is no longer monitored by a trained ASAP adviser.

Table 2: Number of helpline clients

	Oct – Dec 2020	Jan – Mar 2021	Apr – Jun 2021	Jul – Sep 2021	Total across 4 quarters
Helpline clients recorded in ASAP regions	88	99	90	62	339
Helpline clients recorded outside ASAP regions	47	47	35	29	158
Total helpline clients	135	146	125	91	497

The helpline fully supported some clients accessing this service, without the need for referrals for face to face support, demonstrating that the experienced helpline adviser was able to provide comprehensive support for complex issues.

Table 3: The ASAP Helpline supported 485 clients in the year

ASAP Area	Cases	Non-ASAP Area	Cases
Aberdeen	23	Caithness	1
Argyll & Bute	3	Central Borders	5
Ayrshire	28	DAGCAS	10
Edinburgh	69	East and Central Sutherland	2
Falkirk	12	East Dunbartonshire	4
Fife	38	Glasgow	108
Nairn	28	Lochaber	2
Lanarkshire	71	North West Aberdeenshire	4
Renfrewshire	23	Orkney	2
Stirlingshire	7	Peebles	1
Tayside	26	Ross and Cromarty	3
		Roxburgh	4
		Shetland Isles	1

		West Dunbartonshire	9
		Western Isles	1
Total	328	Total	157

Our clients

The service background of people seen varies between regions, depending on the proximity of bases and where veterans settle. Nationally, the proportion of clients has remained roughly the same as previous years. However, for the first time, we are able to show the breakdown of clients with a Royal Marines background separately to that of the Navy.

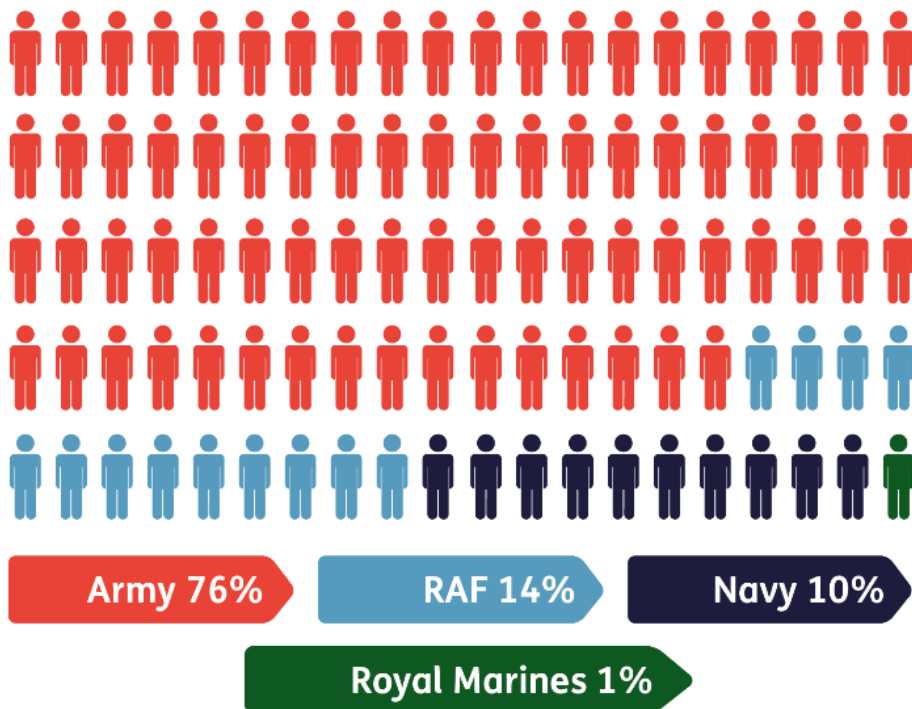
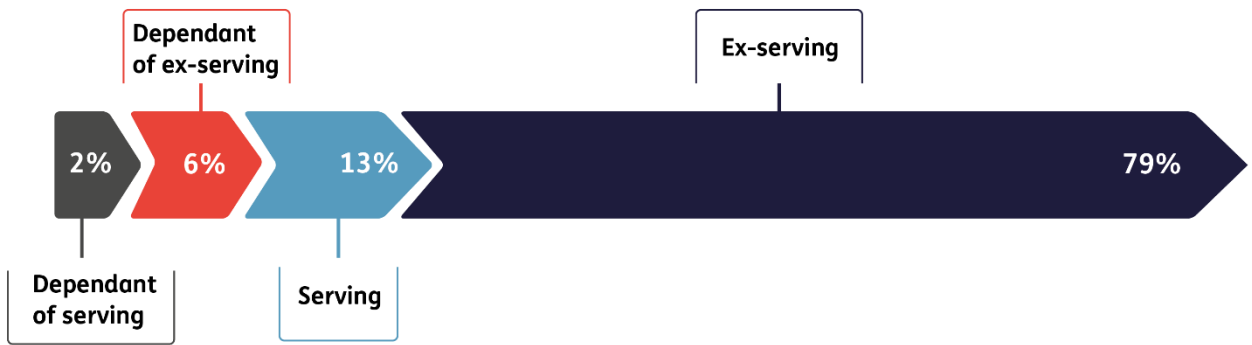


