



**Armed Services Advice Project**



## **Annual Report**

**1 October 2016 – 30 September 2017**

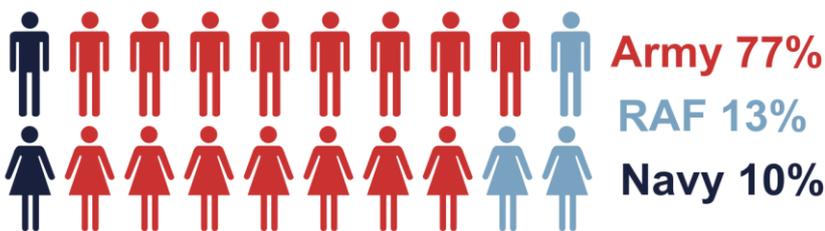


# Key Achievements

The Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) delivers information, advice and support to members of the Armed Forces Community through a Scotland wide helpline and face to face casework in ten 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 2016 - 30 September 2017

- Advisers helped 2,656 individual clients over the year, supporting them with nearly 10,000 new and repeat issues. This resulted in an average of
  - 4.2 issues per client for face to face advice in the regions,
  - 2.3 issues per client for the helpline.
- Our clients:



- The majority, 78%, are ex-serving, and a further 13% are dependents or carers of ex-serving personnel. Serving personnel account for 6%, and dependents or carers of serving the remaining 3%.
- 47% of issues raised were about benefits, 11% concerned debts. Financial issues, including charitable grant applications, accounted for 11% of issues raised, housing 9% and health 5%.
- Clients may gain financially as a result of the advice and 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 £ 1,573,542. A total of 516 clients benefited from a financial gain; the average financial gain per client was £3049.

From the start of the service on 1 July 2010 to 30 September 2017, ASAP has supported a total of 11,672 individual clients with more than 57,000 new and repeat issues. The client financial gain since the start of ASAP is £9.3 million.



**Table 1: Number of clients in each region**

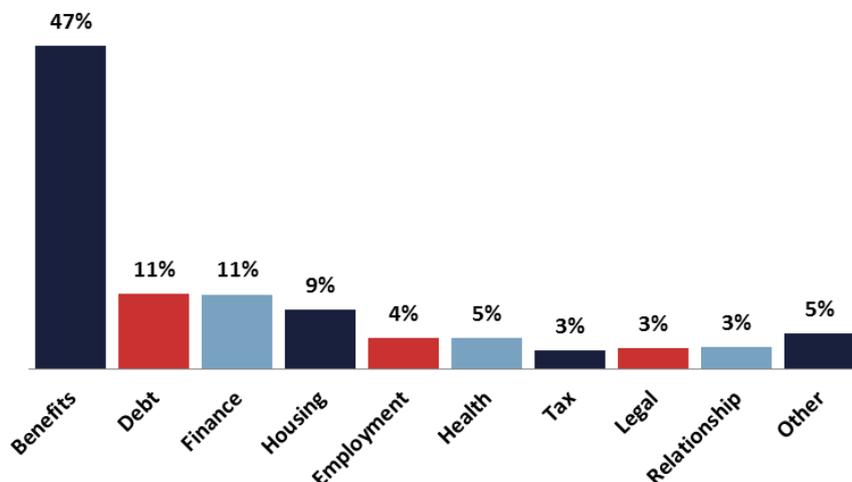
<b>Region</b>	<b>October – December 2016</b>	<b>January – March 2017</b>	<b>April – June 2017</b>	<b>July – September 2017</b>
Citizens Advice Direct National Helpline	129	179	141	172
Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire	54	70	58	50
Argyll and Bute	37	35	40	21
Edinburgh and Lothians	84	98	94	109
Falkirk	48	56	48	44
Fife	53	61	50	95
Inverness, Moray and Nairn	93	83	93	68
Lanarkshire	118	138	144	135
North Ayrshire	2	5	7	0
Renfrewshire	73	70	84	55
Stirlingshire and Clackmannanshire	43	54	41	50
Tayside	74	94	60	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>860</b>

Notes:

- The helpline also dealt with 38 enquiries from other organisations.
- The ASAP service in the Falkirk area is jointly funded by Falkirk Council and the ASAP funding partnership.
- The service in North Ayrshire was provided by a part time volunteer, from January to August 2016. The volunteer has left the bureau, thus ending the bespoke service; the manager is happy to continue to take ASAP related enquiries in the bureau.
- The figures are for the number of people seen in each quarter, counting each person 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.

