

Voice



A magazine for the Citizens Advice
Network in Scotland

PILOT ISSUE

Still on active service

Project Spotlight Award
winner Thomas puts
his war experiences
to good use

Online, on the case

Our new webchat advisers
handle their first enquiries

Just the ticket

The network fights for
long-suffering bus users

A shared Voice

Welcome to the first edition of the network's magazine.

There was a real celebratory feel to the network's recent conference. And it wasn't just because the event doubled as a birthday party to mark our 80th year.

There was a buoyancy and optimism too – a shared feeling that our work is more necessary than ever, but that we're in great shape to meet the challenge.

New friendships were made, old ones refreshed, and many experiences were shared. It was only a shame that it wasn't possible for more staff and volunteers from across Scotland to be there – and that logistics prevent us getting together more often.

The magazine you're holding is an attempt to capture some of that spirit, and to go on harvesting the power of those connections.

This is a pilot edition of a new network magazine. Voice aims to share new developments, experiences and a few lighter moments from around the network.

It's your Voice. Please tell us what you think by taking a short survey (see back page), respond to what you've read, suggest an article, or share what's going on in your part of the network. You can also mail voice@cas.org.uk.

Twin roles

Eilidh McIvor has a double perspective on Citizens Advice. She's one of a handful of people working both at CAS and bureau volunteering. She explains why she just can't get enough of the network.

My connection with Citizens Advice happened almost by accident. I went into Motherwell & Wishaw CAB with a query.

At the time, I'd just finished a project coordination job with Crisis. I was waiting to start another job, which was a 30-hour contract. When I mentioned this, the adviser, Neil, said, 'So you've got some spare time then? Would you like to volunteer with us?'

I said yes. It was the best 'accident' that ever happened to me. That's where my dedication and love for the CAB service kicked off, and it's not an exaggeration to say it changed my life.

I was 24, hadn't been working that long and didn't know much about life. Working at the bureau was incredibly shaping for me in a lot of ways.

When I started, I immediately became interested in social security benefits.



“It changed my life”: Eilidh McIvor (left)

I found I enjoyed filling in benefit application forms and mandatory reconsiderations for clients; not everyone’s favourite job.

That interest also inspired me to go back to uni and do a Masters in policy. Towards the end of that, I saw the CAS job advertised and thought, ‘that looks cool’. I’ve been here almost two years now and my interest in benefits remains as strong as ever, as I plough my way through the realms of Universal Credit policy.

But part of me missed being on the frontline. I wanted to go back to volunteering again. So last October I started at the Leith CAB, one day a week.

I really look forward to my Mondays at

Leith. I love it, in fact. It motivates and inspires me. It satisfies the part of me that craves interaction with people. And it’s great to be part of a CAB family again.

It’s also so grounding for my policy role in benefits. Of course we have a vast database of client case evidence that is incredibly useful for policy work – you can read infinite stories about problems with PIP and so on. But having regular contact with clients helps you to understand those realities even further. I think that’s really important when you’re doing policy work.

I’d recommend it to anybody – not just colleagues. Policymakers in government should definitely all do a month’s intense placement in a bureau!

What’s your story?

How did you get involved in the network and what does it mean to you?

Get in touch at voice@cas.org.uk

Changing channels



For 80 years, bureaux have taken pride in providing face-to-face advice. But April saw the launch of multi-channel contact options. So how are our webchat pioneers finding the experience of dispensing advice remotely?

Pinned to the wall of Kincardine & Mearns CAB is a list. It was drawn up by the team as they prepared to pilot our new webchat and phone service.

“We drew up some core values,” says pilot coordinator, Jim Hendry. “Number one was that we needed to replicate our face-to-face services through the new channels as far as we possibly could.”

Testing the new channels in advance of the Scotland-wide launch in April, Jim’s team – and their pilot peers in Perth – were clear that the people-focused ethos of Citizens Advice would remain fundamental.

In fact, where a webchat or phone user clearly has complex issues, the teams refer them to their local bureau. With the client’s permission, they can even create and store a case record so that the preferred CAB is fully briefed.

Which is not to say that the new channels aren’t revolutionary. For now, they are limited (at least in theory) to queries from those seeking help to claim Universal Credit (UC), in a project funded by the Department of Work and Pensions. But this is only the start.

“The project has allowed us to buy the software, which means we have the infrastructure to expand these channels to other advice topic areas later,” says Richard Sandilands, training and quality officer.

“We anticipate that demand for advice provision through webchat and phone channels will increase significantly. It’s a revolution – a sea change in our offering to clients.”

In advance of the April launch date, Richard toured the regions to lead training for the staff in 34 bureaux. They now run the national multi-channel service, responding to webchat or phone contact from anywhere in the country.