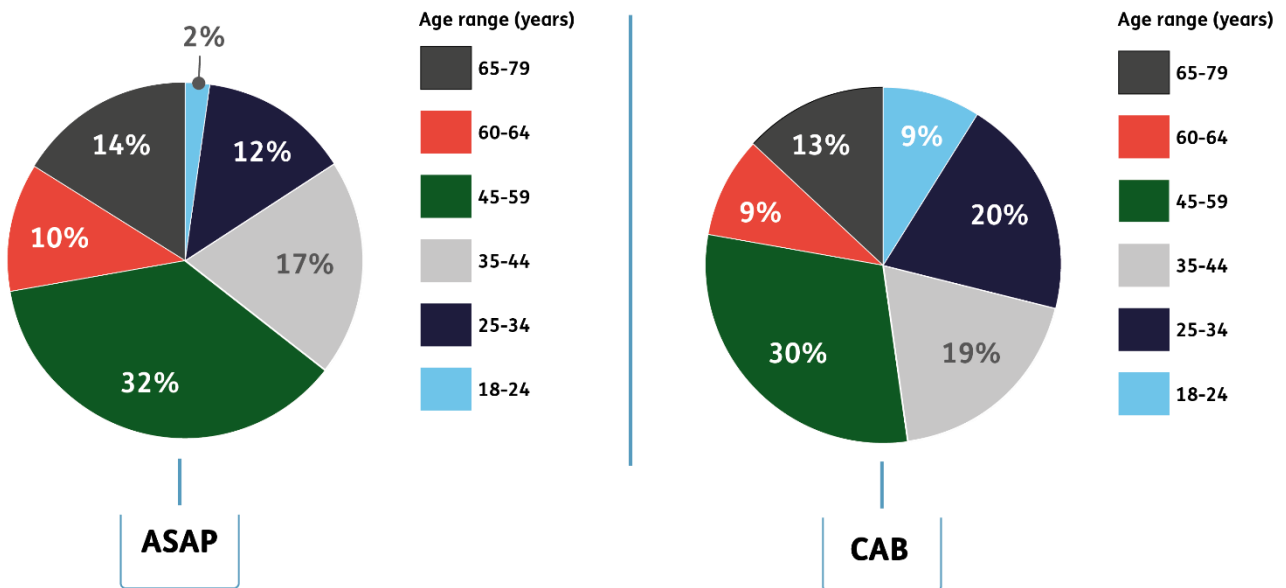
Figure 2: Service status of clients

The proportion of clients in each group is broadly similar to previous years, with ex-serving clients still the clear majority.



However, ASAP advisers still routinely help the dependants of ex or current serving members of the Armed Forces, highlighting the support available for all members of the Armed Forces community.