# Advice needs of ASAP clients

**Figure 1: 9,996 new and repeat issues raised by clients**

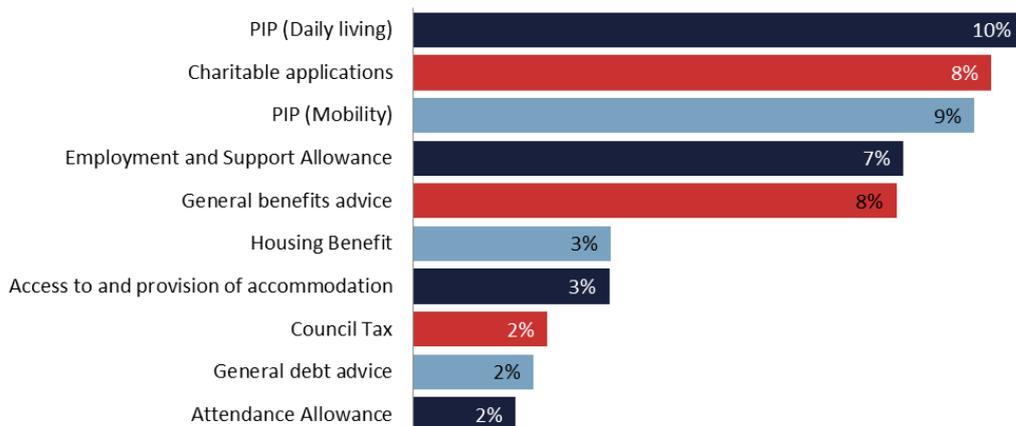


We saw more individual clients in this reporting period compared to the previous year, indicating ongoing demand for the services we offer, however the number of issues clients have been supported with has fallen. The Citizens Advice service in Scotland has undertaken an extensive exercise to review the different types of statistical data recorded in order to provide a data set which shows the value of the work done by the service. This has resulted in substantial changes being made to the categories used to record issues from April 2017, and a reduction in the number of issues recorded by bureaux. This does not mean that the work undertaken is less complex or time consuming; the change simply reflects a more refined and detailed reporting approach across the service.

These changes also limit our ability to compare data with previous years, although the ASAP figures show little change in the proportion of issues dealt with in each category. It is worth noting that Finance includes charitable applications, and given our close relationship with SSAFA, it is unsurprising that for ASAP Finance accounts for 11% of queries, significantly above the bureau norm.

**Figure 2: Top 10 advice issues**

Top ten advice issues as a percentage of all new and repeat issues raised with face to face advisers:



The top 10 advice issues for the helpline include general benefits, advice on mental health related issues, and a greater proportion of housing and homelessness related advice.

## Who we've worked with

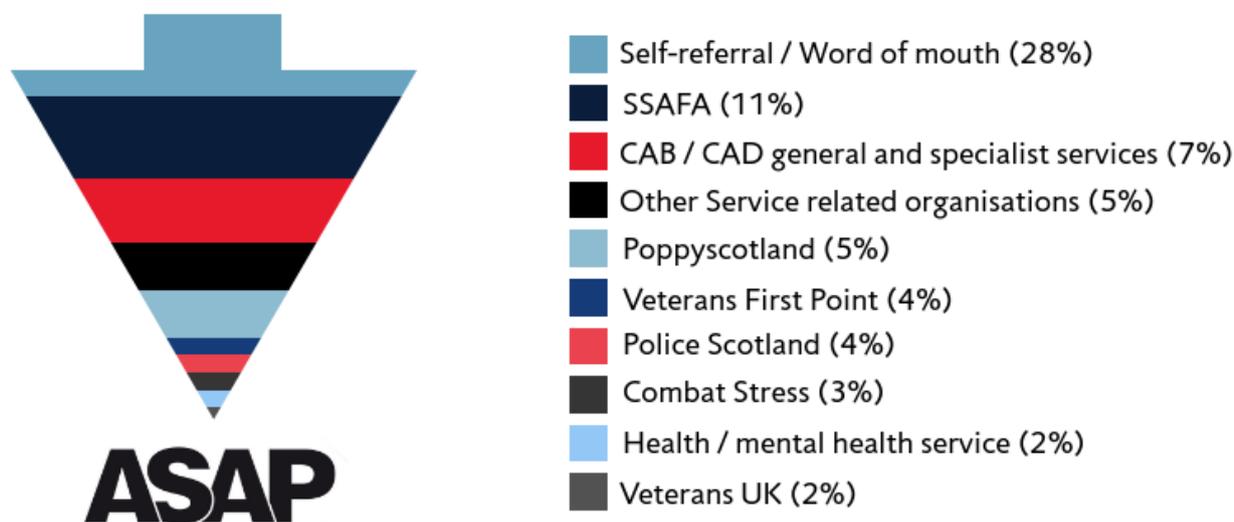
ASAP is an integral part of the support network for the Armed Forces community in Scotland. Our strength lies in our ability to work with a wide range of organisations to support our clients, whether Service related, statutory or voluntary, bridging the gap between the Service experience of our clients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

In the last year we have continued to work with a number of partner organisations at a national level, including Police Scotland to support the Veterans Referral Scheme. We are pleased to be part of the Unforgotten Forces consortium, a group of 15 organisations in receipt of MOD funding to support older veterans, and look forward to forging closer links with the organisations involved as services are rolled out. We have been involved in a DWP telekit promoting support services for veterans to Jobcentre advisers, and meetings with organisations such as SACRO and Age Scotland to ensure that we make appropriate client referrals.