Phone calls are obviously straightforward; the webchat software is the real novelty. But Jim Hendry says

staff have found the system intuitive and user-friendly.

Users seem to like it too. It's early days, but usage ramped up quickly during the course of the pilot. Users were typically younger and more IT-literate than the walk-in client demographic, suggesting these channels have potential to draw in a whole new base.

As a parent of three teenagers, Jim Hendry sees the value clearly: "We now have a generation, probably two generations, who turn to their smartphone or Google first.

"We need to maintain the traditional CAB walk-in service, but we also need to move with the times – if we don't, somebody else certainly will."

20%

The rise in UK consumers' preference for webchat over the past two years. "It's a phenomenal growth channel," BT's futurologist, Dr Nicola Millard, told the recent CAS conference

40%+

The proportion of CAS webchat users so far whose presenting issues are unrelated to Universal Credit – even though the channel is technically devoted to UC issues for now

Webchat etiquette

The Kincardine and Mearns CAB team offer some webchat tips, based on their experiences in the pilot...

Avoid question-bombing

Without face-to-face contact, an immediate data-gathering process can quickly become wearisome for the client. So Kincardine and Mearns CAB learned to intertwine their initial questions with dialogue about the client's issue.



Leaner is better

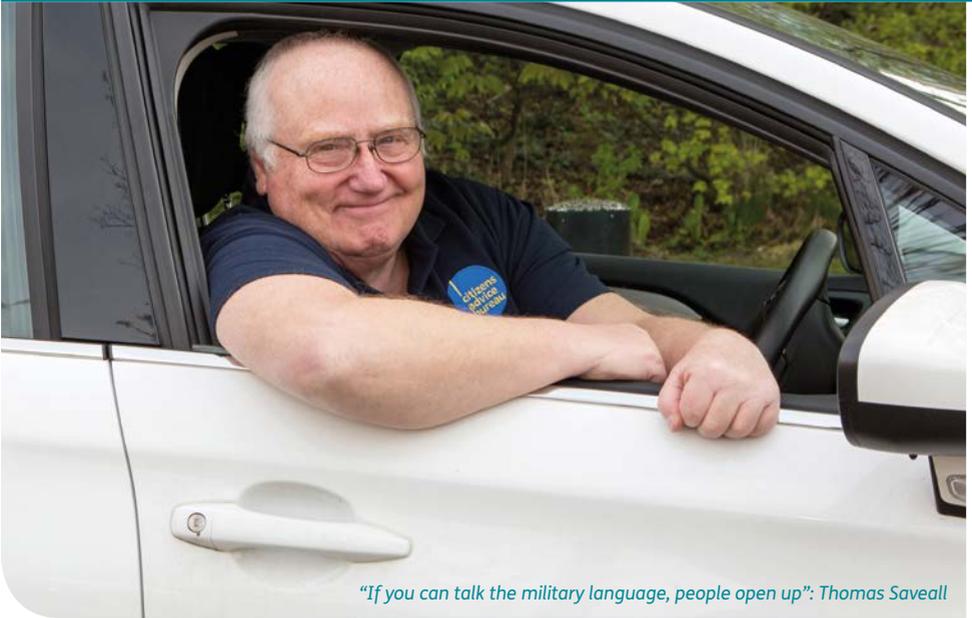
For similar reasons, the pilot team quickly decided that the service's usual go-to benefits checker was too long and unwieldy for phone or webchat use. "We found online benefit checkers that are leaner and quicker," says Jim Hendry.



Don't go silent

One advantage of webchat is that responses don't have to be instant, giving advisers time to think or look something up. "But you need to give the client constant updates about what you're doing, otherwise they'll disappear," Jim says.





"If you can talk the military language, people open up": Thomas Saveall

Still on active service

Winner of the Project Spotlight Award 2019, Volunteer driver **Thomas Saveall's** contribution doesn't stop when he switches off the engine.

There was only a moment's warning before the bullets began to fly.

It was Thomas Saveall's Royal Signals colleague who spotted the armed ambush ahead while they drove along the Falls Road in Belfast. Even as he reached for his rifle, shots tore through the vehicle.

Thomas was hit in the shoulder; his colleague was more seriously wounded, taking two bullets in the back. "We managed to get him into a blood transfusion van straight away – he was in hospital in five minutes," Thomas recalls.

"But then I was left to face the crowd by myself. They backed away slightly when I took the safety catch off my rifle, and that gave me an avenue to run to a police station.

"Seventeen bullet-holes were found in the vehicle later. Fortunately my colleague recovered. My own wound has never healed properly: it still hurts to this day."

“Seventeen bullet-holes were found in the vehicle later. Fortunately my colleague recovered...”