Our clients continued



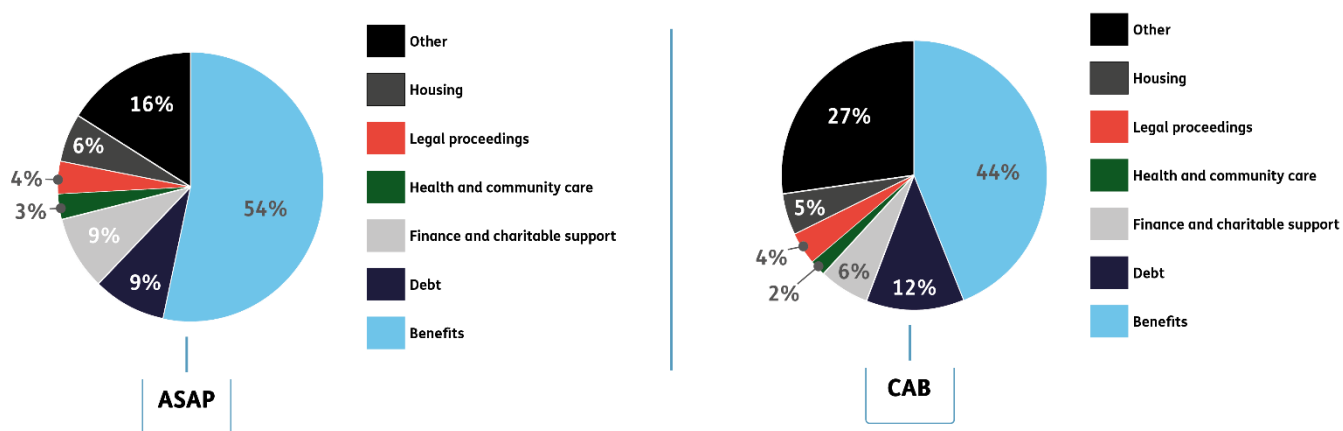
Compared with the bureau average, ASAP supports fewer younger people. However, from around age 35 upwards, the proportion of clients is quite similar between ASAP and the CAB network as a whole.

Please note that the comparison data for the CAB network is from a slightly different time period (Apr 20-Mar 21) to that of the ASAP data as the reporting periods do not align.

Advice needs of ASAP clients

The number of times an ASAP client accesses advice (5.6) is noticeably higher than the bureau average of 3.8 issues per client, indicating that ASAP continues to offer valuable support to vulnerable people who present with multiple problems. Like with previous years, feedback from advisers indicates that the complexity of cases is increasing as people present with greater struggles and need for help.