At a local level our advisers work with a wide range of organisations, doing training and presentations, attending events and providing joint support for clients. These include partnership meetings with prisons and advising prisoners, Defence Medical Welfare Service, veteran's residences and Scottish War Blinded. They also raise awareness of the support available with Serving personnel, for example delivering presentations at the Personnel Recovery Centre and at local barracks.

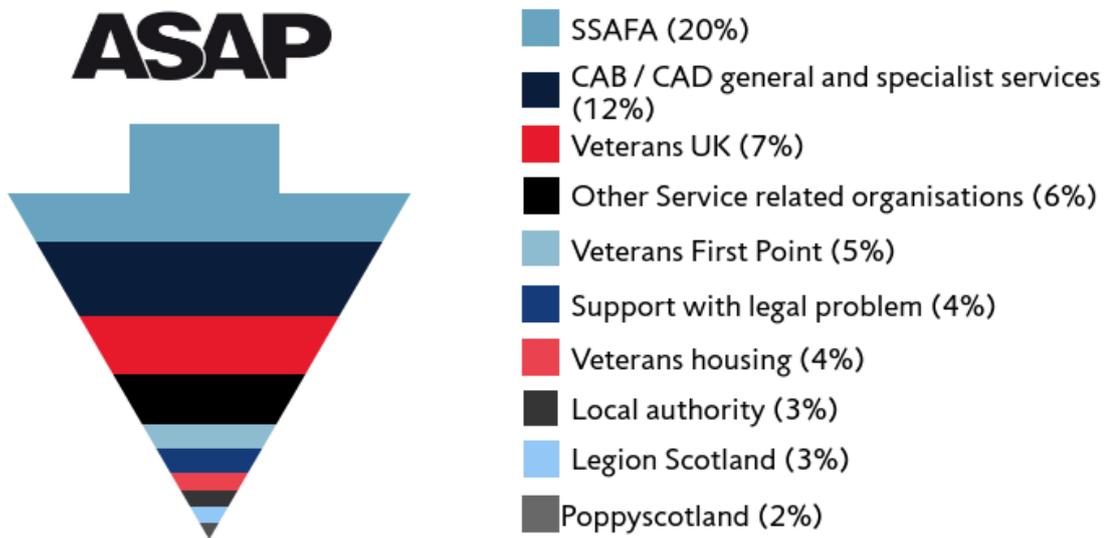
Advisers can record referrals into and out of ASAP when working with other organisations to support clients. These are not routinely recorded for every client, so the data below indicates the range of organisations we work with rather than representing the complete picture.

**Figure 3: Most common referrals into ASAP**



Bureaux offer a wide range of specialist services which we assist ASAP clients to access, including specialist benefits, debt and housing advice, and tribunal representation. Generalist and specialist advisers will also refer clients with a service connection to ASAP for support. We work with the Welfare Team at local bases, and a range of Service related organisations including SAMH Employ-Able, Fares4Free, Erskine, the Coming Home Centre and Glasgow's Helping Hero's, providing support for clients through regular outreach at some venues.

**Figure 4: Most frequent referrals out of ASAP**



As part of the support they provide for clients, ASAP advisers help them access support from other organisations. We work closely with SSAFA and Veterans UK, supporting mutual clients and carrying out joint home visits as required. As well as the organisations listed above, ASAP clients have been supported in accessing local authority services such as housing or council tax support, health services via the GP or specialist mental health organisations, and specific regional services.

## Training our advisers

ASAP advisers are dealing with a particularly vulnerable client group, which means that they need a specialist skill set in addition to detailed knowledge of matters relating to the Armed Forces. All advisers have access to the specialist bureau courses, for example in employment and welfare rights. Regular training days are arranged for advisers with speakers from a range of organisations to foster new partnerships and ensure they are aware of the services available. Advisers have also completed the Mental Health First Aid for the Armed Forces course.

## What we've done for clients

While the support we offer clients frequently involves benefits applications, there are many other ways in which we help clients improve their living situation:

An Army veteran with both physical and mental health issues was referred from SSAFA, who he had contacted for help with fuel arrears. The ASAP adviser assessed his energy situation and helped in a number of ways:

- Noted interest in the energy supplier's Priority Assistance Fund for a grant to clear the arrears once the scheme re-opened;
- Set up a direct debit payment plan for ongoing energy use, as the client's mental health issues made it difficult for him to manage the meter system he had;
- Applied for the Warm Home Discount;
- Signed the client up for the Priority Service Register of his energy supplier, to access a higher level of support from them;
- Switched the client to a cheaper tariff.