There’s just one positive to chalk up to this traumatic episode in Troubles-torn 1970s Belfast. It’s among the stories Thomas uses to establish a bond with veterans who are clients of the Unforgotten Forces project.

As a volunteer driver at the Motherwell & Wishaw CAB, Thomas escorts project adviser Sonya Brown to see veterans across Lanarkshire. He then accompanies her into clients’ homes, for visits that can sometimes be challenging.

“A lot of them don’t want to talk about their experiences, but if you can talk the military language with them, they open up a wee bit,” he says.

A former HGV driver, Thomas has also volunteered his driving services with the Armed Service Advice and the Chest, Heart and Stroke projects. In fact, he often volunteers five days a week to ensure paid staff and volunteers get to home visits, training and meetings.

Thomas’s wife, Linda, supports his



Thomas (right) at 19, shortly before he was ambushed on patrol in Northern Ireland

efforts: “She encourages me. I’m retired, so otherwise I’d just be sitting at home, looking at four walls.”

In addition to his driving duties, Thomas regularly volunteers to help out at Armed Forces Day and other veterans’ events across the region.

Nominating him for a volunteer award, Sonya paid tribute to Thomas’s personality and humour. This was in evidence when he received the award from Princess Anne at the recent CAS conference.

“When the Princess came down to cut the CAB 80th birthday cake, she said she wasn’t sure how to go about it. I was standing behind her and I said, ‘Ma’am, just cut it down the middle – half for you and half for me’,” he recalls.

If the Princess heard, she didn’t let on.

300+

Number of veterans home visits Thomas has supported

40+

Number of community events at which Thomas has represented the Motherwell & Wishaw CAB’s veterans projects

Next stop: better buses?

The network's research has exposed the holes in Scotland's bus services. Will new laws drive up standards?

Regular travellers from Wick to Inverness recently saw a gleaming new upper-level bus introduced on their main morning service.

There was just one problem. All the seating, bar a single wheelchair space and a couple of seats, required passengers to climb a staircase after boarding.

"It's been a huge issue for many people," says Rhionna Mackay, East & Central Sutherland CAB manager. "Many passengers on the service are elderly, and the new bus isn't suitable for people with mobility issues. One woman missed her

stop because she couldn't get back down the stairs."

It's just one example of an operator failing to cater for local communities' needs – albeit, in this case, with the best of intentions.

On the same A9 route, for example, overbooking is leaving locals and tourists alike unable to reach appointments or



"Locals know what they need":
Rhionna Mackay

"Transport isn't one of the top issues we hear about, but when it does go wrong it affects everything else..."

make connections.

And elsewhere in the county, the first bus to arrive in Wick from the Golspie area gets in just 10 minutes before the last bus leaves for home.

“Transport isn’t one of the top issues we hear about, but when it does go wrong it affects everything else – the ability to get to hospital appointments, do the shopping or just see family and friends,” Rhionna points out.

Issues like these have been documented around Scotland for the network’s Round the Bend report in 2016, and in the more recent Your Bus, Your Say survey. Kincardine and Mearns CAB ran their own detailed survey too, which helped to inspire the national research.

Now there is hope that all this work is paying off. The Scottish Government’s Transport Bill will have its second reading in the summer, and it tackles many issues raised in the network’s evidence.

Three-quarters of Scottish public transport journeys are made by bus, yet bus users’ voices often go unheard. So policy officer Ruth Mendel was heartened that so much of the Bill is devoted to buses.

“The Bill’s language is quite positive – it talks about introducing more options for bus services, and about consulting people on their local services,” she says.

“It also includes action to make sure people are able to access information about routes, timetables and fares. Those



were definitely issues we picked up on, and should mean people will be able to get better value.”

But CAS still hopes to influence further changes: “At several points, the Bill mentions meeting the needs of local communities. For us, that would mean ensuring access to lifeline services such as hospitals, but this isn’t made explicit as it stands.”

In Sutherland, where towns such as Helmsdale and Brora have launched community bus services, Rhionna welcomes the Bill’s proposals for new service options. “More local franchises would be a step in the right direction,” she says. “Local people know what they need.”

What’s your story?

How has your bureau been able to help local bus users? Or are you tackling another big issue? Tell us at voice@cas.org.uk

The Bill in brief

- Extended powers for councils to meet local community needs, through improvement partnerships and local franchising
- Operators required to provide more public information about services, and to give more details to local authorities if they want to withdraw services
- Smart ticketing across bus, rail and ferry routes

‘I held her hand and let her cry for an hour’

She’s now CEO of Young Scot, but **Louise Macdonald’s** first step in the sector was as a volunteer, later chair, at Musselburgh CAB. She reflects on her CAB career.

You were a national tabloid journalist before joining Citizens Advice – how did that switch come about?

I reached a point in journalism when I realised that I wanted to do work that had a closer impact on communities – so I decided to quit!