Figure 4: Advice was given 11,400 times

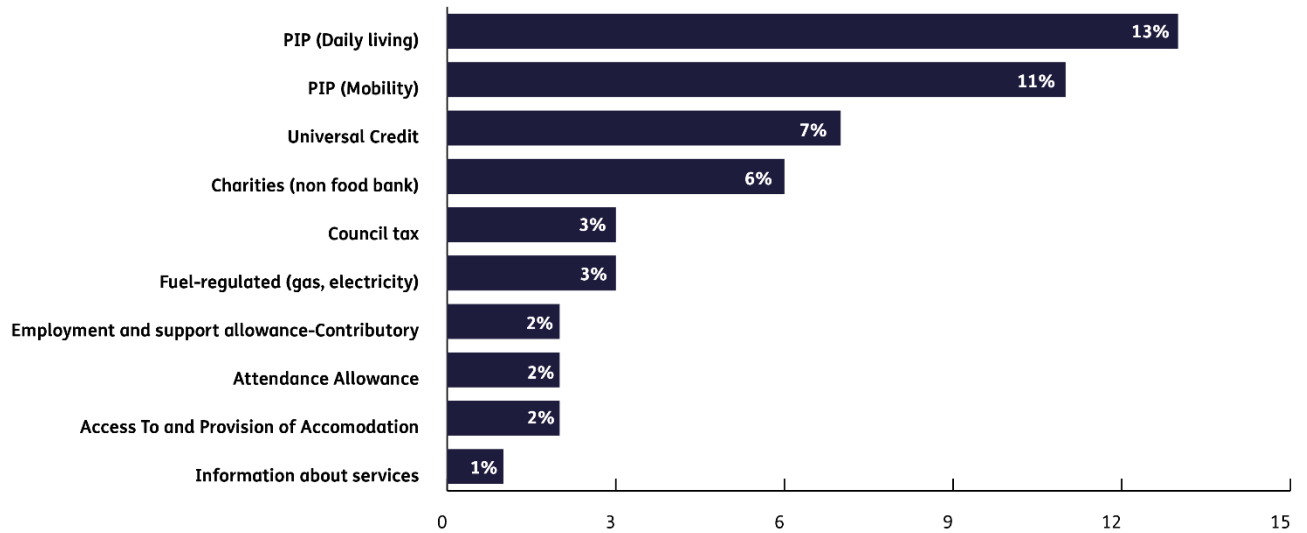


The proportion of benefits issues recorded by ASAP has increased from 51% to 54% over the year, while the proportion for debt and finance and charitable support has decreased slightly. ASAP clients raise proportionately more benefits issues than general bureau clients, giving an indication of the particular support needs of ASAP clients. Similarly, to the previous year, the higher proportion of finance and charitable support advice, compared with the bureau average, is indicative of our close working relationship with Poppyscotland and SSAFA for access to charitable support. The 'Other' category is a combination of consumer, employment, NHS concern, relationship, tax, travel and utilities.

Please note that the comparison data for the CAB network is from a slightly different time period (Apr 20-Mar 21) to that of the ASAP data as the reporting periods do not align.

Advice needs of ASAP clients continued

Figure 5: Top 10 advice issues



The proportion of benefits issues relating to PIP has stayed relatively similar to last year, as has those accessing non-food bank charities. Issues relating to information about services access are now within the top 10 advice issues, whilst general debt advice has dropped out of the list altogether.

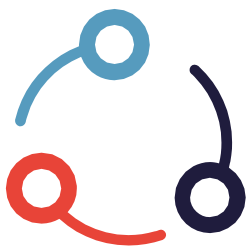
Who we've worked with

ASAP is an integral part of the support network for the Armed Forces community in Scotland. Our strength lies in our ability to work with a wide range of organisations to support our clients, whether Service related, statutory or voluntary, bridging the gap between the Service experience of our clients and the civilian world.

Over the last 18 months our work has been overshadowed by the impact of CeCOVID-19, which meant that many of the services we work with were unable to operate or had to significantly change the way they support clients. ASAP advisers have continued to work with other organisations on a remote basis where this was possible through technology, for example in joint video or phone calls to clients.

As lockdown has eased over the last few months, ASAP has been able to engage with other organisations in a more in person setting, such as, advisers setting up a stall at an RBLs biker event held in Erskine. It has been great to begin to have a more physical ASAP presence at Armed Forces events.

The data below represents some of the organisations that the ASAP service has received referrals in from.

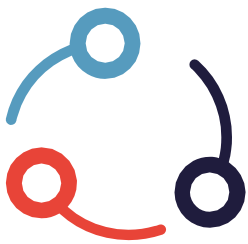


Self referral	20%	Other Service-Related Charity	4%
Other Bureaux Service	9%	SSAFA	4%
Veterans First Point	8%	Police Scotland	2%
Poppyscotland	6%	Veterans Housing	1%

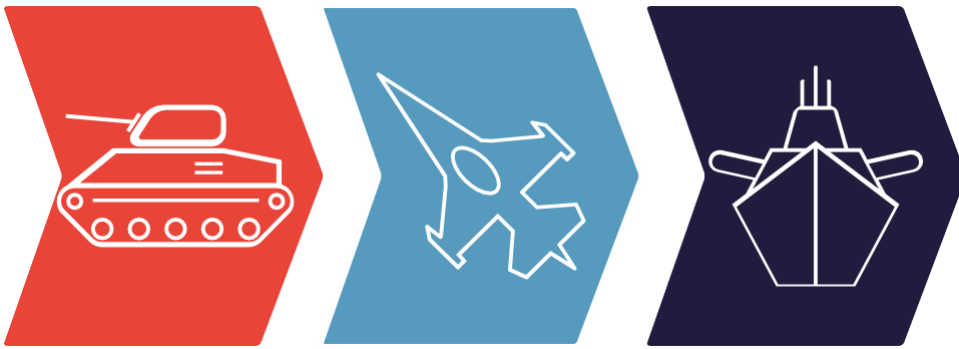
Who we've worked with continued

The bureau network provides many specialist services, for example debt, energy or housing advice, and tribunal representation. Some of this is provided directly by ASAP advisers, and in other cases, ASAP facilitates access to these services.