In the meantime, SSAFA sourced funding to pay off a significant part of the arrears. Once the Priority Assistance Fund re-opened an application was made to clear the remaining amount.

The client has weekly support from a community psychiatric nurse (CPN) and has limited mobility, and so is looking to move into more appropriate accommodation. The ASAP adviser assisted him to complete an application form for veterans housing, and liaised with the CPN to support the application.

The client is delighted that his energy arrears have been cleared and feels relieved that a big weight has been lifted.

ASAP advisers work with a number of organisations to support clients in need, whatever the situation:

The ASAP adviser assisted an RAF veteran's widow to arrange his funeral and wake. The funeral was notified to Legion Scotland and the RAF Association. Legion Scotland arranged a colour party, piper and bugler, while the RAF Association provided the flag and accoutrements. SSAFA sourced financial support to assist with the funeral costs. The ASAP adviser is providing ongoing support to the widow for help with her benefits claim.

Clients often come to us with one problem, but as we offer holistic advice we are able to support them with other issues which are identified as the relationship with them progresses:

A Royal Navy veteran saw a generalist bureau adviser for advice on pursuing a claim for Criminal Injuries Compensation relating to abuse he had suffered as a child. He was advised to report the matter to Police Scotland, and also directed him to Victim Support, who assisted him in submitting a claim. As he had a Service connection, he was also referred to ASAP.

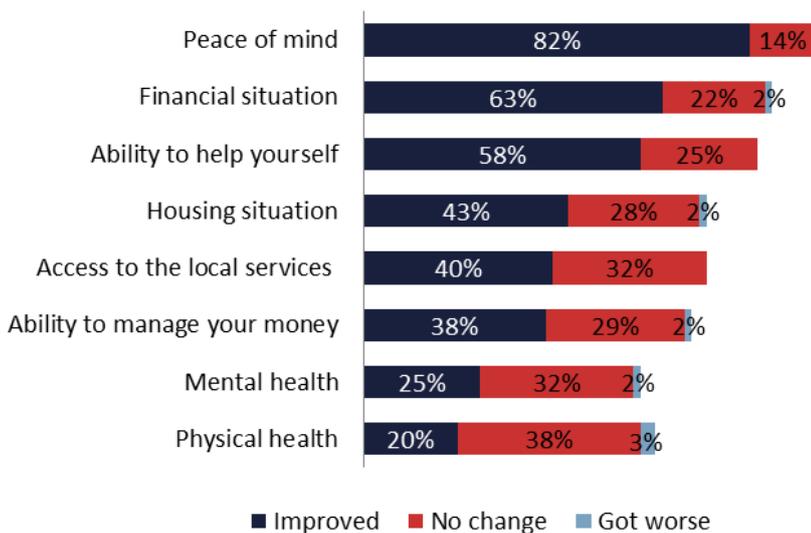
When the claim for Criminal Injuries Compensation was declined on the basis that there was insufficient evidence, the ASAP adviser assisted the client to request a reconsideration, which was successful. However, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority declined to make an award, so the ASAP adviser is assisting the client to appeal against this, via HM Courts & Tribunal Service.

Meanwhile, the ASAP adviser assisted the client to claim PIP, lodging a Mandatory Reconsideration, and referred to SSAFA who were able to source white goods and furniture for the client, and successfully applied for a small annuity from the Royal Naval Benevolent Fund.

ASAP advisers have the facility to record the type of work they undertake for clients. This is done by the ASAP helpline and some of the bureaux, however not every activity undertaken is recorded. The sample of activities we have shows that advisers carry out a range of activities on behalf of clients, including requesting and giving them information, and dealing with third parties on their behalf. They will draft letters for clients, prepare case papers and represent clients at tribunals and other hearings, complete forms and housing applications and work with partner organisations.

We ask our clients what they thought about the service we provided, and the impact it had on their lives. In the last year 65 clients responded with very positive feedback: 86% rated the service as very good and 9% as good.

**Figure 5: Outcomes achieved for clients**



The comments our clients make demonstrate the value of the service we provide to them:

*“My adviser has helped me so much, he has put me in touch with organisations I never knew existed. He's very approachable and friendly and I trust him 100%.”*

*“This project has changed my life. I was stuck in a rut and couldn't see any way out, until I was told about ASAP. They have changed my life not only in a financial way, but given me my dignity back, fought my corner and justice prevailed.”*

*“ Without ASAP support things would have been a great deal more difficult than they could have been. I would still be being denied benefits I am entitled to and it gave me piece of mind to have someone on my side.”*

*“I found them very professional and they knew what I felt and was going through, even did follow on calls to make sure I was getting on OK. They were easy to talk to and understand.”*

## **Contact**

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