While unemployed, I was walking past my local CAB on the way to sign on, and saw their sign advertising for volunteers. I walked in, met the amazing manager at the time, Ann Adshead – and it went from there!

What were your first impressions of Musselburgh CAB?

Physically, it was obvious they were operating on a shoestring! But in terms of the work, it was amazing. So quickly

you could see how much trust there was in the CAB from the people who came in, and how quickly we as volunteers were able to make a difference.

Ann spotted the potential to make my journalistic skills work: pretty soon, as well as doing volunteer sessions, I’d be trained as a trainer and in representative work.

What lessons have informed your career since your CAB time?

So many! Start where people are; the importance of clear communication; the importance of trust. Why the evidence gathered at local level is vital to changing policy and practice nationally. The value of a great information system... I could go on and on!

Any particular days that stand out in your memory?

My first client was a woman looking for help after her niece had died by suicide. It became pretty clear she didn't need any information – she just needed to talk to someone, as she was essentially holding the whole family together. I ended up sitting with her, holding her hand and letting her cry, for a good hour or so. It was what she needed in that moment, and we were there for her.

I then had a break – Ann was very strict about taking breaks if you'd had a client that was more of an emotional experience – and then went to call through the next client. She came in and said: "Are there any Dolly Parton fan clubs locally, hen?" I checked our system – and there was! It is just such a brilliant example of the breadth of what bureaux do.

What gives you most satisfaction about your time as chair?

We built a really strong partnership with the local authority and made our case clear about how we contributed to the community. We were also the first CAB to trial a youth service – training young volunteers to run an out-of-hours session. It sadly didn't last, due to lack of continued funding – but I'm incredibly proud of the efforts we made.

Do you still have links with Citizens Advice?

I don't have a link locally any more, other than being a loud champion! More generally, we have a great partnership between CAS and Young Scot, but I think

there is lots more we can do – so I'm excited to see what might be possible, especially relating to young people and quality youth information provision locally.

You've won a host of awards – which do you value most?

My work is a privilege – I get to work with brilliant young people every day. So when they say thanks, it means the most. I also value highly a comment I got the other day from a young person who said – in a positive way, I hasten to add – that I didn't do patronising 'mum chat' but spoke to them as equals. That's worth all the awards in the world.

Besides Young Scot, you've been heavily involved in sustainability – have you been inspired by young people's recent climate change protests?

I get goosebumps every time I see the young people leading the climate change protests – Greta Thunberg is an extraordinary young woman. I was part of founding the 2050 Climate Group for young leaders and am so proud of what they do in this space also. Our job now is to help them – create the space and let them lead. They give me hope.

Louise Macdonald OBE is CEO of the national youth information charity Young Scot, supporting young people aged 11-26 to make informed decisions and choices as they grow up. There are around 700,000 members across Scotland. Louise is also the independent Chair of the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls, and on the board of the Scottish Parliament Scotland's Futures Forum. A keen "social CEO", she can be found on Twitter @Louisemac

What's on your mind?



As summer approaches, we asked two bureaux: if there's one place in Scotland you could go right now, where would it be and why?

AIRDRIE CAB

Fife. Lots of nice harbours and beaches, with a good bit of history too. And to finish off the day, the best fish and chips are found in Anstruther. *Tina*

Arran. On a sunny weekend, a boat to get there, palm trees and sea, it's like being abroad! We love it there! *Susie*

Skye. I love the rugged landscape, beautiful coastline, mountain scenery and the many beautiful walks. *Vanessa*

St Andrews. It's such a lovely town and it holds wonderful childhood memories for me. *Nikki*

Argyll. I can't choose one place! I love the drive from Lochgilphead along the Crinan canal to Tayvallich. It's incredibly romantic. I think I love it because it's a

place where the forest meets the ocean. *Freyja*

KINCARDINE AND MEARN'S CAB

Luskentyre in Harris. It's peaceful, beautiful – and has no mobile phone signal. *Jane*

Glasgow. Good people, good craic and good fun. *Jim*

Plockton. Peaceful, tranquil, with beautiful scenery and palm trees. Great afternoon teas with scones, jam and cream. *Margaret*

Applecross. A sanctuary! Great roads. Award-winning seafood. No phone signal. *John*

Edinburgh. My kids are there, and it's a small friendly city. *Helen B*

Most searched

The pages most often viewed on our public website in the final quarter of 2018/19...

43,984

Parking tickets on private land

40,913

Police powers to stop and search, enter a private property and seize goods

24,848

Getting divorced

How was it for you?

Did this pilot issue of Voice hit the mark? Help us shape future editions. Let us know what you think now by taking our swift survey at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/CASVoicesurvey. There are five shopping vouchers waiting for randomly selected respondents!