The data below represents some of the organisations that the ASAP service has referred clients out to for specialist help.



SSAFA	5%	Poppyscotland	2%
Other Bureaux Service	5%	Veterans First Point	2%
Veterans UK	4%	Local Council Veterans Champion	1%
Other Service-Related Charity	3%	Legion Scotland	1%
Fares 4 Free	2%	DWP	1%



The impact of COVID-19

As COVID-19 restrictions are eased, more and more ASAP advisers have been able to offer face to face appointments to clients. However, they continue to support their clients remotely, utilising phone, email and video call technology. Feedback suggests that this mix of in person and remote support is welcomed by both advisers and clients and continues to be successful.

However, the change to remote advice still presents challenges for some advisers and their clients. Some processes, such as filling out paperwork, can take a lot longer over the phone, and many clients are not particularly comfortable using technology which makes certain situations more stressful for them and advisers.

Even with more CABs now being open to face to face appointments, there is still a concern that the more vulnerable clients who would drop into the bureaux when they felt able will be excluding themselves from accessing advice remotely and may not respond to the proactive contact from advisers. Despite this, Advisers continue to offer a very high standard of service to clients.



**UNFORGOTTEN
FORCES**
Supporting Scotland's
Older Veterans

Unforgotten Forces

ASAP has been part of the Unforgotten Forces Consortium for the entire length of the project, working closely with partners including the Defence Medical Welfare Service and Age Scotland to support mutual clients. ASAP provides support for older veterans across the regions, with outreach in local hospitals and centres for older people.

Since 1 October 2020, ASAP has been an unfunded partner of the consortium, however, advisers continue to provide a valuable service to clients aged 60 or over.

Training our advisers

ASAP advisers are dealing with a particularly vulnerable client group, which means that they need a specialist skill set and a detailed knowledge of matters relating to the Armed Forces, in addition to general advice skills. As was the case last year, Citizens Advice Scotland has moved to the remote provision of training courses so advisers can continue to access this.

The Citizens Advice Scotland e-modules, providing an overview of the advice needs of the Armed Forces community and the support available, are on the ASAP website www.adviceasap.org.uk.

What we've done for clients

COVID-19 travel restrictions have caused problems for many Veterans:

Client is an elderly visually impaired Army Veteran who had lost most of his remaining sight. Lived on his own in Stirling. His daughter, in Southampton, wanted him to come and live with her, but due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, she was unable to come up to collect him and asked if we could assist.

ASAP adviser liaised with Fares 4 Free and, to a lesser extent, Sight Veterans Scotland. Arranged for the veteran to be driven from Stirling to Southampton with his cat and a few possessions, to begin his new life.

Liaised with the local authority to clear and return the house to them. Family delighted and serves as an example of good partnership working.

Overpayments from the DWP continue to cause issues for clients:

Client is a Royal Navy Veteran and claimed new style ESA in February 2020 and, on claiming, informed DWP of his Armed Forces Pension. Client received his payment of ESA at the full amount with no deductions.

Client received a letter in February 2021 stating his ESA was ending as he had been paid for 365 days. Client should automatically have been assessed to be in the support group following his medical board findings, therefore, ESA should continue to be paid whilst client has Limited Capability for Work Related Activity.

ASAP advised client to contact DWP to advise them of the overpayment. Full ESA continued to be paid at assessment phase amount. Client then received a letter in July 2021 stating ESA had been overpaid. DWP admitted that they knew about the pension, but, due to an increase in volume of claims, decided to pay the full amount rather than delay payment whilst seeking further evidence.

If this was a legacy benefit, this overpayment would be classed as official error because DWP knowingly overpaid despite client informing them of the error and would automatically be written off. However, as New Style ESA is under Welfare Reform legislation, all overpayments are recoverable no matter how they occur.

The legislation, as it stands, allows DWP to make errors either knowingly or otherwise and no matter what the client does to try to correct these, DWP can just decide when they feel fit to demand payment of any overpayment.

ASAP had to remind DWP in a mandatory reconsideration of the DWP commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant: when a service medical board decides a severely disabled person can no longer be employed in the armed forces and should be discharged, DWP should now use the service

medical board evidence to determine eligibility to 'new style' Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit, rather than conduct a face-to-face medical assessment. If they have been assessed by a MOD medical panel to be in their highest disability category, then the client should automatically be assessed to meet the limited capability for work-related activity criteria based on the MOD medical report (F Med 23), and without the need for a face-to-face assessment be placed in the support group.

Some clients receive little support when discharged from the Armed Forces:

Client was medically discharged from the Royal Marines in February 21 - currently no income and living with mum. Client has neuropraxia attributable to service. Client has no transition report from Marines and states he was only handed his papers and given no information.

Client was discharged with no support for finding housing, employment, claiming Armed Forces Compensation or benefit entitlement.

ASAP advised client to claim new style ESA, request a backdate of 3 months, and to request GP to backdate sick note to cover this period.

Client referred for Career transition partnership support and Veterans Welfare caseworker assistance for AFCS claim.

Despite reassurances from Defence Transition Service, there are still serving personnel leaving service after a medical discharge with no support to transition to civilian life.

Client stopped engaging with ASAP so unsure of the outcome of the referrals.

Some clients require help dealing with a whole range of issues from relationship problems, to claiming benefits:

Client is a Royal Air Force Veteran and was referred to ASAP by the Poppy Scotland Welfare Service. She had previously sought help, alongside her partner, from ASAP, Lanarkshire CAB, Fares4free, Poppyscotland, and V1P, with regards to help with food and utilities and then with moving costs and furniture as they were moving to a new property following a dispute with a neighbour.

Client intimated that she wanted to leave her current relationship, which she had initially tried a few years earlier. Refuge was initially secured by Women's Aid in Fife, however, she was prevented from leaving. Client was eventually able to leave the day before her referral to ASAP, and Poppyscotland helped her secure money for food and a new mobile phone to stop call harassment.

Client has a range of health conditions including: asthma, arthritis, severe anxiety, severe depression, and insomnia.

An ASAP adviser helped complete a benefit check with the client and she agreed to assistance with finding more suitable accommodation. Help was also given in claiming PIP.

The adviser believed this case to be a good example of several organisations working in partnership to help a client in need.

Advisers are able to provide comprehensive support to clients, even with the challenge of COVID-19:

Client is an Army Veteran and longstanding ASAP client.

Client is unemployed due to long term mental and physical health issues and is in receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Client called looking for assistance to complete a PIP review form. Client was anxious and stressed because he thought that he would be unable to get help due to the COVID-19 restrictions in place and was worried that he would not be able to return the form in time and, therefore, lose his benefits.

The ASAP Adviser was able, even with the COVID-19 Restrictions in place, to complete the PIP review form over the phone with the client and get it submitted on time. The Adviser kept in touch with the client while awaiting a decision on his PIP Review.

When the client eventually received notification of a Telephone PIP Review Assessment, the Adviser was able to reassure the client by going through the assessment procedure with him and reminding the client of the main points that he had submitted on his PIP review form.

The Adviser was able to provide reassurance to the client before and after the two assessment telephone interviews that the client had to undergo.

The client was notified that his PIP award would be extended to December 2023.

Promoting ASAP

The focus has been on ensuring that other agencies and clients are aware that ASAP continues to be available. The CAS ASAP Coordinator contacted national partner organisations and provides updates for other organisation's newsletters. On-line information reflects current service provision. The project coordinator has been working with national bodies such as DWP, Scottish Prison Service and Police Scotland to develop the linkages between their veterans' champions and the ASAP advisers to encourage collaborative working and signposting of clients between organisations.

Bureaux also undertook promotional activity, including social media, weekly tweets, use of CAB Facebook pages, sharing with others including local councillors and elected members; bureau adverts in local papers; ASAP advisers proactively contacting all organisations they work with; inclusion of service availability in local organisation newsletters.

October 2021

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